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Does the Bible Advocate for Women's Rights?

1 Corinthians 14:34: (KJV) *Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith the law.*



Today is Mother's Day - a day to stop, think about and honor the role motherhood plays in our lives. Be sure to express your gratitude to the mothers in your lives! Now, on this day that we honor motherhood we also want to look into the Bible's treatment of womanhood. It sure seems like the Scriptures make women second-class citizens. Is this true? Does the Bible in any way advocate for women?

Advocate: a person who argues for or supports a cause or policy; a person who works for a cause or group; a person who argues for the cause of another person in a court of law.

Let us read the theme text again: 1 Corinthians 14:34: What conclusions can we easily jump to by taking this out of context..? How about: God is sexist! Women are second-class! Women should not think for themselves - the Law says so! To conclude a biblical perspective about women by just looking at this theme

text would be to make a serious mistake, as it only considers one small aspect of a very large topic in a very specific circumstance.

BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES REGARDING WOMEN:

Men and women began on an equal and complimentary footing

Genesis 2:20-24: (NASB) ²⁰The man gave names to all the cattle, and to the birds of the sky, and to every beast of the field, but for Adam there was not found a **helper <5828>** suitable for him. (This is equal?) ²¹So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then He took one of his ribs and closed up the flesh at that place. ²²The LORD God fashioned into a woman the rib, which He had taken from the man, and brought her to the man. ²³The man said, this is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh; She shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man. ²⁴For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh.

Adam was created before Eve. God knew ahead of time that no helper would be found and created man and woman in this context to accentuate the interconnected relationship that was to be between man and women. There is a tendency to appreciate something more that initially you do not have and then subsequently receive.

Eve was created as a "helper" for Adam. But what does that really mean?

A helper as in one less experienced? An apprentice, maybe? A helper as in one who has less authority? A helper as in one who is inferior?

Help meet (helper): Strong's #5828 `ezer (ay'-zer); 1) help, succor 2) one who helps

It still sounds like this describes someone who is "a little bit less." How is this word #5828 used in other Scriptures? **Here is just one of many examples:** Psalms 121:1-2: (KJV) *'I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my **help <5828>**.* ²*My **help <5828>** cometh from the LORD, which made heaven and earth.* David sings this hymn, looking to God Almighty as his helper. This is the exact same Hebrew word that obviously has a much more important meaning than a second class role.

The creation account shows equality and harmony. Life for both sexes would be so much better if we embrace the differences and respect the value of those differences. God's original intent for His created man and woman had no indications of a relationship built around dominance of one over the other, but rather it was to be based on equality, mutual respect and was extremely complimentary. If we understand this important principle, it helps put everything into a clear perspective!

Sin was committed in the Garden and guilt reigned. God responded with penalties for each (we will skip the penalty for Satan on this program). Notice all of the rules for living were now changed...Adam and Eve were now to live under severe restrictions - not the previously enjoyed freedom of the Garden.



BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES REGARDING WOMEN:

Both man and woman were severely penalized for their sin - blessing now became curse and the rules for living now reflected this change

We believe the Bible does advocate for women's rights within the context of the rules God set out because of the curse. Women are important in every aspect of the Christian walk.

Genesis 3:16: (NASB) ¹⁶*To the woman He said, I will greatly multiply your pain in childbirth, in pain you will bring forth children; Yet your desire will be for your husband, and he will **rule** <4910> over you.*

The curse on the woman: 1. She would bear children in pain - in spite of that, her desire (longing) *still* will be to her husband. 2. Her husband would rule over her. This was not as it was *designed* to be, but it *came* to be this way because of sin.

Rule: Strong's #4910, mā-shal' 1) to rule, have dominion 2) to cause to rule 3) to exercise dominion

Genesis 3:17-19: God is describing the consequences of sin. Adam listened to Eve and disobeyed God, so his life would now be full of toil, failure and sweat. This was the curse for Adam.

The Old Testament Law shows us how seriously we ought to take God's influence in our daily lives. It is because of the curse we see a difference in how vows are handled by the sexes.

The entrance of sin did not take away the need for God's people to have integrity; rather, it underscored the need for our thoughts, proclamations and actions to all be in harmony: Numbers 30:1-9: If a man takes an oath, he must be accountable to his words.

The guidelines for a woman: ³Also if a woman makes a vow to the LORD, and binds herself by an obligation in her father's house in her youth, ⁴and her father hears her vow and her obligation by which she has bound herself, and her father says nothing to her, then all her vows shall stand and every obligation by which she has bound herself shall stand. ⁵But if her father should forbid her on the day he hears of it, none of her vows or her obligations by which she has bound herself shall stand; and the LORD will forgive her because her father had forbidden her. We can see the curse in effect here - the will of the young woman is subject to the will of her father, but her father must act quickly to nullify her vow. This is a different standard than that of a young man.

⁶However, if she should marry while under her vows or the rash statement of her lips by which she has bound herself, ⁷and her husband hears of it and says nothing to her on the day he hears it, then her vows shall stand and her obligations by which she has bound herself shall stand. ⁸But if on the day her husband hears of it, he forbids her, then he shall annul her vow which she is under and **the rash statement of her lips** by which she has bound herself; and the LORD will forgive her. It is the same for a married woman - if her husband does not act quickly, she is bound to her word. The application is the same, regardless of her age.

rash statement of her lips - sometimes we make rash promises. The Old Testament Law said you had to fulfill such statements. Women were subject to men in this example. Why was there not equal treatment? Because the curse had a major effect on humanity. Where there is no attached man, the woman's word must stand just as a man's word must.

Within the context of the curse, the Old Testament does advocate for women's rights - however, the rights of women were definitely under the rule of men. Does this mean that Old Testament women were second class citizens? NO! Let's look closer at women who were powerful mouthpieces for God...

Miriam: Exodus 15:19-21 Micah 6:4: We always think Moses needed Aaron as a mouthpiece, but here we see God specifically sent Aaron AND Miriam. This woman was a powerful godly influence in the early stages of Israel's development. That is NOT a second class citizen.

Deborah: Judges 4:4-5: Women were in positions of responsibility and decision-making. Having said that, it was still within the context of the curse.

BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES REGARDING WOMEN:

The Old Testament shows a subservience of women but not disrespect towards women



Now, what about the New Testament? To understand the differences and similarities with the Old Testament, we need to set the foundation:

1. The curse from Eden still remained in effect.
2. Jesus was a Jew bound by the Law.
3. Jesus was the Messiah and had authority that no other man ever had or would have.

How did Jesus treat women?

Jesus not only spoke with this woman, he offered her a blessing! John 4:7-10: The relationship between the Jews and Samaritans was not good. Culturally it would have been especially unusual for a Jewish man to talk to a Samaritan woman. Jesus overrode the culture and went as far as offering a blessing. He rose above the culture of that time and showed respect to a stranger.

Many women followed Jesus and did their part to support him and the Gospel. What role did they play? Luke 8:1-3: Many women followed Jesus - some were named and there were *many others*. They provided from their own resources so Jesus could do his work. They played an incredible role in the pursuit of preaching the good news of the Gospel. How did things develop in the New Testament? **There were still prophetesses on the scene:** Luke 2:36-38 **Jesus encouraged female followers to learn:** Luke 10:38-42 **Women worked side by side with men in the witnessing of the Gospel:** Acts 18:24-26: Priscilla was specifically part of the input as one of the important conduits for bringing Apollos to an understanding of the Gospel.

So, there is a lot of respect and a lot of advocacy for women's rights within the chosen people of God. Had the curse been lifted? No!

There are many Scriptures that give women a status subservient to men: Colossians 3:18-19: (KJV) ¹⁸Wives, **submit <5293>** yourselves unto your own husbands, as it is fit in the Lord. ¹⁹Husbands, love (agape) your wives, and be not bitter against them.

This clearly teaches that the curse was still in place, yet the admonition is for the husband as much or more than it is for the wife. The woman is to be subservient but the man is to be selfless. Both of these can be a challenge. There is work to be done on both sides.

Submit: Strong's #5293 hupotasso; to subordinate; to obey

This idea of "being in submission" is not just for the husband/wife relationship: Ephesians 5:21-24: (ASV) ²¹**subjecting <5259>** yourselves one to another in the fear of Christ.

²²Wives, be in **subjection <5259>** unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. ²³For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, being himself the saviour of the body. ²⁴But as the church is **subject <5259>** to Christ, so let the wives also be to their husbands in everything.

Theme text: 1 Corinthians 14:34-35: (KJV) ³⁴Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith the law. (Young's Literal Translation) ³⁵And if they wish to learn anything, at home their own husbands let them question, for it is a shame to women to speak in an assembly.

Is this really about not even talking? We need to examine the context! 1 Corinthians 14:5: (NASB) Now I wish that you all spoke in tongues, but even more that you would prophesy; and greater is one who prophesies than one who speaks in tongues, unless he interprets, so that the church may receive edifying. **Speaking in tongues was a major issue in Corinth, as it was an abused spiritual gift.** 1 Corinthians 14:18-19: Paul emphatically states that real communication trumps unrecognizable spiritual truth!

So, Paul sets some guidelines in place: 1 Corinthians 14:27-36: (YLT) ²⁷if an unknown tongue any one do speak, by two, or at the most, by three, and in turn, and let one interpret; ²⁸and if there may be no interpreter, let him be silent in an assembly, and to himself let him speak, and to God. ²⁹And prophets—let two or three speak, and let the others discern, ³⁰and if to another sitting anything may be revealed, let the first be silent; ³¹for ye are able, one by one, all to prophesy, that all may learn, and all may be exhorted, ³²and the spiritual gift of prophets to prophets are subject, ³³for God is not a God of tumult, but of peace...

BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES REGARDING WOMEN:

Jesus showed great respect towards women

BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES REGARDING WOMEN:

The New Testament focuses on respectfully different roles for men and women still in line with the curse



We pause here in the middle of verse 33 as the previous thought is complete and a new thought begins. (Remember, the original texts do not have punctuation - that is supplied by the various translators.) Speaking in tongues was supposed to be done systematically and in order, because God is a God of peace and not confusion.

Paul now addresses women specifically relating to the decorum he is trying to re-establish:
...As in all the assemblies of the saints ³⁴Your women in the assemblies let them be silent, for it hath not been permitted to them to speak, but to be subject, as also the law saith;

Paul is saying that *your women*, as other women, should not be speaking in tongues - that is what he has been talking about for the whole chapter - because they would be usurping undue authority within the context of a church meeting. Speaking in tongues was in the role of teaching. Paul was advising against women applying this particular gift in this particular context. First, the Corinthian church already was having issues with this gift, and second, women were not to be doing this type of teaching in the church. Verse 35 goes to an even deeper problem - that of the Greek culture and its treatment of women:

³⁵and if they wish to learn anything, at home their own husbands let them question, for it is a shame to women to speak in an assembly. ³⁶From you did the word of God come forth? Or to you alone did it come?

In Greek culture at this time, women were considered second-class citizens and this is the context Paul is dealing with in the Corinthian church. Thus we have 1) a matter of decorum within a church meeting - speaking in tongues, and 2) a matter of culture - the necessity for social training of women in Greek society where there had been none. Christianity was drawing women out of their homes. There had to be a learning process because there was no societal education. This actually shows Christianity advocating for women by including and teaching them where they had no previous opportunity.

There is a VERY SPECIFIC reason we must adhere to the standard of women *not* teaching within the church: Ephesians 5:22-28: There is a picture shown here: Wife being subjected to the husband = church subjected to Christ. The Bible uses the husband/wife relationship to show us the relationship of us to Christ. We are to be submissive to our Lord and Savior, Jesus. Why would we want to undo that?

Although husbands have rule of authority in their households, they must have selfless agape love like Jesus. This authority brings with it the responsibility to make the wife the best individual they can possibly be. Wives should be loved and cared for as the husband loves and cares for himself. Our adhering to this picture is actually showing our total devotion to Christ.

Different does *not* mean unequal! Romans 16:1-2: What a testimony of respect for this sister in Christ! She obviously had a role of distinctive influence within that church. **Different but equal!** Philippians 4:1-3: These women were obviously very important to Paul. In spreading the Gospel, it does not matter what role you play; what matters is the job gets done! The body of Christ working together does not focus on who gets the credit.

Galatians 3:28-29: It does not matter where you come from; we are all here together. There is equal opportunity for an equal reward! We simply play different roles. If we master the value of taking our differences and combining them and developing them, together we get something great. John 20:14-16: When Jesus was raised, he spent time speaking to women. Jesus obviously respected women, yet did not call any women to be Apostles. Why? Jesus honored women within the context of the curse and punishment of God in Genesis that the men would rule over them. The adjustment he makes is that he lifted their status to as equal of a basis as possible, supplying them dignity and still honoring the *thus saith the LORD*...

Women play a different role in the church but it is still a vital role and just as necessary as a man could play. Instead of fighting against what the Scriptures have laid out for us, let us embrace it realizing there can be great value developed if we are all humble enough to accept the scriptural principles.

*So, does the Bible advocate for women's rights?
For Jonathan and Rick and Christian Questions...
Think about it...!*

BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES REGARDING WOMEN:

Decorum in the church is always based on godliness and the best opportunity for growth

BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES REGARDING WOMEN:

Women play a vital and spiritual role in the church and should be honored