

10 Hard Questions

*“Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame.”
(1 Peter 3:14–16 ESV)*

*“be ready in season and out of season...”
(2 Timothy 4:2 ESV)*

Doesn't The Bible Denigrate Women?

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Genesis 1:26-27

Genesis 2:15-18

Galatians 3:25-29

1 Timothy 2:8-15

Rev. Paul Carter

Introduction:

Well good morning church! It's good to be with you again today. I was glad when they said to me let us go to the house of the Lord – were you glad when they said that to you? Amen. It's good to be together.

We are jumping back into our apologetics series this morning. Apologetics you will recall is simply evangelism in a hostile world. Kenneth Scott Oliphint says:

“Christian apologetics is the application of biblical truth to unbelief”.¹

So that's basically what we are doing. We are thinking about the process of meeting unbelief and opposition with the truths of the Bible so as to help people over their cultural and philosophical objections on the way to faith and joy in Jesus Christ.

¹ K. Scott Oliphint, *Covenantal Apologetics*, (Wheaton: Crossway, 2013), 29.

This morning we are talking about perhaps the biggest objection of them all – at least for now, at this moment. You see, what the culture hates about Christianity changes from one generation to the next. What we are about to talk about today would not have been controversial 70 years ago. Now, that isn't to say that the culture was entirely Christian 70 years ago. The culture has never been entirely Christian and the culture's view on women has never been entirely Christian. So I am not saying that. I am just saying that THIS isn't what would have MOST offended your neighbours about the Christian faith 70 years ago. But it is now.

We are in the midst of the most significant sexual and gender revolution in human history. And what the Bible says about sex – which we talked about two weeks ago – and women – which we are going to talk about today – represents a complete departure from the current cultural consensus. So, if you want to lead friends and loved ones to Jesus, then you need to be prepared to answer this question:

Doesn't The Bible Denigrate Women?

I think the first thing that it is important for us to understand is that no one would have dreamed of asking this question in previous generations. I think it would be fair to say that no one would have dreamed of asking this question before 1960.

For most of human history Christianity has been understood as a champion and liberator of women.

Rodney Stark is a professor of Social Sciences and he has written extensively about the impact of Christianity on women in the ancient world. Here are a couple of quotes from the chapter on women in his book "The Triumph Of Christianity".

"Christianity seems to have been especially successful among women. It was often through the wives that it penetrated the upper classes of society in the first instance."²

"Women were especially drawn to Christianity because it offered them a life that was so greatly superior to the life they otherwise would have led."³

² Rodney Stark, *The Triumph Of Christianity*, (New York: HarperOne, 2011), 121.

³ Rodney Stark, *The Triumph Of Christianity*, (New York: HarperOne, 2011), 122.

“Women in the early Christian communities were considerably better off than their Pagan and even Jewish counterparts.”⁴

Now here’s one we could just as easily have used two weeks ago when we were talking about sex. Stark says:

“Christians regarded unchastity in a husband as no less serious a breach of loyalty and trust than unfaithfulness in a wife.”⁵

So Stark, writing as a non-Christian social scientist says that Christianity was attractive to women in part because it offered them far more status, far more freedom, far more dignity and far better treatment than was available in either the pagan or the Jewish world.

I’m guessing that not many of your unsaved friends and loved ones are aware of that.

So it is simply not true that Christianity – or the Bible – has been a force of repression for women. On the contrary, Christianity has done more to liberate and elevate and protect women than any other movement or worldview in human history. That is a fact.

However, it is true, that in the mid-20th century – in the 1960’s particularly – Christianity and the cultural cause of women’s liberation in Western Europe and North America did decisively part company. That is true. Most of the key leaders in the early waves of feminism in this culture were Christians. Frances Willard for example was the President of the Women’s Christian Temperance Union from 1879-1898 which was the organization that was absolutely instrumental in earning the right for women to vote. It was CHRISTIAN WOMEN driving that process.

So again, historically, Christianity has been the DRIVING FORCE in empowering and protecting women. But as I said, that changed in the 1960’s. The goals of the movement changed and the definition of equality changed – and of course, Christianity doesn’t change – or at least isn’t supposed to change – and therefore the perception now is that Christianity is holding women back.

So we have to anticipate that objection and as Peter has instructed us many times over the course of this series – we need to be prepared to give an answer. Toward that end I thought it would be

⁴ Rodney Stark, *The Triumph Of Christianity*, (New York: HarperOne, 2011), 122.

⁵ Rodney Stark, *The Triumph Of Christianity*, (New York: HarperOne, 2011), 122.

useful for us to look at 4 key passages in the bible that speak about women and then to attempt a bit of a summary and reflection at the end.

4 Key Passages:

If you have your Bible with you I'd love for you to open them now to Genesis 1 verses 26-27.

Genesis 1:26-27

Hear now the Word of the Lord:

Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. (Genesis 1:26–27 ESV)

The Hebrew word for image is *tseh'lem* and it means both resemblance and representative. The Hebrew word for likeness is *dem-ooth'* and it means shape, likeness, manner, or similitude. So when the Hebrews first heard this, they understood it to mean that in some way they were like God and they represented God over Creation. In their cultural context the only person who had ever been spoken of this way was Pharaoh himself. The name King Tut or Tutankhamen, as he is properly known literally means "the living image of the god Amun". So in this passage God is telling a group of recently liberated slaves that they are all – men and women – sons and daughters of the King of Heaven. They are Kings and Queens. Every one of them has tremendous dignity and worth.

They are RULING CREATURES. They are ROYALTY. Look at verse 26:

"Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let **them** have dominion" (Genesis 1:26 ESV)

So according to this passage, both men and women are RULING creatures. They are God's representatives – they are his vice regents over all the earth.

The second passage I want to take a look at is Genesis 2:15-18.

Genesis 2:15-18

The text says:

The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it.¹⁶ And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, “You may surely eat of every tree of the garden,¹⁷ but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.”

¹⁸ Then the LORD God said, “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him.” (Genesis 2:15–18 ESV)

The creation story in Genesis 2 is a ZOOMED IN version of the creation story in chapter 1. In chapter 1 the focus was the whole universe, in chapter 2 the focus is just the man and the woman and here in this more detailed version of that story, we find out that the man was created first. God made the man first and he spoke to him about his purpose and his parameters – and he did all of that BEFORE he made the woman.

All of that happens in verses 15-17. Now look again at verse 18:

Then the Lord God said, “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him.” (Genesis 2:18 ESV)

So let’s notice a few things here. Let’s notice that the woman was not given a separate mandate. She was told to help the man with THE MANDATE. This is a story about two people sharing aspects of one mission. This is a story about partnership. This is a story about complementarity. Apparently, the woman was good at some stuff that was mission critical that the man was not good at. That’s why she is the HELPER that is FIT FOR HIM.

She zigs where he zags.

That’s the essence of complementarity.

It is the idea that we are equal but different and generally speaking it takes two people to live one good life.

The third passage I want to walk you through is Galatians 3:25-29.

Galatians 3:25-29

This is an incredible passage. Again if your friends think that Christianity has been a force of repression for women, you can just read them this passage. This is a game changer. The Apostle Paul says:

But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian,²⁶ for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith.²⁷ For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.²⁸ There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.²⁹ And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise. (Galatians 3:25–29 ESV)

Paul's primary concern in this letter is actually to show that Gentiles are not second-class citizens in the kingdom of God. The issue behind the letter was that some Jewish Christians were telling Gentiles that they had to become Jews before they became Christians – that's the HERESY that instigated this letter from Paul. Paul wants to nip that in the bud. That is ridiculous! And so he goes on to show that even in the Old Testament it was not merely the biological offspring of Abraham who were saved – it was always and only those who believed. And so he wants it very clear that:

“it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham.” (Galatians 3:7 ESV)

Verses 25-29 then are a rhetorical expansion of verse 7. He is saying: It doesn't matter whether you are ethnically Jewish or not, and it doesn't matter whether you are rich or poor and it doesn't matter whether you are male or female. If you are a person of faith – if you are believing in the God of Abraham then you are ONE IN CHRIST. You are JOINT HEIRS WITH CHRIST. You have a FIRST-BORN SON'S SHARE in all of the riches and glories of God through Christ.

That's the Gospel!

And that was the attraction of Christianity to women and the poor in the ancient world. Only in the church were women and slaves and the poor treated as first class citizens.

So that's what this passage is saying – and it is GOOD NEWS.

But, it is good news that could easily be misunderstood. If women are equal to men in all these marvelous ways, does that mean that they are no longer women? That is a fair question – and Paul answered it on several different occasions, perhaps most infamously in 1 Timothy 2:8-15. That's our fourth and final passage.

1 Timothy 2:8-15

It might be helpful to read this one in bite size pieces. Let's look at verses 8-10 first. The Apostle Paul says here:

I desire then that in every place the men should pray, lifting holy hands without anger or quarreling;⁹ likewise also that women should adorn themselves in respectable apparel, with modesty and self-control, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly attire,¹⁰ but with what is proper for women who profess godliness—with good works. (1 Timothy 2:8–10 ESV)

In terms of the context, in chapter 1 the Paul had charged Timothy with putting down a heretical version of Christianity that was being taught in Ephesus by some wayward elders who were being supported by certain women in the city, whom Dick Lucas describes as “having more time and money on their hands than they knew what to do with”.

These women, through their surrogates, were redefining the essence of Christianity and Paul is telling Timothy to put a lid on that before things get out of hand. So Paul says that the men in the church are to focus on prayer and the women need to dress like women and they need to stop trying to reshape the doctrine and practices of the faith.

The women are to learn quietly with all submissiveness. He says that in verse 11:

Let a woman learn quietly with all submissiveness.¹² I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet.¹³ For Adam was formed first, then Eve;¹⁴ and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor. (1 Timothy 2:11–14 ESV)

Pretty much every word in these 4 verses is considered wildly controversial in our culture. Paul is saying that in the church generally and particularly when the church gathers for corporate worship, the men of the church should take the lead in delivering the authoritative doctrine of the church. The women, during such times in the service should stand down or be at peace. That is the meaning of the Greek word *hesuchia* (ἡσυχία) translated “quietly” by the ESV here.

Obviously Paul isn't commanding absolute silence - he speaks positively of women praying, singing and prophesying in the church - and obviously he isn't forbidding all forms of teaching - he talks about women teaching women and women teaching children and grandchildren - but when it comes to the authoritative teaching time in the gathered church experience – what we would call the sermon time, the women were to learn and listen quietly. What he says here is very similar to what he says in 1 Corinthians 14. Commenting on these largely parallel passages George Knight III says helpfully:

“Both there and here Paul’s prohibition of women teaching would prevent them from serving as elders or ministers.”⁶

Now again, that statement would not have been controversial at any point in Christian history prior to the 20th century. In fact, it remains uncontroversial in most of the Christian world outside of Europe and North America. The Bible says that women and men are equal but different and that they have been assigned priority responsibility over differing aspects of the kingdom mandate. They are both leaders – but they are supposed to focus on different parts of the task and what Paul is saying here to the women is that they should step back a pace and let the men in the church take care of their responsibility. Their responsibility – in the home and in the gathered church – is to deliver and discern the doctrine.

The last thing Paul says in this passage is perhaps the most confusing. He says:

⁶ George Knight III, *The Pastoral Epistles* in *The New International Greek Testament Commentary*, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2013), 141.

Yet she will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith and love and holiness, with self-control. (1 Timothy 2:15 ESV)

What in the world does that mean?

Well to be clear, I am not aware of a single scholar or linguist on planet earth who thinks the Apostle Paul is saying here that women become Christians by having babies. Ok? So we can put that one to bed.

Part of the challenge here is that the Greek word *sode´-zo*, translated as “saved” in the ESV has a wide semantic range. It can mean “rescued from sin”, but it can also mean “preserved from error” or “helped in weakness” or “brought to maturity and wholeness” – the same word that is translated here as “saved” is sometimes translated in your English Bibles as “sanctified” - so we have to look at the context to figure out exactly what Paul means.

There are two very common and very plausible interpretations.

Many scholars understand the word “*sode´-zo*” here in the sense of sanctified; thus what Paul is saying here is that women are generally sanctified in the context of having and raising their children. That will be the place where they will learn to pray. That will be the place where they will figure out where effort ends and faith begins. That will be the place where God breaks them and then makes them whole again through faith in Jesus Christ and few women who have had and raised children would argue with that interpretation.

The second interpretation would have us understand Paul as saying that women are “preserved from deception” by properly valuing the domestic sphere. That seems to make the best sense of the immediate context of the letter. Paul has just said that Eve was deceived, now he says that the daughters of Eve will be saved from deception by properly valuing the domestic sphere and continuing on in faith, love and holiness with self-control.

In essence Paul is saying that many women will be lured onto the rocks of Satanic deception by being told that they are only valuable as people and only useful in the church when they are acting like men.

But that's not true, Paul says. That's a lie that leads to unhappiness and ruin. Who you are and what you are doing is critically important. Let your husband do what he's supposed to be doing and you do what you are supposed to be doing. The kingdom of God will go forward on the backs of both of your efforts – by the grace of God. That seems to be the best understanding of that very difficult text.

Now in the time we have left I want to circle back and summarize what we have seen and heard. If you are able to walk your friends and loved ones through these passages I think you will have given them a decent introduction to what the bible says about women.

Summary: What Does The Bible Say About Women?

We saw for example that:

1. Women are created in the image and likeness of God

I think that needs to be said. I think our culture has a thinly veiled hatred for women and it seems like an increasing number of our young girls are picking up on that. In the last 10 years there has been a 4400% increase in the number of girls being referred for gender transitioning treatment.

Let me repeat that.

4400% increase in the number of girls seeking and being referred for gender transitioning treatment. This treatment, if taken in full, renders young women infertile. This is an existential crisis – and it is happening in North America as well. In 2018, American physician and researcher Lisa Littman said in an interview:

'Parents online were describing a very unusual pattern of transgender-identification where multiple friends and even entire friend groups became transgender-identified at the same time. I

would have been remiss had I not considered social contagion and peer influences as potential factors.⁷

Are you hearing that? Whole friend groups were transitioning from female to male.

Now why in the world would that be happening?

Part of the answer has to be “THE FACT” THAT WE ARE NOT ALLOWED TO SPEAK IN THIS CULTURE which is THE FACT that we have now communicated to women for the last 70 years that only MALE THINGS are important. We have said to women that unless you excel at MAN THINGS you have no worth or dignity.

We have said: children don’t matter. We have said: family doesn’t matter. We have said: the home doesn’t matter.

What matters is business. What matters is money. What matters is power.

Is it then so surprising that no one now wants to be a woman anymore?

This is an existential crisis.

And we’ve never seen anything like it in the history of the human race.

So – let me apply a Biblical tonic. The bible says that women are image and likeness of God. The bible says that women are ruling creatures – as women.

What’s the first thing God said to the ruling class? What was the FIRST ASPECT of the dominion mandate? Do you remember?

And God blessed them. And God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it (Genesis 1:28 ESV)

⁷ As cited here by J. K. Rowling: <https://www.jkrowling.com/opinions/j-k-rowling-writes-about-her-reasons-for-speaking-out-on-sex-and-gender-issues/> Original study can be found here: <https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0202330>

The top billed TASK in the explicated dominion mandate was for us to fill the world with little boys and girls who love and trust their creator. That is not a SECOND-CLASS MANDATE – the mandate you want is a second-class mandate. Only the Father of Lies could have ever convinced you otherwise.

You MATTER.

You as a woman matter. If you stop being you we will cease to exist. You matter. Women matter – thanks be to God!

The second thing I think we need to highlight here is that:

2. Women are intended to partner with men

As indeed, men are intended to partner with women. We are interdependent. We are complementary. We need each other.

Now I realize that this also is offensive in the modern world. We tell women that it is wrong for them to need another person – particular it is wrong for them to need a man. But the Bible says that we need each other.

So let me go first.

I will happily confess that MEN – my sex – men – are so weak and so pathetic that we cannot live the lives we were created to live without women.

I can barely get out of bed without women.

I cannot function without my wife.

I want to go first on this – it is not good for this man to be alone. The Bible says, it's not good for any man to be alone.

Then the LORD God said, “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him.” (Genesis 2:18 ESV)

So men need women – and I don’t think there is any shame in saying that women need men. If we are going to be all that God made us to be and if we are going to do all that God gave us to do – then we need to work together. This constant gender conflict must not be a feature of life in the church. It is of sin. It is not of creation and it is not of grace. Let us have nothing to do with it in this place.

I need to move quickly here but this has to be said:

3. Women are first class citizens in the Kingdom of God

There are no second-class citizens in the kingdom of God. We are all equal with respect to our inheritance in Christ. Every role is important – why would you ever think otherwise, Paul says?

“if the ear should say, “Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body.¹⁷ If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell?¹⁸ But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose.” (1 Corinthians 12:16–18 ESV)

Do you see that?

Just as he chose.

Dear sisters, don’t believe the lie that you get to choose who you are. God chooses who you are. God makes you and he assigns you a gender and he gives you particular gifts and he loves who you are and he loves what you can do with those gifts if you will just receive them and value them as you should. So you be you. Be you in all your glory and beauty.

You are not a second-class citizen – you matter. You are essential. You are necessary and we love you.

Fourthly, we've seen in the Bible that women are equal but different – gloriously, marvelously, wonderfully different and therefore:

4. Women are still women and are not to want to be men

Recently in what remains of evangelicalism there has been this idea that gender was part of the FALL and that once we are redeemed it is no longer a legitimate category. Of course we've seen that that isn't the case. All of our texts in Genesis came BEFORE the fall – they are part of the creation story – not the fall story. J.I. Packer comments on this important distinction saying:

“the man-woman relationship is intrinsically non-reversible ... This is part of the reality of creation, a given fact that nothing will change. Certainly, redemption will not change it, for grace restores nature, not abolishes it.”⁸

Grace restores nature – not abolishes it.

That feels like a good place to end, doesn't it?

Grace takes us back. Grace makes us whole. Grace teaches us how to be human again – the way we were created and saved to be.

My dear brothers and sisters, this culture desperately needs us to be salt and light on this one. Now is not the time for us to go blindly along with the mood of the crowd. The stakes are too high; the lives are too precious; the consequences are too devastating. We need to take our stand here. We need to believe together and we need to proclaim together. We need to tell and show our friends and loves ones that what the Bible says about women is beautiful; it is true and it is good – thanks be to God!

Let me pray for us.

⁸ As cited in John R. W. Stott, *The Message of 1 Timothy & Titus: Guard the Truth*, The Bible Speaks Today. Accordance electronic ed. (Downers Grove.: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 77.

Amen. Pastor Jody, will you come and lead us?