

# Today's Christian Woman

## I. Introduction

- A. The godly woman of scripture - Prov. 31
  1. The theme of a godly woman can be found throughout scripture and is pictured as the greatest of blessings for family and society as a whole. Her role as wife, mother, teacher, example, diligent servant of God and mankind inspires the true student of scripture. One cannot read scripture without appreciating, even standing in awe, at the role God has given to woman to fulfill in the Creator's world. She is, as the wise man said, to be praised by all, her value far exceeds the most precious of stones. To the God-fearer, few words conjure up more feelings of warmth and love and appreciation than does the word *mother*. The Christian knows that no one is more valuable to the Lord's cause than a Godly Woman.
- B. A generation is now living that knows only a feminist's world. Gender equality in every aspect of life is a basic mantra of our culture. It is not only pictured in every television sitcom and drama as the norm, it is becoming codified in the laws of our land. The very idea that female is to be subject to male in any way is regarded as antiquated. "Only fundamentalist Christians believe in such backward ideas!"
- C. That statement may well be accurate. I am convinced the Biblical teaching on the roles of male and female are completely out of step with modern culture's beliefs and practices. I don't think I have to spend a lot of time here tonight discussing how far removed we, as NT Christians, are from mainstream thinking on the role of women in the culture.
- D. Culture influences Christians. And feminism is influencing Christian thought. Its influence is great enough that those planning this lectureship on the church included this topic: Women's role in the church.
- E. The new generation of young Christian women is placed in a terrible dilemma. She is urged to pick a career, train for it, pursue it, then give it up in midstream to start a family. Once a woman has experienced the beginning of career and devoted several years to it and become successful in the business world, it becomes very difficult for many to walk away from it to start all over in a career as a mother and homemaker. They often try to play both roles and end up feeling guilty about not doing their best in either. What is she to do? It is hard for some men to understand the dilemma she is in. This is also against the backdrop of being told that marriage itself is an outdated and demeaning relationship for a woman. And if she can't be in a leadership role in her church she should find a more up-to-date church in step with the times.
- F. I want us to examine the role of the Christian woman in society today. That will involve looking at the different aspects of her life that the Bible addresses.
  1. Interestingly, this discussion among Christians usually centers around three areas:
    - i. Her Role in the Church
    - ii. Her Role in the Home
    - iii. Her Appearance and Dress
  2. These are three very important areas of the faithful Christian woman's life. I think that is why the Bible addresses them either directly or indirectly. Her relationship to the man influences all three of these areas.
- G. Our discussion will be a biblically rooted discussion, respecting the Bible as the inspired Word of God. Any other basis for this discussion would be purely philosophical and one idea would be as good as another. We must recognize the Bible as the final authority in this matter.
- H. I cannot overstate the importance of such a study. The undermining of the Biblical role of woman in society is tearing out the foundations of the culture itself. The modernist mantra of

"self-fulfilment" has an especially detrimental effect on the woman's crucial role in our society and in the kingdom of God. Women are told that self is all that matters.

1. Women are told it is impossible to lead a fulfilled life as a wife and a mother. More and more are walking away from the most important work on this earth - the raising of the next generation of Christian men and women, molding and shaping the lives of their children as God teaches with the dedication it demands.

I. We want to examine:

1. What modernist thought has to say about the modern woman in the culture, including humanist thought that has influenced how the modern woman views herself.
2. Also we want to see what many who claim to follow Christ are teaching to accommodate modern feminist thought, and then:
3. Practically examine our own view of the woman's role in the church and in the home and put it in a true biblical perspective. The discussion of a Christian's woman's appearance and dress is not thrown in gratuitously here. It is actually an integral part of defining the true servant of God. The Bible specifically addresses the matter of the Christian woman's character being reflected in her appearance, demeanor and dress.
4. A lot of Christians who want to do right struggle with biblical teaching on these topic. I want us to see there is no need for any Christian woman to feel oppressed in her role in the Lord's body or in a Christian home and family.
  - i. I also recognize we are, to a great extent, looking here at the married woman though principles apply to all Christian women. The struggle for the single mother today is a unique and particularly difficult one. My heart goes out to a woman (or man) trying to earn an living and raise a family on his/her own. It is one of the most daunting tasks I can think of in modern society and the church should be as supportive as possible of a woman who is in that plight and is trying to be a Christian. They need our prayers and support.
  - ii. But this discussion is aimed more at looking how the modern culture has changed all thinking related to the woman and her role in culture today.

## II. Some background.

- A. The changing role of housewife and mother in our culture.
- B. The Feminist Movement of the last 50 years and its attitude toward the biblical view of family life and motherhood is chilling. It is a radical departure from biblical principles.
  1. "Our goal is to completely restructure the family unit", Betty Friedan, author of The Feminine Mystique. The major premise of the Feminine Mystique is that a woman who is just a wife and mother is a child-like creature who can never reach her full potential until she throws off all male domination.
  2. Grace Atkinson, leading feminist, said: "Any real change in the status of women would be a fundamental assault on marriage the family...it's just not honest to talk about freedom for women unless you get the childrearing off their back." (New York Times March 10, 1968.)
  3. Andrea Dworkin leading feminist wrote: "Marriage as an institution developed from rape as a practice. Rape, originally defined as abduction, became marriage by capture. Marriage meant the taking was to extend in time, to be not only use of but possession of, or ownership." Andrea Dworkin (b. 1946), U.S. feminist, critic. Pornography, ch. 1 (1981).

4. What a shift in thinking! Compare to the sudden belittling of the role of an accountant in society - No positive TV roles of an accountant, brunt of jokes, satire, not considered a part of modern, up-to-date society. Ashamed to say you are an accountant.
5. The feminist movement has succeeded in changing the general view of society on the role of women in the workplace, in the home and in the general culture. My generation has observed a 180 degree shift in the view of women's roles. From the glorified and honored role of the stay-at-home mom of the 1950's we now see the "truly fulfilled woman" as one who is not bound by her apron strings and is free to find "real fulfillment" in her own career. Home and family responsibilities are viewed as secondary responsibilities that can and even should be assigned to hired help or daycare workers. The most radical of feminists regard marriage itself as a cruel slavery devised by the male to control the female and that true liberation of the woman will not be accomplished until marriage is removed from the culture and child-rearing is turned over to the state.
  - i. It should be noted that there has been a backlash, even among women, against such radical views of feminism (e.g. *The Feminist Mistake*, by Marie Clair, et al). Time has shown the folly of believing a woman can have a full career and a full home life. Choices have to be made, sacrifices are made either in the career or in the home. You can't do both full time. The result is a more moderate view of feminism by some but one that is, nonetheless, at odds with NT Christianity.
6. As we examine a woman's role, it is against the background of sweeping change in our culture regarding women's roles and the consequent effect upon views Christians hold concerning this matter. We must address these issues. They are not going to go away. If you are a part of a church that is converting people out of the world then you know that this is a significant issue to be addressed. It isn't just being introduced into the church by our more liberal brethren. It is being introduced by these converts out of the world who often experience culture shock when taught God's truths on these matters.
7. Lets start by talking about the fundamental shift in thinking about the role of the Christians Woman. Then we will look at the Woman's Role in the Church, in the Home, and then how these principles are reflected in her appearance and dress. We will concentrate upon the ideas of some who claim to be NT Christians who nonetheless are trying desperately to reinterpret straightforward Bible teaching on the woman and her role. They are trying to deal with the dilemma of being a NT Christian but still fitting into the modern culture and its view of womanhood.

### III. Modern interpretations of key passages.

- A. If someone wants the church to embrace the basic principles of modern feminist thought, then they must grapple with certain key passages and principles in the Bible. Our discussion tonight is not of the role of women in general but, more specifically, the role of women in the church. I want us to direct our thoughts more to that specific topic. But we do need to see this topic against the backdrop of the overall feminist interpretation of scripture. This will lay the groundwork for all 3 areas of study we will pursue.
- B. Principle of headship/subjectation is found in the Bible. - Key passages
  1. 1 Cor. 11:2-16 - "But I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ, the head of woman is man, and the head of Christ is God." (NKJV)
  2. Eph. 5:22,23 - "Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body. (NKJV)
  3. 1 Cor. 14:34-36 - "For God is not the author of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints. 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. 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. Or did the word of God come originally from you? Or was it you only that it reached?" (NKJV)

4. 1 Tim. 2:11-16 - "Let a woman learn in silence with all submission. And I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence. For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression. Nevertheless she will be saved in childbearing if they continue in faith, love, and holiness, with self-control." (NKJV)
- C. What do the so-called Christian feminists do with these passages? Many teach that subjection of the woman may have been a consequence of the fall of Eve (Gen. 3:16) but that subjection was done away with in Christ and now all are equal before God. After all Paul said there is "neither male or female" in Christ (Gal. 3:28). Let's begin with those passages.
- D. First are the "egalitarian" passages (egalitarian refers to human equality in all relationships - you can study this topic without seeing this term repeatedly). These passages indicate an equality that exists in Christ.
1. Joint-heirs, Rom. 8:17; a new creation, 2nd Cor. 5:17; neither male nor female, Gal. 3:28.
  2. The passages are all talking about our redemption in Christ. They are not discussing male-female relationships or roles. They are pointing out that God makes no distinction when it comes to salvation.
- E. Next are the "Headship/submission" passages. These are the passages that sure seem to clearly indicate that the male is placed in a position of leadership and headship, especially in the church and in the home.
1. 1st Cor. 11:2-16, "head of every woman is the man"; Eph. 5:22-33, "husband in the head of the wife"; 1st Cor. 14:34-36, "women keep silence in the churches...but let them be in subjection"; 1st Tim. 2:11-16, "I permit not a woman to teach or have dominion over a man."
    - i. Feminist argumentation on these passages often centers in redefining the word "head" to mean "source." Although the term is on rare occasions so interpreted, it is impossible to give it that meaning in these passages that are so clearly discussing headship and submission.
    - ii. Attempts are also made to limit certain passages to a specific circumstance being discussed in the context, i.e., veils in 1st century Corinth, etc. Such reasoning overlooks that what is being taught, in 1st Cor. 11 for example, is an enduring principle of which the covering is but one application. Other examples of poor textual analysis could be given but they only further illustrate the same point - that feminist exposition of scripture is really, really weak.
  2. The "Biblical" feminist calls these passages "hard passages." They reason that these verses have difficult concepts in them and one cannot be too strict in their interpretation of these passages. For example, since there are differing views on 1st Cor. 11 concerning what is meant by the covering, or what is meant by "because of the angels" in vs. 10, we shouldn't be dogmatic in using this passage to teach submission of the woman to the man.
    - i. How convenient. If you don't want to follow what a particular chapter in the Bible says, then find some phrase in that chapter brethren differ over. Since brethren differ over that phrase you have to throw out the whole chapter's teaching. Jack Cottrell calls this the fallacy of believing that "incomplete knowledge is false knowledge." In other words if you don't understand it all perfectly then you don't know any of it at all! He rightly points out that such argumentation is not only unreasonable but also devastating to the whole idea of biblical understanding. (It reminds me of the reasoning Karl Ketcherside, Leroy Garrett, et. al. used to use to justify dropping everything but the most fundamental belief in Jesus as a test of fellowship, saying that beyond that you just can't be sure of the truth.)

- ii. These passages are “hard passages” for the feminists simply because they clearly say the opposite of what they want them to say. (Cf. Luther’s struggle with James 2; Baptists struggle with 1 Peter 3:21). Sound exposition of these passages is not hard to someone committed to accepting what the Bible says and not to trying to eisegete a personal bias into these passages.
- iii. We must remember that the Bible doesn’t always say what we want it to say. Some things may go against what we want but either God’s Revealed Will is unchanging and final or it isn’t.