

THE BIBLE & WOMEN

LESSON TWO

Ice Breakers

- ~ Who is your favorite female hero in the Bible? What makes her so great in your eyes?
- ~ How did God call or commission her? How did God help her or otherwise interact with her? How did God's people treat her?
- ~ Name a person you know personally whom you consider a female hero of the Christian faith. What makes her so great? What are her gifts? How does she inspire you?

Introduction –

For more than a dozen years, our elders and ministers at Central have been asking a lot of questions about our worship beliefs and practices. What's the will of our Lord? Are we drawing lines and putting restrictions on Holy Spirit gifts where the Bible doesn't? Are we sending mixed signals about the Gospel and salvation, about what's worship and what's not worship? Are we making the Gospel offensive to our culture and potentially harming our testimony? Are we telling our daughters and granddaughters --- all our Christian sisters --- that they are valuable members of the Lord's Church? Do we grow, do we hear the Bible differently, do we think about God in bigger ways when women are reading and leading the prayers? Those are the questions we've been asking. And we believe our answers all come from the Scriptures. This study and the elders' commitment to continue affirming our women to publicly serve and exercise their gifts at Central is firmly grounded in the Bible.

We know our reading and interpretation of Scripture must be consistent with and measured against God's applications. If we insist that some rule or command we find in the Bible is eternal and part of God's all-time will, we must ask: Does God agree? If we desire to be consistent with God's character, Jesus' Gospel, and the Spirit's leading, we have to look at how God has dealt with women throughout history. That consistently repeated history will reveal God's character and will.

Women in the Old Testament –

We don't want to gloss over the Law of Moses in our study of God's ways of dealing with women. This is important. It's critical to note that the Law of Moses does not follow the curse we discussed last week in Genesis 3. Things change with the giving of God's Law. The Law, typically depicted as the first five books of the Old Testament but broadly seen as the entire Old Testament, generally treats women and men the same, as per the creation design. However, there are exceptions that require our attention.

Deuteronomy 24:1-4 states that only a man may divorce his wife. But we know Jesus reversed this. In Mark 10:1-12, our Lord acknowledges that either party can initiate a divorce. But the point of his teaching is that divorce is wrong no matter who starts it. The responsibility is the same. The Law states that only a man could enter the Holy of Holies, and that only one time per year. But the New Testament tells us those rules are eliminated (Hebrews 10:19-22). All Christians can now enter the Holy of Holies and come into the presence of God. The curtain is opened and we are all allowed entry by the blood of Jesus. We are all priests now (1 Peter 2:5).

What about the women's courtyard at the Temple Mount? Well, that's not found anywhere in the Bible. It's in the maps at the back of the King James Version Bibles, but you can't locate that specification in Scripture. This practice began with the later rabbinic teachings. There is nothing in the Bible describing anything about the tabernacle or the temple that would keep women from coming as close to the presence of God as men.

Even the most sexist rules of the Mosaic age have been repealed and replaced by Jesus.

So how does our God speak of women, interact with women, and commission women in the Old Testament? And does this have anything to say to us today?

Miriam –

a prophetess and a “leader” of all Israel (Micah 6:4)
lower ranking than Moses (Num. 12:6-8), but no distinction between Aaron and her (Ex. 15:20)

Deborah –

a prophetess and a “leader” of all Israel (Judges 4:4-5)
decided disputes; had authority over men and women;
this can't be true if God commands for all time that women can have no authority over men
gave orders to Barak, the general of Israel's army
highest ranking person in the nation
she's a married woman, yet God gave her authority over men
Barak's mistake was in failing to take orders from a woman, not in failing to give orders!

All the Male Kings –

kings are worldly cultural structures opposed by God; seen as equivalent to rejecting God
practice of first-born males inheriting the throne was rejected by God
God selected David; all the others came to power by birthright or violent coup

Huldah –

called by God to be a prophetess; King Josiah followed Huldah (2 Kings 22:14-20)
gave orders to Josiah, the godliest of kings
God spoke through Huldah in public settings to give instruction to the king (2 Chronicles 34)

Proverbs 31 -

the good wife is a business woman and a teacher
she speaks with wisdom and faithful instruction
sells clothes, real estate, trading, ministry to the poor and needy

Esther -

given all authority over the Jewish people in Persia (Esther 9:29-10:1)
established Purim fasts and lamentation feasts and traditions

If God intended women to be subordinate to men, to have no authority over men, and to be silent in their public presence, why is Esther in the Bible? And what do we do with Deborah?

God -

refers to himself and his actions with motherly language (Isaiah 46:3, 49:15, 66:12-13)
I have upheld you since you were conceived, I have carried you since your birth
can a woman forget the baby who nurses at her breast?
Can she withhold compassion from the child she has borne? I would never forget you!
As a mother consoles her child, so I will console you
These passages show our God's high regard for the gifts and sensibilities of women

Women in the Gospels -

It's interesting that women in the New Testament are given even greater honor than those in the Old Testament.

Anna -

the prophetess in the Temple courts (Luke 2:36-37)
the most public place of worship in all Israel

Mary & Martha -

disciples of Jesus; sat at Jesus' feet (Luke 10:38-42)
it was wrong to teach women about God's Law
Jesus taught women even when men were present
Mary was flouting convention and Jesus commended her

Female Disciples -

Mary, Joanna, Susanna, Herod's manager, many others (Luke 8:1-3)
a part of our Lord's inner circle
they supported him of their own means, a scandalous thing in that culture

Jesus Honors Women –

the sinful woman who washed his feet “loved much” (Luke 7:47)

the Canaanite woman with the demon-possessed daughter had “great faith” (Matt. 15:27)

the widow with the two mites “gave all” (Mark 12:43)

Women at the Cross and Tomb –

first witnesses, sent by Jesus to proclaim the Good News

first to see the risen Lord, first to proclaim the Good News

apostles to the apostles

all four Gospels

Jesus never talked down to or subordinated women. He uniformly honored women. His attitude toward women might seem liberated today, but it was revolutionary back then. Jesus never denied a woman the right to speak, teach, or exercise authority.

Women at Pentecost –

Jesus’ inclusion of women among his disciples begins the pattern that was carried on by his apostles and the Church. After his resurrection, we are told that women were among those worshiping and praying with the apostles (Acts 1:12-14). There were 120 of these men and women together in the upper room. And then God’s Holy Spirit was miraculously poured out on all people --- both men and women!

Read Acts 2:17-18. What they saw and experienced together was the fulfillment of prophecy! Women are being filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesying, speaking the words of God! This is the promised new era that had finally come to be.

“I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days.” ~Joel 2:28-29

“I wish that all the Lord’s people were prophets and that the Lord would put his Spirit on them!” ~ Numbers 11:29

This equal rights and access of both men and women to the gifts of the Holy Spirit is the sign that God’s promises are coming true. This is the sign of redemption and salvation and the new Holy Spirit era of God’s righteous reign. Christ’s Church is founded on this very principle: “What you now see and hear...! (Acts 2:32-33)

Women now have the miraculous power to speak words of encouragement, rebuke, exhortation, and condemnation. Joel said the Messianic age would be ushered in with this gift in women. It was promised that someday all people, both men and women, would enjoy and exercise these gifts equally. And those listening to Peter that day were seeing it!

This pivotal Pentecost passage emphasizes the equal rights of men and women to the gifts of God's Holy Spirit. The Old Testament prophets were legendary for their ability to vividly declare the Word of God. So even kings trembled at their voices. They prophesied that God's coming Kingdom would be characterized by this speaking gift being given to both males and females. So it's not surprising to see in Acts 21 the four daughters of Philip prophesying. It shouldn't disorient us to see in 1 Corinthians 11 women prophesying and praying in the presence of men in the Christian worship assembly. Why would it? The Bible tells us it was going to happen this way.

Conclusions –

The life, death, and resurrection of Jesus inaugurates the new age. The curse is now being reversed. God's plans to restore and redeem all of creation are coming true. Women and men are being given equal amounts of God's spiritual gifts. This is the monumental moment and sign. This shows that God is alive and active in the world. This is the evidence that God's promises are being fulfilled. Women and men speaking equally with and among God's people is the unmistakable proof that the consequences of sin are being removed, the distorted order of things is being repaired, and the broken world and its fallen structures are being eternally restored.