

Feminism

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Preacher: Petasha Evans

[0 : 00] Before we start though, I think it'd be great if we just turn to the person next to us and see if we can define what feminism is. I don't know how you found that. I think it's pretty hard to define.

Oh, thank you for that, because that's what we were saying. In her speech to the UN, actress Emma Walton defined feminism as the belief that men and women should have equal rights and opportunities.

Which I think sounds like quite a good summary, doesn't it? But then we get to the problem of having to define what those rights and opportunities are. So it's not quite as simplistic as we first might think.

Now I think the reason that we find it difficult to define feminism is largely because there have been multiple waves which have focused on different things. Now obviously throughout history, there have been what are called proto-feminists.

So largely individual women who have advocated, who advocate for women's rights. But the first recognised wave of feminism happened towards the end of the 19th century and the start of the 20th.

[1 : 10] And campaigning for women's right to vote here in the UK brought together a unified group. And this group sought equality with men in society. So in addition to the vote, they sought access to education and legal rights for owning property and having bank accounts.

Think Millicent Fawcett and Emmeline Pankhurst. Now the second wave of feminism broadened the equality agenda to the home and gender roles and relationships.

During the Second World War, women had more than proved their ability to do many things that men had traditionally done. Then the invention of contraceptive pill and with access to so-called safe abortions.

That gave way to the sexual revolution in the 60s. Now the third wave is more difficult to identify and sum up. There's the kind of ladette or raunch culture of the 90s, or started in the 90s, which further embraced sexual promiscuity as a sign of independence.

So depending on your age, think Loaded Magazine or the Spice Girls or Miley Cyrus and her Wrecking Ball. Now whilst we could say that feminism in essence seeks to erase the differences between the sexes, this wave of feminism sought to do that in new ways.

[2 : 33] But there was also a focus on other minority groups and intersectionality, where someone belongs to multiple minority groups at the same time.

So someone might be female, black, immigrant and gay. And the rise of Black Lives Matter illustrates that because it campaigns against racism, but also the abolition of authority structures like the police force and the perceived patriarchy in the family.

So common themes in this wave, because it's quite hard to pin down, seem to be the right to individual choice and the validation of subjective experience.

Women are viewed collectively as an oppressed, disempowered underclass, with men as the privileged oppressors. And in particular, white, western, middle-aged, middle-class, heterosexual, cisgendered men.

Now currently we're in the fourth wave of feminism, which has seen the introduction of the global Me Too movement, campaigning for safety for women from sexual harassment and violence.

[3 : 39] And this saw a rise in publicity locally after the murder of Sarah Everard. And like the third wave, this fourth wave isn't just about women, sexism and misogyny, but it's also about minorities, racism, homophobia, transphobia.

The latter of which has obviously brought to the fore arguments between feminists over how we define women. It's hard to campaign for the rights of women as a distinct group when anyone can

identify as a woman if they choose to.

But perhaps that is also the logical conclusion of erasing the distinctions between the sexes. And the fourth wave is almost unequivocally celebrated by celebrities and media outlets.

And opposition to it is seen as an infringement of human rights. And we've seen that, haven't we, with the backlash to J.K. Rowling and her views on feminism and transgender.

So when we talk about feminism, it's probably helpful to define which wave of feminism we're talking about. As with all culture, we should be asking what the Bible, what Christianity says about feminism.

[4 : 51] So to start us off, I've printed, you'll see on the sheet of paper, just a few different Bible verses. We could have gone so many different places in the Bible. And I just wonder if, again, we go into twos or even on your own if you want to, or small groups.

Just have a look at those verses and have a think about how they, what's taught in those verses, contrasts with what we just said with the kind of key issues in the different waves of feminism.

So how does that, we're going to go right back to the beginning of the Bible. We're going to look at Genesis. Some of those verses are obviously on the sheet for you. So we're going to turn to Genesis 1.

And we're going to what Andrea is going to read for us. Genesis 26 to 28. In a moment, we're all there. We're all there.

We're all there. We're all there. Oh, that's all right. Okay. Then God said, let us make man in our age, after our likeness.

[5 : 59] And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the heavens, and over the livestock, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that comes 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. And God blessed them. And God said to them, be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the heavens, and over every living thing that moves on the earth.

Thank you. So men and women are both made in the image of God. Men and women are both blessed. Men and women are both to exercise dominion over the earth, and everything in the earth. Men and women are made equal in dignity and worth. Now we all know that that's not the way a lot of societies throughout history, and even some today, view men and women.

Most belief systems throughout history have not taught that humans are of equal worth. In Jesus' day, in first century Rome, it would not have been unusual for unwanted babies, and particularly girls, to just be left out in the streets to die.

[7 : 17] And a Roman man would think it was his right to have sex with a slave or a prostitute. The teaching of the Bible, and the way Jesus treated women, was completely countercultural.

And the kingdom that he proclaimed turned hierarchical culture on its head. So the roots of some aspects of feminism are actually found in Christian teaching.

As women, we have equality in access to education, the right to vote, we're able to own our own land and have our own bank accounts. Today, humanly speaking, because of the work of people like Emmeline Pankhurst and Millicent Fawcett.

But both of those women who were so influential in the UK drew on the biblical principles of justice and equality in their campaigns. And over the years, the feminist movement, as well as other movements, including many Christian charities, have campaigned against violence against women. So seeing as feminism is the pursuit of equality between the sexes, does that mean that we can agree with all of feminism? Well, let's just think a little bit more about the implications of humankind being made all in equal dignity.

[8 : 31] Sorry, made equal, everybody being made equal in dignity and worth. Because that means that every human life, however worthless or disposable society may think it is, is precious in God's eyes.

Every human life is made in God's image, which will have an impact on how we view unborn babies. The Bible says that we can't view unborn babies as property to be dealt with as we wish. Psalm 139 tells us that we are knitted together by God in our mother's womb. It goes on to tell us that God has written every one of our days before any of them came to be.

The Bible tells us that life starts in the womb. It's understandable, therefore, that historians like Tom Holland are now saying that the sexual revolution that took place in the 1960s, while being born off the back of the legalisation of abortion and the invention of the contraceptive pill, was actually a rejection of Christianity.

It was decided that the only moral code that mattered with sexual expression is consent. I think it's fair to say that the freedoms that feminists in the 60s thought would benefit women have actually proved most beneficial for men, as the repercussions of non-committal sex have been reduced.

[9 : 55] Author and political commentator Louise Perry, who, like Tom Holland's, is not a Christian, cites that the downsides of the loss of the institution of marriage have been overwhelmingly borne by women and children.

It's also worth noting that the legalisation of abortion, support for which is often considered a non-negotiable hallmark of feminism, led to further discrimination against women due to sex-selective abortions.

It's estimated that between 1970 and 2017, 47 million female babies were aborted globally because of their gender.

Now, most of those were in South and East Asia, but there is evidence to suggest that sex-selective abortions are happening in the UK today. So, in an attempt to claim perceived equality with men, feminism may have unintentionally caused further inequality.

Let's head back to Genesis, because as well as seeing that God made humans equal, I hope we'll also see that God made humans different. God made men and women equal in value, but in his wisdom he didn't make us equal in role.

[11 : 09] There is diversity as well as equality. Now, in creation, everything had been good. We see that throughout chapter one. Let's look back down at Genesis again.

God looks at what he's made and he declares it good. When he makes mankind in chapter one, verse 31, if you can look that up, it is very good.

But in 2.18, God declares something not good. Just have a look down with me at verse 18 of chapter two. What is it that's not good? It's man being alone.

Now, remember, God wants mankind to continue his job of filling the earth and subduing it. And for that role, God wants both men and women. Now, the filling bit is obvious.

Men can't have babies on their own. But there's also something about the ruling aspect of God's, in God's perfect plan needs both men and women. Adam needs a helper.

[12 : 08] Now, we can often think that that word is quite derogatory. But God actually uses it in the Old Testament to describe himself. God is our helper. That comes up multiple times in the Old Testament.

Lots in the Psalms, in Exodus and Deuteronomy. But particularly Psalm 115, if you want a reference. So it gives the idea of a partnership and of helping someone to do something that they're unable to do on their own.

And it's the helper who is fit for him. Do you see that again down in verse 18? And again in verse 20? In the original Hebrew, that phrase literally means like opposite.

So Adam, who was created first, needs a like opposite. And so God created Eve. She was like Adam in humanity, in dignity, value, status and worth.

But she is also opposite to him. She's different. You may have heard of complementary colours. If you can cast your mind to that for art lessons. So who knows what the complementary colour to orange is?

[13 : 15] Green. Green. Blue. Blue. Because they're opposite each other in the colour wheel. Yeah, so when they're put together, they have an impact on each other.

They work better together. They make each other pop. And it's the same with men and women. In God's good design, we've been made to complement each other. Society is better off because there are men and women in it.

God created both male and female because he needed both male and female to be his image bearers. And to fulfil his role of filling and subduing the air.

He's given males and females different roles. And we see that in the Bible, specifically in the areas of church and within marriage. A bit like a sports team.

Everyone on a sports team has slightly different roles that all contribute to the performance of the team. You wouldn't win a football match if everyone was strikers. You need somebody to be

stopping the goals from going in the net.

[14:18] There is diversity. But this diversity does not contradict their equality. Now we've seen that feminism started off with largely God-honouring initiatives like seeking to stop the abuse of women in the workplace.

And establishing laws that allowed women to vote or have access to education. But a lot of feminists went on to call for equal and identical outcomes for men and women.

And this movement went on to devalue the traditional and distinctive nurturing roles of women. And in the case of liberal feminism, rejecting motherhood altogether. In essence, feminism sought to eradicate any difference between men and women.

On this issue, author and podcaster Louise Perry again said that women and men are profoundly different. Feminism should support those differences, not erase them.

And she would call herself a feminist. I don't know if any of you have heard of the author Rosaria Butterfield. She is now a Christian. But before her conversion, she was a lesbian professor of English and women's studies in the US.

[15:29] And in one of her books, *Five Lies of Our Antichristian Age*, she says this. The category sacred to feminism is women's equality with men in all things, to the point of denying the creation ordinance and basic biology.

Under feminism, men and women are interchangeable. Under scripture, such interchangeability is sin. She goes on to describe how after becoming a Christian, she struggled to stop idolizing feminism.

It had been such a crucial part of her identity. And for her, the breakthrough she describes came when she was meditating on Psalm 72.

She said, How do the sun and moon fear God? By fulfilling their creational design. The design of the sun and moon is as plain as day and night.

And for the sun and moon to fulfill their design, they must do the work that matches their nature. Yet we image bearers of God are so pardoned by our sin that we don't see our rebellion. We call it liberty, progress, feminism.

[16:33] But God sees it as rejecting the brightness of his glory, scorning our designated roles and places as kings and queens. We scoff at the glory God holds out to us when we deny the biblical gender roles he has reserved for his daughters.

Now all that said, we don't want to go beyond the Bible and claim differences between the sexes that aren't there. So nowhere in the Bible does it say that girls need to like pink and dancing and that boys need to like blue and cars.

So let's make sure that we're not assuming cultural stereotypes. And obviously they're very extreme stereotypes that I just mentioned. There are others. Now the claim of feminism in the second and third waves was that God-given boundaries for sex were oppressing women.

And that marriage was a vehicle for male domination. Rather than the protection from male domination as it had previously been understood.

Now of course some men and sometimes women are violent and abusive in marriages. But this is the result of the sin of the individual, not a problem with the marriage that was instituted by God.

[17:44] Which in its unspoiled form is a beautiful picture of Christ's relationship with the church. So feminism moved from wanting equality in value to equality in outcome and role.

Equality is right, but there should be diversity within that equality. Too much current thinking about equality, whatever the sphere, assumes that to be equal one must be identical.

Or that our value comes from where we are in a hierarchy rather than our equal dignity as image bearers. As I think we all know, God's perfect creation didn't stay perfect for very long.

It didn't take long for humans to sin and spoil it. And therefore God cursed mankind. And because of our sin, humans made the battle of the sexes.

I don't know how many of you remember that book, *Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus*. It was a bestseller in the early 90s. And as you can probably guess by the title, the author states that the most common relationship problems between men and women are a result of fundamental differences between the sexes.

[19:00] But let's have a look down at Genesis and see what these verses say. Annie, I think you're going to read that for us, aren't you? So we're just going to have a look at Genesis 3, verses 16 and 17.

To the woman he said, I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing. In pain you shall bring forth children.

Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you. And to Adam he said, Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, you shall not eat of it.

Cursed is the ground because of you. In pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life. Thank you. So God had given mankind two roles, to fill the earth and subdue it.

So to fill the earth and subdue it. And now both of those roles would be hard. God curses childbirths and the land that man needs to farm.

[20 : 04] Incidentally, we see here the creative differences between men and women being highlighted. In the curses that God places on them. But did you also see, nestled in the middle, he curses their relationship with each other.

He says to the woman, Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you. Now desire usually means to want something strongly. But here the original Hebrew has a sense of wanting to master or control.

So the woman will want to control the man, and he will rule over her. There is going to be strife and jostling for supremacy or dominance. And that is why we are where we are.

We've seen this distortion of God's good design, haven't we, throughout history. Feminism arose precisely because people were denying that men and women were equally valuable.

Because sadly, in the past, and in some parts of the world today, men misused their physical strength and authority to take advantage of and abuse women, rather than respecting them.

[21 : 09] What's become known in the West as toxic masculinity. Now when we look at Jesus' interactions with women, we see a completely countercultural way in which he engages with them.

Just think of the Samaritan woman in John 4, who Jesus should not even have been speaking to because he was a Jew. She was a social outcast in her own culture due to her promiscuity.

And yet Jesus spoke to her with respect and kindness, and offered her a freedom through the Gospel that no feminist revolution could ever offer. Women are given dignity into significant roles in the Bible.

In Luke 1, Mary and Elizabeth were the first people to recognize and declare the Lord's arrival. And Jesus chose to reveal himself, his risen self, to women first.

Even the philosopher Nietzsche said that Christianity was the religion of women and slaves. And he said that because it was a religion that held women and slaves in equal standing to men.

[22 : 14] And that is because the Bible teaches that Christians are equal in Christ. Even atheists can see that Christianity is a religion that upholds the marginalized.

And that brings us to our final point. Christians are made equal in Christ. If we turn to Jesus in forgiveness, we have a new identity in Christ that supersedes, though it doesn't erase any other category or identity we may have.

In Colossians, Paul encourages the Colossian church to live lives worthy of that new identity. And Katie, I think you're going to read for it, aren't you? Colossians 3.

Here is the page number, Katie. 1185. Page 1185 in my church type title. It's Colossians 3, verse 9 to 14.

Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices, and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator.

[23 : 27] Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, scythian, slave, free, but Christ is all and in all.

Put on men, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassion, kindness, humility, meekness and patience, bearing with one another, and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other, as the Lord has forgiven you, so that you also must forgive.

And above all these, put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. Thank you. We don't have to strive to achieve what we think is equality, because we are equal in Christ.

Whatever our sex, or our status, whatever our nationality, or our abilities. Whether we've pushed through the glass ceiling, or we're content cleaning the glass windows at home.

If we are Christians, we are equal in Christ. And incidentally, our status as one of his people is far greater and more wonderful than anything this world could offer.

[24 : 40] As Colossians goes on to say, we therefore should put on love. So, what are the implications of all this? I've put a couple of things in a box there.

So, maybe don't feel you're only happy to chat about those. They're very basic. But, why don't we spend just a few minutes now having a chat about what we think the implications of some of the things that we've talked about, and then we'll come back together and talk about those implications a little bit more.

I've put two things in the boxes there. Obviously, it's totally right to be appalled at how women are treated in Afghanistan. And we may feel totally comfortable calling ourselves a feminist, because we long for a world in which all are looked on equally.

Or, we may choose not to, because we don't want to be associated with some of the more progressive agendas of feminism. But, ultimately, whether we do or don't, I think let's make sure we're calling ourselves Christians.

Because feminism is built on an inadequate notion of what is right and good, i.e. it's not a biblical notion. It'll only be good when it happens to align with God's will and the teaching of the Bible.

[25 : 55] So, we're far better off starting with the Bible, with what God says. I think it's also worth just pausing for a few minutes now to think how we might have slipped into some of the more negative implications of feminism in our Christian circles.

And this is not meant to be exhaustive, so I'm sure you'll be able to add others. But I just jostled a few things down now on the handout. Are we seeking to complement each other rather than compete?

And I'm meaning complement with an e, rather than a complement. Obviously, if you want to complement all your Christian brothers at church, then please go ahead. But I'm saying here, do we look to partner with them in the role of looking after God's world and His church?

Or are we wanting to push ourselves forward and vie for supremacy? Let's look for opportunities to help them to embrace their God-given role of leadership in the church and the home.

Do we enable rather than belittle? I don't know if you've noticed, but in the media there often seems to be, particularly sitcoms, the kind of bumbling dad figure who's mocked while the women have it all together.

[27 : 11] We get it in The Simpsons, don't we? In Modern Family, the American sitcom. And I think we even get it in Peppa Pig. In my teens, I embraced feminism.

I had a postcard that my friend Sarah had given me that said, women need a man like a fish needs a bicycle. And I remember plenty of times I would have scoffed at men trying to help me out, as though, you know, why on earth would I need you to help me?

And the other day actually, I didn't scoff, but a very godly man was seeking to help me and offered to carry, I had multiple heavy bags and he was wanting to help me carry them.

And I resisted his help. And I realised afterwards actually probably I shouldn't have done. He offered multiple times. And I wasn't scoffing at him, but he was just trying to serve me and potentially acknowledge the differences in that he was probably stronger than I was.

And I was telling him, not with words, but that I didn't need him and he shouldn't really be offering it to me, which was a bit unfair I thought actually. And I'm really aware of this being a mum of three boys.

[28 : 20] I'm wanting to bring them up to be respectful and to care for women, especially in the wake of all the Andrew Tate stuff. But it's pretty confusing for them to work out what's acceptable and what's not in a feminist world.

So let's enable men to acknowledge the differences and be respectful of others, rather than, sorry, to be respectful of them rather than belittling.

Do we graciously correct rather than condemn? Now, where there is misogyny and abuse, of course, it is absolutely right to challenge that and to hold people to account, both in the church and even legally where that's appropriate.

But equally, whatever the size of the issue, we can do this in ways that still show the grace of the gospel. Where the world cancels people who have fallen, as a church we should rightly condemn sin, but offer grace to the sinner in the hope of repentance.

Do we forgive rather than being easily offended? And I want to put in a million caveats here. I am absolutely not saying that we should ignore sin. I am not saying that we shouldn't feel able to talk about a situation.

[29 : 31] Please, if you think that you have been subject to sexism or misogyny, then please speak to somebody that you trust. And I know Fiona and I would hope that you would all feel able to come and speak to us about anything like that.

But I am saying, let's not be easily offended if we feel overlooked in some capacity and assume it's kind of because it's over our agenda. I read a book recently that seeks to highlight where women are maligned or sidelined in churches.

And it encourages us to think about how we're viewed by men in our churches as whether we're, to establish whether we're being patronised or treated a bit like a temptress or a usurper.

And I'm sure that the motive of the author was a good one. But I wonder if in most cases we can show grace to the person rather than assuming the worst of them rather than the best.

Let me finish by reading Revelation 21, 1-4. You don't need to turn there. Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth.

[30 : 43] For the first heaven and the first earth had passed away and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them and they will be his people. And God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes and death shall be no more. Neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain any more. For the former things have passed away.

Though there is a day when it won't matter what sex we are, Jesus died so that if we're trusting in him, one day we will be joined together as the body of God's people to collectively be his bride.

And any pain caused by sin in this world will be went away. Let me pray. Father, we thank you that in your good design, you have created the whole of humanity equal in dignity and worth.

[31 : 55] Thank you that you have created a society with many differences and that we see something of your character and your beauty in those differences. Please would you help us to embrace those differences?

Help us to keep thinking wisely about the culture of the world that we live in. And please help us to align our personal view with your word rather than the world.

Amen.