

The Impact of Christianity on Women in the Graeco-Roman World

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[0 : 00] Okay, is it okay if I put water on here? Yeah. Okay, well, it's a pleasure to be with you guys this morning, and thanks for having me.

It's a good opportunity for me to be able to learn how to start teaching and stuff like that, so I appreciate the opportunity. And, yeah, I think I've discovered this morning where the social hell of the church exists, and I think it's here at Learners' Exchange, which is great.

It's good to see you. So the topic that I chose to speak on this morning is how Christianity impacted women in the Greco-Roman world. And the reason why I chose to discuss women in the Greco-Roman world is because this is the region that was first impacted by the gospel after the death of Christ, and it's the cultural setting of our New Testament, right?

So I originally became interested in this topic because my non-Christian friends started asking me questions about how Christians think about women and their role in society and also in the church.

And often I'd have questions about whether or not Christianity suppresses women. And I found also that I had questions... Throw your voice so it hits the back wall.

[1 : 18] Okay. Okay. Okay. So you speak louder? Okay. Okay. So I've also had questions from many of my Christian friends who feel uninformed about the topic or like they really don't understand Scripture's perspective on the issue well enough.

And so often in these discussions that I've had with people, I began to realize that I was actually quite uninformed on a topic that seemed very important to people, especially because of its ability to raise deep emotion in people because of gender issues that they faced.

And, you know, I haven't particularly felt very oppressed as a woman myself, but I know that many women have.

And so this has become an issue for them. And anyway, then as a Regent student, I had the privilege of sitting in lectures where this topic was discussed. And it intrigued me a lot.

And so I decided to write a paper on it. And then this is actually what my talk this morning comes out of, is that I started learning about this at Regent and got really interested in it.

[2 : 31] And I hope that you find it encouraging because, as I'm going to argue today, I think that Christianity has substantially increased the quality of living for women in the Greco-Roman world in a very profound way.

So learning more about this topic has given me a renewed sense of confidence in the value that God places on women. And it has also helped me when I read the Bible.

It has helped me to understand some of the cultural issues the New Testament writers were speaking to. And so I hope that it will likewise be of benefit to you and that it will also give you an increased sense of confidence in Christ's power to affect change in our lives and in the world.

So I'm not an expert on this issue. And I'm not a historian. But my thoughts are significantly influenced by other people.

And I'm going to try to give them credit often throughout this as I can. So Rodney Stark is one of those people who has influenced my thinking a lot on this topic.

[3 : 45] And he wrote a book called *The Rise of Christianity*. And in it, he explores the growth of Christianity in its early stages and the role that women had in its growth because they were particularly drawn to Christianity.

He says, Amidst contemporary denunciations of Christianity as patriarchal and sexist, It is easily forgotten that the early church was so especially attractive to women that in 370, the Emperor Valentinian issued a written order to Pope Damasus I requiring that Christian missionaries cease calling at the homes of pagan women.

Although some classical writers claimed that women were easy prey for any foreign superstition, most recognized that Christianity was unusually appealing because within the Christian subculture, women enjoyed far higher status than did women in the Greco-Roman world at large.

So then, how and why did Christianity, sorry, did Christian women enjoy a higher status than women in their wider culture?

Well, there are many reasons for this. But one of the most fundamental reasons is that Christianity taught equality between men and women.

[5 : 10] And this might not seem like a radical concept for us today in our North American culture, which in many ways takes this for granted. But in the Greco-Roman world, it was huge.

So, to give you a sample of what life was like for women, I'm going to read you a clip from Stark's book. He provides some insight into what life was like in Athens. And he says, In Athens, women were in relatively short supply owing to female infanticide, practiced by all classes, and to additional deaths caused by abortion.

The status of Athenian women was very low. Girls received little or no education. Typically, Athenian females were married at puberty and often before. Under Athenian law, a woman was classified as a child regardless of age and therefore was the legal property of some man at all stages in her life.

Males could divorce simply by ordering a wife out of the household. Moreover, if a woman was seduced or raped, her husband was legally compelled to divorce her. If a woman wanted a divorce, she had to leave her father or some other man bring her, or have some other man bring her case before a judge.

Finally, Athenian women could own property, but control of the property was always vested in the male to whom she belonged. And this is a sample of what life was like in Athens, specifically, but nonetheless, I think it gives us a picture of what life was like for women in the Greco-Roman world.

[6 : 48] Many women were the objects of an oppressive structure of male superiority and were treated as the property of men. In this culture, status was of utmost importance, and when it came to status, women had none.

Or they had virtually nothing anyway. Not only was the man in charge of the household and the ruler over the woman, but she was his property and he had legal authority and ownership over her.

Women were transferred from their husbands in a similar way as to how a dowry would be transferred. And I found a few people helpful in understanding the relationship between men and women and these people include Robert Hall, Gordon Fee, and E.A. Judge.

Hall explains that under Greek law, a woman or girl's father was her lord until she was transferred by marriage to the power of her new lord, kurios, which is the Greek word for lord, her husband.

Roman women lived under the ancient institution of Patria Potestas, that is, the control of the male head of the family, whether grandfather, father, or husband.

[8 : 01] By custom and law, these traditions, these respective traditions have implications for property rights, divorce, and legal definition of marriage. Gordon Fee explains that men did not marry their wives because of love in the way that we would understand it today, but because of the necessity to continue the family line.

And it was especially important for women to bear sons, and there was potential that if she failed to do so, it could result in divorce. Further to this, E.A. Judge explains that the situation, explains the situation by stating that the Greco-Roman world considered that women are by nature inferior to men, that they lack in both intellectual and emotional capacity, that the husband owns the wife in some sense, and uses her for the purpose of procreation, and that marriage is to be undertaken as a public duty.

So, as you can imagine, the circumstances for women were difficult. They were not treated as equal to men, and in a setting like this, it is no surprise that Christianity, which taught the equality of male and female, should appeal to women, and that the Apostle Paul should provide such a striking contrast to their culture.

In 1 Corinthians 7, verses 1 to 5, Paul called both the husband and wife to mutual submission of their bodies to one another.

It says, Now concerning the matters about which you wrote, it is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman, but because of the temptation to sexual immorality, each man should have his own wife, and each woman her own husband.

[9 : 53] The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband. For the wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does.

Likewise, the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. Do not deprive one another, except perhaps by agreement for a limited time that you may devote yourselves to prayer, but then come together again so that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.

So here, Paul expresses that neither the man nor the woman should deprive the other of sexual relations, and if they did, it should be by mutual agreement, and it should be for the purpose of prayer.

Paul's concern for mutuality demonstrated the equal value he placed on a woman, and thankfully, this also changed how a woman was sexually treated.

From a Christian perspective, it was not acceptable for a woman to be used merely as a means of procreation at her husband's discretion. Furthermore, Paul called for the husband and wife to give their bodies to one another.

[11 : 15] Giving is an act that requires voluntary surrender. He also addressed each party separately, speaking to both the husband and the wife rather than just the husband.

The emphasis Paul put on mutual consent in marriage and the fact that he addressed each gender individually demonstrated that he was treating both genders as equal.

His words came at a significant contrast to the culture that thought and lived quite differently than this. Gordon Fee says, this passage radically alters the sexual relationship within marriage instead of the more common pattern of sex as something the husband does to his wife for his sexual gratification.

Sexual intimacy is a celebration of belonging to one another where one's body is not one's own private possession. Both partners give their bodies for the other in a relationship of mutual love.

Another important issue where Paul insists on the equality of women is in his treatment of female slaves and their connection to prostitution.

[12 : 29] In the Greco-Roman world, forced prostitution was among one of the tragedies that slave women had to face. And slave masters could ask their slaves to prostitute themselves much like they could ask them to do household chores.

It was also to the master's economic advantage to profit from his slave's activity. And for a woman who had no legal authority of her own, she had very little choice in the situation.

And as for the man purchasing her, it was considered his prerogative. In Lynn Coet's book, *Women in the World of the Earliest Christians*, she says, the institution of slavery and the practice of prostitution were tightly interwoven within the fabric of the Greco-Roman world.

She goes on to explain that as slaves, women would have had to obey their masters even sexually. This would include accepting sexual advances and working as a prostitute.

This kind of living is not something that Paul condones. This will come at no surprise to you. In 1 Thessalonians 4, 6, in the context of avoiding sexual immorality, he says, no one should wrong or take advantage of a brother or sister.

[13 : 49] Also, in 1 Corinthians 6, 12 to 20, Paul tells men not to sleep with prostitutes. He says, all things are lawful for me, but not all things are helpful.

All things are lawful for me, but I will not be dominated by anything. Food is meat for the stomach and the stomach for food, and God will destroy both one and the other.

The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord and the Lord for the body. And God raised the Lord and will also raise us up by His power.

Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Never! Or do you not know that he who is joined to a prostitute becomes one body with her?

For as it is written, the two will become one flesh. But he who is joined to the Lord becomes one spirit with Him. Flee from sexual immorality.

[14 : 49] Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body. Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit within you whom you have heard from God?

You are not your own, for you were bought with a price to glorify God with your body. Lynn Coyt makes an interesting note about this passage.

She points out that Paul does not condemn women in this situation, but exhorts people to honor God with their bodies and that rather than speaking to those who don't have choices, Paul is speaking to those that do.

She makes the argument that for those who have no choice, Paul does not hold them responsible as would have been the case with women prostitutes who had no choice in obeying their masters, even in regards to sex.

And in 1 Corinthians 7, 21-24, Paul encourages slaves not to be troubled about their status as slaves, but he instructs them to gain their freedom if they can.

[15 : 56] He offers hope to these people by explaining the equality they have in Christ. In 1 Corinthians 7, 22, he says, For those who were slaves when called to faith in the Lord are the Lord's freed people.

Similarly, those who were free when called are Christ's slaves. Galatians 3, 28 is a text that is great at emphasizing the equality of people in Christ.

It says, There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. In the Greco-Roman world, Paul's perspective because of the gospel was totally countercultural.

Even though the pagan society made strong distinctions between male and female and their worth, these distinctions were completely eradicated in Christ. As a result, many women were attracted to faith in Christ and it dynamically impacted their living conditions, which were in dire need of reform.

The gospel really was good news. And not only had Christ died for women and dealt with the problem of sin, but life in Christ also came with the added benefit of being valued in a way that women never had been before.

[17 : 25] For women who had been treated as the property of men in marriage, slavery, and prostitution, Christianity offered them a liberating message of hope in the midst of their oppression.

Another important topic that Christianity addressed that significantly impacted women was infanticide. In the Greco-Roman world, it was legal to kill unwanted female infants.

This was considered an acceptable moral practice and all classes of people participated in it. Deformed males could also be killed, but they were deformed and the women had less value than that.

and the man to whom the women belonged could, you know, he could determine whether or not the wife would kill the children.

Simply discard his daughter. So because of this, many female infants were killed, and men in that culture outnumbered women significantly.

[18 : 34] I got this stat from Rodney Stark's book and in it he says, in his classic work on ancient and medieval populations, J.C. Russell estimated that there were 131 males per 100 females in the city of Rome and 140 males per 100 females in Italy, Asia Minor and North Africa.

However, because Christianity prohibited infanticide, many more women were allowed to live. And I don't know if there could be a greater act of social justice than permitting women to live and rescuing them from death.

Christians stood up in the midst of a culture that lived and thought very differently than they did, and they prohibited infanticide. Christians believed that all people were created in the image of God had equal value, and that it's not up to the individual person to determine who should have the right to live and who should not.

Christians believed that murder was wrong, and that belief extended to the murder of female infants. And of course, this also benefited males, because it protected the deformed males from being discarded as well.

And Rodney Stark makes an interesting argument about this. He says that this aided in the rise of Christianity, because not only were Christians having children and letting them live, but over time the sex ratios began to equal out among Christians compared to what was going on in the pagan world around them, and as a result it contributed to the growth of the church in its early stages.

[20 : 23] And another problem that Christians fought against was abortion. abortion was a legal practice in the Greco-Roman world, and much like it is in our culture today.

And because women were the property of men, men had to say over whether or not the woman aborted her child. But in regards to abortion, if the man ordered the abortion of the fetus, the woman had no choice.

She had to follow through with it. And another problem with this was that abortion was dangerous for women. And many women that had abortions died in the process.

And one of the common methods that was used was drinking poison that would cause the woman to miscarry. And of course, the more poison you drink, the more sure your abortion is. And so, with different women having different tolerance levels to the poison, many of them died from ingesting improper doses.

other methods of abortion included inserting knives, hooks, or long needles into the uterus of the woman and then taking the fetus out.

[21 : 41] Yeah, I'm just going to spare you the rest of the details on that, but abortion is horrible. Abortion is a horrific thing, and it is completely contrary to nature.

And it was a hurtful process for many women. It was unsafe and could be deadly for the mother, and it was certainly deadly for the child. For women who survived the abortion of their children, the methods used could often reduce their future fertility.

But thanks be to God, to God, because he is merciful, Christians stood up against both abortion and infanticide. And because Christians took such a radical stance against these things, many women were protected from the abuses against their bodies and their children.

Their children were spared and women were saved because they couldn't die from a process that they weren't participating in. And furthermore, their future fertility was also protected.

Christians also impacted women because of their stance on sexual immorality. It was normal in the Greco-Roman world for men to be very promiscuous, to use prostitutes, and to have several women.

[22 : 58] There were a lot of female prostitutes, and as we learned earlier, many of the women were forced into prostitution, particularly in regards to slavery. And the church's response to this was to prohibit sexual immorality.

In that time, it was expected of women to remain sexually pure before marriage, but there was a different standard for men. However, Paul required men to be sexually pure before marriage.

And furthermore, he required sexual purity during marriage, not just of the woman, but also of the man. In 1 Thessalonians 4, 1-8, Paul says, As for other matters, brothers and sisters, we instructed you how to live in order to please God, as in fact you are living.

Now we ask you and urge you in the Lord Jesus to do this more and more, for you know what instructions we gave you by the authority of the Lord Jesus. It is God's will that you should be sanctified, that you should avoid sexual immorality, that each of you should learn to control your own body in a way that is holy and honorable.

Not impassionate lusts like the pagans who do not know God, and that in this matter, and in this matter, no one should wrong or take advantage of a brother or sister.

[24 : 21] The Lord will punish all those who commit such sins, as we told you and warned you before, for God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life. Therefore, anyone who rejects this instruction and does not reject a human being but God, the very God, who gives you his Holy Spirit.

Another problem that Christians protected women from was polygamy, because they opposed polygamy. Men in that culture were permitted to have several women, but Paul encouraged men to be the husband of one wife.

And to the leaders of the church, who are to set an example for the people, Paul says in 1 Timothy 3, verse 2, Therefore, an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife.

And again in verse 12, Let the deacons each be the husband of one wife. He talks about it in Titus as well. Christianity also protected women when it came to divorce.

I earlier read you a clip from Stark's book on Athenian law, and it touches on the divorce issue, so I'm just going to read the relevant part of it again to you. It says, Typically, Athenian females were married at puberty and often before.

[25 : 41] Under Athenian law, a woman was classified as a child, regardless of age, and therefore was the legal property of some man in all stages of her life. Males could divorce by simply ordering a wife out of the household.

Moreover, if a woman was seduced or raped, her husband was legally compelled to divorce her, if a woman wanted a divorce, she had to have her father or some other man bring her case before a judge.

And another reason why men could divorce their wives was if she was failing to bear sons for him. That would be another reason. There was lots of problems with divorce.

But it's interesting, if you listen to this interaction between Jesus and the Pharisees in Matthew 19, verse 1, when the Pharisees are asking Jesus if it's lawful to divorce one's wife for any cause.

It says, Now when Jesus had finished these sayings, he went away from Galilee and entered the region of Judea beyond the Jordan. And large crowds followed him. And he healed them there.

[26 : 44] And Pharisees came up to him and tested him by saying, Is it lawful to divorce one's wife for any cause? He answered, Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female?

And said, Therefore, a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. So they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.

They said to him, Why then did Moses command one to give a certificate of divorce and to send her away? He said to them, Because of your hardness of heart, Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so.

And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another commits adultery. Jesus substantially raised the expectation of how women should be treated in a marriage relationship.

He did not condone divorce for any reason, or for any cause, as the Pharisees were asking him. But he limited it to the one cause of sexual immorality, and he showed that God never intended divorce to be for any cause.

[28 : 03] Another thing that Christians did was they raised the age of marriage for women. Many girls in the pagan world were married to men by the time, or when they reached puberty, and often, or at least at times, it could also be before they hit puberty.

And in a lot of situations, it was to men who were a lot older than them. And an unfortunate thing about this was that the wedding was normally consummated without delay.

Roman law held that age 12 was when a girl could become a legitimate wife, but there was no consequences if she was married earlier.

And Stark quotes Hopkins on this, and he says, Hopkins noted that one Roman law did deal with the marriage of girls under age 12 and intercourse, but it was concerned only with the question of her adultery.

Several Roman physicians suggested that it might be wise to defer intercourse until monarchy, but did not stress the matter. Among Christians, however, women were permitted more freedom in who they married, and many of them were often married much later, more so around the age of 18.

[29 : 22] So, what we have seen through this talk is that Christianity substantially has increased the quality of living for women. In the Greco-Roman world, Christians made a huge impact, first and foremost, because, as Paul said in Galatians 3.28, 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.

God valued women as equal to men, and Christians were able to act on what this implied. Christians helped to protect women through mutual consent and sex.

They stood against sexual immorality of all kinds, including prostitution, promiscuity, adultery, and polygamy. Christians encouraged women to gain their freedom if they were slaves.

They saved the lives of many women by prohibiting infanticide and abortion. They protected women from unwarranted divorce, and they raised the expectation for the age that women could be married.

And there's also a lot of other ways that Christians have done good things on behalf of women that I don't have time to get to in this talk.

[30 : 44] But for me, in learning about these things, it has been just a really, a real encouragement for me to see how supportive Christianity has been of women.

I think this is an aspect of our history that we can be extremely proud of. And, yeah, we have a rich tradition. And I think in this, though, it's important to recognize that these things didn't happen in the past because Christians are such good people, but more so because the God that we serve is good.

And the transforming life of Christ in us enables us to have radical change in our lives that comes about by the power of the Holy Spirit.

And in turn, we are able to impact change in our world for the glory of God. We serve a God who is committed to taking equality seriously. And upon the rise of Christianity, the quality of living for women was substantially impacted in a profound way.

One thing that I don't want to do is to leave you with the impression that, or leave anybody with the idea that men have simply been abusing women for centuries, and they still are today, therefore men are bad.

[32 : 12] Please don't hear me saying that, because that is not what I am intending at all. Apparently you guys needed me to say that. I hope so.

Anyway, there have been some problems between the genders, but we have to recognize that also because of good men standing up on behalf of women when they needed it, women have benefited from the freedom from oppression these men have called for on their behalf.

Paul and Jesus are excellent examples of good men who spoke on behalf of women. When you read the Gospels, who also were written by men, you're bound to hear Jesus in a different light when you see how he interacts with women in contrast to his culture.

What will also stand out to you is all the times the Gospel writers highlight women in their telling about the life of Jesus. In a culture where status was of great importance and women had none, when you read the Gospels, you see women keep popping up in them, and you can't help but notice the incredible value and dignity that Jesus gave to women.

It was the voice of men who wrote these Gospels, and who chose not to tell the story of Christianity and the story of Jesus without including women, how it impacted them, the dignity that Jesus gave them, and how they also contributed to the life of Christ.

[33 : 47] So, through understanding the situation of women in the Greco-Roman world and the response of Christianity, I think that Christians today, both male and female, can have courage to persevere boldly in defending the equality of women in situations where this fundamental value would otherwise be compromised.

Christianity can still be, and is, a major impactor of change today, because it continues to offer a radical and counter-cultural hope that is powerful enough to initiate change, even in the most desperate and oppressive circumstances.

You can be encouraged that today, Christians are still active all around the world, defending the cause of the oppressed, because they are motivated by the Gospel.

Christians all over the world continue to oppose the exploitation of women. They continue to defend the equality of women, and they also fight for the freedom from oppression for all people, males included.

And obviously, this work is not yet complete, and today we are still faced with problems that we as individuals can and need to respond to.

[35 : 12] Today, in our culture, many women still face prostitution. Both males and females continue to wrestle with the lure towards promiscuous lifestyles and adulterous relationships.

And today, women are still objectified through pornography, as are men also. Pornography on the Internet alone is a huge, huge problem for Christians to face today.

Our culture also continues to wrestle with decisions about abortion and divorce. Christianity has made massive progress to affect change in these areas, but we still have a lot of work to do.

And when we think about the problems that surround us today, it might feel overwhelming and feel like, how on earth do we deal with this? But I think what we first and foremost need to do is we need to trust God.

And specifically, we need to trust that He is establishing His kingdom throughout the earth, and that we are partners with Him in His work. I think that we do this first and foremost by exalting Christ.

[36 : 22] And because if Christ is exalted, He will draw people to Himself. And that's when people are really going to experience change in their lives and in their cultures.

No one can deal with the problems of sin like Christ can. He gave His life to deal with it, and to provide the Holy Spirit to empower His church to live in a way that glorifies God and that benefits people.

So we have to trust that if God was able to raise Christ from the dead and seat Him at His right hand in heavenly places, as Ephesians chapter 1 tells us, that Christ truly is far above all rule and authority and power and dominion and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the age to come.

So we can take confidence, not in our own ability to affect change, but in Christ's ability. And then we can act in the power of the Spirit as He leads us.

So be encouraged by these words of Jesus. In Acts 1 verse 8, He says, But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to all the ends of the earth.

[37 : 45] And with that, I think, I don't know how you normally do it, but I think it's open for questions now or comments. Yeah. And if any of you have anything to add to that, please do, because...

Yeah. Yeah. Danielle, thank you for this. You took us right back into a world we don't often look at when we read the Bible, and that was most interesting.

I am wondering how you answer the people that nowadays talk to you about the Church and women and who are thinking of much more contemporary examples.

Right. How would you answer people who say, well, look at what the Church has done to suppress people. They won't allow, some of them, won't allow women into the pulpit.

They won't allow women to speak in various ways in the Church or whole office. Yeah. And we don't have to look very far for some of those examples, so we do know what they're talking about. Yeah.

[38 : 46] How would you answer that kind of thing? Oh, I totally wanted to dance around that topic. As you'll notice, I completely avoided it.

We were actors. We thought this was hard. Yeah. Yeah, that continues to be a really controversial topic in the Church today. And, yeah, I feel like I still have a lot more to learn about that topic and a lot more to even come to at peace in myself.

I think that Christianity has done phenomenal things for women in terms of leadership within the Church. But, you know, like I feel like I just need to, I don't know the issues well enough to say this is the answer, you know, so, yeah, I can't totally answer that.

I need to dance around it, if you don't mind. Just because, I, yeah, I don't want to, I don't want to raise unnecessary controversy that I'm uninformed about, you know.

As a person who's broken through a lot of the glass, what do they call it? The glass ceiling.

[40 : 15] Ceiling. Ceiling. First of all, I ignored the issue. Right. Second of all, God opened up various ways that I did have openings.

And, so, it's still to me, like, for men and women, the, the word discipline, we're all fighting our natural inclinations.

And, so, the men to respect women and to, for women to, um, respect in the word of God, also the opposite thing, that we're supposed to respect the men.

So, yeah. And, I have frequently not been one of the people that gave communion because I was a woman. But that was fine.

You know, I could still find a place that worked for me. Yeah. So, um, but it, it's still up to everybody, uh, just, the growth we need in the Lord.

[41 : 31] Yes. Absolutely. Yeah. Yeah, for sure. Yeah. Yeah. I agree. And, and almost every church, uh, says, it's okay for women to go so far.

Right. But the actual practice might be inhibited. Yeah. Yeah, it's true. I feel like I'm still on a journey in that regard, for sure. And, actually, I'm, I'm kind of excited at this stage to pursue further understanding about that because I think it is an important topic that needs to be treated well and thoughtfully and very respectfully.

Um, and that, yeah, I'm excited to understand more about it because it does change how people live and how they view the body of Christ and, and, yeah, things like that.

it's important. Um, gentlemen in the back there. Do we have any pagan writers, say in the first three centuries or so, commenting on the Christian teachings of men about things like lowliness, meekness, gentleness, and did they find that offensive?

Oh, wow. Because, in the modern world, through the influence of people like Nietzsche especially, that has come under attack.

[42 : 56] This makes people, it makes men especially weak, uncreative, uh, not performing in the way as they should. So, uh, what's, I'd like to find that out because maybe they thought, oh, this deep, this lowers men as much as it puts up women.

Yeah. So, right. But I, I, I, it's there, and you haven't found it out. No, I don't. Starve, has it referred to that? Not that I'm aware of. I don't know. Dr. Packard, do you know anything about that?

No, and I don't think that it was an issue which, uh, pagan men raised in those early centuries. I don't think that, uh, from what I've read, that it ever became a matter of discussion.

Mm-hmm. It was quietly an area of change when Christians were doing their own business with their own people, Mm-hmm. and then quietly again setting an example in the neighborhoods where they lived, Mm-hmm.

which pagans were free to learn from if they wanted to. Mm-hmm. But, um, there was never any debate that I know of about the rightness and wrongness of, um, well, the rightness of giving women the, uh, respect and the provisions Mm-hmm.

[44 : 32] that you've been talking about and the wrongness of not doing so. Mm-hmm. Um, that is a modern thing. Mm-hmm. It wasn't an ancient thing.

Mm-hmm. And, uh, so a lot of the changes that you talked about are being noticed by us in a way that, Mm-hmm.

as I said in the, centuries in which they were taking place, they weren't noticed. Mm-hmm. That's interesting. Uh, Christians founded hospitals on the same basis.

Mm-hmm. Nobody notices that or celebrates it. Yeah. But, uh, in neighborhoods where people were ill, well, oh, the Christians have founded a, a place where the sickers look after.

Mm-hmm. Very good. You, you, you know. Right. But, uh, it never was an issue of public discussion. Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. I think that's the story.

[45 : 31] Right. Yeah. Yeah, go ahead. Uh, um, thanks, yeah. Good. Um, like, Paul just talked about, like, that, in the New Testament, I have called you and ordained you, you know, um, to be a leader in the church.

Um, um, you just speak about the woman being, like, more of a emotional, weaker vessel, as it's put, I don't know what you'd call it, today. So, if the women, like, I think, if women are doing all the leadership in any congregation, like ministerial, pastor, then the men are really sidelined and, and, like, you know, how do they prove or show that they're capable?

Yeah. And the woman, I wouldn't want it. I mean, all that responsibility of those people's emotional lives and difficult, and I wouldn't want, like, I have enough trouble in my own emotions. So, I mean, I just think, who would, so I think, it's right that the man, otherwise, what are the men doing?

Like, if the, because some men might be lazy and just say, well, the women can take over this congregation. Right. Yeah. Yeah.

Yeah. Can, Dr. Packer, I know I'm putting you on the spot, but do you want to address the issue of women and leadership in the church? If, if you want to avoid it, we can do that.

[46 : 59] You're asking the wrong question. Okay. You want me to say something, but you have to say, I would like you.

I would like you. Okay. You'll put me on the spot. The world is full of people who would like to put me on the spot. Oh. May I limit myself to saying one thing?

Sure. That is, that in the New Testament, the primacy of male leadership is still an unquestioned assumption, both among Christians and among pagans, though for different reasons.

and whereas male leadership could be beastly when pagans were exercising it, in Scripture, right the way through, I would say, and most certainly in the New Testament, it's humanized in a wonderful way, simply because Christ has come and establish the pattern.

Christ, it requires fully human recognition of all persons, well, all persons as such remain in God's image.

[48 : 30] And so, all relations amongst groups of believers must be humanized. Yes, men will leave, that never comes into question, but their manner of leading is humanized.

And then, when it's a question of women, well, it seems to me that theologically, what the New Testament is telling us is this. God the Holy Spirit bestows spiritual gifts, that is, capacities for ministry, certainly capacities for service of an active sort, on all Christians.

The gifts are given to everyone according to the measure of the gift of Christ. That includes within. Okay. Then, in Christian fellowships, space must be given in the structure and in the informal relationships of the fellowship, as on it goes, space must be given for women's gifts to be discerned and harnessed for the edifying of the people of God, just as men's gifts must be.

And at that point, the question, in effect, is passed from the New Testament to the ongoing Christian church, which is left with the query, well, how then are we going to do this in our own day, in our own culture, against our own background, and so on.

And, as with other questions of practice that the Bible raises and leaves unanswered, God's gift of wisdom must be sought to guide his people into doing not simply what's permissible, but what is wise and good and best.

[50 : 46] And that's the shape that the ongoing discussion has to have. Which, of course, I mean, I can see it by the look on your face.

You recognize this is me passing back to you unanswered the question. Fair enough.

Happy Sunday morning. It's interesting. We have to leave it there. I mean, it's a matter, in other words, for discussion within the fellowship, whatever the fellowship unit is.

If there's a congregation, St. John's, Ben, Ben, Ben, Ben. There are plenty of other unit fellowships where the same question has to be raised.

Okay, God gives gifts to the women in the fellowship just as to the men. What's the best, wisest way to make full use of those gifts?

[51 : 50] Yeah. Hmm. That's good. Yeah, that's very helpful. Thank you. Yes. Go ahead. Your paper seems to me so informative and so well-reasoned that I'm wondering if there would be an important feminist journal in which you could publish it.

Oh, thank you, but I don't know about that. But thank you. What did you think about that? I don't know. That thought has never crossed my mind, actually. You have something terribly important to say.

Yes. Thank you. If I may pop up again. Do you really think, Phil, what a feminist journal would be...

I'd like you. There are very many sincere women who just haven't looked at facts like these.

Well, that's true, but there were very many sincere men also. Oh, of course. Yes. There's a new book journal. It's just started to be published called Convivium.

[53 : 02] It's published by Father Jesus. He's one of the editors and they, I just saw my first copy yesterday, they publish this kind of reflection that impacts public life in Canada.

You better get it. Okay. Well, thank you. You guys are extremely kind to me. I wasn't expecting that. Thank you. Yes. Danielle, you're getting all kinds of encouragement here to go further with this topic.

And I do that too. I mean, we had a massive sexual revolution in the last 50 years that has released women if they wanted to be released from the quote-unquote tyranny of biology.

I mean, a lot of women's roles in the past have been very much linked to childbearing and child care, something that we could never get out of.

Now, promiscuity has become a problem with women as well as women. women. Yeah. And all of those things that you brought up, I would love to see you carry this kind of study into examples from the past 50 years.

[54 : 06] I think it would be tremendously insightful in terms of comparing with the early Christian church and the principles of equality within the body of Christ that were established there.

And they still had to live in a world where all those other things were okay, promoted, and had a certain respect. Bring that up to a more contemporary example.

I think it would be an exciting study. Go for it, kids. Thank you. Well, I've certainly really enjoyed studying about this and I feel like I definitely have an appetite to study more about it so that I can continue to be more informed and more thoughtful about it, especially because I have some feminist non-Christian friends that are just like, what's the scoop?

And who are sincerely interested in Christianity as well. There was an article years back, I think in Vogue, and it began with the premise that Christianity was anti-women, which isn't true.

And there were things, so what? Well, just do it anyway, do whatever you feel like. But you start with the wrong premise, you don't get anywhere.

[55 : 25] Right. Yeah. Did you have questions? more of a comment, like the parts in Scripture that talk about your body is not your own. That is very difficult for this day and age because today is, you know, your body is anybody's, and your sexuality is anybody's, and, you know, I can have a child without a man, and there's so many issues today that complicate that, and I think that might go down like a lead balloon with a lot of women today who feel they've got the freedom, quote, unquote, to do what they like with their own body.

Yeah. Mm-hmm. Never mind subjecting to a husband or, yeah. Yeah. Yeah, that's true. Yeah, I think we have a lot of challenges ahead of us in the future here because there's just so much, there's so much problems, as I mentioned a little bit of them, and I really, as I was studying this, I was really just overwhelmed by the sense that we can't do this on our own unless, Christ really is the only answer to these problems.

And until we, what we can do on a daily basis is that we can exalt Christ in our life. And as we do that, we will not only live counter-culturally, we will think counter-culturally, and we will act counter-culturally.

Right? Just as Christ did, just as Paul did, and just as the writers of the New Testament did, Christianity really does change people because the power of the presence of God in our lives changes us in ways that we cannot do on our own.

And so we have to trust that God is able to accomplish His good purposes in the world, and that He is redeeming His world, and He is establishing His kingdom, and this is a process, and we are part of that process.

[57 : 24] And so I just encourage you, live radically for Christ. Thank you, you guys.

Thank you.