

The Holy Nation 8, The Role of Women

Joe Fuiten, September 22, 2024

This class is on the topic of politics and the Bible. In the last two sessions we have been following themes related to the commandment to honor your father and mother. There are so many aspects of politics today that spring from that commandment. So today I want to add one more as it relates to the role of women.

The charge is often made that Christianity oppresses women and has kept them from advancing. However, the opposite is true. Far from demeaning women's rights or restricting women's access to health care, Christianity has actually changed the way the family is viewed.

Christianity changed the family

Marriage was a broken institution when Jesus arrived. Wedding ceremonies were facetious mockeries complete with singing of obscene songs. Sexual immorality was the order of the day to the extent a chaste wife was a rarity according to the early second century historian Tacitus. Both men and women were equally promiscuous.

Public sex was common similar to pornography. Restrooms were used by everybody. There was no his and hers. In the public baths, bathing was mixed. If you appreciate privacy at certain times, you are enjoying a distinctly Christian idea.

Divorce was common in the ancient world. However, a woman could not divorce her adulterous husband. He could divorce her for adultery but she could not divorce him. It was not until 449 that the church did something which had never happened before in ancient history. They provided that a woman could divorce her husband on the grounds of adultery or sodomy.

If you just got married, you have the expectation that your spouse will be faithful to you. In our weddings we even include the words, "and keep thee only unto her alone, so long as you both shall live." Even to this day, whether you are a Christian or not, you expect faithfulness to the marriage. For that hope, you can thank Christianity. There were no standards of fidelity being upheld when Jesus began to preach. Standards of fidelity and faithfulness were Christian contributions to the Roman world.

If you have children, you expect them to be safe in whatever environment they are in. In ancient Greece and Rome, pedophilia was very common and not illegal. Children were routinely molested. Without Christianity, no child would be safe.

Homosexual behavior was much more common in ancient Greece and Rome than it is today, but it was not found among the Christians. Paul spoke only that some used to do that sort of thing, but no longer. If Christianity were not here we would be overrun by homosexual pedophiles, as they were in ancient times.

Christian taught that our bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit and belong to God. Augustine said the Romans despised Christians because they opposed their unrestrained sexual lifestyles. Tertullian said they even hated the name "Christian." The teachings of Christianity gradually changed the way people thought about things. They began to see the world through the eyes of God's Word which says in 1 Corinthians 6:9-11 "*Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders 10 nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. 11 And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.*"

The family, and the values surrounding family, has been absolutely transformed by Christianity. We believe your children should be safe in their physical person and safe morally. In that others share that value, you can thank Christianity. We believe when you get married your spouse should be faithful. For that expectation, you can thank Christianity. We believe, when you go to the bathroom, you should be able to go in and close the door and be alone. If you appreciate that, you can thank Christianity.

For our purposes in this class it is important to note that under Christian political influence all these things we expressed in law over the centuries.

If Jesus had not come into the world, the status of women world-wide would be pretty much the same as it is in Islamic countries. As a woman, go to Saudi Arabia and try to get a driver's license or go out in public without a male family member. This is exactly as it was in ancient times. Women were property of men.

An Athenian woman could not leave her house without that escort. When the husband's friends came over, she had to retire to the women's quarter because she was not allowed to eat or interact with men. It was like that all her life. Boys went to school, but the girls had to stay home. They were not to speak in public or be seen. Sophocles wrote, "O woman, silence in an adornment to woman." Aristotle said, "Silence gives grace to women." In the Odyssey, Homer portrayed Telemachus rebuking his mother Penelope for speaking in the presence of men. He says, "speech shall be for men." Just a reminder that most people's education laughably taught that Athens was the birthplace of democracy.

In Greek culture, female infanticide far exceeded that of males. The same was true among the Romans. It is not really much different from Chinese or Indian culture today where the abortion rate against female babies is much higher than for boys. (1.05 boys per girl is normal. 1.17 boys per girl after the first girl child and 1.52 boys per girl after the second girl child.) In many Asian countries, the cultural preference for boys is resulting in lopsided sex ratios. To those who assume there's no prenatal sex discrimination in the United States, think again. The first published analysis of its kind, which appeared in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, revealed that some—but not most—Asian families in America are choosing to have a son after one or more daughters.

The natural sex ratio is 1.05 boys for every girl born. This ratio help up for the first (US-born) child of residents who indicated they are Chinese, Korean, or Asian Indian on the 2000 Census. But if their first child was a girl, the sex ration of the second child was 1.17:1. If the first two children were girls, that ratio jumped to 1.51:1. (Compare to the most recent data for India 1.39:1 and China: 2.25:1.¹

In Roman culture a woman was under the Roman law of *manus*. That law gave her husband absolute control of her and her possessions. Under than law she couldn't even tell her husband's slave what to do. According to *lex Voconia* (a law enacted in 169 BC) a woman was legally prohibited from inheriting property. The law survived for some 600 years, only to be changed when the Christian Emperor Justinian incorporated Christian ideals into Roman law.

Such treatment was basic to earlier Roman law. Table Four of the Twelve Tables of Roman law originating in the fifth century BC spelled out the law of *patria potestas* giving the rights of paterfamilias to the married man. He had complete control over her wife and property

¹ <http://www.popsoci.com/future-human/article/2008-04/preference-boys-seen-among-asian-americans>. A similar article by Randolph E. Schmid AP Science writer appeared on March 31, 2008 via the Associated Press.

including the children and grandchildren. That law lasted for almost 1000 years to be repealed by Christian Emperor Valentinian I in 374. With that change, the pagan husband lost the power of life and death over his wife and children. Fathers could no longer sell their daughters to a husband. The daughter could marry without her father's consent.

In such a world imagine how bold Paul was when he said, "*Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.*" Then he added, "*He who loves his wife loves himself.*" (Ephesians 5:25, 28) The high and honorable marital ethic of Ephesians, and illustrated by Christ's conduct with Mary and Martha, the Samaritan woman, and the other woman who followed him and his teachings, has no parallel in the Greek or Roman worlds. Further, when the early church made room for women as Deacons, Fellow Workers, and even one Apostle mentioned in Romans 16, something had clearly changed.

In ancient societies, whether in Babylon, Assyria, Greece or Rome, men often married child brides as young as eleven or twelve. Since the daughter was sold to the husband, the girl was not free to reject the purchasing husband.

Very quickly, Christian women married later than their pagan counterparts and they married out of choice. It made the Christians hated by many Romans.

Still today, in non-Christian areas of the world, child brides are not that unusual. Among the Maasai tribe in Kenya, in Bangladesh, and in China a large market for child brides still exists. Particularly in the Muslim world, children are married off at very young ages, as young as seven, and sometimes even younger.

So many of these ideas are shocking to us today because we live in a nation that had largely adopted Christian values in its laws relating to women and "women's healthcare." As these laws are being changed by leftists in their pursuit of an anti-Christian agenda, women become the ones who are most penalized and harmed by these changes.