

## International Conversation Cafe

Bible Topic: Understanding Gender Relationships in the Bible

Gender, according to dictionary.com, is defined as either the male or female, especially as set apart by social and cultural roles and behavior. The discussion of this paper will be limited to the cultural and social roles gender of men and women as demonstrated in the Bible.

Genesis 1:

<sup>27</sup> So God created mankind in his own image,  
in the image of God he created them;  
male and female he created them.

<sup>28</sup> God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground."

*Restate what this Scripture is about in your own words.*

*What specifically does this Scripture seem to say about the value and roles of male and female in God's sight?*

The next Scripture that seems to predict how men and women relate to each other in roles is found in Genesis 3. The following Scripture is what God explained to Eve what was to come to her because she ate the fruit the Lord told her not to eat.

<sup>16</sup> To the woman he said,

"I will make your pains in childbearing very severe;  
with painful labor you will give birth to children.  
Your desire will be for your husband,  
and he will rule over you."

The last phrase in this verse, "he will rule over you," leaves little doubt as to how marriage and families would now work after Adam and Eve at the forbidden fruit. This was not the way God had originally intended as we read in Genesis 1. The new family structure came as a result of Eve's disobedience. Now, the husband would be in charge with authority. From ancient history until now, many cultures and societies find that men rule over families, households, and in general, many areas of life.

*In your country or culture, do fathers have more power in a family than a wife? If so, how?*

*In your country or culture, what is the role of a wife?*

As we continue reading in Genesis, we see the men were in the head of and responsible for their whole households which included wives, children, servants, and animals. Abraham would be an example of such headship as described in Genesis 18.

<sup>19</sup> For I have chosen him, so that he will direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing what is right and just, so that the Lord will bring about for Abraham what he has promised him.”

*What does this Scripture say about Abraham’s responsibilities?*

When we enter the world of the first century, the same paradigm rules in the Jewish world and the Greek or Roman world. For example, Paul greets households by naming the head: Narcissus, Chole, Stephanas, and Aristobulus. Chole is a female name so it seems that households in the first century were mainly male oriented, but not exclusively. (Romans 16, 1 Corinthians 1)

*Are there families you know where the wife has more responsibility for the well-being of the family than the husband? Give an example.*

The second question is what were the limits in Bible times on women in regard to families and society in general? There are several examples of women taking on roles of leadership over men. Miriam, Moses sister, is listed as a prophet to the whole nation. Deborah was a military general and Huldah was a prophetess that gave messages to the high priests and other men. In the New Testament, women were among the Jesus’ disciples. Women were credible witnesses to the resurrection when women’s testimony was generally not received. In Acts, women are named as prophetesses and they teach men and women. Paul names women as his fellow workers in the gospel in the book of Philippians. In Galatians 3, Paul writes, “There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”

*What are your conclusions about women in society as demonstrated in the Bible?*

*What do you think is the significance of Paul’s words as quoted in Galatians 3?*

Paul never tells women to rule their husbands and he doesn’t men to rule over their wives. He tells husbands to love their wives. “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her...” Ephesians 5:25

This was a radical departure from cultural expectations where a husband was to provide for his wife and household but not necessarily love his wife and children.

*How do you think men and women should relate to each other in marriage?*

*Have you seen a marriage you admire? Tell how that husband and wife relate to each other in their marriage.*

