

## International Conversation Cafe

### Bible Topic: 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 of men and women as demonstrated in the Bible.

Genesis 1:

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

28 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 of male and female?*

*What roles does God give to them?*

The next Scripture predicts how men and women will relate to each other after they disobey God. Recorded in Genesis 3 is what God tells Eve because she ate the fruit the Lord told her not to eat.

16 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 work after Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit. The husband would have the power and control over the wife. This was not the way God had originally intended as we read in Genesis 1. This family structure is a result of Eve's disobedience. The husband rules his wife and family. From ancient history until now, many cultures and societies demonstrate that the prophecy that men rule over families, households, and in general, many areas of life. Depending on the time and place in history, men make the final decisions when it comes to finances, education, political alliances, and marriages.

*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 that men were responsible for their whole households which included wives, children, servants, and animals. Abraham would be an example of such rulership. Twice, Abraham misused his power and sent his wife, Sarai, posing as his sister, to powerful rulers in order to save his own life, Genesis 12 and 20. The following Scripture, Genesis 18, is an example of how Abraham should use his authority.

<sup>19</sup> I have chosen him. He must direct his children to live in the way that pleases me. And he must direct the members of his family after him to do the same. So, he must guide all of them in doing what is right and fair. Then I, the Lord, will do for Abraham what I have promised him.”

*How was Abraham supposed to lead his family?*

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 a prophet to the whole nation. Deborah was a military general and Huldah was a prophet that gave messages to the high priests and other men. In the New Testament, 12 men were named as Jesus’ disciples and men are named as church leaders. Women were among Jesus’ disciples and were the first to report the resurrection of Jesus to the men. In Acts 18, a woman and her husband taught a man. Philip’s four daughters were prophets, Acts 21. 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.”

*Summarize what you have learned about women’s and men’s roles in the Bible.  
What do you think is the significance of Paul’s words as quoted in Galatians 3?*

Throughout the centuries, we see that men tend to dominate women, although in the last two centuries we see some men and women working for more equality in families, the workplace, and government. Looking at the New Testament for guidance, Christians turn to Ephesians 5 where Paul begins addressing the relationship between the husband and wife by saying, “Out of respect for Christ, be courteously reverent (respectful) to one another.” Paul then gives new meaning to the husband’s role as head by describing it in terms of love, not authority.

Wives, understand and support your husbands in ways that show your support for Christ. The husband provides leadership to his wife the way Christ does to his church, not by domineering (ruling over) but by cherishing (to care for tenderly). ~Ephesians 5:22-24, The Message

*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.*