

I AM A WOMAN OF GOD... WHAT DOES THIS MEAN TO JESUS?

by **Bonnie Ricks**

But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtlety, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.

2 Corinthians 11:3 KJV

The foundation for being a woman in God's Kingdom is Jesus Christ. Whether a woman is strong depends on what the rest of her is made of. Whether she's able to submit to her husband – in the true manner that Paul taught and not in the perversion of that submission that permeates many churches – depends on whether she's able to see herself as Jesus sees her... as a unique and precious creation of God.

Let's begin with Eve. If we're going to talk about women, we might as well begin with the first one. Eve had the best. She had what you and I will one day have when we go to Glory. She had what you and I can have today, if we'll only accept our God-given role in this earthly life. Let's take a look at just what Eve did have.

Up until the point of creation of man and woman, God had spoken everything into existence. When He was ready to crown His creation, He took a hands-on approach. From the dust of the earth, he molded a man in His own image (Genesis 2:7), carefully and tenderly shaping the man, Adam, into the most beautiful of all His creation to that point. With all the vastness of His imagination and creative genius, God Almighty shaped a man, then breathed into him the breath of life - completing a process that He and only He can do. Rising up from the ground to stand on his perfectly formed legs, the man, Adam, was the perfect reflection of God. But Adam was alone. In an incredible garden unlike anything we can imagine, a garden filled with animals and plants and birds and unsurpassable beauty, Adam was alone.

So God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him." (Genesis 2:18) Once again taking the caring, hands-on approach, God caused Adam to go to sleep, and He took one of his ribs and formed woman. But He took more than just a rib. He took all those qualities from Adam that make up woman. Qualities that are a part of the perfect reflection of God's image. Qualities that, when melded together with Adam's through marriage, made the two of them, together, a perfect reflection of the image of God.

God is not a man. God is not a woman, either. God does not have a body. God is Spirit. (John 4:24) But He has within His great being both the male and the female qualities that make up man and woman. It is these qualities that He put into man and woman to make them the most special part of His creation. "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them." (Genesis 1:27)

Before we go any farther, let's settle one thing -- "helper" did not mean subordinate. It did not mean slave. It did not mean "Mrs. Step-n-Fetch It". It did not mean "life-support system for a baby factory who can cook". And it also did not mean "boss" or "superior". Everywhere else in

scripture that the Hebrew word for "helper" (ezer) is used (i.e., Exodus 18:4; Deuteronomy 33:7, 26, 29; Psalm 33:20, to name a few), it refers to God Himself when He is acting as a rescuer of His people. Eve was made for Adam as a companion, a helper, a partner in Eden, to rule over the earth with him, hand-in-hand and side by side, to rescue Adam when he needed help, and to glorify God together with Adam in the perfect partnership of monogamous marriage.

In Genesis 1:28 we learn of God's original plan for how the earth would be ruled, "God blessed them and said to them, 'Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground.'" God didn't give this instruction to Adam, telling him to be in charge. He gave the instruction to both Adam and Eve, in partnership. Before sin came into the world, Eve stood in perfect union and equality with Adam. In addition, Adam was not superior because he was created first. If that premise were correct, then mankind would be subordinate to animals, because they were created before man. The simple fact is, in God's original creation, Adam was not in authority over Eve. They had equal authority, together, in God's perfect world. As we shall see, this soon changed.

It changed because along came the serpent, sidling up to Eve and causing her to fall into temptation. Why did Satan pick Eve rather than Adam? Was it because she was weaker or more stupid than her husband? Not at all. It was because she was more easily deceived. Eve had missed out on one thing Adam had experienced – direct instruction from God.

For a brief time, Adam had the privilege of being the one and only person on earth. He had direct, solitary and intimate communion with God. And during this time, God had commanded Adam to keep his hands off the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Eve, too, had her special time with God one-on-one, while Adam was asleep before God brought her to Adam, but we aren't privy to anything they discussed during this wonderful time. We know Adam shared the commandment concerning the tree with Eve, because she tells the serpent that she is not supposed to eat the fruit of that tree. But the serpent plays on Eve's weakness – a desire for power. If she eats of that tree, she can become a goddess, or so the serpent tells her. Lucifer used the same thing that caused his own downfall (Isaiah 14:12-14) to cause the downfall of mankind – a desire for godhood.

Even though Eve argued with the serpent a little, she still succumbed to temptation (Genesis 3:1-6) – just like all of us have done – it was pretty, it smelled good, the fruit looked juicy and delicious, and it would, according to the serpent's lie, make her like god. Adam, on the other hand, didn't argue, didn't question, he just took the fruit from his wife and ate it. He knew exactly what he was doing, and he did it anyway. (Genesis 3:6)

When God confronted Adam and Eve with their sin, the original case of scapegoating occurred. Eve blamed the serpent. Adam blamed Eve. (Genesis 4:11-13) But notice that Eve had to answer for her own actions. (Genesis 4:16) She was not dependent upon Adam, did not fall in his shadow. She was neither condemned by Adam's sin nor protected by his position. She had to stand naked before God on her own.

Then came the consequences of sin. Both Adam and Eve were cast out of the Garden, never to be allowed to return. (Genesis 4:23-24) Never again would they stand naked and unashamed before God. In God's perfect creation, they had walked and talked one-on-one with God in perfect communion. Now they would have to reach across the gulf of their own sin to touch God only occasionally. And, for the first time since she was created, Eve had to face the consequences of her own sin – rather than standing in equal partnership with her husband, she would now be ruled by him. Satan had won this small battle. He had brought sin and death into the world. And he had made certain of the dominance of men over women – at least for the next four thousand years.

The significance of the rebellion of Adam and Eve multiplied itself over and over throughout the centuries as sin has permeated the life of mankind. And, only six generations later, the ultimate expression of Satan's plan for male dominance reared its ugly head – polygamy. God's plan of "one flesh" was thrown into the trash heap as men began to satisfy their lust through "legalized" adultery. It's interesting to note that the first man to take more than one wife was not one of the descendants of Seth, Adam's godly son. Rather, it was Lamech, a descendant of Cain, who first spit on God's plan for marriage and took more than one wife.

Throughout the Old Testament, we are presented with one woman after another – some good, some bad, some weak, some powerful. But whatever their position, because of the fall, each of these women had to continually deal with the fact of male dominance in society.

Sarah was a strong woman who called Abraham "Lord", but her husband obeyed her (Genesis 16:2, for example) a few times – to disastrous results. Too impatient to wait for God's promise that Abraham would father a great nation, Sarah convinced Abraham that they needed to "help" God along by having Abraham sleep with Hagar to produce an heir. I've often had the mental picture of Sarah ushering Hagar into Abraham's tent, with a caption that reads, "Six thousand years from now, what difference will it make?" While that may be amusing, it's not really funny at all considering that this act has had long-lasting and worldwide repercussions; the ancient enmity between Ishmael's descendants (from whom came the Arab people) and the descendants of Isaac (from whom came the Israelite people), has a major role in many of the bitter conflicts still occurring in the world today!

And then there was Abigail (1 Samuel 25:2-42), an intelligent, capable woman who was married to an idiot. In spite of the fact that Abigail had saved his life, the very thought that she had countermanded his orders caused her husband, Nabal, to have a heart attack and die.

Deborah (Judges 4 & 5), on the other hand, showed what a strong woman could do in spite of society's attitude – becoming a prophetess and the only female Judge over Israel, ruling that nation for forty years. She had to contend with Barak, her commanding general, who was a weenie. He refused to go into battle unless Deborah went with him!

There were plenty of bad women, too. Like Jezebel (1 Kings 16, 18, 19, 21; Revelation 2:20-23), who is known as the most evil woman in the Bible – so evil that even today the use of her name brings with it the most evil of connotations. And like Delilah (Judges 16:4-21), who used all of her "feminine wiles" to evil advantage, nagging and whining until she brought Samson's downfall. This, by the way, does not relieve Samson of his responsibility in the matter. He, after

all, did have a choice. But, true to his inherent libidinous nature, he let his hormones control his brain to the point of destruction.

Two good women were Naomi and Ruth (Ruth 1-4) who found themselves poverty-stricken when their husbands suddenly died – not just because they lost their source of income, but because they were women without men in a male-dominated society. If not for Boaz, their kinsman-redeemer (who was also a great guy, rich, and handsome, to boot), they would have faced a life of scraping for every bite of food and begging for shelter. As it was, Ruth not only found a wonderful husband, but she – a Moabitess – became one of the ancestors of Jesus.

The list of Old Testament women could go on and on, but let's get to the good part – Jesus. When Jesus – God Incarnate – came to earth, He brought with Him the Good News of salvation through His sacrifice on the cross. When He died, the (Hebrew) Temple Veil – a massive woven tapestry that was so thick and strong that two teams of oxen pulling in opposite directions couldn't even put a stretch mark in it – was torn in two from top to bottom by God, signifying that never again would anything or anyone – temples, blood sacrifices, priests - stand between God and man because man's sins would now be covered by the blood of Jesus. “For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus,” (1 Timothy 2:5 NIV)

Through His unimaginable agony on the cross, Jesus brought us the good news that He had paid the price for our sins – all of them. His sacrifice opened the doors of heaven to anyone who is willing to accept His gift freely given. There is nothing we can do to get there on our own. And, once we have accepted His love, there is nothing we can do to lose it. Because it's not you and me who are doing the saving - it's God Almighty, through the freely given gift of Jesus Christ on the Cross. And that gift is irrevocable. (Romans 11:29) When we stop accepting His gift... when we begin trying to earn His love... when we begin believing we might lose our salvation through some error of our own... then we are denying what He did for us on the cross. We are denying Him.

He loves us – each and every one of us – more than we can imagine. He loves us with a stubborn, unstoppable love that surrounds us no matter what we do. We can do nothing to earn His love. We can do nothing that will cause Him to stop loving us. All we can do is love Him in return.

Jesus brought some other good news – good news for women. Through His grace, women were elevated to equal standing before God once again. The curse Eve's sin brought upon women was lifted.

Jesus' attitude toward women is revealed in several ways. First of all, notice how Jesus handled men – especially men "of authority" – who did something wrong... He always gave them a tongue-lashing, berating them for their evil ways. (See Matthew 23, for example.) But with women, Jesus never demeaned, embarrassed or berated. (See John 4:4-42 and John 8:1-11, for example) Not once. Instead, with every woman He encountered, He was always gentle, always kind, always merciful.

Plus, take a look at how women fared in His ministry. Conceived by the Holy Spirit (Matthew 1:20), Jesus came into the world through a woman, Mary, who was the first to know of His Incarnation. Because He was a good Jewish son, He always minded His Mama (John 2:1-11), and one of His last earthly concerns was for His mother's welfare (John 19:25-27). He knew that Mary would have a miserable life if she was left in the care of any of Jesus' half-brothers, who had not yet come to believe in Him. So He placed Mary in the care of His beloved disciple, John. Women were the strongest financial supporters of Jesus' ministry (Luke 8:1-3). The first person to comprehend what was about to happen to Jesus was a woman (Mark 14:3-9). While the men all ran away and hid, the women went to the cross (Matthew 27:55-56). And the first person allowed to see Him in His resurrected state was a woman (John 20:10-18).

(I have always been amused at how typical the situation was after Christ's death on the cross. The women immediately went about the business of taking care of what needed to be done. The men, on the other hand, were having a committee meeting trying to decide what to do.)

One after another, Jesus encountered women and demonstrated His great love for them through His gentle touch and His protective and forgiving attitude. He showed the world, once and for all, that women were no longer to be "second rate", but were to be lifted up to their precious status in His Kingdom.

Throughout the New Testament, the value of a woman's role is revealed again and again. Aquila is never mentioned without Priscilla, and her name always comes first. Timothy's solid grounding in God's Word is attributed to his mother, Eunice, and his grandmother, Lois. The women who followed Jesus were always there, always faithful, never turning tail and running. Perhaps it was because their gratitude ran even deeper than the men's. Because not only had Jesus saved them from their sins, He had removed the curse placed upon Eve so long ago. In this life, and forever, they were truly free at last.

A doctrinal examination of some of the teachings of Paul concerning women's role in the church which have caused so much controversy within churches throughout history would be a book unto itself. There are many books written on this very subject already, so I won't go into that lengthy subject here. Suffice it to say that after a careful study of Paul's letters, I am convinced that Paul honored women and not only allowed, but encouraged them to participate in ministry.

Let's touch on one last thing – authority in the Christian home. God is a God of order, as evidenced by everything in His creation. He established a line of authority in the churches, and He established a line of authority in the home, with the man at its head.

Whoa! Wait a minute, you say? Didn't we just discuss women's "equal" standing before God. Right. But God, in His wisdom, knew that there must be lines of authority in order for any group of two or more people to function peacefully. So, in the home, God made man the head. This does not mean the man is "Lord and Master", ruling with an iron fist. It also does not mean that the woman has no authority. What it does mean is that the man is commanded to take the same role in His home as Christ does with the church – to love and to cherish, to be the spiritual leader, to protect and defend.

Men and women both are given responsibilities within marriage toward each other. They are to put the other's needs and desires before their own. They are to give each other 100% of themselves – blowing the idea of a 50/50 relationship out the window.

But perhaps the most interesting thing is how they are told to feel about each other – and this one thing makes me feel more special, more cherished than any other. Nowhere in scripture is the woman commanded to love her husband. She is commanded to honor him – to respect him, to hold him in awe, to show him affection. But she is never told she has to love him. This doesn't mean she shouldn't. It's just not commanded. (Ephesians 5:22-33) Now it might be argued from Titus 2:4, that women are to love their husbands. But this is one of the many cases where going to the original language is helpful in understanding the true meaning of a verse. Titus 2:4 says, "That they may teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children." The Greek word used here is *philandros*, which literally means to be fond of or to be affectionate towards.

Men, on the other hand, are commanded to love their wives "even as Christ loves the church" – even to the point of being willing to die for them. The Greek work used here is *agapao*, which is the root word for agape, the kind of love God has for us – unselfish, unconditional, self-sacrificing love. No more extreme act of devotion can be found than to be willing to lay down one's life for one's beloved – not only through physical death, but through placing her wants and needs above his own. If a man is truly following Jesus Christ and keeping His commandments, if he is truly walking in the Spirit, there is no possible way he could ever do anything to harm his wife or to lower her status. This one commandment does more to lift women up than any other in scripture. If that doesn't make you feel cherished – if that doesn't let you see how very important and precious you are to our Lord – nothing will.

Take a look at your own life... are you a woman of worth like Jesus intends for you to be? Or are you a "life support system for a baby factory that can cook" as we mentioned earlier? Proverbs 31:28 says, "Her children arise and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praises her:" Does this resemble you? Do you feel like you're on a pedestal? Does your husband "lay down his life" for you on a daily basis? Or does he barely have time for you among all his other wives? It is hoped that, after reading this article, you have come to realize that Jesus values you greatly and has plans for your life that do not include your sharing your husband with other women. In 1 Corinthians 2:9, Paul said, "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him." Isn't it time that you started receiving the blessings the Lord has prepared for you?