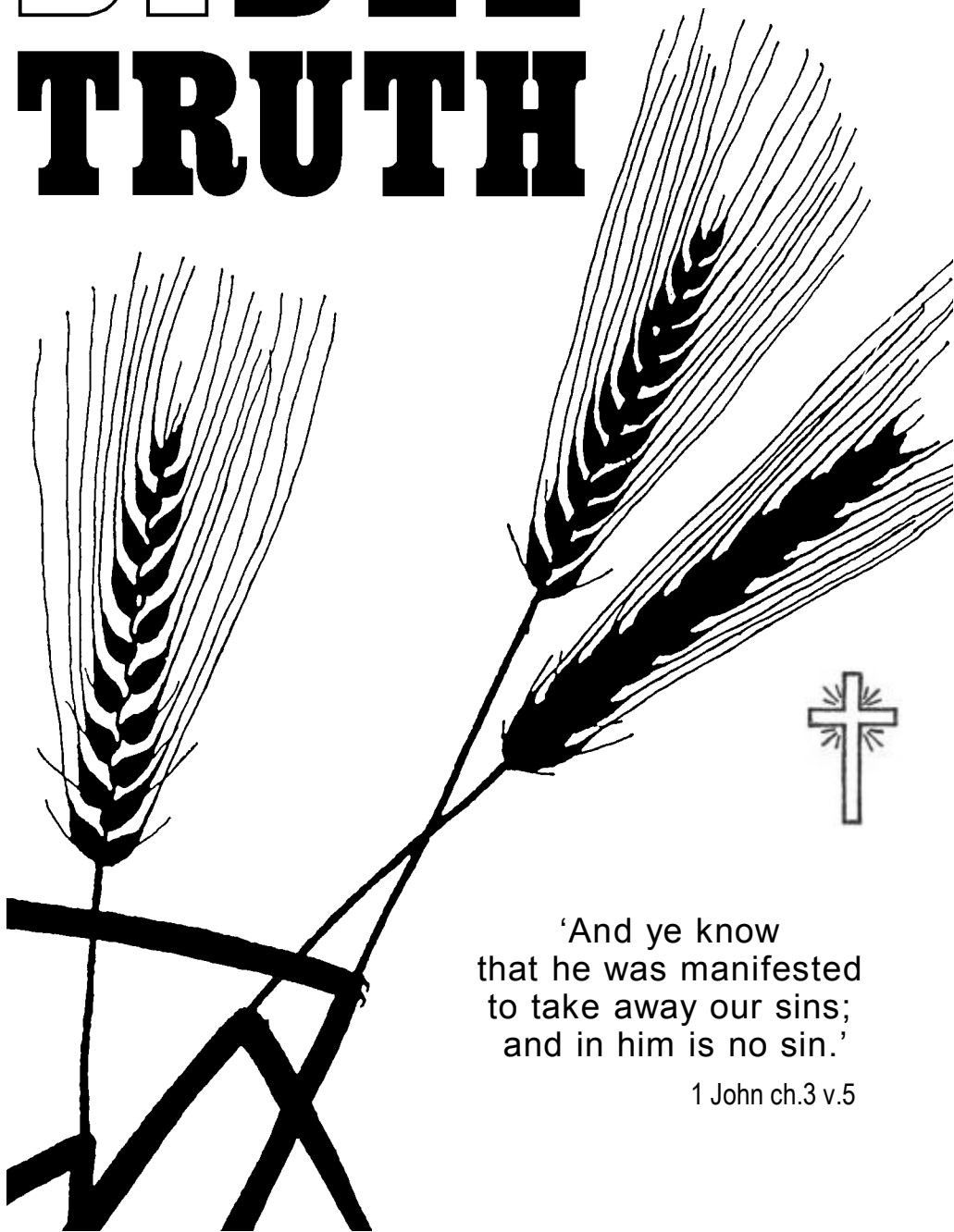


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‘And ye know
that he was manifested
to take away our sins;
and in him is no sin.’

1 John ch.3 v.5

‘A Woman’s Place’

Women’s Role in the Bible Versus Popular Religion

by Pastor Jory Steven Brooks, (*Canadian British Israel Association*)

Christianity differs greatly from both Islam and Judaism in its attitude towards women, although all three are largely misunderstood by the vast majority of people.

Dr J.B. Segal, of the School of Oriental & African Studies at the University of London, wrote an interesting article entitled, *The Jewish Attitude Towards Women* (Journal of Jewish Studies xxx:121-136). Segal states (p. 121), that there were

‘... severe disqualifications of women in [Jewish] civil law,’.

For example, he pointed out that according to the Jewish Mishnah in the Talmud, women were prevented from being judges or witnesses in court (mSheb. 4:1), and had no right to contract or terminate a marriage (mYeb. 14:1). In religious duties, women were precluded from partaking in Temple duties, and were not allowed in the Temple beyond the Court of the Women. Segal sums this up (p. 121), by saying,

‘The inferior position of women in Judaism is encapsulated in the prayer uttered by the man in the Shaharith service, “Blessed art Thou, O Lord our God, King of the Universe, who hast not made me a woman” ’.

Likewise, Moshe Meiselman, in his book, *The Jewish Woman in Jewish Law*, (NY: Ktav, 1978) agrees with this assessment, but adds (p. 49),

‘... the inability [for women] to perform certain male tasks may be severely debilitating. However ... The essence of Judaism is for a Jew to live his life in conjunction with the divine will’.

Although Judaism is a religion which has its roots in the Old Testament, the important question, of course, is whether it is in fact following God’s Will in trying to prevent women from having virtually any rights or privileges?

Women Under Mohammed

Mohammedanism is growing exponentially in Western countries today, including Germany, France, Britain, Canada and the United States, but its teachings are still little known, even among many of its followers. Dr Segal explained that its beliefs also draw a strong distinction between the rights and privileges of men and women. For example, the Muslim holy book, the Quran (Quran 4:34), states that men,

‘... stand superior to women in that God hath preferred the one over the other ... Those [women] whose perverseness ye fear, admonish them ... and beat them; but if they submit to you, then do not seek a way against them’.

This verse of the Quran became the subject of a feature article in the *Detroit Free Press Newspaper*, when one Muslim woman became upset about this teaching of her religion and confronted her Imams (religious leaders). Eventually, a resourceful Muslim scholar declared that this verse could be taken a different way; the root of the Arabic word might also have the meaning of ‘contend’, he decided, not just ‘beat’. Was he giving Muslim men a choice here?

Perhaps such objections by women influenced another Muslim teaching, for Dr Segal also relates that,

‘Most of the inhabitants of Hell ...’,
declares a hadith [religious teaching], are women,
‘... because of their unbelief’.

Similarly, the 13th century commentator, al-Baydawi, stated,

‘Innumerable men have achieved Paradise ... but only four women’.

Commentary on Quran 66:11f

Christian Women

The question of women’s role is an important one for Christians as well. One of the new teachings making inroads to our churches today is popularly known as ‘egalitarianism’, (derived from the French word *égal*, meaning equal), which postulates a total equality between men and women, husbands and wives, in every area of life. While this is certainly ‘politically correct’ today in society and in our modern churches, it is not God’s design as outlined in the Holy Bible. Because of the tremendous confusion over this issue, it would be good to examine the relevant Scriptures. Here is the Divine Order.

‘But I would have you know, that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God.’

1 Corinthians ch.11 v.3

In other words, Christ is over every man, man is over woman, and God is over Christ. The Egalitarians may consider this arrangement unfair and huff about ‘men’s assumed superior position’, but the fact remains that it is the New Testament that gives a husband authority over a wife.

However, this also involves a responsibility on the husband’s part. We are told in 1 Peter ch.3 v.7,

‘Likewise, ye husbands, dwell with them according to knowledge, giving honour unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life; that your prayers be not hindered’.

A husband is to honour, cherish, protect, and defend his wife and children, and not use his position under God for abusive behaviour. A husband is therefore in the position of a benevolent leader, shield, guardian, defender and protector. If a man abuses his privilege, this is not God’s fault, nor the fault of God’s system of Divine order. It is true that any one particular husband’s family management can be very wicked, but we disagree on Scriptural grounds that the New Covenant family structure itself is evil or demeaning to women. This is an important distinction that is often ignored by the proponents of Egalitarianism.

In the New Testament, our Lord is actually referred to in the original Greek as a ‘despot’ (Greek, despota, Luke ch.2 v.29). Although the Greek word had a neutral connotation (its literal meaning is ‘owner’), this term has taken on a very negative meaning in secular society today because of ungodly human rulers. So has the word ‘subjection’, and worldly people today recoil at the thought of being subject even to Christ and His Word and Laws, or to any Godly authority. But Christ is not a dictator, autocrat, tyrant or oppressor in his ruling or subjection (Romans ch.13 v.1) of the church, and neither should a husband be so in his headship of a family. Christ’s style of leadership is an example for our families.

‘Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing’.

Ephesians ch.5 v.24

Unfortunately, non-Christian leadership and subjection is often demeaning and ungodly. But Christian headship, leadership, or subjection is not tyranny, nor is it 'debilitating' with 'severe disqualifications' for women.

The relationship between Christian husbands and wives should not be solely based on some part of the Old Testament, the Old Covenant, but upon the New Covenant, the 'better covenant'. There we are told that,

'... the husband is head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: ...'

Ephesians ch.5 v.23

But Christ is an example of devoted leadership, not persecution. He does not prevent Christians from exercising their talents and abilities, but encourages it (Matthew ch.25 vv.14-30)! In addition, the New Testament provides the example for Christian 'chivalry', a seldom-heard term anymore: the virtue of making women a subject of consideration, protection, respect, and love. This is very different from the humiliation and degradation often found in other religions (as well as in today's debased secular culture). It is also very different from the other extreme, the modern secular idea of 'total equality'.

When viewed in a proper Biblical perspective, Biblical headship is not a bad thing, nor is it morally wrong.

'Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord.'

Ephesians ch.5 v.22

Therefore, a New Covenant family structure is a good and godly thing for Christians, even while a non-Christian husband can be unbearable 'despotism'.

Unfortunately, in order to circumvent New Testament teaching, Egalitarians generally insist that the words of the Apostles Peter and Paul on this subject were added later by translators and should be excised and ignored. Doing this, however, eliminates at least fifteen verses of Scripture in several books of the Bible! Such an 'end-run' around the Word of God is becoming endemic today.

Just last week, a visitor to our church told me, 'Mary was not the mother of Jesus'. Hoping I had not heard right, I asked, 'where did you get that idea?' Her reply stunned me, 'Of course, the Bible says Mary was the mother of Jesus, but that was added by translators', she confidently told me. Where does this all lead to? With such an attitude toward God's Word, a person can teach any doctrine under

the sun and self-justify it. This reminds one of the semi-anarchy of the time of the Judges, when we are told,

‘... every man did that which was right in his own eyes’.

Judges chs.17 v.6 & 21 v.25

The Proper Role Of Women

What then is to be the role of women? Contrary to what some may think, women do have important roles to play in the church and society. We see a very good example of this in the Samaritan woman in John chapter 4. Christ declared His Messiahship to the woman,

‘And upon this came his disciples, and marvelled that he talked with the woman: yet no man said, What seekest thou? or, Why talkest thou with her? The woman then left her waterpot, and went her way into the city, and saith to the men, Come, see a man, which told me all things that ever I did: is not this the Christ? Then they went out of the city, and came unto him’.

John ch.4 vv.27-30

The woman successfully evangelized an entire city, verse 39 tells us so.

‘And many of the Samaritans of that city believed on him for the saying of the woman, which testified, He told me all that ever I did.’

This should not only be an example, but an inspiration to Christian women to use their talents to the full extent in proclaiming Christ’s Kingdom Gospel.
