

“Lies Women Shouldn’t Believe” – Week 5

Dec. 9, 2016

Lie: Women are and have always been inferior to men throughout the history of the Bible and in the church.

Question: "What is the history of Christianity and The Evolution of Women and Their Roles in Early Christianity?"

History of Christianity - The Beginning of the Church

The church began 50 days after Jesus’ resurrection (c. A.D. 30). Jesus had promised that He would build His church (Matthew 16:18), and with the coming of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4), the church—ekklesia (the “called-out assembly”)—officially began. Three thousand people responded to Peter’s sermon that day and chose to follow Christ.

History of Christianity - The Growth of the Early Church

Not long after Pentecost, the doors to the church were opened to non-Jews – the Gentiles. The evangelist Philip preached to the Samaritans (Acts 8:5), and many of them believed in Christ.

History of Christianity - The Rise of the Roman Church

In A.D. 312, the Roman Emperor Constantine claimed to have had a conversion experience. About 70 years later, during the reign of Theodosius, Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire. Bishops were given places of honor in the government, and by A.D. 400, the terms “Roman” and “Christian” were virtually synonymous.

History of Christianity - The Middle Ages

During the Middle Ages in Europe, the Roman Catholic Church continued to hold power, with the popes claiming authority over all levels of life and living as kings. Corruption and greed in the church leadership was commonplace. From 1095 to 1204 the popes endorsed a series of bloody and expensive crusades in an effort to repel Muslim advances and liberate Jerusalem.

History of Christianity - The Reformation

Through the years, several individuals had tried to call attention to the theological,

political, and human rights abuses of the Roman Church. All had been silenced in one way or another. But in 1517, a German monk named Martin Luther took a stand against the church, and everyone heard. With Luther came the Protestant Reformation, and the Middle Ages were brought to a close.

Although Catholicism made a comeback in Europe, and a series of wars between Protestants and Catholics ensued, the Reformation had successfully dismantled the power of the Roman Catholic Church and helped open the door to the modern age.

History of Christianity - The Age of Missions

From 1790 to 1900, the church showed an unprecedented interest in missionary work. Colonization had opened eyes to the need for missions, and industrialization had provided people with the financial ability to fund the missionaries. Missionaries went around the world preaching the gospel, and churches were established throughout the world.

History of Christianity - The Modern Church

Today, the Roman Catholic Church and the Eastern Orthodox Church have taken steps to mend their broken relationship, as have Catholics and Lutherans. The evangelical church is strongly independent and rooted firmly in Reformed theology. The church has also seen the rise of Pentecostalism, the charismatic movement, ecumenicalism, and various cults.

History of Christianity - What We Learn from Our History

If we learn nothing else from church history, we should at least recognize the importance of letting “the word of Christ dwell in [us] richly” (Colossians 3:16). Each of us is responsible to know what the Scripture says and to live by it. When the church forgets what the Bible teaches and ignores what Jesus taught, chaos reigns.

There are many churches today, but only one gospel. It is “the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints” (Jude 3). May we be careful to preserve that faith and pass it on without alteration, and the Lord will continue to fulfill His promise to build His church.

The Evolution of Women and Their Roles in Early Christianity

In researching this topic, we find that women in the apostolic and early post-apostolic era were treated with equality and had similar responsibilities as the men in the church, engaging in public prayer, prophecy, and teaching, and being apostles, servants (ministers) and overseers of house church congregations. The Gnostic texts show that women held senior roles as teachers, prophets and missionaries. They were ordained by the laying on of hands and conducted rituals such as baptisms, the Eucharist and exorcisms. Historians writing about this period note that many more females than males were converting to Christianity in its first centuries and recognized Christianity's appeal to women as an important factor in its success. It is also noted that in the first Christian centuries, women were able to utilize their position in the family household environment to spread the Good News and to increase the number of converts. So as long as the early church gathered in private homes, women who were influential in their communities economically and culturally often led the congregations. More often than not, women owned the homes in which the New Testament house churches met.

Mary the mother of Jesus continued to work alongside her son until his death and resurrection. She was present with all of the other disciples in the upper room on the day of Pentecost when the church was born and she continued in the faith and in the work of the Gospel until she was called home.

Phoebe (Romans 16:1-2): This woman was a deaconess of the church in Cenchrea, who was beloved of Paul and many other Christians for the help she gave to them. She filled an important position of leadership. It would be a difficult stretch of the imagination to say that this woman fulfilled her responsibilities and duties without ever speaking in the church. She is the only deacon in the Bible to be identified by name. The foundation for the work of a deaconess is found in **Acts 6:1-6; Romans 16:1-2; I Timothy 3:11.**

Priscilla (Acts 18:26): Priscilla and her husband Aquila are often mentioned with great respect by Paul. Together they were pastors of a church in Ephesus, and were responsible for teaching the full gospel to Apollos. We are told in the Bible that they both taught Apollos, and pastored the church together. We see here another example of a woman in a very prominent position of teaching and pastoring. **(Other references to Priscilla and Aquila are Acts 18:2, 18; Romans 16:3, and I Corinthians 16:19).**

Acts 21:8: Philip the evangelist had four unmarried daughters who were prophets.

Euodia and Syntyche (Philippians 4:2-3): Here we see reference to two women who were "true yokefellows" and who labored with Paul in the advancement of the gospel.

Junia (Romans 16:7): In this verse we see Paul sending greetings to Andronicus and Junia, his "fellow-prisoners" who are outstanding among the apostles. Junia is a woman's name. In some modern translations, an "s" has been added (Junias) because the translators so denied a woman being an apostle, that they assumed a copyist has accidentally dropped the "s." However the proper male ending would have been "ius," not "ias." No church commentator earlier than the Middle Ages questioned that Junia was both a woman and an apostle.

Dorcas or Tabitha (both names meaning "gazelle") was well-known and much loved for her acts of charity in the city of Joppa, especially for her making clothes for the poor. When Dorcas died suddenly, the members of her congregation sent to the neighboring city of Lydda for the Apostle Peter, who came and raised her from the dead **(Acts 9:36-43).**

Lydia was a woman of Thyatira, who worked at Philippi selling a famous purple dye and fabric. She was a wealthy businesswoman and she was also a "worshiper of God," most likely at a local synagogue. When the Apostle Paul encountered her in prayer among other women, his preaching of the Word brought Lydia to faith in Christ. She and her friends became the nucleus of the Christian community in Philippi **(Acts 16)**. It was to her house that Paul and Silas returned following the conversion of the Philippians jailer.

Chloe (1 Cor. 1:10-11) is mentioned as the owner of a house where Christian meetings were held.