



The Christian origins of our Kiwi Cultural views on

# THE EQUALITY OF MEN AND WOMEN

## What changed world opinions?

### OPENING QUESTIONS:

- Have you ever been in a situation where you were the last to be selected for something? What happened and how did you feel?

**Opening comment:** Being left out feels stink, and discrimination feels the same. Throughout history women have been badly treated by men. This is changing in our times. This is our topic today.

### BIBLICAL BASIS QUESTIONS:

- What is the basis for our belief as Christians in the equality of men and women? Genesis 1: 27-28.
- Was male domination God's intent, and how did it come about? Genesis 3:16 (After the fall strengths in the area of initiation that men were given were misused to dominate).
- What three areas of equality does this Bible verse affirm? Galatians 3:28
  - (Equality irrespective of [1] race, [2] economic/social status, and [3] gender. All three were in contrast to the culture of the day [See footnote 1])
- Read the three examples of areas in which Jesus advocated for equality on Pg16-17.
  - After each, ask someone to summarise the point in their own words.
- [In footnote 2 you will find a few thoughts on the difference between equality and 'headship' and also women in Church leadership. These Biblical-interpretation matters are probably best left for another time, though some notes included may help give a starting perspective]

### HISTORY REVISION FROM THE 'HOPE FOR ALL – AT PEACE TOGETHER' BOOKLET

The below questions can be answered from the concise historical summaries found in *Hope for all - At Peace Together*.

- From your reading of this booklet, what difference did Jesus' teachings have on the following periods of time:
  - The early church (Pg17)
  - In the middle ages (Pg17)
  - in the past 200 years (Pg17)
- What unique role did NZ play in establishing women's increasing rights in the late 1800's? (Pg 19-23)



- What was the WCTU, and how specifically 'Christian' was this movement in its motivations?
- Do you think it fair that our society today generally suggests that Christianity is a hindrance to women's rights, when it has actually been its prime promotor through the past 2000 years? Explain.

Optional questions, if suitable: How might this criticism of Christianity have come about?

1. *People in the Church, including leaders at different times, have failed to live full by Christ's teachings. Some men have abused power, so some criticism is valid.*

2. *The 'feminist' movement has shifted from a focus on equality itself, to a focus on a range of other issues that are really very different (in many of our view). Abortion – in which an innocent and voiceless baby loses its life, is the main issue. Other newer issues include the equivocation of the genders, as if gender were fluid rather than being based on biological realities [See footnote 3 for more].*

What could we say that could help the situation?

*We can openly admit the failures of people in churches – while also speaking up to tell the kinds of stories found in the provided 'Hope For All' booklet, which put the reality of Christian influence in starting this movement back in the picture.*

- What does the booklet suggest to be a continuing area of primary focus in Christian mission around the globe? (The defence of women and children).
  - *Note the one-sentence examples in the booklet (Pg18).*
- **Video story:** Consider watching the short video telling David and Linda Cowie's story - which is about radical commitment to Christian charity, including creating ways to defend women from ongoing abuses by men in other nations where these protections don't yet exist. (10daychallenge.co.nz/stories)
- **Video story:** Consider watching 'Jerram's story' – which is about rescuing girls from the sex industry. (10daychallenge.co.nz/stories)

#### APPLICATION QUESTIONS:

- Summarise: Where did our cultural ideas of equality (of gender or race) come from?

**Comment:** Despite tensions that might occasionally exist with some feminists, never lose sight of the fact that (1) equality between men and women in our society today is at a level unparalleled in any culture through all of previous history, (2) and exists as it does because of the initial advocacy of Christians (whose values our whole society then embraced), (3) and that this Christian work continues in significant ways all around the world today.

- What can you take away from this discussion?
- Do you have friends who are passionate about this topic? Might they be interested in reading this booklet, to hear these stories?
- Pray for those friends



## FOOTNOTES:

[1] Belief in the equality of genders is a very different to believing there are no differences between genders, or that gender identity is fluid. Scripture affirms gender differences while maintaining equality.

[2] The idea that men have 'headship' in a marriage in the Bible is a topic that might arise, as also is the role of women in church leadership. These topics warrant additional study, however some starting notes are below, in case useful.

### **What is the difference between equality and headship? 1 Corinthians 11:3 -12**

**V2-3** – These verses reaffirm 'the traditions' which, as in Genesis 2, recognise men were created first, and that there is a function called 'headship'. But what does '**headship**' mean? How about '**first responsibility**'? In Genesis 3 the conversation with God has a specific order to it. God calls Adam to account first – holding him primarily responsible. God then announces the consequences for Adam's sin last – this being the climax of the punishments.

**Ephesians 5:21-25** gives further context to this. 'Headship' is connected to a responsibility to love one's wife like Christ did the Church – and Christ died for the Church. *So it is about a responsibility to do good, not power.* It is about being the first to give; the first to love; the first to serve. Our reactions to this idea exist because we are viewing 'headship' in the earthly way – as if it were about power (or because we've heard of some men abuse this idea for their own benefit). Jesus taught that the leader is to be the servant of all. Headship in the New Testament way of seeing things means laying your life down for the other. **Ephesians 5:26-27** illustrates how a man's role in a marriage is to help his wife achieve her greatest potential. It is about selfless love and empowerment – not control. **Ephesians 5:28** says men should love their wives as their own bodies. In the Greco-Roman world, women were the property of men, and easily replaced. It is difficult today to comprehend how radical this idea was in their time.

**V4-10** – This passage is initially difficult to understand, as we are distracted by a cultural tradition, in which women's heads were covered in certain formal contexts. To illustrate from today, imagine if a Muslim woman in a Muslim community were to embrace the Christian faith. She then removes her head coverings, because the Bible's laws don't require it. The mere act of removing the head covering might shock her community and bring the Christian faith into disrepute, because it is viewed as disrespectful within their culture. It is likely similar here in Paul's letter to the early Christians in Corinth. The removal of head coverings was not understood – and so they were advised to put them back on, in keeping with accepted cultural norm.

So, what's the real issue here? Consider Galatians 3:28 again (...there is neither...male nor female...). Some misinterpreted this radical affirmation of equality between men and women as a suggestion that these gender differences and boundaries now no longer applied. They then abandoned social norms in a way that brought the gospel into disrepute – so Paul corrects them.

In 1 Corinthians 11:14 we have men growing their hair long – counter to cultural norms. This is another case of the same kind of confusion. Just because men and women are equal, it doesn't mean they are the same! The point wasn't that men having long hair is wrong either. Consider how Numbers 6 affirms that some men were supposed to keep their hair long! The issue was about how these actions affected others. The law of love is more important than our personal preferences.

**V11-12** – In a context of concluding the above verses, what do these two verses reaffirm? Paul reaffirms that men and women remain equal before God! It's important that we note again that, at that time, stating that a man 'was not independent of woman' was radical. Men ruled the world. Jesus' teachings had then clearly challenged that inequality. Of note, no other religious leader or philosopher was making statements similar to these!

### **Are there church leadership roles to which men only are called?**

This is a more involved discussion and, again, maybe best left for another time. Some feel that eldership, and governmental authority are "men-only". Those believing this would suggest this has no bearing on the equality of men and women, but instead only on the ways they are called by God to function. Others, however, look at how Jesus had women disciples (even though his 'official 12' were all men), and also at how many in 'apostolic leadership' in the early church were women, and therefore interpret these other passages on local church leadership through different lenses, from awareness of the existence of women in regional positions of leadership. They therefore see validity in recognising that some cultural dynamics sat behind these instructions by Paul. While there are a couple of passages that seem to suggest women were to never be in certain leadership roles in the Church, Paul concurrently affirms dozen or more women in regional Church leadership roles. *So the question is how we reconcile these – once we have studied the different Scriptures enough to have both clearly of the whole.*

[3] Abortion is presented these days as a women's rights issue, while ironically ignoring the (voiceless) baby's rights. This is abuse and dominance at its worst – with the literal death of another as the result. Regarding the future of abortion, current efforts are in place to legalise abortions up to full term – which is 40 weeks. For example, in the State of Victoria, Australia, this is already legalised. The irony is that we call prematurely born babies 'babies' (not a 'foetus'), and we are able to keep them alive in incubators from 24 weeks, and would be correctly charged with murder if we killed them. In contrast, the 40 week unborn baby would be considered a 'foetus' and not a 'baby' – and would have no legal rights to life. Under what circumstance is it ok for someone to kill someone who is entirely innocent?

**Booklets online:** [HopeProject.co.nz/ebooks](http://HopeProject.co.nz/ebooks)

**Discussion guides:** [AllTogether.co.nz/sermons-studies](http://AllTogether.co.nz/sermons-studies)

**Email to request free copies of booklets:** [admin@shininglights.co.nz](mailto:admin@shininglights.co.nz)