

Victory of the Lamb
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Sermon text: Romans 16
Sermon series: Who told you that?
Sermon idea: Is the Bible against women?
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Last week I read an article entitled “Not safer at home.” The basic message of the article was that for many people, especially women they are not safer at home during this pandemic. They live in a home where there is danger. Men are controlling or abusive. They even try to twist the Scriptures to support their abuse.

Uncover a real problem that’s been going on for thousands of years: Gender inequality. That for many women they are not safer at home, at work, at church, or anywhere there are men.

We know that something has to be done, but what? What was the root cause of this crisis? Well, many looked at the problem of gender inequality and believed that focusing on gender leads to inequality (**Gender → inequality**) The idea was that if we could just get rid of gender distinctions then we could get rid of inequality. So we started seeing hospitals giving the option to not put gender on a baby’s birth certificates. You might have noticed that other questionnaires have dropped gender distinctions as well.

Now, if you are a Christian this is a problem because the Bible talks about two genders, male and female. And the Bible talks about differences in the genders.

And so some Christians are embarrassed or ashamed about what the Bible says about gender distinctions. Some have left the faith. In fact, some of you might be holding back your desire to become a Christian because you have heard that Christianity is oppressive to women.

This sermon series is all about talking about those kinds of difficult topics. We are continuing our sermon series **Who told you that?** And this week we are looking at this idea, Who told you that? **The Bible is antiwoman.**

We all want our world to be safer for everyone, especially women. So that is the question I want to answer today: **How can we make our communities safer for everyone, especially women?**

Let’s look at the Bible and see if it is really antiwoman. So where does the Bible begin talking about different genders? Is it on page 500? 100? 50? Nope. On page one. The first page of the Bible begins talking about God creating two distinct genders, male and female.

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.**

In Matthew 19, Jesus himself quotes this verse. He says, in the beginning God created them male and female. Maybe we wish the Bible didn’t start this way. Maybe we wish the Bible was more gender neutral. Maybe already from page one the Bible feels offensive.

Well, this verse has always been offensive throughout time, but usually for different reasons. In other ancient cultures, like ancient Cana, Assyria, or Babylon, they would be more offended by the fact that the Bible says that both man and woman were created equal, in God's image; both man and woman deserved equal rights and protection.

In fact, this verse of the Bible is the foundation of all human rights throughout the world. Every human, black or white, young or old, male or female all are created by God. All deserve equal honor, value, protection and respect. If it wasn't for this verse we would not have a category for human rights. No other worldview. No other religion begins with such a beautiful statement of the dignity of each human, both men and women. You will not find this in Islam, nor in Hinduism. You will not be able to find a basis for human rights and equality in Darwinian evolution either.

Not only does the Bible begin by saying that every human, both men and women, have intrinsic value, but then as we turn to the New Testament, Paul makes this beautiful statement:

Galatians 3:26-28

²⁶ So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, ²⁷ for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. ²⁸ There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

This would have been a remarkable statement in the first century where Rome ruled the world. The Roman culture was all about power and class. The goal was to be served, to be number one. And Paul makes this radical statement that in Christ the classes and power struggles are over. All are one in Christ, no matter if you are slave or free, male or female.

But what about this idea of gender distinctiveness? Why does the Bible make such a big deal about "male" and "female"? Let's look at Genesis 1 again.

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.**

The Bible begins saying that both men and women were created in the "image of God", "in his likeness". Then the Bible emphasizes both male and female. So there is something about being a man that reflects and reveals God. There is something we learn about God as we look at the distinctive qualities of a man. AND there is something we learn about God when we look at the distinctive qualities of a woman. Both men and women complete the picture of God for us. They each reveal the glory of God. Take away the genders and we miss out on the glory of God.

So here is what you need to know:

1. Women uniquely reflect the glory of God.

And that is why it is such a great sin for men to hurt or harm or abuse or try to control women. They are God's children, made in his image, to reflect the glory of God.

I had a professor who taught us this point as he explained 1 Peter 3:7

⁷ **Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers.**

My professor said that when he would do marriage counseling he would look at the man and say, "You might be biologically stronger than this woman. And if you use your strength to hurt this woman, recognize you are dealing with one of God's daughters. And will hold you accountable for hurting one of his precious daughters (heirs). He will not listen to your prayers and unless you repent and change, you will face God's judgment."

My professor made it very clear. So what are men and women supposed to do?

2. Spend more time with Jesus.

Men, you need to spend more time with Jesus. First of all, for forgiveness. Let's get on our knees and beg Jesus to bleed all over us and forgive us for how we have treated women.

Spend more time with Jesus. Learn what it looks like to truly be a man. Jesus honored women. He didn't see them as second class citizens. He valued women. It was women who supported his ministry. He respected women. He told men, "Don't you even dare look at a woman lustfully. That is adultery in God's eyes."

Women, you also need to spend more time with Jesus. See how much he values you and honors you and respects you. He honors you. He valued his mom, speaking to her and taking care of her even from the cross. He respects you.

In this series we have been looking at Paul's letter to the Romans and at the end of his letter he greets his friends and fellow workers. You can tell that Paul spent lots of time with Jesus because look at who he mentions first.

Paul says, **I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a deacon of the church in Cenchreae. ²I ask you to receive her in the Lord in a way worthy of his people and to give her any help she may need from you, for she has been the benefactor of many people, including me. (Romans 16:1-2)**

The first person Paul mentions is a woman, Phoebe. And she holds a position the church called "deacon", which means minister or someone who serves. Paul "commends" her, which means he honors her. She was a "benefactor", which means she was someone who stood by Paul's side. She was a helper.

Paul honored this deacon, Phoebe. And we do well to follow his example. Honor the women in our lives. Lift them up by putting the spotlight on their good works and all that they have done for the kingdom of God. I think about the tremendous blessing of my wife. Emily is my rock. She forgives me. Loves me. She is my best friend.

As Paul continues with his final greetings at the end of this letter he mentions two co-workers:

³Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my co-workers in Christ Jesus. ⁴They risked their lives for me. Not only I but all the churches of the Gentiles are grateful to them. (Romans 16:3-4)

Paul greets a dear couple Priscilla and Aquila. We see their names pop up throughout the New Testament. They were dear friends of Paul. In Acts 18, we hear them inviting the preacher Apollos to their house where they explained the way of Jesus more fully to him. In this section, Paul says that they *risks their lives* for Paul. Paul and all the churches are grateful for them.

In other words, Paul valued Priscilla and her husband. Priscilla was not a second-class citizen. She was a co-worker with Paul. She risked her life for Paul. Something happened, that if Priscilla didn't risk her life, Paul's life and ministry might have been cut short.

In other words, we value women because we need each other. Women show us a side of Jesus that we can't see without them. Men can't do life without women. Let us give them the value that they deserve. Let's speak like Paul and call the women in our lives co-workers, of equal value and worth, who bring more to the table than we often acknowledge.

I think about what Paul would have said about our staff and volunteers here. The hard work of Sammi, Laura, Kari, Nancy, Annie, Cindy and many more.

As we continue through the end of Paul's letter, he greets Rufus. Now Rufus is also mentioned in the book of Mark. He was the son of Simon, the man who carried Jesus' cross to Golgotha. If we were to read between the lines, it seems like carrying Jesus' cross had such a profound impact on Simon that he became a Christian, as well as his son Rufus.

Listen to what Paul says about his family: **Romans 16:13 Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord, and his mother, who has been a mother to me, too.** So Simon's wife, Rufus' mother was like a mother to Paul. In other words, Paul had a deep respect for Rufus's mother. He didn't look at her like an object, but as a dear mother in Christ.

This is not the only time that Paul talked like this. When he was writing to Timothy, the man he was training to become a pastor in the church, he said, **Treat younger men as brothers, ²older women as mothers, and younger women as sisters, with absolute purity. (1 Timothy 5:1-2)**

Paul is saying something totally counter-cultural in 1st century Rome. Women are not to be treated as objects but as dear family in Christ. Treat all older women like you would treat your mother. Treat all younger women like you would treat your sisters with absolute purity.

And that's what today is all about. Mother's Day. We celebrate our mothers and all our mother figures in our lives. Those who have shown us what Jesus is like. Those who gave us life and taught us love.

I'm concerned about the spread of the virus. But I'm even more concerned about the safety of all God's people, especially women and children. We are going through a health crisis, but more than that a mental and emotional and spiritual health crisis. We want all people to be safer at home, safer at work, safer everywhere. And the way we can make more people safe is not by rejecting with what the Bible says about men and women, but spending more time in God's Word, spending more time with Jesus. When people spent time with Jesus, they knew they were safe and loved and valued. That's how we can make everyone safe today. Be more like Jesus.