

5. Gender and Discipleship

Biblical material: Mark 5:25-34; Luke 1:26-38; 8:1-3; 10:38-42; John 4:4-30.

Quotes

- One day our descendants will think it incredible that we paid so much attention to things like the amount of melanin in our skin or the shape of our eyes or our gender instead of the unique identities of each of us as complex human beings. *Franklin Thomas*
- We are all androgynous, not only because we are all born of a woman impregnated by the seed of a man but because each of us, helplessly and forever, contains the other—male in female, female in male, white in black and black in white. We are a part of each other. Many of my countrymen appear to find this fact exceedingly inconvenient and even unfair, and so, very often, do I. But none of us can do anything about it. *James Baldwin*
- The main difference between men and women is that men are lunatics and women are idiots. *Rebecca West*
- The first time Adam had a chance he laid the blame on a woman. *Nancy Astor*
- Until Eve arrived, this was a man's world. *Richard Armour*
- The one thing that unites all human beings, regardless of age, gender, religion or ethnic background, is that we all believe we are above-average drivers. *Dave Barry*

Questions

Why is it significant to examine the issue of gender and discipleship? What role did women play in the life of Jesus? Why did Jesus really not speak to gender issues, especially among his disciples? What lessons are we meant to learn from Jesus' example? How do differing ideas of the role of women in society impinge on discipleship?

Discussion/ Comment

The first two texts we are referred to (the woman healed, and Mary, the mother of Jesus) are not really part of any discipleship issue. More significant is Luke 8, and its specific reference to Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and Susanna, and the fact that these and other women seem to be the major financial supporters of Jesus' ministry. It's interesting to note that no man is identified in this way...

Similarly Mary and Martha, the sisters of Lazarus, are very clearly valued disciples, and their home in Bethany one of his favorite resting places. Jesus' discussion with the Samaritan woman went beyond both ethnic and gender barriers.

Just as significant is the role of women at both the crucifixion and resurrection. Luke (23:49) records the women watching the crucifixion from a distance, while all the men had fled. He also relates the story (chapter 24) of the women's visit to the tomb on that incredible Sunday morning. In fact, in at these most critical moments, it's the women disciples that we see.

But beyond this, Jesus really does not specifically address the issue of gender and discipleship. He simply accepted all just as they were, without any question or gender prejudice. That is perhaps the most telling aspect—that Jesus did not feel it necessary to make this an issue, or to make an “equal opportunity” statement! And this is not surprising, because as the Creator of the Universe values all his created beings, his children.

In his respectful conversation with the Samaritan woman at the well, Jesus reveals his open acceptance of all, regardless of gender. His disciples were surprised at his actions, and yet

Jesus is concerned only to reach out to another of his children, despite the societal taboos that should have prevented him from even speaking to her. It would have been interesting to have known more of Jesus thoughts on gender issues, but his disciples never thought to ask, What we have here though is the more important—because it is demonstration, not simply statement. Jesus shows us what he really thinks!

Ellen White Comments

ELLEN WHITE DOES NOT ELABORATE ON THE INDIVIDUALS WHO FOLLOWED JESUS FROM PLACE TO PLACE DURING HIS MINISTRY. HOWEVER, THE FOLLOWING QUOTES GIVE US A GLIMPSE OF SOME OF THE WOMEN WHO FOLLOWED HIM AND SUPPORTED HIS WORK WITH THEIR MATERIAL RESOURCES.

Their [James' and John's] mother was a follower of Christ, and had ministered to Him freely of her substance.--DA 548 (1898). {DG 70.4}

The record declares, "He went throughout every city and village, preaching and shewing the glad tidings of the kingdom of God: and the twelve were with him, and certain women, which had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities, Mary called Magdalene, out of whom went seven devils, and Joanna the wife of Chuza Herod's steward, and Susanna, and many others, which ministered unto him of their substance." Not only Christ, but His disciples also, labored in the cities and villages; and those who had been in the truth longer than the new converts, ministered unto Him of their substance.--RH, Feb. 3, 1891. (Italics supplied.){DG 70.5}

Among the believers to whom the commission was given were many from the humbler walks of life--men and women who had learned to love their Lord, and who had determined to follow His example of self-denying service. To these lowly ones of but limited talent, as well as to the disciples who had been with the Saviour during the years of His earthly ministry, was the commission given to go "into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature." These humble followers of Jesus shared with the apostles their Lord's comforting assurance, "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world."--RH, Mar. 24, 1910. {DG 70.6}

The women who had been Christ's humble followers while He lived would not leave Him until they saw Him laid in the tomb and a stone of great weight placed before the door, lest His enemies should seek to obtain His body. But they need not have feared; for I saw that the angelic host watched with untold interest in the resting place of Jesus, earnestly waiting for the command to act their part in liberating the King of glory from His prison house.--EW 180 (1882).

Mary then hastened with all speed to the disciples, and informed them that Jesus was not in the sepulcher where they had laid Him. While she was upon this errand, the other women, who waited for her at the sepulcher, made a more thorough examination of the interior, to satisfy themselves that their Lord was indeed gone. Suddenly they beheld a beautiful young man, clothed in shining garments, sitting by the sepulcher. It was the angel who had rolled away the stone, and who now assumed a character that would not terrify the women who had been the friends of Christ, and assisted Him in His public ministry. But notwithstanding the veiling of the brightness of the angel, the women were greatly amazed and terrified at the glory of the Lord which encircled him. They turned to flee from the sepulcher, but the heavenly messenger addressed them with soothing and comforting words: "Fear not ye: for I know that ye seek Jesus, which was crucified. He is not here: for he is risen, as he said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay. And go quickly, and tell his disciples that he is risen from the dead; and, behold, he goeth before you into Galilee; there shall ye see him: lo, I have told you." {3SP 199 (1878)}.