

BASIC BIBLE PRINCIPLES

THE ROLE OF SISTERS

“And the LORD God said, It is not good that the man should be alone;
I will make him an help meet for him” (Gen. 2:18).

“And the rib, which the LORD God had taken from man, made He a woman, and brought her unto the man. And Adam said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man” (vv. 22,23).

“For we [brethren and sisters] are members of his [Christ’s] body, of his flesh, and of his bones. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church” (Eph. 5:30-32).

“For a man . . . is the image and glory of God: but the woman is the glory of the man” (1 Cor. 11:7).

The principles which govern the relationships and responsibilities of men and women are set out in Genesis and continue right through Scripture. Neither the passing of time, nor the environment, nor social custom, can affect or change these principles or the requirements they place on the individual. They stand from Eden until Christ returns and establishes the Kingdom on the earth.

Woman was created as a “help meet [suitable]” for man. Adam allowed Eve to usurp his authority and teaching, and as a consequence sin entered the world. God then placed His pattern, by which men and women should live and worship, into the earth; and this pattern, and the principles governing it, are carried down through time into the first-century ecclesias, and should be seen in His household today.

Ephesians 5 shows the link with Eden clearly. As Eve came from Adam, so the saints come out from Christ and reflect His glory. The sister is representative of the Bride of Christ, the ecclesia, made up of both brethren and sisters. The brother is representative of Christ. The sisters work alongside the bridegroom, the brethren, who take responsibility for the ecclesia until the true Bridegroom comes. This does not affect the status of the sister in the sight of God, for both brethren and sisters are joint heirs of salvation; yet the pattern is clear: God—Christ—man—woman. Christ represents God, man represents Christ, and the woman represents both male and female in the figure of the Bride of Christ, the ecclesia. In fulfilling this pattern neither men nor women lose their equality in Christ, but they fulfil differing responsibilities, which for the sisters are many, varied, and extremely important.

Sisters: when the ecclesia comes together

In the formal meetings of the ecclesia (breaking of bread, public talks, Bible classes, fraternal gatherings, baptisms, etc.) the sister is under the restriction of the Word of God. It counsels her not to usurp the authority of the brethren, but to display that quietness of spirit through her demeanour and head-covering that becomes one representing an ecclesia subject to Christ. Her discreet behaviour reflects that disciplined mind which Scripture enjoins her to cultivate. In these gatherings the sister remains silent, but does join in the praises of hymns, gives assent to the prayers, and by her presence witnesses to the faith of the ecclesia and the love of the ecclesia for its Lord and God.

1 Cor. 11:1-16; Eph. 5:22-33; 1 Tim. 2:9-15; 3:11

Sisters: as helpers in Christ

There is a great deal of work for sisters within the household. Teaching other sisters, teaching children (in Sunday school, youth group and the home), pastoral work in caring for the sick and aged, visiting the housebound and lonely, helping other sisters in their family duties, caring in a maternal sense for children in the ecclesia as needed (perhaps this is a possible meaning of the expression “saved in childbearing” in 1 Timothy 2:15, giving a wider meaning than strictly childbirth)—all of these responsibilities are specifically listed in Scripture as the work of the sisters. To this is added the help they give in preaching activities outside the formal meetings, teaching unbelievers and helping brethren in the preaching activities.

Tit. 2:3-5; Rom. 16; Phil. 4:3; Acts 1:14; 18:24-26; Heb. 6:10

Sisters: as keepers at home

The tremendous work of creating a home where the spirit of Christ prevails, the principles of Scripture are upheld and children are brought up “in the nurture and admonition of the Lord” (Eph. 6:4), is one of the most important activities a sister can engage in, whether as a wife or as a single or widowed sister. Scripture gives examples of mothers whose godly influence affected the faith and adult life of their children; of women who gave hospitality willingly; of wives whose attitude to their husbands portrayed that love for and wisdom of God that comes from a woman’s response to her call to holiness. In a world in which homes are often built on materialism and covetousness, a sister can create an environment of stability and peace where the lasting values are not affected by the pressure of the world.

1 Tim. 2:9-10,15; 3:11; Prov. 31; 2 Tim. 1:5; 1 Tim. 5:10,14

Sisters: as heirs of salvation

The fact that sisters are required to fulfil a role and responsibility within the ecclesia and family life which is different from that of brethren in no way diminishes their status and standing before God. Sisters are “heirs together of the grace of life” and “all one in Christ Jesus” with the brethren. Our attitude to one another, brethren to sisters and sisters to brethren, must be that of esteeming others greater than ourselves. Sisters through the power of prayer and the wearing of head coverings represent the Bride of Christ (male and female), and work for the salvation of those whom God has called.

Gen. 18:12; 1 Pet. 3:1-7; Gal 3:26-29; 1 Tim. 5:10; Phil. 2:3; 1 Cor. 11:1-16

“Both [men and women] are to ensure that such influence as they can bring to bear on their surroundings is a Divine influence and, in the spirit of Christ, seek to make the Lord’s will paramount. The woman, however, though encouraged by Scripture to use initiative, is to work out her dominion within the overall framework of male leadership. It is the man who has the ultimate responsibility for controlling the direction of events which are to be, to the best of his understanding, in accordance with God’s ways. In turn, he is to seek and to value the woman’s counsel, remembering always that the phrase ‘help meet’ means a God-given fellow-worker in the task of understanding and implementing the Divine will”.

Michael Lewis, *Man and Woman*, The Testimony, 1992, p. 54.

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