

## How Has Christianity Changed the Role of Women in Society?

- Many ethnic groups exist to which the gospel is taken. They were not all the same.
  - First century groups
    - Hellenistic culture: Women were completely equal to men. Of course, certain genders dominated certain roles, but they had the freedom to choose. So, for married women with Christian husbands to adopt the follower role (Ephesians 5:21 – 33) would have been noteworthy.
    - Roman culture: Women could not vote or hold public office, but they held significant influence and were important in the society. They could own land, run businesses, and appear in court.
    - Jewish culture
      - The courts around the Temple, from outer to inner, were for the Gentiles, women, men, and priests
      - Inheritance was through the sons, not the daughters because women married into the husband's family.
      - Unmarried daughters and widows were supported by the eldest son, who received a double share plus a lot of financial responsibility.
      - In the case of no sons, the daughters split the inheritance. (Numbers 27:6 – 11).
      - A widow with no children was expected to remarry in the clan. The first son legally inherited as the son of the first (deceased) husband. (Deuteronomy 25:5 – 10)
      - Women had legal standing and could run businesses (Proverbs 31:10 – 31)
    - Other cultures: Various cultures placed women at various levels. Most of them afforded them few if any rights.
  - Modern cultures
    - Women in Islamic cultures have no rights and may be abused at will.
    - In Chinese culture, women keep their last names when married, and the children are given the last name of one or the other (usually by gender).
    - In the US, women became politically equal in 1920.
- Passages about the status of women:
  - Women were the first to see the resurrected Jesus
    - Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James (Matthew 28:1 – 10)
    - Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James and Salome (Mark 16:1 – 11) but the disciples did not believe them.
    - Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James and another who was not named (Luke 23:55 – 24:11) but the disciples did not believe them.
    - Mary Magdalene (John 20:1 – 3, 11 - 18), so Peter and John went to check the tomb.
  - When Rhoda found Peter at the gate, not in prison, the disciples did not believe her (Acts 12:12 – 16)
  - Phoebe was a servant of the church in Cenchrea (port city of Corinth) who traveled to Rome on church business (Romans 16:1 – 2).
  - Priscilla and Aquila are always mentioned together (Acts 18:2, 18:18, 18:26, Romans 16:3, 1 Corinthians 16:19, 2 Timothy 4:19).

- Galatians 3:28 “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”
  - Ethnic groups existed, but that they are equal in the church.
  - Slavery existed, but they are equal to free people in the church.
  - Men and women are different and are treated differently in each culture, but they are equal in the church.
- 1 Peter 3:7 “Husbands, likewise, dwell with them with understanding, giving honor to the wife, as to the weaker vessel, and as heirs together of the grace of life, that your prayers may not be hindered.”
  - Weaker vessel: in general, women are smaller and less physically strong.
  - Understanding: childbirth, motherhood, follower
  - Prayers: men who think they are superior will fail
- Christian husbands and wives model the behavior of Jesus and the church. (Ephesians 5:21 – 33). Illustrations of leadership, fullness, wisdom, nurturing, building up, equal
  - 1 Timothy 2:11 – 12 Let a woman [assuming, wife, since it is the same word] learn uncontentiously, with all submission. And I do not permit a woman to teach or to act independently of a man, but to be peaceable.
- Mixed marriages
  - ...even if some do not obey the word, they, without a word, may be won by the conduct of their wives, when they observe your chaste conduct accompanied by fear. (1 Peter 3:1 – 2)
  - How do you know, O wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, O husband, whether you will save your wife? (1 Corinthians 7:12 – 16)
- Marriage is not a necessity, but a cultural and situational choice (1 Corinthians 7:25 – 40)