



Jesus FaceTimes with Women

[John 4:1-9]

The Issue: *Jesus, NextGens, and Gender Roles in the Church*

A July 26, 2022 online *Christianity Today* post had this headline: "With Gen Z, Women Are No Longer More Religious than Men." While data shows older female church attenders still outnumber older males, Pew Research reports a huge gender reversal in NextGens. In 2016, religious affiliation among those under 30-years of age was 7% higher than their male peers. By 2024, there was a 12% gender flip. Gen Z men now attend church at a 5% higher rate than their female peers.

The Gen Z gender gap is even bigger when it comes to social and political issues. Studies show Gen Z women to be much more liberal than Gen Z men. This alone may explain the gender flip when it comes to religion. Progressive



viewpoints on many hot button issues are often at odds with biblical stances. When NextGen women are increasingly liberal, we should expect a marked decrease in their religious affiliation.

Studies show that one of the biggest issues for Gen Z women (and females in general) is what many see as gender bias in evangelical churches. Tragically, there have been a plethora of reports about churches, denominations and parachurch ministries ignoring, and even covering up, sexual abuses by male leaders. Yet, there is a more subtle abuse: male leaders, religious traditions, cultural biases, dogmas, and church bylaws that disenfranchise female Jesus followers by not allowing them to fully use their gifts and talents in ministry.



The role of women in ministry is a difficult and dicey issue. On the one hand, the Bible makes crystal clear statements about gender roles in marriage, family and the Church. On the other hand, many religious dogmas are rooted more in traditions and cultural biases than in an accurate reading of the Bible. As a result, there's lots of confusion and division. Yet, **1 Corinthians 14:33** says, "God is not the author of confusion..." Jesus never confuses. And he has the last word on every issue for those who follow him. Let's look at one of his face-to-face conversations with a woman in ancient Samaria.

Now Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard that he was gaining and baptizing more disciples than John—although, in fact it was not Jesus who baptized, but his disciples. So he left Judea and went back once more to Galilee.

Now he had to go through Samaria. So he came to a town in Samaria called Sychar, near the plot of ground Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about noon.

When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, "Will you give me a drink?" (His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.) The Samaritan woman said to him, "You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?" (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.) Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water."

—**John 4:1-10 NIV**

If you want to talk about how much Jesus values women, this is a great place to begin. Jesus had left Judea and headed north to Galilee. In Jesus' day it was never safe to take the shortcut through Samaria from Jerusalem to Northern Israel. Jews and Samaritans had been mortal enemies for generations. Jews risked their lives to go directly north. The safe route was circuitous, going 25 miles east down the Jericho Road. Then 85 miles north up the Jordan River Valley to the Sea of Galilee. After that, cutting back west for 20 miles to Nazareth. A total of 130 miles walking, just to avoid Samaria.

Yet, **John 4:4** says, "Now Jesus *had* to go through Samaria." Literally, he was *compelled* or *driven* to go that way. He was on a mission. And the object of that mission was a woman. A Samaritan woman at that. She had been married five times. But, most likely, those marital breakups weren't her choice. This was a man's world, and it was almost impossible for a woman to leave her husband. Men used and abused their wives with impunity. They could divorce and cast them out on the streets for any reason. Most likely this woman had been divorced by five different men. She was probably a shame to her family, and an object of ridicule in her village. She couldn't go home again. So she lived with some man, providing for his needs in exchange for a place to lay her head. By now, her only other options were to be a street beggar or prostitute.

It's no wonder she came down that steep hill in the heat of the noonday sun to draw water from Jacob's well. The village women would have come down in the coolness of early morning to draw water and engage in social banter and gossip. But she wasn't welcome to join them. She was an outcast.

Sitting by the well was an Orthodox Jewish rabbi. In Jesus' day, every Jewish boy was taught to begin his day with this prayer: "I thank God I wasn't born a Gentile, a dog or a woman." And yet this Jewish man was compelled to go to Samaria to bring God's love to a degraded and despised non-Jewish woman.

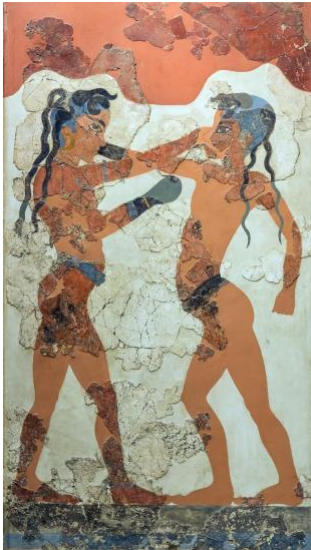
No one ever treated women with more dignity than Jesus did. He was the only man in history who ever truly loved and valued women for who they were. That's why they followed him in droves, all the way to the Cross itself. That begs the question: would as many women become disillusioned with churches today if they saw more of Jesus in the way they were treated?



This woman, who had been abused by so many men, could hardly believe it when he spoke to her. “You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?” [John 4:9] Jesus must have smiled when he replied, “If you only knew the gift of God and who it is who asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water.” [John 4:10] God wants to give good gifts to us all. So what do we learn from this woman’s FaceTime with Jesus?

One: We shouldn’t conform to culture, or be counterculture, but rather be transcultural.

Jesus never compromised truth in order to conform to culture. He surely didn’t conform to the ethnic prejudices of his day. Samaritans were part Jewish and part Gentile. Jews considered them to be inferior half-breeds. No self-respecting Jew would talk to a Samaritan, but Jesus did. He also transcended national hatreds. Samaritans and Jews had as much violent history as Israelis and Palestinians do today. No prudent Jew would go to a hostile Samaritan enclave, but Jesus did. Few Jews would show love for mortal enemies, but Jesus did. Samaritans had syncretized paganism with Judaism. Jews called them heretics. No Orthodox Jew would engage in a religious dialogue with a Samaritan, but Jesus did. He also transcended cultural views of gender. No Orthodox Jew would stoop to having a theological discussion with a woman, but Jesus did on several occasions.



Jesus never conformed to entrenched cultural norms or outdated traditions if they violated God’s Word. But we can fall into that trap. Conservatives can hold to religious traditions on gender roles, and even swear that they are biblical, when in fact they aren’t. They can cling to them for fear they will be seen as rebels, heretics or “woke” in their church or denomination. On the other hand, progressives can reshape or dismiss biblical truths in order to conform to the changing views of a postmodern world. We have to reject any notion of going along just to get along, whether it is with traditionalists, conservatives or progressives.

It can be just as dangerous to be countercultural just to prove we are unworldly. Jesus doesn’t call us to be pious nerds, reactionary or “in-your-face” hostile. Jesus wasn’t *of* this world, but he was *in* the world. He followed the Jewish cultural norms of his day as long as they didn’t make him go against his heavenly Father’s will. We too should be culturally sensitive to our world today. But we should also transcend culture. We don’t belong here any more

than Jesus did. We are just passing through on our way to our eternal home. We are not to be cultural or countercultural. We are called to be transcultural. Or, to put it another way, we belong to the Jesus culture. Men and their institutions are to treat women as He did in the Gospels.



Two: We must liberate women from that which diminishes them.

Jesus liberated the Samaritan woman from the gender inferiority assigned to her by her culture. He talked face to face. There was no male patronizing. This was God in the flesh dialoguing on equal terms with a shunned woman. She could have come down in the morning to enjoy female fellowship as she drew her water. But she wasn't welcome by women who thought themselves morally superior by comparison. Yet, she was no outcast to the One who waited in the hot sun for her to come down to him. He was as thirsty for her soul as he was for the water in the well. She was stunned. "Why would a Jewish man talk to me, a Samaritan woman?" How much more will she be taken back when she discovers that this stranger knows all her dirty secrets and still affirms her as a person of great worth? This is real women's liberation.

Jesus freed her from the bondage to the limitations and expectations of society. "Go get your husband." [John 4:16] He knew she had been cast off by

five husbands, and was now living with a sixth man. She had found no grace from abusers of females in a male dominated world. But that wouldn't stop Jesus from giving her the grace of his heavenly Father. The well was at the bottom of a steep hill, and she was at the bottom of a steep hill of failure and shame. She came



down for water, but she was thirsty for so much more. Two thirsty people met at Jacob's old well: a woman with an insatiable thirst that can only be satisfied by God, and that same God who was so thirsty for her soul that he left heaven, crossed the vast galaxies, reduced himself to a two-celled zygote in a Virgin peasant girl's womb, grew up in hardscrabble poverty, and now has come to this well to give her living water.

But, before he gave her living water, he asked her for a drink from the well. She responded gladly, serving him without compulsion. Imagine ministering to God himself! (And, yet, some people say that God has forbidden women to be in ministry.) Within the hour, this woman would become the first foreign missionary in the New Testament, taking the message of Jesus to a Samaritan village. She was the first evangelist in the gospel narrative. She was also a preacher as she declared the message of salvation to her village. Even men sat under her preaching. And her day would reach a climax when she brought her whole village to meet Jesus. When Jesus saw her and her townspeople coming down that hill from Sychar, he said to his disciples, "Look up, for the fields are ripe unto harvest, but the laborers are few. Pray that the Lord of the harvest sends laborers into the fields." [John 4:35] This woman became an example of what his disciples, then and now, should become. Jesus liberates women to serve him to their fullest. How can his church not do the same?

Three: We should Not see God's gifts as gender-Based.

We have clearly seen that Jesus released the Samaritan woman to serve, evangelize, and preach the good news to both women and men. This was revolutionary in a day when women were not even allowed to sit with men in the synagogues or enter the court of men in the Temple. Later, Jesus would pour out his Holy Spirit on 120 people huddled in an upper room in Jerusalem. Both men and women would be filled in accordance with an Old Testament



prophecy: "In the last days I will pour out my Spirit on *all* people. Your sons and *daughters* will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, and your young men will see visions." [Joel 2:28] In that ancient prophecy, God made an audacious promise to those who live after that Day of Pentecost: there would be no national, ethnic, racial, age, social, or gender distinction when it came to the filling, fruit and gifts of his Holy Spirit.

God promises through the prophet Joel, "...daughters will prophesy..." What is it to prophesy? It is to speak for God. It is to speak forth his Word. It is to evangelize, preach and teach. It is to build up, admonish, rebuke, and correct. Priscilla expounded the Scriptures to Apollos who went on to become one of the great Christian leaders of the First Century. [Acts 18:26] Timothy was Paul's disciple and the pastor of the church in Ephesus. Yet, it was his mother

and grandmother who first grounded him in the Scriptures. [2 Timothy 3:14&15] All the gifts necessary to spread the gospel and build the Body of Christ are in woman, and ought to be put to full use.

Four: Don't ignore the distinction between gifts and offices

All Jesus followers—men, women, boys, and girls—are to do *all* the works of the ministry. [Ephesians 4:11] No one should be excluded from any ministry in the church because of age, ethnicity, social status, or gender. Nor should women be excluded from ministering to men, whether it be through evangelizing, discipling, teaching, or by any other means of declaring God's Word. Again, "Your daughters *will* prophesy." No one would think of forbidding females from demonstrating all the fruit of the Spirit, so why would we think we can bar them from using *all* the gifts of the Spirit—in spite of whatever traditions, cultural biases, or misinterpreted Scriptures have developed over 2,000 years of Church history?

Nevertheless, while there are many gifts exercised by the saints, there are only two offices in the Church: elders and deacons. Elders are the fathers of a church family. They are biblically called to exercise the final authority on all matters of faith and practice. A church's elders are also the final authority teachers in a congregation. In the Bible, they are variously called elders, bishops, pastors, or ministers. While all the saints can prophesy, the elders are the final authority teachers and arbiters about whether the exercise of gifts in the church conform to Scripture.

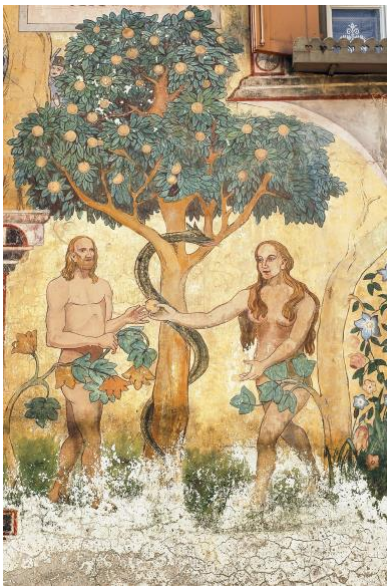


If our churches fully operated according to New Testament dictates, every sermon from the pulpit, every Sunday School class, every small group would be overseen by elders who guard the purity and efficacy of the teaching and protect their flock from wolves in sheep's clothing. People ask, "Do you believe a woman can pastor in the church?" Of course, I do. My wife has wonderfully pastored me and others. They ask, "Do you believe a woman should teach men?" Of course. Some of my best learning has come from women. "Can a woman preach?" I've known a lot of women who've preached to me, and I've benefited immensely.

Yet, I don't believe women should be ruling or teaching elders in a church. When St. Paul lays out the qualifications for an elder in **1 Timothy 3**, he specifically says that men should be elders. He is not gender specific in the latter part of that passage when he speaks of deacons. So, why is he gender specific when it comes to elders? It is because they are the *final* authorities on all matters of faith and practice in the church. And here's why:

Five: Men are called by God to lead in families.

The Apostle Paul could not be more clear about this precept than he is in **1 Timothy 2:11-15**. Wives are not to exercise authority over their husbands. It is the job of husbands to lead and be the final authority teachers in the family.



Despite what many Christian feminists say, this is **transcultural truth**. Paul argues from **creation order**. He reminds us that God created the man first. He gave him his Word before the woman was created: "In the day you eat of this fruit, you shall surely die." [**Genesis 2:17**] Adam's whole Bible was a single commandment that could have been printed on a single slip of paper tucked away in a fortune cookie. The man had two jobs: 1) to teach God's Word to his wife and family, and 2) to exercise the authority necessary to guard his family from harm. Adam did neither. He sat by passively and allowed Eve to take spiritual authority that would plunge the whole world

into sin. The woman was deceived by Satan, but Adam was missing in action. The first deception wasn't believing Satan, but not believing God's gender roles were for their ultimate good. The woman seized what wasn't hers to take and the man gave away what was not his to give. Sadly, nothing has changed in most marriages and families since.

Later, in Genesis three, God called Adam, and not Eve, to account. Accountability belongs to those who have authority. He also pronounced curses on them for their disobedience. He said to the woman, "Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you." [**Genesis 3:16**] Literally, God was saying that, in a fallen world, women will strive to seize the role God assigned to their husbands, and men will abuse their power to strongarm their wives." In that moment, God was predicting a gender gap; the battle of the sexes that has raged ever since.

Paul said, "I don't want a woman to teach or exercise authority over her husband." [**1 Timothy 2:12**] He doesn't mean a wife can't teach or take the

lead where she is gifted, but rather that men should have the final authority in the family when a 50/50 agreement isn't there. Above all, husbands should never be slackers in guarding the spiritual lives of their families. There is a



divine order set by God. And, like Adam and Eve, we violate that order at our peril and that of our children.

In **1 Corinthians 11**, St. Paul also argued from the **nature of the Trinity**. Again, this is transcultural, rooted in the unchangeable relationship between the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. He wrote, "But I want you to realize that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God." [**1 Corinthians 11:3**] His parallelism is brilliant in affirming both men and women. God the Father and Son are equal in power, attributes, and glory. And, so are husbands and wives. There is an equality in gender just as there is in the Persons of the Trinity.

Yet, there is a difference in their roles. God the Father decided what must be done in both creation and the redemption of a fallen world. God the Son carried out his will by taking on the role of a servant man, being grossly humiliated, dying a brutal death for our sins, and being under the power of death for three days. There was a time in the Garden of Gethsemane when he didn't want to assume his assigned role. But he said to God the Father, "Not my will, but yours be done." The Father gave him his marching orders, and guarded him in the process. In a sense, they both submitted to each other, just as husbands and wives are called to do [see **Ephesians 5**]



Please allow me to repeat it: there is an equality of personhood, but a difference in roles. That doesn't mean that one role was more valuable than the other. Jesus has been exalted with a name above every name, that, at his name, every knee in heaven, on earth, and in hell should bow to him. [**Philippians 2:9**] Quite frankly, it is fashionable today for even Christians to say that the biblical assignment of gender roles is demeaning to women. That is tantamount to saying that the role assigned to God the Son was demeaning.

A Crisis in Manhood.

Here's a critical point: we live in an age when traditional roles have been reversed. Almost everyone is confused, especially men. Gender confusion. Sexual confusion. Confusion about marriage. A large percentage of NexGens don't want children. Where there are children, an increasingly high percentage are being raised by single parents or grandparents. 24.7 million American children will go to bed tonight in a home without their biological father. The statistics on the fate of fatherless kids are dismal. There is a cultural war on fatherhood, and our children are paying the price.

NextGens are the victims of progressive engineering that is intent on redesigning God's plan for gender, sexuality, marriage, and family. The Annual World Happiness Index for 2024 is alarming. Finland still holds the top spot for happiness. But the USA has tumbled eight spots in one year to 23rd place in the world. When it comes to being happy, American Gen Zs come in at 62nd place, even below NexGens in Guatemala and Saudi Arabia. And, among Gen Zs in the USA, women are the unhappiest. The new morality isn't working.

The Church as a Model

In such a cultural crisis, the family of God must be a model for families in the home. It's critical that our young people see Christlike male role models leading in their churches. We might deduce this as the reason Jesus chose



men to be his Apostles, and his Apostles dictated that men should be in the final authority positions in the Church. However, they must be men who act like Jesus did with that Samaritan woman.

Jesus cares about the wreckage of manhood, marriages and families. That's why he zeroed in

on the failed marriages of the Samaritan woman. Was her life a mess because her relationships were a mess, or were her relationships a mess because her life was a mess? We don't know the answer to that question. But we can know that there was a connection between the two. Jesus' question matters then and now: "Where is your husband?" We should care enough about the dignity and worth of women that we make it possible for them to be all they can be in the Church. But we should also train boys to be men, and call men to take a

Christlike lead in guiding and protecting their women and children—in both the home and the church.

Six: We should be culture sensitive in the Church.

While we are not to conform to culture, we are not to be counterculture reactionaries. Jesus and St. Paul dealt with a culture where men set the rules and used their power to exploit others: husbands over wives, fathers over children, rulers over citizens, and masters over slaves. The synagogues and churches of their day had to step gingerly and work around those realities. We live in different times. Increasingly, women in the church are single adults. They no longer wear head coverings as a sign that they are under their fathers' authority. So, it gets more dicey when we tell them to be under the authority of men. Which men would that be? Women today can rise to the top in every sphere of life. How do we function in a world where a woman can be the President of a nation but not an elder in a church? These are tough issues that require creative thinking to balance gifts and God-ordained roles. Churches in a postmodern world will have to figure out what are true biblical restrictions and old traditions that may have been necessary at one time, but are no longer relevant today (or never were). For instance, can women be pastors, ministry leaders, speakers in the assembly, and heads of critical church ministry teams without holding the final authority role of elder? These and other questions have to be asked, debated and settled—or the church will continue to lose NexGens unnecessarily.

Seven: We all seek to serve, not to exercise power



Sadly, talk about liberating women in the church is too often couched as “empowering women.” Too often, the complaint of feminists is that they’ve been denied positions of power. Jesus didn’t empower the Samaritan woman. He set her free to be all she could be in ministering to others. Ministry should never be about gaining access to power. In the original language, to minister meant to serve others. God’s servants are just that: SERVANTS.

Jesus asked the woman at the well to serve him. “Please give me some water.” He in turn served her. Whether in the church, family, or society, real leadership is in serving others. Jesus modeled that when he wrapped himself in a towel, got

on his knees, and washed the dirty feet of undeserving disciples. When he taught his disciples about the difference between the way the world looks at power, compared to those who lead in the Kingdom of heaven, he said, "...whoever wants to be great among you must be your servant. And whoever wants to be first must be the slave of all." [Mark 10:43&44] Jesus calls us to servant leadership. He does not seek to empower us by putting us in authority positions. Instead, he wants to give us supernatural power to say "no" to being a bigshot, or to find our worth in the preeminent position or a prestigious title, or to lord it over the little people.

Sadly, too many so-called feminists want to possess the positions of power that have beguiled and left men dissatisfied and unfulfilled since the sons of Adam began to lord it over others. Wiser but sadder men have discovered what the Samaritan woman knew: there is a thirst that can never be satisfied in the things of this world. The woman at the well found her thirst satisfied by serving and knowing the One True God who had taken on flesh to find and redeem her. May I also remind you mothers, sisters, and daughters, that there are things that only you, and not men, can bring to this world. I like what Sir William Golding wrote:



"I think women are foolish to pretend they are equal to men. They are far superior and have always been. Whatever you give a woman, she will make it greater. If you give her sperm, she will give you a baby. If you give her a house, she will give you a home. If you give her groceries, she will give you a meal. If you give her a smile, she will give you her heart. She multiplies and enlarges whatever you give her."

All this, and so much more, is the glory of a woman. Why would she ever want to stoop to being like a man? If only we men could rise up and give ourselves to honor, protect, and help women to become all they were created by God to be. Then we might be more like Jesus when he met a Samaritan woman at a well in Sychar.

DR. BOB'S QUESTIONS TO PONDER



- 1. What did you think about the distinction between gifts and roles in the church?**
- 2. How can women be all they were created to be without diminishing the manhood of males?**
- 3. Can women be leaders in the church without being elders? How can that creatively be done?**
- 4. What biblical message can we give to NextGen women that will be both gender-affirming and non-compromising on Bible truth?**