

**Are women treated unfairly in the OT?**

**Mark** Today, we are going to teach a passage that, honestly, I would never naturally pick. We are doing this because we value the WHOLE of scripture and don't avoid issues just because they are hard. Because one of the things we can celebrate as a church is that for 100 years, we teach the WHOLE Bible, and not just the easy stuff. So, today is a hard one and yes, a weird one – the unequal treatment of women and purity in Childbirth. So strap on your booster rockets and **Turn to Leviticus 12**

**DAWN** The LORD said to Moses, <sup>2</sup>“Say to the Israelites: ‘A woman who becomes pregnant and gives birth to a son will be ceremonially unclean for seven days, just as she is unclean during her monthly period. <sup>3</sup>On the eighth day the boy is to be circumcised. <sup>4</sup>Then the woman must wait thirty-three days to be purified from her bleeding. She must not touch anything sacred or go to the sanctuary until the days of her purification are over. <sup>5</sup>If she gives birth to a daughter, for two weeks the woman will be unclean, as during her period. Then she must wait sixty-six days to be purified from her bleeding.

<sup>6</sup>“When the days of her purification for a son or daughter are over, she is to bring to the priest at the entrance to the tent of meeting a year-old lamb for a burnt offering and a young pigeon or a dove for a sin offering. <sup>7</sup>He shall offer them before the LORD to make atonement for her, and then she will be ceremonially clean from her flow of blood.

“These are the regulations for the woman who gives birth to a boy or a girl. <sup>8</sup>But if she cannot afford a lamb, she is to bring two doves or two young pigeons, one for a burnt offering and the other for a sin offering. In this way the priest will make atonement for her, and she will be clean.’

**MARK** Alrighty... one more passage I never thought I'd pick to preach from, but here you have it. Weird things from Leviticus. But here is my promise: It ultimately points us to the promises of God and Dawn and I will take you there today.

Purification from childbearing. So the first question I'd ask from this passage is what needs to be purified? Is child birth sinful? Why would it be unclean? And what about menstruation and regular old sex? Why are they considered unclean in Leviticus?

But here is the big question: Why is it unequal between boy babies and girl babies? 7 and 33 days for boys for purification but double that for girls – 14 and 66 days! How do you get that? Are boys better? Are girls a bigger burden? Why would the law say something so horrible? I think these are all great questions for DAWN to answer. And she will in just a minute?

Along with that are these questions. Why is there so much sexual brokenness in the Bible? Why are women treated as second class citizens? Why are there terrible things still happening when you read the Bible story – like rape, incest, polygamy or even slavery? We hope to give a little perspective today by giving you some bigger picture.

**Whiteboard the big picture**

So, here we have a graph of the history of the Bible. Creation to NHNE. This axis is how good things are for women.

- Creation – really good - God's original design... mutual partnership – intimacy with God and with others – holiness of sex - health and safety in childbearing – It was really good. The word for the partnership in English is 'helper'. In Greek it is Ezer Kenegdo. Ezer is a helper from a position of power – usually God, like “A very

present help (ezer) in times of trouble.” And Kengdo means opposite or facing. So a woman is to be the powerful helper – face to face, or equal with her husband.

- Fall – Really bad - In the fall, there was a curse... on a lot of things. But the curse hit men and women hard. That relationship – which was equal, mutual and face to face fell too. And Genesis 3:16 reflects the fall – **your desire will be for your husband, but he will RULE OVER you.** It turned the relationship from face-to-face to top and bottom. And you know, we have seen this in history too. Men have ruled over women in culture after culture... From ancient Mesopotamia to the modern Me Too movement, men have been on the power side and women have been on the sexually oppressed side. This creates a perfect storm in culture after culture for the abuse of power – unless held in check by powerful forces.
- ANE – A mess
- OT – marginal improvement
- Jesus – perfect
- NT – not perfect, but improving
  - And can I just admit here that we have not always done this right as a church... and I have not always done this right as a leader. But we are headed up and to the right. I was honest with the elders when I got here 15 years ago that I am in perfect alignment with this church and denomination. And yet we have to do better with reaching lost people. And we have to do better in how we treat women – how we love the hurting, empower their giftedness, elevate their potential... because **God is elevating the value of women**, we need to as well... and imperfectly, we are moving that way.
- NHNE – perfect, three perfect places, sin gap, messy Bible Stories

**Big Idea: God is elevating the value of women**

## **Dawn – OLD testament**

I’m thankful for God’s intervention, because life for women in the ancient near east (the times of the patriarchs, judges, and Israelite kings) was no picnic. And the Old Testament describes the reality of these communities. A major consensus among scholars of this period is that women of that time were second class, oppressed, and subservient to men. Here’s a quick overview of some realities in the Old testament, along with reminders of how God pushes back against the realities of the day.

women were often not named or even seen in the story, but only described in relationship to nearest male

**but God** sees women like Hagar – who even names GOD! El ROI – the God who sees! and God re-names women for his purposes (Sarai to Sarah to mean “mother of the nations”).

Women were devalued and considered the property of their father or husband – examples throughout Genesis of the patriarch “purchasing” a wife for a son /or the story of Lot offering his daughters for sex with strangers

**BUT GOD** gave women the right to inherit property (Num 27/Job 41) and protects daughters by commanding fathers NOT to make them prostitutes (Lev 19:29)

Women could not make vows or promises without the confirmation by father or husband, (Num 30)

**BUT GOD** allows Hannah to make her own vow to promise Samuel to God’s service.

Women were sexual objects, used only to gratify man’s desire (Dinah, Gen 34, Levite concubine, Jud 19)

**but God** also protects women with Levitical laws about rape and incest – and the Song of Solomon reminds us that sex is meant to be pleasurable for both men and women.

Women were often one of “multiple wives” (Abraham (1+1) , Jacob (2+2), David (7 + ?) , Solomon >>???)

**but GOD** allowed it in that context only to proliferate the human race and perhaps to protect women from too many dangerous pregnancies and economic disaster. A multitude of examples show us that Polygamy never went well... it was not a model to repeat, but a warning to prevent.

Women were valued primarily for their ability to bear children/to produce an heir

**but God** commanded both men AND women to “be fruitful and multiply” (Gen 1) and God worked through women who (as far as we know) never had children (Esther for example)

In all these examples, **God is elevating the value of women.**

With this as our backdrop, let’s go back to **Lev 12**

The first question is “Why unclean”? What needs to be purified?

- Bodily emissions (including both the man’s semen and the woman’s menstrual blood) were tied closely to “life” - the command to be fruitful and multiply – the procreation of the species
- when the potential for procreation went unfulfilled, it represented “Death” and therefore, uncleanness
- Neither giving birth, nor having sexual relations, nor having a monthly period is sinful, it is only “unclean”

The second question is “Why the difference of time in her time of uncleanness if boy versus girl?”

- Worth noting that even among many scholars, the answer to that disparity “we don’t know”
- Shorter “unclean” period of 7 days for mother who delivered a boy meant she could attend the boy’s circumcision – an act of kindness to the new mom!
- Time of purification could be compared to the modern “maternity leave” - God’s grace to moms for a bit of rest. For instance, **Leah DiPascal** notes...

*Without this “time of purification” an Israelite woman would most likely have returned to her daily chores and responsibilities right away, leaving no time for her body to mend or her heart to savor and delight in those first few weeks with her newborn baby.*

*Only God would care so much and love so deeply to provide these precious days between a mother and her child.*  
**Leah DiPascal – Proverbs 31 ministries**

- One note on Leah’s comment about a break from her “responsibilities” – this includes sexual responsibilities toward her husband.
- Since sons were often more highly valued for manual labor and family contributions, having a longer purification period after a girl could allow mom a couple of extra weeks before dad came back too fast to “try for a boy”
- What a beautiful picture - **God is elevating the value of women!**

Finally, the offerings themselves are NOT dependent on gender

- While several translations call it a sin offering, many scholars prefer the term “purification” offering
  - The sacrifice is not for “sin” but for “ritual purification” so that she can re-join the community
  - the issue is to retain ritual purity so an unholy people could be in relationship with a holy God (the focus is on God’s desire to reconcile humans to himself)
- Allowances are made for various economic levels – God’s design is that both rich and poor are reconciled in community. All are welcome and included.

- The offerings were the exactly the same whether boy or girl – neither gender child had more value than the other.

**Mark Example of Gold Kingdom Wives?** – When I was in Gold Kingdom, I asked one of our professors, named Daoda, what sticks out most in the city they live in- which is 98% Muslim or Animist and only 2% Christian. Interesting, he said, “We get the most comments about our marriage. When we walk around town, we hold hands, talk together and laugh. The Muslim families have the wife – or 2, 3, 4 wives – walk behind the husband a few steps and never interact. The gospel has made us different in that we are equal and intimate. People ask us often about this. And the women especially yearn for this kind of relationship. You know, Christians have not always been on the leading edge of male-female relationships, but Jesus was.

**Jesus –**

- **Woman with the Issue** of Blood (Mt 9, Mk 5, Lk 8)
  - The Leviticus passage puts some fresh light on the woman in Mark 5 who had been bleeding 12 years!
  - OK, so we know that her bleeding for 12 years means unclean for 12 years. Outside the camp. Not allowed to touch anyone. No hugs, no high fives, social distancing for 12 years straight. Can you imagine the loneliness and isolation ON TOP OF her physical pain?
  - She battled the crowds, found her way to Jesus and just touched the wings of his garment.... And boom! She could feel the healing power! And Jesus didn't dog her for touching him and making HIM unclean. Because in Leviticus, anybody an unclean person touches would also be unclean. Nope. Not this time. Because when the Son of God comes on the scene, the unclean thing works backward. Unclean things don't taint Jesus... Jesus purifies, heals, restores and saves those things that are unclean.
  - Unlike Leviticus, you don't DIE when you touch God and are unclean, you get HEALED... or Saved...
  - Jesus response Calls her daughter. “Your faith has healed you.” (word is *sozo* = can mean healed or saved) (both physical and spiritual healing). Jesus brings healing and salvation to men and women!
- This isn't the only example of Jesus caring for a woman, he consistently raised the value of women. **Women followed Jesus** from town to town – Luke 8:1-3
  - In fact, they were his **benefactors** – funding the entire deal!
  - N T Jesus spoke of **marriage between 1 man and 1 woman**, just like the garden of Eden – not polygamy, not musical marriage...but exclusive, heterosexual, monogamy.
  - Jesus had **women who learned**. Now this is not radical today, but back then women prepared the food in the kitchen while the men sat around the living room to learn from the master and prepare to teach. But when Mary had the audacity to sit and learn while Martha was busy with hospitality... Jesus said “Mary has chosen what is better.” Women are to be learners.
  - Jesus commissioned the woman at the well **as an evangelist** in John 4
  - The **first person to proclaim the resurrection** – on Sunday morning – to MEN – was Mary Magdelene. Jesus did not choose her for this moment by accident!

**Jesus is elevating the value of women!**

**Dawn**

- **Not only Jesus, but Paul the apostle also elevates the value of women.**

That might surprise you. When I was growing up, I learned about “Paul the missionary” in the book of Acts, and I learned about “Paul the author” of many new testament letters. But what I mostly learned about Paul, especially as a young adult female in a conservative denomination, was about “Paul the oppressor of women.” Anyone else have that assumption? Two specific texts are used from 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians and 1<sup>st</sup> Timothy, often out of context, to emphasize Paul's

expectation that women would be silent and submissive. While I LOVE to talk about those texts, we'll have to save them for another sermon or 6-week class!

But the more I studied those texts over the last two decades (and particularly, as I studied them within their contexts), the more I realized that just like Jesus, **Paul is elevating the value of women.**

Shocking, right? Let's look at something Paul wrote related to childbirth.

**But women will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety.**

**1 Tim 2:15**

Since Paul elsewhere wrote “we are saved by grace through faith,” we can be confident that what he **doesn't** mean here is that while men are saved through Jesus, women are saved through childbirth. The parameters of Jesus' salvation are not different for men and women. So, what DOES Paul mean?

One option is “women will be kept safe through difficult process of childbirth.”

- In an era when midwives were the only “medical help” available to mothers, the rate of maternal death during childbirth was high.
- Many women in Ephesus (where Timothy was minister) were praying to a God named Artemis for safety in childbirth... they were “hedging their bets,” as it were, and praying to both the God of the Christians and this Greco-Roman “god” named Artemis.
- In chapter 2, Paul gives instructions for prayer and a life of peace and godliness. In this context, he reminds Timothy to teach the women that only Jesus can save (or keep them safe in childbirth.)

We also know from other verses in 1 Timothy that false teaching was a primary concern. False teachers in Ephesus were speaking out against marriage and procreation – they were advocating for asceticism and celibacy. In fact, the 2<sup>nd</sup> century church father Tertullian comments on this text saying, “Paul is attacking false teachers who forbid marriage.”

- Paul uses these words about childbirth to encourage women and affirm marriage in a context where many were avoiding it. **Paul is elevating the value of women.**

This is not the only example of Paul doing so –

- just a few verses earlier, Paul tells Timothy to **“let the women learn!”** a striking contrast to the culture
- When Paul writes about **Spiritual gifts** there is no language to suggest that certain gifts are only given to a particular gender. The Spirit gives gifts to anyone God chooses.
- Before Paul talks about **marital submission** in Eph 5, he reminds both men and women believers to submit to one another.
- When Paul talks about marriage in **1 Cor 7**, he reminds **both** men and women to fulfill their spouses' sexual needs. In fact, this text often catches readers off guard
  - **“<sup>4</sup> The wife does not have authority over her own body but yields it to her husband...”**
    - (no surprise here – the culture expected wives to yield to husbands)
  - But Paul shocks his audience with the next sentence
    - **“In the same way, the husband does not have authority over his own body but yields it to his wife.”**
- In that culture, the men ASSUMED wives were required to meet their needs.
  - But Paul spends equal time in this text reminding husbands to meet their WIFE's needs.

Paul disagrees with both radical feminists and patriarchists and teaches mutuality in marriage - You are not your own... you are to meet the needs of your spouse...

- In the same text, Paul also talks about singleness and gives the unmarried and widows high praise. In fact, both Jesus and Paul remained single – they did not glorify marriage above singleness.
  - A woman did not require a husband to be complete in Christ, or to be sanctified before God.
- In all these passages, and in contrast to the culture of the day, **Paul is elevating the value of women.**

### **Mark Why didn't God just restore creation in one fell swoop? Why in stages?**

It begins with the idea that culture is a mess and sin is pervasive. God tends to reveal our sins one step at a time and help us move toward the light. It is progressive and it is never finished. This is true in culture too. God meets people where they are and helps them move forward.

It is like a marathon runner – you don't get off the couch one day and run a marathon. You run down the street, then around the block, then one mile... until you can run the full distance. God's sanctification of people and culture is the same.

Beyond that, God is constantly reaching new people who are in their own cultural mess... with their own gender value hangups, sins and abuses. So, he moves us forward one step at a time.

But the long term trajectory is to make things like they were in the garden. Like they were for Jesus. Like they will be in the New Heavens and the new earth. We aspire to the day we can live out Galatians 3:28

**Gal 3:28 – <sup>28</sup>There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.**

You know, it wouldn't be the gospel if we said "You all are united in Christ, but Jews still dominate Gentiles." It wouldn't be the gospel if we said "We are all equal before Jesus, but Mexicans rule Malaysians." It wouldn't be the gospel if we said "Everybody is welcome, but the rich will be the leaders and the poor the followers." And it isn't the gospel if we say "we are all one in Jesus, but men dominate women or men are leaders and women are followers." We must follow Jesus kingdom agenda in righting what was made wrong by the fall! This is the gospel of Jesus' kingdom!

### **Conclusion – Music Begins HERE**

Women, before we close, I have a word for you. Some of you have had stellar lives where you were loved by your Dad, honored by men, treated with dignity by your husband and you have some awesome stuff to celebrate! And yet...

- Some of you have been valued based only on physical attributes or looks
  - But in Christ you are valued because you are created in the image of God
- Some of you have been insulted, overlooked, or limited professionally because of your gender
  - But in Christ you are honored and empowered to lean into your God-given gifts.
- Some of you are heartbroken over the inability to have children
  - But in Christ you are affirmed for your personhood, not your motherhood
- Some of you may have been abused or raped, or sexually harassed.
  - But in Christ you are healed and made whole

Men, some of you have been remarkable in the way you treat women. You honor and value them in the home, and open doors for them in the church and workplace. If that is the case, I say 'way to go'! Keep doing that! And yet...

- Some of you have struggled with insecurities based on jobs or earnings.
  - But in Christ, you are valued regardless of income or employment.
- Some of you assume that only physical strength and athletic prowess will gain others' admiration.
  - But in Christ, you are accepted as both artists and athletes,

- Some of you have believed the lie that you have no power against sexual urges and that women are there to be used to gratify them.
  - But in Christ, you are empowered by the Holy Spirit to overcome lust and turn away from temptation
- Some of you believe that men don't cry, and that discipline requires strength.
  - But in Christ, you are affirmed as both nurturing parents and gentle shepherds

We want you to know that you matter to God. God draws closer when you are in pain. God's power is made available to you for healing and life. This world is a mess – even Bible stories are messy. But God is good. Look to Jesus for your model. And know that there will come a day when we escape this sin-stained blood-soaked world... and enter into the rest and joy that God has planned. God will make things right!