

Chapter 1

God's Plan for Women

It was faith that immersed you into Jesus, the Anointed One, and now you are covered and clothed with his anointing. And we no longer see each other in our former state—Jew or non-Jew, rich or poor, male or female—because we're all one through our union with Jesus Christ with no distinction between us.

—GALATIANS 3:27, 28 TPT

The book of Galatians was written to Christians who were turning away from their faith in Jesus Christ. The grace of God was under attack in Paul's day, and he wrote for them to refocus their attention. First, salvation is for all men and women everywhere. I believe the Lord will minister to whomever will come unto Him. Not only will He freely give life to all but also all can be used to minister to others this life in the Son—Jesus! There is an equality in life that is found only when we submit our thinking processes, attitudes, and expectations to the Lord. We are free to love and to serve the Lord with everything in us!

As we meditate on the Bible with an open heart, the secrets of godly wisdom are available to us. If we are willing to discard the traditions and customs of man concerning the Almighty God and His Word, then it is

possible to come to maturity. The first Scripture the Lord quickened to my heart was the basis for a victorious walk in the Spirit.

In other words, God is not interested in using only male personalities, is He? If He is, then how do we justify the passage in Galatians that opens this chapter? No, He simply desires a vessel to flow through in order to reach the world and to increase His family—the children of God. In Christ Jesus, it makes no difference whether it is a man or a woman or even a child who wins the lost. The Father wants His children to come back to Him. If there is no distinction in the male and female, then this passage of Galatians has become an established fact for the church.

The first couple enjoyed an amazing relationship filled with harmony and contentment. They were in complete agreement. The peace of God dictated their every decision and corresponding action. Neither was superior to the other or intimidated by his or her mate as they walked in incredible unity. It's hard to imagine, isn't it? In our day, we witness individuals who live in constant friction, asserting their authority, belittling, blaming, or patronizing the opposite sex. When this type of behavior happens, we can know they have refused to submit to God's original plan. I believe His plan was for man and wife to walk in mutual authority and mutual equality. The notion of this being found within the church is seldom realized.

For instance, over thirty years ago, my sister was very ill in the hospital. A man from our church came to her room and insisted I wait outside in the hall while he prayed for her. It was inconceivable to him that we could agree in prayer together for her. I was willing to leave her side so there would be no contention, knowing strife is a hindrance to healing.

In Heaven, there is no quarreling, anger, feelings of superiority, or judgments between men and women. Our understanding has been thwarted from generation to generation by the lies of the enemy. In effect, the devil stole the dominion and coleadership from the first couple. Today, we are desperate for understanding from Heaven's point of view. For example, our Lord made an interesting statement when confronted by the Pharisees of His day. He referred the religious leaders back to the book of Genesis and

God's original plan. Why would a man desire to divorce his wife if they were truly one? Why would a husband belittle, criticize, or abuse his wife if they were truly one? Let's consider how our Lord responded in two of the Gospels to the legalistic demands of the day. These men thought they could "snare" the Lord with their words.

Some Pharisees came and tried to trap him with this question: "Should a man be allowed to divorce his wife for just any reason?" "Haven't you read the Scriptures?" Jesus replied. "They record from the beginning 'God made them male and female.'" And he said, "'This explains why a man leaves his father and mother and is joined to his wife, and the two are united into one.' Since they are no longer two but one, let no one split apart what God has joined together." (Matthew 19:3–6 NLT)

Some Pharisees came and tried to trap him with this question, "Should a man be allowed to divorce his wife?" Jesus answered them with a question, "What did Moses say in the law about divorce?" "Well, he permitted it," they replied. "He said a man can give his wife a written notice of divorce and send her away." But Jesus responded, "He wrote this commandment only as a concession to your hard hearts." (Mark 10:2–5 NLT)

Their attitude and demeaning attacks on women were not unnoticed by our Lord. For example, He refused to become tangled in the Pharisee's web of the subject of divorce; instead, He focused on the real issue of a man and wife walking in unity. He referred to the decree made by Moses and his decision, based on the hardness of man's heart. I believe they were shocked at His answer. He understood the motives of their hearts and gave them an answer they were not expecting.

Unfortunately, things haven't changed much in the church or our world today. Only the work of Calvary softens our heart so that a husband and wife can walk in the authority designed by God from the beginning. I believe the Lord was directing the Pharisees back to God's original plan for

man and woman. The first couple was created to walk in agreement and to take dominion over the power of darkness. They were given the power to refuse every lie of the enemy.

It takes effort to forgive unconditionally and to make the decision to walk in love. It is far easier to point the finger at someone else and to make judgments concerning his or her behavior than to work through disagreements. It is our choice to choose the high road and to walk in love. I believe many marriages, homes, and churches have been torn apart due to a spirit of being “right” rather than seeking to build a strong relationship with each other. A strong marriage requires the humility and grace to prefer each other and to walk in mutual respect of your mate. If we refuse to allow God to work in us, then our spiritual authority or dominion over the powers of darkness is diminished. For example, Peter wrote,

In the same way, you husbands must give honor to your wives. Treat your wife with understanding as you live together. She may be weaker than you are, but she is your equal partner in God’s gift of new life. Treat her as you should so your prayers will not be hindered. (I Peter 3:7 NLT)

Before sin entered the earth, headship or female subordination was unknown. Josephus, the Jewish historian, wrote, “The woman it says in the Law is in all things inferior to the man. Let her accordingly be submissive, not for her humiliation but that she may be directed: for the authority has been given by God to the man spirit.”³ This man was not a Christian, and yet, his words and beliefs still dominate the church today.

It seems to me that throughout history, God uses a woman who desires a vibrant relationship with Him. They learned to take charge with their words. In particular, the Gospels recorded how our Lord included women in His ministry. His attitude was never demeaning.

For example, He exhibited compassion consistently to every woman He met. His kindness to the woman discovered in adultery, to an insignificant widow, a woman who was unclean, a twelve-year-old girl, or a woman

from Samaria whom every Jewish man would shun should be the example we emulate. The precedent the Lord set with the Samaritan woman was remarkable. His interaction with this woman gives us tremendous insight into the ways of God. After she met the Lord, her life was forever changed, along with the lives of everyone in her village: “Come and meet a man at the well who told me everything I’ve ever done! He could be the Anointed One we’ve been waiting for” (John 4:29 TPT).

The apostle John devoted forty-two verses to the account of this unnamed woman. I believe a surface reading does not do justice to the Lord’s attitude to a disgraced and shunned woman. This woman was filled with shame as she came alone to obtain water in midday. She faced continual rejection from the men in her life, along with the other women in her village. If ever there was a woman in desperate need of hope and a future, it was she. The poor choices she made in her life generated only more rejection, sorrow, and hardship for her. Yet the Lord’s behavior stood in stark contrast to the rabbis, scribes, or Pharisees of the day. Their teachings did not reflect God’s heart or offer this woman peace in her soul. It is apparent our Lord had one mission, which was to demonstrate the love of His Father God to every person, including this outcast living in Samaria.

Their brief encounter occurred at a plot of land well known to students of the Old Testament, the site that Jacob deeded to his favorite son, Joseph (Genesis 48:21–22). The well mentioned in the preceding passage does not appear in the Old Testament, but according to Jewish tradition, its location was well established in the time of Jesus. The Lord considered it important in his travel from Jerusalem to Galilee to journey through a land occupied by an unclean people. Every devout Jew avoided this trip because the Samaritans occupied the land, even though it was the shortest route from Jerusalem to Galilee. They were willing to travel many miles out of their way to avoid having any contact with the Samaritan people.

The Samaritan people were a mixed race descended from pagans who had intermarried with the few remaining Israelites after the Assyrians conquered the northern kingdom (722 BC). Their history dates back to Nehemiah’s time (the mid-fifth century BC), as the Samaritans were

a real threat to the purity of Israel. Sanballat was the early governor of Samaria, and the Jewish high priest's grandson married Sanballat's daughter. Nehemiah was determined to bring restoration to God's people and said, "I drove him from me" (Nehemiah 13:28). Nehemiah was zealous for God and refused to allow the people to defile themselves with those who did not fear God or walk in His ways.

By the time of Christ, the Samaritans had built a distinct culture as they blended Judaism and rank paganism. They worshipped on Mount Gerizim, where years before, Sanballat built a temple to rival the one in Jerusalem. During the times of the Maccabees, Jewish armies destroyed that temple; however, its location was still sacred to the Samaritan people. The Jewish people viewed the Samaritan people, and their false religion and culture, with such hatred that they refused to set foot on the land, even though it was so important to their heritage.

Our Lord deliberately went against all convention when He said, "He needed to go through Samaria" (John 4:4 NKJ). He came to seek and save the lost, and there was a woman without hope who would be a tool in His hand. Everything in this particular gospel is amazing. It is recorded that our Lord was weary. I wonder if He was as "weary in body" as he was "weary of the traditions of men" that placed unbelievable bondage on women and suppressed them? Our Lord had no problem initiating a conversation with the Samaritan woman in a time when every Jewish man, especially those of the priesthood, ignored and shunned her. A little later, his disciples were shocked to discover Him in conversation with her. She was an "unclean" woman in her lifestyle, culture, and person, yet our Lord was willing to do something unheard of in His day: He drank from her vessel. It is incredible how our Lord was willing to receive water from her hand. He chose to receive from an unclean woman.

Our Lord determined Samaria was a place He would visit, and this woman would be the recipient of incredible revelation. Her sin was ever present in her mind, but our God spoke to her heart and offered her a place of restoration! To this despised woman, He revealed Himself as the

Messiah. Clearly, her heart was discerned, and she was open to God's correction and instruction.

In addition, our God did not rebuke her as a liar when she said, "I have no husband," but instead seemed to commend her for speaking truthfully. She didn't deny her sin of living with a man, and she certainly wasn't proud of it. She simply failed to tell the whole story. However, the Lord went straight to the heart of the matter. She needed the living water of life available through a right relationship with Him. He let her know that where she worshipped wasn't the issue. He looked into her heart. She knew the Messiah was coming, even though her religion was flawed, and the Messiah would reveal to them all things. The Holy Spirit was able to penetrate her heart, and she was forever changed. When our Lord revealed Himself to her, it was the only time He revealed it so forthrightly until the night of His betrayal.

After she left the well, she went back into the town, brought the leading men, and introduced them to the Lord. Her burden of sin had been removed, and she became a strong witness for God. She no longer attempted to hide her sin but boldly embraced the forgiveness of the Lord and desired others to know Him as well. Her effect on the city of Sychar was profound. John wrote, "And many of the Samaritans of that city believed in Him because of the word of the woman who testified, 'He told me all that I ever did'" (John 4:39 NKJ). The religious leaders were disgusted with the Lord's behavior because He was willing to talk with a "shady" woman. They ridiculed and mocked Him openly. However, our God found a woman He could use to influence a city. I believe He is still looking for women He can use who refuse religious thinking and open their hearts to receive His living water.

Tax collectors and other notorious sinners often came to listen to Jesus teach. This made the Pharisees and teachers of religious law complain that he was associating with such sinful people—even eating with them! (Luke 15:1–2 NLT)

In addition, another woman the Lord commended in the gospels was the Queen of the South, or the Queen of Sheba. She is noteworthy because she was willing to travel a great distance and brought immense wealth to learn of the wisdom of God. In the recorded passages in the Old Testament, her arrival into Jerusalem is noted with vivid details.

Now when the queen of Sheba heard about the fame of Solomon concerning the name of the Lord, she came to test him with difficult questions...When the queen of Sheba received all the wisdom of Solomon, the house that he had built...she was overwhelmed. Then she said to the king, "It was a true report which I heard in my own land about your words and your wisdom." (I Kings 10:1–13, II Chronicles 9:1–12)

Twenty-five verses were used to describe this incredible woman. She had one mission, which was to meet King Solomon, who was reported throughout the known world for his God-given wisdom. If we are wise, then we will make it our heart's desire as well. Centuries after her days on the earth, the Lord made mention of her. Why this particular woman? Could it be that the Queen of the South was on a quest to obtain the wisdom of God? I wonder if we are willing to pursue the pearl of great price in the kingdom of Heaven as well? The time, energy, and financial cost were worth it to her, and she left quite a legacy to her family.

Centuries later, her descendants in Ethiopia traced their godly heritage back to this encounter with King Solomon. Emperor Haile Selassie I claimed he was a direct descendant of King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba from the tenth century BCE. He was a powerful Christian who led Ethiopia as its emperor for four decades.⁴ He was known as the elder statesman for many developing African nations. One of his close personal friends was Rees Howell, the intercessor and founder of Wales Bible College.

After a time of ministry in England and Scotland, I was privileged to visit Swansea, Wales, and to meet one of Rees's aged employees who remained on the grounds. This tiny woman took Fern, our secretary, and

me to the room where they studied and prayed. This wise intercessor was delighted to share with us the incredible prayer meetings concerning World War II and the conflicts around the world. She shared how Rees prayed for Ethiopia in its crisis and rejoiced when Haile was able to reenter his beloved city after a failed coup. She knew her life's purpose was to pray, and she continued faithfully throughout the years. It was a tragic time for the kingdom of God when the Communists invaded Ethiopia and killed everyone in Haile's government in just one night.

Throughout the gospels, our Lord consistently demonstrated a heart of compassion to men and women and showed us how to love well. When we share our faith and encourage others to do the same, the love of God grows. It is our choice to develop in godly character and to remain faithful in the midst of political unrest, heartache, and unfair treatment.

“But go and learn what this means: ‘I desire compassion, and not sacrifice,’ for I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners.”
(Matthew 9:13, NRSV)

“But if you had known what this means, ‘I desire compassion, and not a sacrifice,’ you would not have condemned the innocent.”
(Matthew 12:7 NRSV)

It was not beneath the Master to welcome women among His disciples. Our Lord Jesus never demonstrated any sense of superiority in every recorded conversation. The women who traveled with Him were comfortable and secure. Included among his company were wealthy and influential women who willingly shared their financial and material support with Him and His disciples. They were privy to His ministry, and their presence was welcomed. For instance, He took time with Mary and explained to her the most important things in her life. This behavior was completely unheard of among the rabbis or religious leaders in that day and culture.

Tim and Anne Evans wrote an amazing book on the power of a married couple functioning together, *Together: Reclaiming Co-Leadership in Marriage*. I believe their ministry to couples is setting the gold standard

for the way God intended for leadership to be enacted in the world today. They have tapped into the power of agreement and mutual submission that truly reflects the heart of God. Their understanding of the power that is found in mutual submission to each other is refreshing and empowering. They have established principles that are articulated in their books and seminars. I believe their ministry is influencing couples, and they are changing our culture to reflect Heaven's design.

As we saw in the creation story, God's primary purpose for marriage is for a man and a woman who are both made in the image of God to reflect and reveal the plurality, character, and goodness of God through their relationship with Him, with each other, and with all whose lives they touch. We also saw that God appointed man and woman to co-lead together and rule, taking dominion over the earth. He declared this dominion mandate first in Genesis 1:26, then reaffirmed it directly to the man and woman in verse 28.⁵

They believe men and women from the beginning were created equal in God's image. In addition, their function was equal due to the mandate to have dominion and to fill the earth with their offspring. Gilbert Bilezikian explained this principle to the Evans in their book:

It is often assumed that "head" in the Koine Greek of the New Testament, means leader, boss or authority. However, despite the fact that there are scores of references with all kinds of titles to leaders in every area of life in the New Testament, none is ever designated as "head." The word "head" used in this manner appears exclusively in the relation of Christ to the church paralleled in that of husband and wife. In each of those New Testament references, the function of Christ's headship to the church is one of servant-provider and never one of authority or leadership.⁶

Effective leadership requires us to receive the whole counsel of God's Word. When we refuse the temptation to isolate our thoughts on a few verses, it is possible to receive God's heart for us. For instance, our Lord commanded us in John 13 to "love one another," in Galatians 5 "Through love serve one another," in Ephesians 4 to "be kind to one another," and in Romans 12 to "be devoted to one another...giving preference to one another." There are many more verses for us to consider if we are willing to humble ourselves. It should be our joy to submit to one another in the fear of the Lord!

We make the choice to refuse discouragement in serving our God. The women used throughout the centuries made a difference because they kept their eyes on God, not man. As you read their stories, my heart's prayer is that you will be obedient to whatever God would have you do. All over the world, women from many different nations and cultures responded to His direction. I believe He is still looking for those who are willing to pay the price.