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RESEARCH ARTICLE

A CRITICAL ANALYSIS ON THE POSITIVE REPRESENTATIONS OF WOMEN IN THE BIBLE

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this study is to examine and analyze the positive representations of women in the Bible. The study analyzed the Bible by using theories from feminism and hermeneutic interpretations. The researcher used the Bible as a document. Qualitative research design was used for the study. This is because it was believed to be suitable to interpret and thematically elucidate the existing gender related issues in the Bible. Textual analyses were chosen as a method of analyzing the verses in the Bible. The result shows that in the selected verses women were represented positively unlike religious preaching's. The result revealed that it is at odds with most of the teachings in Ethiopian churches that usually represented women negatively. Based on this result, the study recommends a balanced representation of women to be incorporated in the teaching of Ethiopian Churches towards women.

INTRODUCTION

According to Michael (1996), within western thought woman is theoretically subordinated to the concept of masculinity and is viewed by the man as his opposite, that is to say, as his other, the negative of the positive. The subordination of women within the very structure of western thought is at the root and reinforces daily the physical and psychological oppression of women and the continued dominance of men, challenges to the system that perpetuates these inequitable positions are potentially compatible with feminist aims. The concept of the subordination of women is also true for African and the others nations. Tinker (1976), states that masculine and feminine stereotyping exists in almost every culture. Men are supposed to be strong logical, analytical, systematic, fearless, and assertive, whereas women are supposed to be the opposite: soft, emotional, uncertain, timid, shy, intuitive, and fearful. She also argues that tradition has forced women to conform to codes that restrict their behavior and make them subservient to men. These codes were pronounced long ago in religious texts and elaborated in plays, poems, and stories. In china, for example, Confucius and Mencius instructed women to adorn themselves, to please, to do house work willingly, and not to talk too much. In India, Hindu literature taught male supremacy and female submissiveness. Daughters were 'precious jewels lent to parents until their husband claimed them.'

In Latin America, the teaching of the Catholic Church relegated women to an inferior status and represented them as belonging to their husbands. Buddhist portrays women as a cause of the craving, anxiety, and unhappiness of men. In Moslem culture, Shari-ah law still permits a man to marry more than one wife. It has been left to the man's decision to decide how many wives he needs; the man also has a unilateral right to divorce his wife anytime he wishes. These cases are not also different in our country Ethiopia. O'Kelly (1980) argues that subordination of women is supported by the religions of most herders. Islam is widely accepted among herders of Asia and Africa, while Christianity predominates among European and New world pastoralists. She argued that both of these religions support male dominance; Islam specifically requires female subordination and isolation. She also stated that hunters' religions show few similarities with the major religions that developed in patriarchal agricultural societies, such as Judaism, Islam, and Confucianism. But they do not denigrate women or exalt the power of fathers or of men in general. They reflect the basic egalitarianism of the hunting and gathering way of life and emphasize the people's relationship to, dependence on, and respect for nature. O'Kelly (1980) also states that Christianity arose and spread within a more capitalistic market economy of urban Rome instead of the more agrarian societies of the ancient Hebrews, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, and Confucians. It is less misogynistic than these other great universalistic religions. It was probably even less misogynistic in its early years when it appealed to the powerful segments of Roman society. However, it eventually become the state religion of Rome and was incorporated in to the male dominated Roman power structure; then, women

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were soon excluded from equal participation in the religion. The earliest Christian followers broke with traditional gender role divisions, minimized sex differentiation, and advocated celibacy. They were detached from traditional family roles. This new way of life was attractive, first to working class and merchant women, and later to women from well-to-do families. The opposition from non-Christians was fierce because of their new ideologies that consider women as the equals of men. A great many women as well as men were persecuted and put to death partly because of their new ideas of equality between men and women. O'Kelly also stated that even though Christianity had begun as a religion which liberated women and treated them equally with men, through time it had become a force for subjugating them because of the patriarchal culture's influence of different societies in many parts of the world. In Ethiopia, even though the society is deeply religious, the depiction of women in religious teachings and the powerful impacts they may project seem to have been neglected as part of crucial gender issue. Every day, women are seen participating in religious activities. However, the ways they are depicted in religion may be limited and traditionally stereotyped. It may be argued most of us often fail to recognize how women and men are portrayed and what the portrayals would suggest. But studies could help women to critical question how they were represented in religious books and why the culture was not friendly towards them.

In African generally and in Ethiopia particularly, few studies have been carried out on gender and religion in general and specifically on how women are depicted in religion. Religions depict women with various roles, behaviors and activities. It may be, therefore, important to critically analyze women's image portrayed in religious books and attempt to indicate their possible implications. This study, therefore, attempts to investigate, in a critical way, how women are depicted in the Bible. The researcher has been interested on the study of the Bible towards the representation of women, because of its influence and the position the Bible holds in history, religion and philosophy of life. The content touches every aspect of society's traditional and modern way of life. The Bible deals with issues of gender, sex, alcohol and others. Since this study focuses on women, the researcher found it interesting to investigate how women are depicted positively in the Bible.

Objective of the Study: The objective of this study is to examine and analyze the positive images of women as depicted in the Bible.

Conceptual framework of the study

Definition of Feminism: According to Peterson and Runyan (1993) feminism is an orientation that views gender as a fundamental ordering principle in today's world, that values women's diverse ways of being and knowing, and that promotes the transformation of gender and related hierarchies. Burris (2005) has defined feminism as a concern with the impact of gender on writing and reading which does not simply look at literature from female writers or from female characters' point of view but attempts to uncover what a particular text has to say about gender and gender differences. Michael (1996) also has defined feminism as a movement to eradicate men's dominance over women, as well as revalue women's differences from men. He also stated that feminism criticizes the dominant male centered culture from a particular position and view point, which is concerned with the complex

power relations, particularly gender and sex relations; between people, institutions, ideologies, languages and other systems that function within culture at large, and aims in various ways to end women's oppression. According to Tyson (1999) feminism is a revolt on the patriarchal expectation in line with components of social and cultural expectations of how women shall live act or be ordered. He also stated that feminism distinguishes between the word sex, which refers to our biological constitution as female or male, and the word gender, which refers to our cultural programming as feminine or masculine which are categories created by society rather than by nature. Feminism criticizes the dominant male centered culture from a particular position and view point, which takes into consideration the complex power relations, particularly gender and sex relations, between people, institutions, ideologies, languages and other systems that function within culture at large, and aims in various ways to end women's oppression. A feminist approach to understanding literature attempts to uncover what a particular text has to say about gender and gender differences. Women have been generally underrepresented in the traditional cannon, and a feminist approach to literature readdresses this problem (Burris, 2005). The above are some of the definitions given to feminism by some feminist scholars. Feminists do not have a single definition in which they agree up on, but they have a common purpose that is the advocacy of women's right and a struggle to liberate women from any type of oppression which may be political, economic, religious and socio-cultural. The researcher also believes that their lack of a single definition may be due to their use of different theories because of its being a new concept having no single discipline. But the rise of feminism is undeniably one of the major events in the development of literary criticism in the 21 century. It has pushed forward both the theory of literary criticism and the understanding of individual works of literature as we shall see briefly below

Theoretical framework of the study: Feminist literary theory engages with the political and social goals of feminism, and it concentrates on literary culture and theory as a possible site of struggle and as a means of eventual change. Feminist literary criticism is also the critical tool for feminists approach to the patriarchal literary culture because it analyzes texts with respect to the ideologies of gender. It also focuses on how women in particular are represented in the system of gender relationships (Meese, 1990 and Wallace, 1997). Feminist literary criticism grew out of women's movement following WWII; it analyzes the representation of women in literature. Though the projects of individual critics differ, there is general agreement that their interpretation of literature involves critique of patriarchy (ideology that privileges masculine ways of thinking [points of view] and marginalizes women politically, economically and psychologically. For some feminists who are under French feminists influence, project of interpretation is to expose patriarchal nature of language itself. While some others who are under influence of Anglo-American feminism explore texts in detail, demonstrating patriarchal patterns, or the complex response of women writers to their own authorial status (Peterson and Runyan, 1993). Liberal feminists engage in many kinds of strategies to erode or explode gender dichotomies. They are most active in equal rights movements and seek to eliminate these dichotomies by eliminating the emphasis on gender difference and replacing it with an emphasis on sameness. They argue that women are equal to men because they are essentially the same as men in

regard to capacities for aggression, ambition, strength, and rationality. This argument is at odds with the idea that women are naturally the opposite of men. They also challenge the gendered division, but not the gendered notion of power. Moreover they reinforce the idea that power equals aggression, ambition, strength, and rationality (Peterson and Runyan, 1993:117). Radical feminists' approach to gender inequality is quite different from liberal feminists. Rather than insisting that women are the same as men because they share masculine capabilities, radical feminists celebrate feminine traits and argue that men should adopt them. They also argue that masculinity with its emphasis on aggression and violence directed by men against women and men, as the problem, not the solution for liberating women and other subordinated groups (Peterson and Runyan, 1993). As cited in the same author same radical feminists have a strategy to revalue previously denigrated aspects of femininity, making them the norm to which all people should aspire in pursuit of a better world. They are often referred to as cultural feminists who seek to remove the negative connotations from such feminine traits as passivity, nurturance, emotionalism, and dependence; and also they seek to redefine them more positively. For example, women's purported passivity (destructive if it keeps them from acting politically against their oppression, and positive to the degree that it promotes a desire for accommodation and thus a nonviolent resolution of conflicts. Similarly, women's supposed tendency to nurture (problematic when it comes to binding women exclusively to reproductive labor, and is positive as an ethic of care that extends to children the poor and victimized, and the planet as a whole.

According to Peterson and Runyan (1993) Radical feminists also state that people and nature are bound up in webs of interdependency that entail responsibility and care for others. Due to this they insist that interdependency to be revalued and redefined in a way that promotes the establishment of mutually respectful relationships among women and men, among peoples, and with nature a mutual respect that also criticizes the inescapable interdependency of all life. They criticize women who depend on men in ways that too often leave the women victimized. They are critical of male defined pleasures and masculinity principles, and also the concept of heterosexism which assumes heterosexuality is the only "normal" and legitimate pattern of sexual and social relations. Moreover they are active in reproductive rights, gay and lesbian rights movements. In short they are not interested in being equal to men because they think being equal with men means becoming like or the same as male oppressors. Spiritual feminists recognize that male dominated religion is the major factor in the legitimating and perpetuation of patriarchy. In relation to literary enterprise they contend that women challenge canonical texts and readings of those texts, and create new stories and modes of interpretation. While the types and aims of feminist spirituality vary widely, the major unifying principle is a desire to challenge patriarchal religious interpretations and to affirm women as spiritual beings and authorities concerning their own spiritual experience (Wallace, 1997).

Hermeneutic Interpretation: According to Abrams (1981), the term hermeneutics was originally used specifically to designate the interpretation of the Bible' including both the formulation of rules governing a valid reading of the Biblical text and exegesis, or commentary on the application of the meanings expressed in the text.

It was designed to serve as the basis of interpretation of all forms of writing in the 'human sciences' that is, in literature, the humanities, and the social sciences, as distinguished from the natural sciences. The aim of hermeneutics is to establish a general theory of 'understanding' specifically textual understanding of a text. That is, to understand the determinate meanings of the parts of any linguistic unit, we must approach them with a prior sense of the meaning of the whole; yet we can know the meaning of the whole only by knowing the unit of its constituent parts.

METHODOLOGY

Design of the Study: Qualitative research design was used for this study. This is because it was believed to be suitable to interpret and thematically elucidate the existing gender related issues in the Bible.

Sampling Technique: For this study, the researcher used purposive sampling and the verses that represent women positively were selected from the Bible.

Data Analysis: For the analysis of the Bible, the researcher used qualitative method of data analysis. Then, he presented the results and discussion of the selected verses, and then analyzing and interpreting them within their representations of women based on the theoretical framework of the study.

Analysis and discussion: Under this section the verses taken from the Bible were analyzed critically based on the theoretical framework of this study.

Religion as a method to solve Gender related problems: Now we will see the basic teachings of the Bible that could bring positive changes towards Gender issues. Since there are a lot of denominational differences among the Christians of the world I preferred to use the Bible which all of them uses as their reference to oppress or to give freedom for women. In this section I have also tried to show how the Bible could be used to solve the problem of women. Now let me show how we can use the Bible in order to solve Gender biased problems in our society. Let me start from the beginning of the Bible to show how men and women are represented in the book of Genesis.

The name Adam was first used in the Book of Genesis to refer to both man and woman

"Male and female created he them; and blessed them, and called their name Adam, in the day when they were created."
Genesis 5:2

"...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."
Genesis 2:23

According to the above two verses from the Bible we can clearly understand that a woman was first taken out of the male man and is made of the same material that the male man was made (Munroe, 2006). He used the term the male man because both of them were called Adam: the male man and the female man. The description also makes the male man as the first mother for woman; because she was made of his bone and flesh. According to the above description woman means the one who is taken out of a man.

In short we can understand that man and woman are not different in nature and naming before their God according to the Bible. Therefore it is possible to teach the equality of men and woman in the society based on the above verses.

Man and Woman were created to be rulers together but not to rule one another

“...And God blessed them, and God said unto them, be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.”

Genesis 1:28

According to this verse, man and woman were created to be fruitful, multiply, replenish the earth, and to subdue the earth and also to have dominion over every creature on the earth together. God blessed both of them and gave them the power together to rule. This shows that it is not Biblical to avoid women from administering or governing over the earth. And also it is clear that God did not order man or woman to rule one another but to rule together over other created things. This shows explicitly that it is not Biblical suppressing woman or dominating them because of their difference from men. This also shows that some traditional Christian religious ideologies that based their doctrine on the Bible need to reconsider their Gender related Teachings and thinking according to the Bible.

The role Women played in the Old Testament: Lots of women have shown great success story in the Old Testament. Here I have presented some of them under this section. In the Bible God used men and women for his purpose.

Prophetess Miriam: This woman is the elder sister of the great Old Testament Prophet Moses. She was a most remarkable woman. She saved the life of her brother Moses by helping him grow by his own mother after he was left on the river. Through her action plan to pharaoh's daughter, she managed solving the problem her family faced and saved her brother from the challenges that he might face at Egypt.

“.....Then said his sister to Pharaoh's daughter, Shall I go and call to thee a nurse of the Hebrew women, that she may nurse the child for thee?”

Exodus 2:7

She was also a worship leader and prophetess.

“And Miriam the prophetess, the sister of Aaron, took a timbrel in her hand; and all the women went out after her with timbrels and with dances.”

Exodus 15:20

She was a leader with Moses and Aaron.

“ For I brought thee up out of the land of Egypt, and redeemed thee out of the house of servants; and I sent before thee Moses, Aaron, and Miriam.” Mic 6:4

Prophetess Deborah

This woman is also a great leader who is a prophetess, a Judge and a warrior that delivered her people from their enemies.

“And Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lapidoth, she judged Israel at that time.”

Judge 4:4

“Then the lord made me have dominion over the mighty”

Judge 5:13

The second verse was the song of Deborah when she defeated her enemies at the battle. She has delivered the children of Israel from twenty years domination by other nations. She was a married woman but her marriage did not stop her from being a prophetess, a Judge and a warrior that delivers her people from their enemies. This shows that the Bible does not restrict a woman to a house hold responsibilities.

Prophetess Huldah: This woman is a reformation agent. She brought a great reformation in her time in Israel. She inspired King Josiah, the high Priest who is the spiritual leader of the nation and other leaders in the country.

“So Hilkiyah the priest, and Ahikam, and Achbor, and Shaphan, and Asahiah, went unto Huldah the prophetess, the wife of Shallum the son of Tikvah, the son of Harhas, keeper of the wardrobe; (now she dwelt in Jerusalem in the college;) and they communed with her.”

2kings 22:14

Like Deborah, Huldah is also married and a prophetess. But her marriage did not block her from accomplishing a great mission in her time. She produced a sweeping change in the nation of Israel in a very short time.

The virtuous model Woman of the Bible

This woman is found on the book of proverbs which is written by King Solomon the son of King David. He is considered as a great king because of his wisdom and administration ability. King Solomon in his writing seems biased against women when he writes the book of Ecclesiastes. But in this book he describes the best woman that all other women should imitate. Now I will take some verses from proverbs 31 to show how an excellent woman is described in this chapter of the Bible.

She is diligent, skilled crafts person.

“She seeks wool, and flax, and works willingly with her hands.”

pro31:13

“She lays her hands to the spindle, and her hands hold the distaff.”

pro31:19

“She makes herself coverings of tapestry; her clothing is silk and purple.”

Pro 31:22

She is landowner and business woman.

“She considers a field, and buys it: with the fruit of her hands she plants a vineyard.”

Pro 31:16

“Her husband is known in the gates, when he sits among the elders of the land”

Pro 31:23

She is benefactor of the poor and needy.

"She stretches out her hand to the poor; yea, she reaches forth her hands to the needy."

Pro 31:20

Her wisdom and opinion is respected.

"She opens her mouth with wisdom; and in her tongue is the law of kindness." Pro 31:26

The woman in proverb 31 is a Biblical model or ideal women for others. But the Biblical model woman is not accepted by most religions including Christianity in the world. The woman in this chapter is diligent. She is a strong farmer, excellent businesswoman, wise, benefactor, and craftswoman. This woman almost does all jobs and she is successful in everything she does. If the role model woman given for a standard is this one, then it means woman can do any business according to the Bible without any limitation on them from the society.

The role Women played in the New Testament: According to Ralph Mahoney (1993) by the New Testament times, the Jewish women had stopped being active in religious participation. Because of Talmudic traditions which are an Oral law had relegated woman to an inferior and unbiblical role. But the teaching of Christ has brought real change in the lives of women. His new teaching was strikingly new, and his respect for women contrasted with the teachers of the law and with others. Let me use a verse from the Bible to show how the difference because of tradition has been broken by Jesus' teaching.

"There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for you are all one in Christ Jesus"

Gal 3:27-28

The above verse clearly shows that the teaching of Christ has ignored all forms of discrimination like: race, color, and Gender differences. It also makes all human equal before God in Jesus Christ. All of them were regarded as one regardless of their race, Gender or color. If this is what the Bible teaches, then the sources of discrimination on gender should be from other causes like culture. I believe that in every society when Christianity is accepted it is acculturated with their way of life or tradition. If the society that accepted Christianity is oppressive towards women, then they use the religion as much as possible in order to make it oppressive towards women like their culture. This might be also the cause of differences in Christians of the world towards their difference on Gender related issues or thinking. But if all of them focused on what the Bible teaches about Gender issues they will bring positive results to change the life of women in particular and the transformation of their country in to the freedom and equality of men and women.

Lots of women have also shown great success story in the new testament as they do in the Old Testament. I have presented some of them only under this section. In the Bible God used both men and women for his purpose. Let us see some of them under this section from the new testament.

Mary: The Mother of Jesus Christ: Jesus' mother Mary was a good and godly woman. It was from her that the leader of all christens faith Jesus Christ was born. The Bible describes that humanity has fallen because of the disobedience of Eve the first woman, and also a savior was born who saves the world because of the obedience of Mary the mother of Jesus Christ. Most people focuses on the mistake done by Eve which is disobedience, but not on the obedience of Mary the mother of Jesus for the purpose of God. Her obedience was to allow God to be a human being through miracle by residing in her womb because she was a virgin. This shows that in the Christian faith women are very important, because God has used them as a foundation for what he wants to do in this world. If God gave women this privilege I do not think it will be fair to forbid them the place and the value given for them in the Bible.

Prophetess Anna: She was the first woman to confirm that Jesus was the savior of the world. Although she is a widow her situation did not limit her from serving God by prophesying the future about Christ and his crucifixion.

"And there was one Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Aser: she was of a great age..." Luke 2:36

"And she was a widow of about fourscore and four years, which departed not from the temple, but served God with fasting and prayers night and day." Luke 2:37

According to the bible even if she is aged and widow she serves God by praying and fasting day and night. This shows that she is diligent and very strong in her old age. If Anna managed serving God in her old age with diligence, who will forbid women not to serve God at any time if they wanted and the Bible allowed for them. Religious leaders could encourage women to be involved in the services of God by teaching what the Bible says about women and by changing their attitude which was shaped by their own culture rather than the Bible. Opening theological collages also could enhance to improve the religious teachers knowledge about Gender issues and will help them to share positive experiences from other denominations that involve women in their ministry and promote their capacity.

Forgiven Woman: an Evangelist Woman: In the bible both men and women followed Christ. Women were blessed, forgiven and healed the same as men. A woman having five husbands, and living with another one whom she has not married has been forgiven and became a preacher or an Evangelist and brought a whole town to Christ.

"The woman then left her water pot, and went her way into the city, and says to the men..." John 4:28

"Come; see a man, which told me all things that ever I did: is not this the Christ?"

Then they went out of the city, and came unto him." John 4:30
"And many of the Samaritans of that city believed on him for the saying of the woman, which testified, He told me all that ever I did." John 4:39

This woman was a sinner because she has broken the rules of the Jewish traditions as well as the Bible. But Jesus forgave her sins and she was turned out to be his minister and managed

bringing her community to him by preaching what he did to her. If Christ changed and used women in his ministry; why the churches do not allow them serving God by preaching and other things which they were allowed in the Bible? I do not think there could be a reason except tradition like what the Jewish did in the New Testament times. Therefore, challenging religious dogmas that restrict women's right is very important in order to bring real change in our society which is very religious.

Women supported Jesus Christ Financially: According to Mahoney (1993) the only record of financial support given for Jesus is from women.

"And Joanna the wife of Chuza Herod's steward, and Susanna, and many others, which ministered unto him of their substance." Luke 8:3

Mahoney also states that even nowadays in the western world 80% of the finances for the churches come from women. If women were not involved in business making how could have they supported Jesus in his mission. This shows that empowering women to their position even makes the church to be profitable in finance. I think this might be one of the reasons that make Ethiopian churches to be weak financially.

The last person at the cross of Christ was a woman

"Now there stood by the cross of Jesus his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Cleophas, and Mary Magdalene." John 19:25

Where were his followers while Jesus was crucified? Peter denied him, Mark run away, and also others fled.

"And again he denied with an oath, I do not know the man." Matt 26:72

"And after a while came unto him they that stood by, and said to Peter, Surely you also are one of them; for your speech betrayed you." Matt 26:73

"Then began he to curse and to swear, saying, I know not the man. And immediately the cock crew." Matt 26:74

"Then all the disciples forsook him, and fled" Matt 26:56
"And they all forsook him, and fled" Mark 14:51

"And there followed him a certain young man, having a linen cloth cast about his naked body; and the young men laid hold on him: and he left the linen cloth. And fled from them naked." Mark 14:52-53

We do not see any woman denying Christ but almost all of the men fled to save their life from the Jewish who wanted to kill their Master. Here women were presented in the Bible having a better quality than men by being more reliable in times of persecution.

The first person at the tomb of Christ was a woman

"The first day of the week cometh Mary Magdalene early, when it was yet dark, unto the sepulcher, and sees the stone taken away from the sepulcher." John 20:1

This shows how much strength a woman has because she is trusted even after the death of Jesus. This totally opposes the cultural assumption that put women an untrustworthy.

The first person to announce the resurrection of Christ was a woman

"And they departed quickly from the sepulcher with fear and great joy; and did run to bring his disciples word." Matt 28:8

It was also a woman who preached the first sermon on the resurrection. And she preached it to the Apostles being sent by Jesus himself.

"Jesus said unto her, Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father: but go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God." John 20:17

"Mary Magdalene came and told the disciples that she had seen the Lord, and that he had spoken these things unto her" John 20:18

Today women are often told not to preach or teach, yet we see when Jesus sent a woman with a message: "Go tell my brothers, that I am raised" where were those brave men on the morning their Master was rose from the dead? But a woman was there! This shows that women are better than men in their quality at the time of hardship. This may be the reason that the Bible called them a suitable helper for men.

Jesus promised miracles to follow all Believers

"And these signs shall follow them that believe; in my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues" Mark 16:17

Here there is no difference in Gender to do miracle in the name of Jesus, the only thing he requested is faith from his followers.

None Jewish woman in the New Testament

None Jewish women are those women who do not belong to the nation called Israel. So under this section we will see women from other nations that played a great role in the Bible like the Jewish women. Some of them are:

Lydia

According to Mahoney (1993) this woman was the first European convert into Christianity. She was a merchant woman, wealthy having many houses even for her gusts. She also taught to have converted many kings in European nations by some historians.

"And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, which worshipped God, heard us: whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul." Acts 16:14

"And when she was baptized, and her household, she besought us, saying, If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house, and abide there. And she constrained us." Acts 16:15

Priscilla

She is a woman who explained the way of the Lord Jesus Christ to the powerful preacher named Apollos.

"And a certain Jew named Apollos, born at Alexandria, an eloquent man and mighty in the scriptures, came to Ephesus." Acts 18: 24

"This man was instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in the spirit, he spoke and taught diligently the things of the Lord, knowing only the baptism of John." Acts 18: 25

"And he began to speak boldly in the synagogue: whom when Aquila and Priscilla had heard, they took him unto them, and expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly." Acts 18: 26

"...For he mightily convinced the Jews, and that publicly, showing by the scriptures that Jesus was Christ." Acts 18: 28

Priscilla is an amazing woman. She has trained the most effective African man who was born in Alexandria, an eloquent man and mighty in the scriptures. This sows the man may be the one who brought Christianity into Africa by being helped by a woman. But it is amazing that most modern churches do not allow women even to speak in some churches.

Philip's Four Daughters

"And the same man had four daughters, virgins, which did prophesy." Acts 21:8

Philip did not know that women were not allowed to pray and prophecy, as the modern day church teaches. But he knows that God has promised in his word to pour out his Spirit upon all humanity for his purpose. This includes women as the Bible shows.

"And it shall come to pass in the last days, says God; I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams" Acts 2:17

The above verse clearly shows that women like men were gifted with the gifts of God without any discrimination.

Phoebe: She was deaconess at the church called Cenchræa. She was the helper of many. According to Mahoney (1993) the historian Eusebius says she oversaw two churches and traveled extensively in ministry.

"...I commend unto you Phebe our sister, which is a servant of the church which is at Cenchræa: that you receive her in the lord as becomes saints, and that you assist her in whatsoever business she has need of you; for she hath been a helper of many and of me also." Rom 16:2

Junia: According to Mahoney (1993) Junia is a feminine name in Greek. She was called an Apostle. This is the highest authority in the New Testament. This shows that one of the 22 Apostles mentioned in the New Testament was a woman. This also means that there is no authority in the Bible that women have not been involved in. From this we can conclude that women can be involved in all forms of religious activities according to the Bible.

"Salute Andronicus and Junia, my kinsmen, and my fellow prisoners, who are of note among the apostles, who also were in Christ before me." Rom 16:7

Euodia and Syntyche: The above two women were spiritual leaders at Philippi. Paul the Apostle called them my fellow laborers because they were doing the same work that was done by him.

"...help those women which labored with me in the gospel, with Clement also, and with other my fellow laborers, whose names are in the book of life." Phil 4:3

She was respected senior pastor at a church in her own home. She was charged with the responsibility of controlling teachings at her church. If she was not the pastor of the church she would not be given the responsibility of controlling teachings at the home church. This shows she was a teacher that can identify false doctrine from the truth.

"If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed" 1 Jn1:10

In the above sections we have seen how the Bible described Jewish and none Jewish women and how God used them for his purposes. And also we have seen that it is not Biblical to oppress women not to be leaders in the churches or in other areas. Now let us see some of the verses in the Bible that are used against women in many christen denominations, especially in our country Ethiopia.

Woman was made to be a suitable helper for a man: The word helper is perceived as inferior by many teachers of the Bible. The Bible states that a woman is a suitable helpmate for a man. To understand better this word let us see what the Bible says about woman as a helper of man. First we have to understand that a woman was not made only for man after Adam was created, because God created both of them at the same time. But they were manifested or formed into the physical world turn by turn.

"So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them." Gen 1:27
Here man refers to both the male and female man according to Genesis 5:2 which says that: "Male and female created he them; and blessed them, and called their name Adam, in the day when they were created." Genesis 5:2

But after their creation in the spiritual realm we see that it is only the male man that was seen physically being made of the dust of the ground. And later God takes the woman out of that man, and the Bible called this process forming man from the dust of the ground and the woman out of the man. This means the male and female man were created twice. First they were created at the same time in the spiritual world and second they were formed into the physical world. The Bible also shows that there is no sex difference in the spiritual world because the male and female man will be like the Angels. This may be the cause that made the creator to form man and woman into physical entities so that they could have sex differences for the purpose of multiplication to sustain their generations.

"But they which shall be accounted worthy to obtain that world and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry, nor are given in marriage" Luke 20:35

If we have seen to this extent the creation story of a man and a woman, let us come back again to the point that why woman are called a helper of man and what does it mean. Eve the first woman was called the helper of the first man called Adam.

"And the Lord God said, it is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a help meet for him." Gen 2:18

Here the woman is not meant to be a servant or a slave for the male man Adam but his life partner or companion that live together with him to accomplish the purpose God gave them when he created them to rule and govern the earth together. They are also called one flesh after they physically united through sex. This shows that they are not different in the eyes of their creator if they are one body. If they are one, how they could not be different from one another.

"...Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh." Gen 2:24

The above verse shows that if one hurts his wife then he is hurting his own body because they are one body. This means it is not Biblical to oppress woman in any form since they are our own body. Nobody hurts his own body unless he is mentally sick.

"So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loves his wife loves himself. For no man ever hated his own flesh; but nourishes it, even as the Lord loved the church; for we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones." Eph 5: 28-30

The above verses from the book of Ephesus also confirms what is written on Genesis by stating that since a wife is one body with her husband, he has to nourish and cherish her as his own body. And also it clearly shows that hating a wife is like disgust for once own body which nobody does at normal conditions. If this is the case then it could not be Biblical by any means to hate woman and oppress then using Bible as weapon against them.

Here the above description shows that a helper does not mean that the one who is below the other to be undermined and mistreated. According to Oxford Concise Dictionary (2005) to help means: to make something easier for someone to do something. It is also means to improve a situation to benefit or assist someone to move in a specified direction. Therefore the woman for the man is the one who makes things easier when he does something. And also she is the one who improve a situation for the man to benefit or assist him to move things forward for the success of things that the man does. This shows that the woman as a helper is very important in making things easy for the man. In all the information's given above the word that more clearly describes the context of a helper in the Bible is when it is used even for describing God himself. When the creator is described by the word helper it does not make him inferior rather the one who is very available to help those who need his help. So is a wife for her husband.

"I will ask the father, and he will give you another helper... the Spirit of Truth." John 16:14

Here the Spirit of Truth is the Holy Spirit: one of the Triune God in the God Head of the Christian faith. If being a helper

for humanity does not make God inferior, so it will not also make a woman to be inferior because she is a helper for a man.

Woman was commanded in the Bible to be submissive to her husband: Women have been commanded in the Bible to submit to their husbands in the Bible. And many preachers focus on this topic. But the problem is they do not consider other verses that teach men also to submit to their wives. I believe that if women's submission helps them to improve their relationship it is good if they submit. But the submission the Bible teaches is not by force but by love; because, husbands have been ordered to love their wives as Christ loved the church by giving his life to her on the cross. This shows the extent of love expected from a husband is unto giving his life to death for the sake of his wife. If a husband loves his wife to this extent, it will not be surprising if his wife submitted to him. But if men expect their wives to submit for them without loving them to the extent of dying for them, they are expecting to reap what they have not sown. This is wrong and unbiblical, and also unfair if we think logically.

"Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God" Eph 5:21

"Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord." Eph 5:22

"Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it" Eph 5:25

The above verses make the idea of submission very clear. First all believers are expected to submit to one another, this commandment also works for husbands and wives to submit one for the other. But the emphasis given is different. Men are expected to love their wives to the point of dying for them like Christ died for the church.

Women are expected to submit for their husbands to respond for their love which is up to death. Which one is easier dying or submitting? For me it is better to submit like a woman and live rather than loving like a husband to the pint of death. Anyways the point is clear that everyone in marriage is expected to take his part according to the Bible in order to make his or her life peaceful and fruitful.

Woman as the 'Wife' of Jesus Christ

"...Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh." Gen 2:24

"Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honor to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come and his wife hath made herself ready." Rev 19:7

Here a lamb refers to Jesus Christ according to the book of John.

"The next day John sees Jesus coming unto him, and said, Behold the Lamb of God, which takes away the sin of the world." John 1:29

"And he says unto me, Write, Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb. And he says unto me, these are the true sayings of God." Rev 19:9

“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 5:31-32

When the Bible begins the woman was taken out of the man. But at the end of the Bible the man was inside a woman called the church. The church is regarded as the body of Christ which is the aggregate believers in one body being symbolized by a woman. At the beginning God made a woman and man and they were married in the paradise physically. And also at the end men and women together being symbolized by a single woman who is called a church will be married by Jesus Christ to be one body with him in heaven. This marriage is not like the first one because it is spiritual and the wedding is also done in heaven. This shows how much God respects woman to the point of considering her as a symbol of his ‘wife’ which is called the church. The beginning and the end of the Bible also shows that how much God gives value for both men and women and their institution which is called marriage. In short the Bible is a spiritual book that begins by a wedding on earth between Eve and Adam and ends with a wedding in the Heaven by a spiritual wedding between Jesus Christ and the Church which is symbolized by a woman that represents the followers of Jesus Christ both men and women. Here we can see that the story of the human race begins in the paradise by a single man (who holds all men and women in his body), and ends by a single woman (who holds both men and women in a single body) called the church.

Conclusion and Recommendation

Conclusion

There are different feminist groups having almost the same goal but different approaches. All of them criticize traditional literary canon as misrepresenting and under-representing women in any society. Some feminists struggle for the equality of women with men, but others like the Radical feminists struggle for creating a feminist world by replacing the position of men and the patriarchal system. I believe that if feminists are straggling to repeat what patriarchy has done with matriarchy; this will be another mistake taken to correct the first mistake. The Bible criticizes any form of evil doing whether it is done by men or women and appreciates a wise and diligent woman who takes responsibilities for household and other activities. This shows that women are represented in the Bible based on what they have done not because of their gender. In short moral instruction and the fear of the Lord is the highest worth both for men and women in the Bible (proverbs 31:31). This study clearly shows that most of the teachings in Ethiopian churches are not based on the Bible. This is partly because of the influence of societal traditions on the Biblical truth about women. Studies like this could be valuable in order to challenge traditional way of representing women in the teachings of Ethiopian churches. In short, as this study clearly shows, it is possible to magnify the positive representations of women taking the role they played in the Bible.

Recommendation

As it has been discussed women have been represented positively in the Bible. But, Women in Ethiopian Churches are usually represented negatively taking verses inappropriately

and interpreting them wrongly against women. Ethiopian churches altogether should, therefore, teach the balanced and realistic images of women in the Bible. To this end, thus, the following specific recommendations are made based on the findings in this study:

Women should be encouraged to participate in any activities of the churches in Ethiopia which is allowed for them in the Bible. Since Ethiopia is dominated by Christianity and most of the people are religious, it would be good if the churches in Ethiopia teach the positive roles women played in the Bible. Avoiding cultural values and practices influence on Biblical teachings and interpretations should be given due consideration. Churches should have to encourage and teach women’s active participation in the economic, socio-cultural and political aspect of their country; because these engagements are not against the Bible and also important for the country as well.

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