

# FORGOTTEN WOMANHOOD

A Joyful Discovery!



Finding and Fulfilling Our Resolve  
to be a Woman of God

by Joanne Beckley

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## DEDICATION

In memory of my mother  
Evelyn Wilson Barnhart  
She had a dream – I have now fulfilled it.

A special thanks for my husband's wise leadership  
in keeping me on course  
and my friend and sister in Christ, Linda Maydell,  
for editing and proofreading

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## Letter to Students

Dear fellow students (and teacher) of God's holy word,

Throughout my life I have battled for an understanding of what it means to be a woman, as God intended and expects from me. I went through school absorbing one image of womanhood. My mother/grandmother taught me another, and preachers taught me yet another. These influences continued to battle each other in my mind and affected my personal desire to be obedient to Christ.



Enough is enough, and now forty-five years later I began a study from the Scriptures to diligently weed out as much confusion as possible, to understand my own selfish motives, attitudes, and pride, and then to replace them with a purity of purpose in serving God as a woman. He never intended us to become asexual in serving Him. He made **woman** to serve Him.

While searching, I also began reading secular writings and listening to speeches with the purpose of pinpointing deliberate attempts to mold my mind and heart. Along the way I also stumbled around in the muddy waters of conflicting ideas from preachers, teachers, writers, and friends. I came to realize that each one of us women is going to have to personally study and apply what she learns and face her Maker with a sincere desire to please **Him**. We cannot afford to bow to the many pressures of society, a favorite preacher, or our own specially reserved pockets of insubordination.

Woman is defined in the second chapter of Genesis, from the very beginning, as a “help meet” or “help suitable” for man. Society has ground this idea down so badly that we may catch ourselves cringing to even hear the term. We might seek ways to redefine not only this Hebrew word but any others which keep us from being who we want to be. Let us be honest with ourselves. Let us face the Scriptures with excitement and issue a challenge to each other to discover and develop God's woman within each of us.

If you are one of the fortunate number who is confident with your understanding and practice of being a godly woman, study with other women who have become concerned. Your example is priceless and it represents a strong love for each woman in the class. If this study opens your eyes to yet further truth, any change in your life will give impetus to others so that they too can repent and make changes in their attitudes and in their lives.

My sincere prayer is that the following material will help you face the Scriptures, change what needs to be changed, and forgive yourself as you are forgiven. Joyfully live for your Father as a woman.

NOTE: It is important that you record any questions raised during a lesson that are not specifically covered in the lesson. **Do not** let the class get bogged down with discussion before you have studied the full background. Remember, “The **sum** of Your word is truth, And every one of Your righteous ordinances is everlasting,” Psalm 119:160.

Your sister in Christ, with love, Joanne Beckley

**Before you begin this study** – Write a statement below of your understanding of woman and her role. At the completion of your study, return to this statement and reflect on any changes or additions you made concerning your original statement.

## Finding and Fulfilling Our Resolve...

### WHO AM I?

#### A Short Review of Secular History and Woman's "Liberation"

##### Lesson 1

**W**ho am I? Why am I here? What should I be doing? Where am I going? Why am I having difficulty answering these questions? Why can't I be happy with who I am? Or be comfortable with what others expect of me? The following is a lengthy reading. As you read, make notes in the margin of possible scriptures you think may be useful in your future study.

When we work out an understanding of ourselves we should consider the past that molded us and influenced our thinking. It is easy to pass over this crucial step because a review of the past may either cause us pain and anger or we may not realize just how important history plays a part in our present. With the Bible placed before us, we may be disconcerted to find that the very first lesson in this book is a reading about our secular history. Please read on. I found it of great benefit in my own life and encourage you to make use of the following information.

Make notes in the margins as you read. Think of a verse? Write it down. New thoughts raised in your mind? Be sure to write them down as you study through this workbook. Don't depend on your memory. When you reason through to a conclusion, record your path...you may forget it!

**As you read through the following, put 's by statements with which you agree, put \_'s by those you oppose, and ?'s by those you question.**

#### **Our Past in the Present**

We live our past in the present while we affect our future and the years to come, even to the fourth generation, Exodus 20:5. We need to try to look back at how history is strongly affecting our understanding of the woman's role in our homes, the church, and our society. Your grandmother's example to your mother and hers in turn to you will be a part of what you bring to your study of God's desire for woman—you and me.

Today many women (including Christians) are unhappy with being a woman. They are not finding the rose garden the world has promised them. Their unhappiness may stem from dissatisfaction with their actual physical bodies, or from roles they feel they are being pressured to play in society, or even from the role required by them by the God they try to serve. Many men have begun to abandon their responsibility as the bread-winners, partly as the result of women becoming more and more willing to shoulder "making a living." As women try to adjust and make the changes society "requires" of them, men are reacting with resentment and abdication of their own societal responsibilities. Much of the feminist movement in the church today comes from a feeling that if the men won't lead, the women must lead! Besides, the women can do a better job!

Women today are demanding changes, doubting God's wisdom, wondering where things have gone wrong, feeling pressurized to conform, fearing the future, and retreating from living in this pivotal generation that is trying to develop intellectual and spiritual attitudes that will mix in with present economic and social changes. What has happened? Why does this chaos and confusion exist in the minds of men and women?

## ...to be a Woman of God

Although we are going to concentrate on the last 100 years of American history, let us begin with some observations taken from written history.<sup>1</sup>

### THE WORLD AND WOMEN

ca. 3000 BC	<b>Sumer</b> (Mesopotamia) kept women excluded from politics. Women exercised different roles outside the home and had some protection in owning property.
ca. 3000 BC	The <b>Minoan</b> society of Crete gave women equal political authority with men.
ca. 1500 BC	Throughout these years, <b>Hebrew</b> law placed women under the protection of men with provisions for the widow and unmarried.
800's BC	Classical myths concerning man's origin placed the woman figure as a disruptive force or as a virgin.
500-300 BC	Classical <b>Greek</b> civilization did not allow women political participation. Women were placed in the home where they earned dignity and respect for their household management.
AD 600's	The <b>Germanic tribes</b> saw women as property to be exchanged by men.
AD 800's	Women's lot had improved and they could inherit property. Marriage was still indissoluble and thereby protected women.
AD1000's	The Catholic church and later various monarchies limited women to the home where love was idealized.

During the **Renaissance Period** women were kept in the home and protected. Any other attempted roles were seen as disruptive or even dangerous.

The religious **Reformation Period** emphasized a woman's participation in her own salvation and glorified marriage. During the 1600's the **Puritan** Movement in England promoted the belief that a woman's life should be centered in the home.

As liberal and democratic beliefs emerged throughout the Western world, these tenants encouraged a certain model of womanhood for women. The industrial revolution caused the growth of a wage labor force in which working women were a major part, although for lower wages than men. Then in the 1800's women evidenced more verbal concern for social reform and improvement of their own position. A decline in the birthrate and infant mortality left more and more women with fewer years of childbearing. This in turn opened more possible doors for self-expression, and more opportunities to pursue a variety of roles.

Women have struggled throughout history feeling inferior as women. In more recent history many women have taken up the banner to attempt an improvement to gain "rights" for women, seeking solutions in a variety of ways. As you read the following it becomes clear that feminists today feel that all sexist ideas began in antiquity, with the Hebrews and then with the Christians believing and teaching that women are inferior.

### FEMINIST ACTIVITY

#### Individual Activists

Because of time and written space constraints in this study, you may wish to read more about the following women from another source.

## Finding and Fulfilling Our Resolve...

**Mary Wollstonecraft** wrote an article in 1792 that influenced many 19th-century suffragists. **Lucretia Coffin Mott** helped to establish the Anti-Slavery Convention of American Women in 1837. She was an American Quaker preacher, abolitionist, and a leading women's rights advocate. She became a symbol of the *moral* force of feminism in the 19th century. **Elizabeth Cady Stanton**, who founded the organized women's rights movement in the 1840's, insisted that "obey" be omitted from the marriage vows. She advocated more liberal divorce laws, co-education, the right of a married woman to control her property, and less restrictive clothing for women (i.e., the corset, bonnet, perfume, and drab colors—all designed to encourage women to appear submissive, sweet, resigned). In 1847 **Lucy Stone**, a leading advocate of women's rights, would not adopt her husband's name.

Then in 1848 The Seneca Falls Convention was held and a "Declaration of Sentiments" was published listing 16 forms of discrimination against women. This became a blueprint for future organized fights for women's rights. A major milestone was reached in 1920 when the Nineteenth Amendment was ratified giving women the right to vote.

During **World War I** there was a frantic call for women to leave their homes and work in the vacated factories. After the war, legislation was passed to return women to the home and give their jobs back to returning men. But after **World War II** women remained in the work force and their participation rose from 15% to 73% by 1980. By 1990 only 1 in 4 remained full-time homemakers.<sup>2</sup>

During the 1960's **Betty Friedan** wrote a book called **The Feminine Mystique** and caused national attention to return to women's rights. Several women of this time period had learned much in their previous efforts to realize legal equality for Black Americans. They used this knowledge of protest terminology, ideology, and experience to work directly for women's equality.

### STAGE ONE

A major premise of Stage One in the feminist movement is the feminist theory that the majority of men view women's primary function as child bearers, which means their chief concern is centered on home and family. Thus this patriarchal system locks women into roles that are based on a woman's ability to have children. However, feminists feel they are unjustly accused of believing that women are superior to men.

**President Kennedy** gave ear to feminists' concerns setting up a commission to study the status of women, and the Equal Pay Act was enacted in 1963. **N.O.W.** (National Organization for Women) was founded in 1966 and became the watchdog against discrimination. Many judicial decisions and executive orders of this time period still exist today.

The highly publicized antiwar movement of the 60's fed a new feminism by making many women more sensitive to injustice everywhere. Women protesters used small support groups to promote feminist liberalism groups. They focused on male supremacy as the root of women's troubles. They encouraged rearrangement of personal relationships and tried to end traditional "masculine" and "feminine" stereotypes. Their key explanation for women's subordination was her biological functions. Having babies was the problem. They demonstrated a fierce dedication to personal freedom and control over their own bodies. This was aided by easier methods to **control conception**. The possibility of determining reproduction has freed countless women to make choices. Abortion was legalized and this has given women a whole new set of options.



## ...to be a Woman of God

There exists **great disagreement** over how these changes for women should influence the new social structure and general value system. Feminists feel that the real rub is at this point. Reality has not kept up with their expectations. Note the following frustrations feminists have expressed:

1. Women still do not have adequate access to information to make informed decisions related to sexuality: decisions as to whether to take the pill, bear a child, abortion, etc.
2. Women emotionally are not coping with the proposed changes. Traditional feminine nurturing goes on. Female children are still encouraged in their traditional roles. Yet the majority grows up to face the pressure of succeeding in the workforce as well.
3. Equal pay for equal work is still elusive and wage differences have grown.
4. The stance of religious institutions lags behind. They still teach submission to some degree or other. Often entire religious groups have been slow to offer women roles of leadership and influence equal to those of men. In fact, some are even arrayed against the cause of women's rights.

### STAGE TWO

Stage 2 of the sex role revolution is what N.O.W. (National Organization for Women) has coined and is concentrating on today. They are working *behind the scenes* in an effort to restructure our institutions of marriage and parenting.<sup>3</sup> **Marriage** is to be redefined as a state where neither party has a separate role in the life of the other.<sup>4</sup> **Parenting** is projected as the highest form of oppression and the emphasis is “a revolution in domestic life” in order to reconcile the demands of family and career. Mrs. Clinton remarked in a speech on May 8, 1995<sup>5</sup> – “The traditional family is ineffectual and no longer viable.” Barbara Ehrenreich published two essays in **Time Magazine** stating, “Many families could use a lot more outside interference in the form of counseling and policing. Even healthy families need outside sources of moral guidance.”<sup>6</sup> What outside source might she be referring to? Could we, like the biblical writer Jude, say, “They revile the things which they do not understand”? Jude 10.

But why the switch in goals within the feminist movement? They have chosen a new front to avoid “getting locked into obsolete power games and irrelevant sexual battles that never can be won, or that we will lose by winning.”<sup>7</sup>

Feminists have done their job well—and do not fully realize it. Women today have no desire to turn back the cultural clock. Today mothers welcome the chance to teach their daughters to have an identity separate from father, brother, husband, or sons. Daughters are being taught to secure the future for themselves. Do these statements sound good and right? Today's young mothers are the result of the 60's mothers.

### THE FEMINIST MOVEMENT IN RELIGION

This movement is not easy to define. It challenges the principles of Genesis 1 and 2 concerning the roles of men and women and the authority of God to speak to modern man through the Holy Scriptures. There are at least five segments of the movement which affect you and me. Both men and women are supporters of each of these segments.<sup>8</sup>

1. **Radical Feminists** place little or no reliance on the Bible. They are religious in the sense that they have formed their own religion. They are violently anti-male. The names of organizations such as WITCH (Women's International Conspiracy out of Hell) and SCUM (Society for Cutting Up Men) give us some idea of their nature and intent. They see patriarchy as the source of all evil. Marriage is called “a dehumanizing institution—legal whoredom for women.”

## Finding and Fulfilling Our Resolve...

The radical feminists have an agenda which includes: 1) Equality for women. They are not troubled with whether this might affect men's equality. 2) Abolishment of hierarchy. They begin by rejecting God or else by making God over to include feminine characteristics. 3) Sexual freedom, including abortion. 4) Positions of power and control for women. They preach that, "The virtues which theologians should be urging upon women are autonomy and self-realization, not charity, meekness, obedience, humility, self-sacrifice, service."<sup>9</sup>

2. **“Christian” Feminists** have chosen to work within the boundaries of organized religion—barely. They find almost everything about it to be an enemy of their true cause. They believe women must be elevated to roles of authority in every area of the church. They are positive that today's Christianity is the greatest barrier that stands in the way of the victory of the feminist cause. True Christianity would not have a father figure as God or a male figure as Savior. Christianity should be perceived as a goddess religion. Rosemary Ruether and Mary Daly are widely recognized advocates for this arm of feminism.

3. **Evangelical Feminists** are working for widespread change in the home and in the church, but they are not as bitterly opposed to marriage, home and motherhood as the previously mentioned feminists. They do not approve of traditional marriage but make concessions in the areas of co-habitation and childbearing. Traditional roles in child rearing are still a curse to their concept of feminism. Phyllis Chesler and Betty Friedan are well known in this moderate feminist camp.

They claim that the Bible is their standard of faith and practice but believe that passages that place limitations on women have been misunderstood. This is a grouping of people who are both evangelicals and feminists seeking to work out a theology that combines both viewpoints. They use Galatians 3:28 as their key text for the interpretation of all other texts. You will hear more from feminists such as Patricia Gundry, Gretchen Hull, Roger Nicole, Paul Jewett, Richard Longenecker, Alvera Mickelson, Philip Barton Payne, Walter L. Liefeld, Catherine Clark Kroeger, Timothy P. Weber, Nancy Hardesty, and Letha Scanzoni. I have included these names for those of you who have read their books and have not understood this segment of feminism.

4. **Complementarianists** take the Bible seriously, and avoid the feminist rejection of God-given sexual distinctions. Being created equally in the image of God means manhood and womanhood complement (supplement, perfect, refine) each other. This is seen as a partnership in leadership yet the Complementarianists say they believe that God created the male to have a position of authority in the home and church, but not in society.

5. **Paternalists** appeal to the Bible for a strict hierarchy in the home, church, and society. They are accused of being militantly opposed to modern liberal theologies. Essential to Paternalists is the “order of creation,” Ephesians 5:22-24 and 1 Peter 3:1-2. They do not believe a woman's abilities override the basic rules of authority. They are, generally speaking, against domineering, repressive, and autocratic males and husbands. They are accused of not questioning whether Scripture is prescriptive or descriptive and of disregarding literary and historical contexts in interpretation. They are accused of using language which demeans males and degrades females, that is the words “domination” and “subjection.” Feminists believe Paternalists create an environment for emotional and physical abuse of women.

**Take a moment and write down how feminists might describe you: Radical, “Christian,” Evangelical, Complementarianist, or Paternalist.**

## ...to be a Woman of God

Today we see Christians claiming to be in the Lord's church who hold to tenants of the feminist movement. Many uphold that the Bible teaches a hierarchy for both home and church, but view women as being involved in church leadership. Their special interest is their demand that the Bible be *reinterpreted* in such a way as to remove woman's submission to man in the home (marriage is a partnership), and to elevate women to roles of authority in the church. Rather than leave the church, some are striving to reach their goal by subjecting congregations to civil lawsuits, by withholding their monetary contributions and by threatening the tax-exempt status of any church that refuses to place women in positions of authority. They are deadly serious about their actions.

### NEW RIGHT

Feminists have now defined a new movement and have labeled it the *New Right* (Christians who stand firmly in their belief of hierarchy as described in 1 Corinthians 11:3). Feminists view this new movement as a threat to the progress they have made. Cassandra Langer, describing the frustration of feminists in *Feminist Critique*, wrote: "They (feminists) see these supporters (of the *New Right* movement) opposed to women's demands for liberation and steadfastly maintain the vicious cycle of sex segregation that relegates women to second-class citizenship...believing that the Bible is an infallible guide to personal salvation and that it contains the prescriptions for just laws and the good society.... Feminists see them intruding on the lives of families and children and on women's rights, gay and lesbian rights.... Fundamentalists of this ilk find it extremely difficult to separate the two realms of value—religious and secular—because of the unity of their faith and morals."<sup>10</sup>

So! Where are you and I sitting within our society? We are there somewhere.... Are the feminists teaching truth concerning women and their role? Do they have some valid points in their favor? Should we fight them? If so, what will be our standard? What standard of hermeneutics (rules of biblical interpretation) will you use? The "New Hermeneutics" is also a part of the movement in an attempt to reinterpret the Holy Scriptures.

"*I never promised you a rose garden....*" We **can** have a beautiful rose garden by learning what we are to be as women. **There is hope!** Let us go to the Source and weed our heart's garden and replace rebellion (however unintentional) with seeds of obedience to our Maker.

**Summary:** Write below any scripture, thoughts, and observations you have made in reflecting on our history as women. You may wish to add more up-to-date information than is available at time of publication. Each of your summaries will be used *at a later date* to aid your conclusions.

**Caution: I would like to caution you to limit your discussions to the subject(s) covered in each lesson. Each lesson is designed to develop our reasoning and understanding of many applications that deeply concern us as women. Write down your concerns and questions and ensure they are studied if the following lessons do not address them.**

