Feminism’s Beginnings
Day 2 of 3

Guest: Carolyn McCulley
From the series: Radical Womanhood: Feminine Faith in a Feminist World
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Bob: We think of feminism as something that emerged in the ‘60s and the ’70s, but author and speaker Carolyn McCulley says there have been waves of feminism, and long before the revolution in the ’60s and ’70s, there were people like Margaret Sanger introducing a radical kind of womanhood.

Carolyn: She was very intentional about recreating women’s sexuality. She said that women should be free of all restraints and she herself lived this way, and she also had a very sobering perspective about the worth of babies. And there is one quote I read that just really – it makes we weep even today. I'll paraphrase it, but she said, essentially, that the most merciful thing that a large family can do for one of its infants is kill it.

Bob: This is FamilyLife Today for Tuesday, May 12th. Our host is the president of FamilyLife, Dennis Rainey, and I'm Bob Lepine. We'll talk today about how the radical ideas of feminism have found their way into the thinking of many women, even Christian women today, influencing how they think about what it means to be a woman, a wife, and a mother. Stay tuned.

And welcome to FamilyLife Today, thanks for joining us. The subject we're dealing with this week could get us in some trouble; this is one of those that can stir the passions – in fact, I've got a question for you that I am also curious to find out how our guest would answer this, but I know just by asking the question …

Dennis: Well, let's introduce our guest first so she can jump in here.

Bob: All right, all right.

Dennis: Carolyn McCulley joins us again on FamilyLife Today. Carolyn, welcome back.

Carolyn: Oh, it's great to be back. Thank you.

Dennis: Carolyn is the author of "Radical Womanhood." She is the media specialist for Sovereign Grace Ministries near Washington, D.C. She has a blog by the same name called "Radical Womanhood," and is the proud aunt, count
'em, of six nieces and nephews. Now, what's your question? Are you ready, Carolyn?

**Carolyn:** I hope so.

**Bob:** I want to know is it possible to be a faithful, godly Christian and a feminist? What's your answer to that?

**Dennis:** Ooooh. Well, as I understand what a feminist is, there are a number of issues around feminism that are 100-percent right, they have nailed it. Men have been sinful, they've been self-centered, they've assaulted and abused women, they have been passive, they've gotten off into pornography, they have taken advantage of women. I think the whole issue of feminism revolves around what is a woman's response going to be to not only weak men but about their own identity. Where are they going to go to determine who they are and what it means to be a godly woman?

And as I understand feminism, I don't think you can be a true follower of Jesus Christ and be a feminist.

**Bob:** And embrace some of the ideology that is inherent in feminism, that's what you're saying?

**Dennis:** I am saying at the point you are embracing the world, you are missing it, and I think a huge portion of the ideology of feminism is clearly from the spring of the world system. Now, let's let our guest on the program, Carolyn, answer it. What do you think, Carolyn?

**Carolyn:** Well, I would say that according to the studies that I've done for this book, the simple answer would be "no" because from the very start, feminism arose in opposition to Christian authority to the biblical authority and to the church.

Feminism isn't just a 1960s construct. It actually goes back into – well, actually into the 1700s, but most people would say feminism really got its start around 1848 with the first Woman's Rights Convention in Seneca Falls, New York. And in that case, those organizers had serious offense against the men who held authority in the church. They wanted changes in the laws for women in terms of the right to vote and the way that marriage relationships were done, and in the way that churches structure an authority was created and maintained.

**Bob:** So what you're saying is they were challenging the Scriptures, they were challenging the biblical understanding of these things right from the get-go?

**Carolyn:** Yes, that's true.
**Dennis:** And speaking from the get-go, I think the first feminist meeting occurred in Genesis, chapter 3, when Eve embraced a lie. The lie was, "Has God said?" That was what the serpent was tempting her with, and I think feminism today tempts Christian women who want to be followers of Jesus Christ and want to be committed to Him to find an easy way out.

**Bob:** There were only two people who showed up for that meeting – two people and a snake.

**Dennis:** And you know what? And the man …

**Bob:** But one of them was a guy, so …

**Dennis:** And the man is clearly at fault because he didn’t speak up at that point.

**Bob:** That's right.

**Dennis:** He had nothing to say to the enemy's temptation, and there are many who speculate the real sin of this thing was that there is a passive guy right there.

**Bob:** But the point that feminism at the core is a – there is a selfishness that's attached to it, that's fairly accurate, don't you think?

**Carolyn:** At it's core, the seeds of feminism lie in all of our hearts because the temptation is to say that what God has created and the boundaries that God has given to us for our lives are not good, and He is not wise, and any system that we can create is better. So the same temptation exists for me today that it did for Eve; to look at something with my own eyes and say, "Hey, that's pretty good, that looks good, that must make me more wise, that would really help my life, so I'll reject what I've been taught and pursue something of my own making."

So as a political movement, feminism could be traced to the 19th century, but I think it's really a response of sin, and that's what Jesus came to save us from.

**Bob:** And it's interesting to see that some feminist leaders have been out front and overt about having an anti-God or an anti-Christian bias to their feminism. You've talked about the meeting back in 1848, is that when it was?

**Carolyn:** Mm-hm.

**Bob:** But in modern feminism or at least what's modern to me, back in the '60s when what you call the "second wave" of feminism emerged, you've got people like Betty Friedan, who wrote "The Feminist Mystique," and Gloria Steinem who helped found Ms. Magazine – some of these women were right out front saying God, Christianity, is a bad thing, right?
Carolyn: In fact, they inherited that from the first wave, and it might be helpful for just a quick breakdown – the first wave was approximately 1848 to 1920, and largely centered around obtaining the right to vote for women – not something that I disagree with. I'm glad to have it. But the leader of that movement, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, went on to publish a book called "The Woman's Bible," in which she attempted to strip out all references to masculine theology. So, from the start, those early founders had an axe to grind against Christianity and against the Bible.

The second wave …

Dennis: Before you go on there, you know, I think her Bible showed up again recently in the TNIV, which attempted to strip out many references, masculine references in the Scripture and create a gender-neutral Bible.

Carolyn: Actually, I have a memory of being a brand-new Christian in 1993 when there was a "Re-imagining God" conference, and I remember the whole media hype about it, because there were all these women, primarily women, gathered from different denominations, from different streams of Christianity, but mostly liberal and mainline to gather together to re-imagine God and to re-imagine the Scriptures, and it was really a pagan celebration, you have to be honest about it. They ended up worshipping a goddess named Sophia, because that's the Greek word that's used for "wisdom" in the Old Testament, and so they saw that wisdom preceded Christ so, obviously, Sophia must have been really the true God. And they just re-imagined orthodox Christianity straight out of the picture.

Bob: So back to the first wave – it ends in 1920, women get the right to vote, but some of these subtle anti-Christian, anti-God biases begin to spring up in the seeds of that first wave. When does the second wave start?

Carolyn: Well, it started in 1963 with the publication of Betty Friedan's book, "The Feminine Mystique," but there were a lot of things that were happening in those years in between. As a political movement, it wasn't organized well because we were a little distracted, as a nation, with World Wars I and II and the Depression. But there were some very significant events happening during that time, and probably the most notable was Margaret Sanger's activities as she began what later became Planned Parenthood, and she was very intentional about recreating women's sexuality. She said that women should be free of all restraints, and she herself lived this way, and she also had a very sobering perspective about the worth of babies.

And there is one quote I read that just really – it makes me weep even today. I'll paraphrase it, but she said essentially that the most merciful thing that a large family can do for one of its infants is kill it. So her ideas were based in eugenics, which was the same philosophy of social reform that Nazi Germany had. In other
words, some people are worthy to live, and others are not. Some principles are worthy to procreate, and others are not.

So while there wasn't any political activity really going on during that time as a movement, she lived in that sort of in between the first and second waves, and that's why the second wave was so defined by the issues of abortion and birth control and sexual freedom and the sexual revolution – because of what she had already been sowing.

**Dennis:** Gloria Steinem is a name that some of our listeners may not recognize, but she was a key leader in this movement, this second wave that you are referring to. She grew up in a horrific home, I mean, it was rat-infested, and she actually ended up with an anti-God ideology that she promoted through her feminist beliefs, is that right?

**Carolyn:** Yes, in fact, I have a quote in my book in which she says, "Monotheism makes me grouchy. I don't trust any religion that makes God look like one of the ruling class. I guess I'm a pagan or an animist."

**Bob:** So, again, this idea that in order to be truly liberated, you've got to be liberated from deity is an undercurrent in feminism. Now, we started this by asking the question, can you be a Christian and be a feminist, and I know there are some listeners who are saying, "You know, I wouldn't agree with Gloria Steinem on that, and I wouldn't agree with Margaret Sanger on her view of children," but a lot of women would say, by and large, I think the feminist movement has brought positive social change to our culture and therefore a lot of the social change they've seen. Are they fooling themselves?

**Carolyn:** No, and I think that anybody on this topic has to have some intellectual honest to say there have been some right observations, and there have been some good benefits that have come out of feminism, but that's a very small percentage of the results of feminism. The vast majority have led to young women today wondering why they only have the hookup culture to deal with in college and in high school – why they are not cherished and honored, why their sexuality has to be so vulgar and up front in order to catch a man; why they feel that they have to emulate pornography and porn stars in order to get attention to be labeled "hot," and they have no idea how this came about.

You know, in fact, that's a new development because second wave feminism that went from 1963 to around 1983 or so was actually an alliance with Christian evangelicals in the idea that pornography degraded women. There was actually a time period when both sides were lobbying the White House and Congress and others to change the laws. But their daughters were the ones who came of age in the early 1990s, and they said, "Oh, no way. We are definitely going to trade on our sexual power. We're going to be the ones to flaunt ourselves," and so this female raunch culture came about during that time.
Dennis: What I hear you saying, Carolyn, at least, in part, is that you are blaming much of this sexual revolution that we've seen emerge – '60s, '70s, '80s, and '90s – upon the feminists.

Carolyn: There is definitely a strong linkage, but it's not the only link because there are many movements that wanted to throw off any restraint and any authority from socialism to humanism to social Darwinism, and all these things kind of intersected in the 19th century, anyway. So for the influence on women, I would say the influence of feminism has been much stronger on women than perhaps on men's sexuality.

But can you tell me when on columnist wrote, "This era is sex o'clock in America." Can you guess when that was done?

Bob: It could have been done – I mean, I remember, what, the late '60s, early '70s, that sounds like when that all kind of catalyzed, at least in my memory.

Dennis: I wouldn't know when to guess on that.

Carolyn: 1914, 1914. That's when we had very early precursors of Kinsey and others. There was a sexologist named Havelock Ellis, and that's when he was active and when Margaret Sanger was active. In fact, they actually had an affair. Their worldviews were what were shaping the fact that women's sexual energies needed to be released without any restraint in marriage.

Bob: Hm, well, okay, so the third wave of feminism then comes along – is there a catalytic event that defines the start of that?

Carolyn: No, that one is actually harder to define, and the leaders are harder to define. In fact, they share that post-modern perspective of what's true for me is what guides my truth, and so it's much less organized. The political activism of second and even first wave feminism – it's very different and more diffuse in third wave.

Bob: So how would you get your arms around the – and I guess we're in the third wave today, right?

Carolyn: Yes.

Bob: How do you get your arms around what defines the third wave of feminism?

Carolyn: Well, largely, it's a matter of saying that there is no one boundary for sexuality that we're all pan-sexual beings, and that's why a lot of young women going to college experience the pressure to have relationships among men and women alike. There is the big embrace of the gay/lesbian/bisexual and
transgendered population. There is the promotion of the hypersexual female, so much so that you see it in our music and our media and our video games. The barely dressed fierce video vixen is a great example of it.

In fact, I had the opportunity to speak to a campus conference one time, and I started drawing these girls out saying, "What are you aware of? What have you heard of? Do you know the name Gloria Steinem? Do you know the name Betty Friedan? Do you know the name Jean Paul Sartre?"

And, you know, a few hands would go up, and it was a conference for new believers, as well, and so I said, "Who knows the Proverbs 31 woman?" And, again, two, three hands. Being charitable, I understand they were new, and as I explained to them what had developed over the course of feminism and how things had dramatically changed even in my own life and how different it was for them 20, 25 years beyond me in college.

I said, "The things that you are now living in grieve me. When I was your age immorality didn't cost you your life. The things that have come up since I was in college, like HIV-AIDS, the hookup culture, the rising level of divorce." And so I said to them, "How many of you are children of divorce?" and more than half the room raised their hands. I said, "Something profound has happened in this world – such a seismic change, and you don't know what happened. You need to know what has happened so that you can live purposefully and intentionally."

Bob: Yes, I think you make a good point, because I think those of us who are more aged, those of us who were around in the '60s and the '70s when this revolution took place, it's a part of our understanding. We lived through the change.

My daughter didn't live through the change, so the only world she's ever known is the post-revolutionary era, and if you're living after the revolution, you just assume that this is the new normal, and you don't question it, do you?

Carolyn: No. And not only that, it's like being a frog in that proverbial pot of boiling water. Things are getting hotter and hotter, and you don't know what's happening or where it came from.

Before we started this recording, I was in the studio, and I heard now that they're marking stripper poles to young girls. This is something to fun to put in your room, decorate it and play your little music. This kind of marketing to young girls is part of that aggressive hyper-female sexuality that developed in the third wave of feminism.

Bob: You know, I remember last summer when the movie version of the TV show, "Sex in the City" came out, and I remember reading an article in Newsweek that was commenting about this movie and commenting about the
And as I just think about your question, I think there are going to be some women who don't like that answer, but why would you want to be known as a Christian feminist?

Carolyn: I think women want to be known by that because they want to receive affirmation as equal in God's sight, as being co-heirs in the grace of life, and sometimes that hasn't been their experience. And so they are claiming because they think that that's going to give them the equality that they look for rather than looking to Christ for it.

With that being said, your neighbor, who is a feminist, your sister, your colleague, whatever, they are not who you are opposed to. They are not your enemy, they are not the challenge. When we talk about feminism, we're talking here about a perspective, a worldview, and ideology, but we're not talking about the people who believe that. They are not our enemies, and they are not the ones we oppose.

Ephesians 6:12 tells us that our real enemies are spiritual enemies, they're not flesh and blood.
Dennis: And I'm glad you drew the distinctive there, because our enemy, at this point, is not a person. We are not wanting to set up war against a group of people called "feminists." I do want to set up war against their ideology. In fact, the Scriptures are at war with a worldview that embraces self. It's – I don't have to set up the war, the war already started, it started in the Garden." But I'm glad you drew that distinctive, because the Christian community, many times, is known by what it's against not by what it's for, and we try to be right at the expense of being kind.

And I don't want to be unkind, I want to be loving, I want to be affirming, I want to call people out of that ideology – come, let us reason together. Let's talk about this together.

Bob: And a woman today who would want to say, "I am a Christian feminist" can maybe reevaluate some of the feminist ideology and say, "What I really am is a Christian who embraces radical womanhood."

Dennis: And I know a good book by that name.

Bob: I mean, that – you can imagine, if you're talking to your feminist friend at the office, and you say, "You know, I am a Christian, but I embrace radical womanhood," and she says, "Well, what do you mean by that?" Say, "I've got a book. Here, borrow this," and just see what the Lord does with that, right?

Dennis: Well, here is the subtitle of Carolyn's book, "Feminine Faith in a Feminist World."

Bob: That's right, there you go. And we've got copies of the book in our FamilyLife Resource Center. Go to our website, FamilyLifeToday.com, and you'll find information on the Web about the book. You can order it from us online, if you'd like. Again, it's called "Radical Womanhood." The website if FamilyLifeToday.com. We also have information online about a book that Carolyn contributed to called "Becoming God's True Woman." You may want to get both of these books when you go to FamilyLifeToday.com, or call us, toll-free, 1-800-FLTODAY, 1-800-368-6329, and someone on our team can let you know how you can get either or both of these books sent to you.

You know, we've been encouraged over the last few days – many of you have heard us talking – you heard Dennis mention last week that we have been through a very difficult season here at FamilyLife financially, as have many of you in your home situations. We are down nearly $1 million in donations from where we were at this same time last year, and as a result we have had to adjust. We've released 14 percent of our staff; we have instituted pay cuts; we have had to step back from some projects that we were moving forward on, and it's been a challenging season for us.
That’s why we were encouraged earlier this spring when some friends of the ministry stepped forward and said that they were willing to match every donation that we receive during the month of May on a dollar-for-dollar basis up to a total of $356,000, and we appreciate their generosity. Now we’re trying to take full advantage of this special matching gift, and many of you have called or gone online and made a donation.

Every time you make a donation, that gets us one step closer to our goal of taking full advantage of this match, and your donations are doubled – every dollar we receive from you is matched with an additional dollar. So we appreciate those of you who have already responded. We are still a long way away from taking full advantage of this matching gift opportunity. We need you to ask this question – “What can we do?”

And if FamilyLife Today is a benefit to you and your family, we’d ask you to go online, make a $10, $20, $50, $100, whatever you can do – make a donation to FamilyLife Today or call us, toll-free, at 1-800-FLTODAY. You can make your donation over the phone. Again, you will be helping us take full advantage of this matching gift opportunity, and we just want to say in advance thank you for your support and for your generosity. We appreciate you very much.

Tomorrow we’re going to be back to talk about a woman being a homemaker, a wife and a stay-at-home mom, and how that fits the model of radical womanhood. I hope you can be back with us for that tomorrow.

I want to thank our engineer today, Keith Lynch, and our entire broadcast production team. On behalf of our host, Dennis Rainey, I’m Bob Lepine. We’ll see you back next time for another edition of FamilyLife Today.

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