Is Feminism the Answer?

Bob: There is a lot of talk about feminism in our day. Carolyn McCulley says there are roots of feminism that we need to be aware of—roots that have a diabolical origin.

Carolyn: At its 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. The same temptation exists for me today that 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 wise,” “That would really help my life. So, I’ll reject what I’ve been taught.”

Bob: This is FamilyLife Today for Thursday, September 21st. Our host is the President of FamilyLife®, Dennis Rainey; and I’m Bob Lepine. We’re going to talk today about the good and the not so good that are a part of modern-day feminism. Stay with us.

And welcome to FamilyLife Today. Thanks for joining us. I knew, when I looked at what we were talking about today—I knew exactly where you were going to turn your Bible, and you turned right to where I knew you were going to turn. [Laughter] It’s easy to see where you are. You’re on Page 1; right?

Dennis: I’ve just got to tell you—first of all, welcome back to FamilyLife Today, Sweetheart. Barbara joins us again—my wife of 45 years—think about that—45.

Barbara: I know. How did that happen?

Dennis: Several years—it just took—

Barbara: I guess, but it feels like a blink. Anyway, I’m glad to be back.

Dennis: It was a blink, but it’s been a blast!

Barbara: It has been fun!
Dennis: We’ve had a great journey—not without our own valleys and mountaintops. Here’s the thing, Bob. Marriage and family today is not taking place on a romantic balcony. It’s taking place on a spiritual battlefield. Where we are seeing this played out is around the sanctity of marriage.

It goes all the way back, upstream, to where I turned in my Bible—to “male and female.” In fact, let me just read to you what I turned to here—Genesis, Chapter 1, verse 26: “Then God said, ‘Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness’”—verse 27—“God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. And God blessed them. And God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky…”—and so forth.

Bob, if this is where God started, it’s not long after, in Genesis 3, until we see the enemy attacking. He attacked the first husband and wife, who were male and female; and he ultimately deceived them. They ended up being cast out of the garden. We’ve been dealing with the consequences of their wrong choices, and their selfishness, and their decision to be god ever since.

Well, today, we come to the subject of genders and of maleness and femaleness—and today, specifically, what it means to be a woman and what it looks like to be God’s woman. This is a subject I’ve got to plead with every man and woman—husband, wife, mom, dad, grandparent—who is listening: “We’re not in a time where we need to be keeping our mouths shut. We need to be opening the Book and talking about what is unique about being a woman: “What does God say about that?” and “How should we equip the next generation of both girls and boys to think about how God made them?”

Bob: During this year, we have been spending time revisiting some of the subjects we’ve addressed over the last 25 years. Our 25th birthday for FamilyLife Today comes up, here, in a few months. One of the themes we have talked about over the years is the maleness and femaleness of humanity; because to understand marriage and understand family, you have to understand these core ideas of maleness and femaleness.

And Barbara, the idea of what it means to be a woman is something that—it’s gotten a lot of attention; but it feels, to me, like it’s gotten more confusing over the years, not more clarified over the years.

Barbara: Well, I think it’s confusing; because there are so many voices now trying to address what it means. We don’t have a single source anymore. I think, for centuries, there was a single source; and that was the Bible.

Bob: A number of years ago, we invited Mary Kassian, who is a writer and a speaker, to join us. She had done historical research on the feminist movement. She stepped in and
talked about how this movement emerged and kind of defined for us what’s at the core of modern-day feminism. Listen to how she explained feminism for us.

**Dennis:** Incredibly relevant for today.

[Previous Interview]

**Mary:** Betty Friedan, who was an American journalist in 1963, wrote a book called *The Feminine Mystique*. In it, she said that women were secondary / that women were secondary to men in everything. Her whole question was: “How do we give women significance?” It was really interesting, actually; because the way that her book came about was—she gave a handout / a questionnaire to her graduating class / her college graduating class. It was questions like: “Are you fulfilled in your role as a wife and a mother?” She gave these questionnaires out, and it turned out that there were a lot of women who were feeling really frustrated in being wives and mothers.

Now, I personally question whether we gave—if we gave that questionnaire out, *now*, to all the women, whether there would not be just the same level of discontentment. But she said this discontentment was a severe problem and that it needed to be dealt with.

**Bob:** And in her view, the problem was that women lived in a culture where their role was *always* secondary in everything to the role of a man.

**Mary:** That’s right. That was her view of the problem; and therefore, her solution was to bring it together—that women ought to be brought up to pace and to do the same things that men did.

So, in the first stage of feminism, which lasted from about 1960 to 1970, the whole purpose was to obliterate differences between men and women so that men and women would be, essentially, the same.

[Studio]

**Bob:** Again, that’s Mary Kassian reflecting back on some of the historical roots of the feminist movement.

And we should explain, Barbara, when we’re talking about feminism, there is a difference between feminism and femininity. The Bible is pro-femininity. Whether it is pro-feminist or not really depends on how you define feminist. That’s kind of a tricky thing to put your finger on today; isn’t it?

**Barbara:** Well, I think what makes that incredibly complex is that, I think, the definition is unclear. I think different people are saying different things and meaning different things when they talk about feminism. I think feminism—just because it’s so closely tied to the word, femininity / I mean, they’re spelled differently but very similarly—I think that
even adds to the confusion; because we want to know what it means to be feminine; but then, we hear “feminist.” So, that even blurs it and makes it confusing.

**Dennis:** And what we’re not saying, here on *FamilyLife Today*, is that we want to suppress women further—absolutely not! If there is anything that we have done, we’ve wanted to call men to honor *all* women—I mean, treat them with dignity as God’s creation and give your life *up* for them.

**Bob:** Yes; women are created in the image of God, just as men are created in the image of God. There is equality in terms of worth and value, and we’ve tried to uphold that. I think a lot of people would say, “Well, I’m a feminist,”—that’s all they’re saying—but when you get to some branches of feminism, Barbara, you get to ideas that go beyond equal pay for equal work or dignity for all people.

**Barbara:** That’s right, and that’s why I think it’s confusing to us. I think what the answer to this is—is to find out what God says about women in the Bible to find out what He made us to do and how He made us to live on this earth. And I think the solution is found in becoming the woman that God made you to be—not becoming what the culture or other voices say that you need to be.

You know, I think the equality piece—everyone agrees to—but it’s how we get there. If it’s demanding and it’s self-focused, that’s not what God has called us to do. God has called us to love Him, and to please Him, and to serve Him. I think the key is where you’re coming from: “What is your heart? If your heart is to please God and to become the woman He made you to be, that’s the place to start.”

**Dennis:** The route to becoming God’s woman is found at the foot of the cross in surrender to Jesus Christ. We’ll talk about it next month—but we’re going to talk about how to become God’s man—how to be a true man / a real man. It’s not a self-route.

**Bob:** Yes.

**Barbara:** That’s right.

**Dennis:** It’s not a self-promotion and self-exaltation. No! That’s the root of our problem today.

**Bob:** Yes; in fact, you mentioned that—listen to what Carolyn McCulley said about this when we were talking with her about the history of feminism and where some of the feminist ideology of our day came from. This is interesting.

[Previous Interview]

**Carolyn:** At its 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. The same temptation exists for me today that 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 wiser,” “That would really help my life. So, I’ll reject what I’ve been taught and pursue something of my own making.”

As a political movement, feminism could be traced to the 19th century; but I think it’s really a response of sin—that’s what Jesus came to save us from.

[Studio]

Bob: And that goes to your point; right? We find our resolve in our maleness and femaleness by turning away from sin and self and turning to the cross.

Dennis: And I think, in this case, where you need to push back against feminism is when it starts sounding like the same voice which she just talked about in that little clip there—the voice that says: “You can have it your way!” “You can be your own god!” That’s how Eve was tempted in the garden. I think, today, there are a lot of women being tempted to have it their way—they’re wanting to reject the design that God has. I just go back to it: “There is no true femininity without surrender to Jesus Christ.”

Bob: Barbara, you were on the college campus at the time when what’s referred to today as second-wave feminism—that Betty Friedan-inspired movement—was really coming to full flower. Did you find yourself, as a young woman, thinking: “Well, maybe, this is what I need to be. This is what I need to embrace”?

Barbara: I actually didn’t. The reason that I didn’t is because I had just met Jesus Christ—I had just become a Christian a year before that. So, I was viewing all of life through the Bible for the first time in my life; and that was such a change for me. There was really no temptation to look anywhere else, at that season in my life; because I had just discovered that my meaning, and my worth, and my value as a woman and as a human being came from Christ.

However, I was watching other girls do it. I saw a lot of young women that I knew—who were my friends / who I had been in college with for two or three years—starting to adopt these patterns of thinking. Primarily, it showed up in the way they dressed, and they just began to dress much more frumpily. It was just an interesting thing to watch as these girls experimented with some of these ideas they were hearing. That was the way it expressed itself, outwardly.

Bob: Courtney Reissig, who, as a young woman / a young mom—she remembers embracing the thinking of her day, as a young woman. This was before she came to know Christ; but she was out in pursuit of kind of a triumphalistic feminine empowerment that ultimately had, at its core, sin and self.
Barbara: Yes.

Bob: This was not that long ago. Listen to how she talked about her own experience when we interviewed her a few years ago.

[Previous Interview]

Courtney: People think feminism is the answer for women, and I actually think it's not. I think Genesis is the answer for women. God created us in His image—so we're telling a story about God in our humanity; but then it also goes on to say, in Genesis 1:26 and 27, that He created male and female in His image. So, there has got to be something there about being female that images God that's not just mere humanity or biology.

I think that feminism was trying to answer a problem of the battle of the sexes, which is a problem that we see coming out of Genesis 3, where the sin entered the world; and now, we have strife. So, feminism isn't the answer. If we had just gone back to the Word of God, we could see that the answer is found in—we were created to image God in very unique ways that tell a story about who God is—and a much better story than what feminism could ever tell us.

Bob: You don't have any problems with equal pay for equal work, for women; right?

Courtney: No; no; I don't. A Christian women’s author calls it: “The radical notion that Jesus believes that women are people too,”—[Laughter]—which is—

Dennis: Yes!

Bob: You would agree with that?

Courtney: Absolutely!

Bob: Okay; so, what’s the difference between “The radical notion that Jesus believes that women are people too,” and the kind of feminism that you would say is problematic in the church culture today?

Courtney: Because feminism is very fluid—so, people—you can’t really pin it down. Some women will say—like the other author would say: “It’s the radical notion that women are people too,” / some would say it’s equality: “Equal pay for equal work.”

I define it as: “Equality equals sameness.” I believe I first heard Mary Kassian say that before—is that: “We are equal; therefore, we are the same. So, we can do the same things. So, if a woman wants to preach, she can preach. Submission in marriage is mutual—so it doesn’t matter if the husband submits or the wife submits. We’re both called to submit to one another. It doesn’t matter who stays home with the children.” So, it’s the interchangeability of that: “Besides biology, we’re really not all that different.”
I think that *that’s* the more problematic notion of feminism; and that’s kind of what we all believe if we’re not consciously looking beyond that for answers in Scripture.

[Studio]

**Bob:** That’s Courtney Reissig—an interesting observation, Dennis—the whole idea that equality means sameness. We can be of equal value and equal worth without being the same; right?

**Dennis:** We can. In fact, I didn’t marry Barbara to make her the same as me. I want to afford her total equal value and worth in life.

**Barbara:** We are very much not the same. [Laughter]

**Dennis:** Oh, we are *very* much not the same. [Laughter] I celebrate that, Sweetie.

**Barbara:** Yes; I know.

**Bob:** And you’re not trying to pursue sameness; are you?

**Barbara:** No; I don’t want to be like him, and he doesn’t want to be like me because we are different; and we need those differences. I mean, we are *so* different; and because of that, we balance each other.

**Bob:** But what if one of your daughters had wanted to be the kicker on the football team? What if one of your daughters had wanted to be in combat?—she wanted to join the Army and be in combat? [Laughter]

**Dennis:** Wow; wow.

**Barbara:** Yes?

**Bob:** What would you have done?

**Barbara:** Well, I think it’s really tricky; but I know my first instinct would be to discourage that. I don’t really know what I would have done, because that would take a lot of thought.

**Bob:** Yes.

**Dennis:** I can answer that by saying: “I’d pray a lot. I’d think a lot. I’d seek some wise counsel,” and “I’d be careful because I would want my daughter to be all of who God created her to be.” I can’t actually say what I would decide here. I think I would probably have gone along with what Barbara said, but you’re asking me on the spur of the moment. I’ve never experienced that, but I would pray about it a lot.
**Bob:** And I think the point is: “The goal should be: ‘Who has God created my daughter to be?’”

**Dennis:** Right.

**Barbara:** Yes; that’s the goal.

**Bob:** “What are the good works that He prepared beforehand that she should walk in them?” and “How do I help that happen?” That’s where you do need to be prayerful; and you need to be seeking His counsel, looking at what the Bible has to say, and then pointing your daughter in that direction.

**Barbara:** Absolutely. That really was the goal with which we raised our kids—is we wanted all six of our children, the girls and the boys, to do what God made them to do to become the people that God made them to be and to find out what He wanted them to do and to follow it.

**Dennis:** Well said, Sweetheart: “Train your kids to follow Christ.”

**Bob:** In the midst of the confusion, we asked Nancy DeMoss Wolgemuth, back when she was still Nancy Leigh DeMoss—[Laughter]—we asked her to give us her understanding of what it is that God has called women to do and to be: “What’s a biblical understanding of womanhood?” Here’s what she said.

[Previous Interview]

**Nancy:** For me, the essence of femininity is to embrace the concept of surrender—as a woman, to become a receiver, a responder, and surrendered to the heart and the will of God. I love the example of Mary, the mother of Jesus. To me, she is a portrait of what it means to be a woman of God. When the angel came to Mary and explained to her that she was going to be a mother of the Son of God, Mary’s response was: “I am the Lord’s servant. May it be unto me according as you have said.”

For me, the difficulty—and I think it’s true for every human being—is to embrace what God has said—to say, “Let it be to me as you have said.” And that means for all of us, male and female, that there are restrictions—that there are certain roles that we are not asked to play / that we are not designed to fulfill.

And sure, my flesh has chaffed against embracing those roles and those restrictions at time; but it’s the enemy that causes us to see those as restrictions. It’s God’s way to see those limitations as loving limitations, as wise limitations, and as a means of protection—even as you protect your children from the oncoming traffic by teaching them not to step off of that curb in front of the house.
Dennis: Our assignment, as parents, is to embrace God’s design—receive it. A Christian’s definition of success in the roles of men and women is around God and in surrendering to that which God has called him to be and to do.

And I wonder sometimes, Bob, even within the Christian community, how foolish we’ve become in buying into this trap, as we raise our daughters—seemingly, to prop their ladders against the careerism wall and to say that the goal of their education / the goal of their lives ought to be a career. “Wait a second! Where is that in the Bible? Where’s the home here? Where are relationships here? Where is the next generation here?”

Nancy: I’ve been involved in ministry to women—and women in the church, primarily—and have found that women today, by and large, are frustrated; in many cases angry, hurt, wounded; and hardened in some cases. It’s not difficult to convince women today that the world’s way has not worked. The world has promised freedom, and success, and joy; but it hasn’t delivered. So, what a time for us to hold up the standard of God’s Word and say: “Here’s what God offers! This is the means to true freedom.”

[Studio]

Bob: Well, that’s Nancy DeMoss Wolgemuth from about 20 years ago, by the way.

Dennis: My voice has changed.

Barbara: Wow. [Laughter]

Bob: It’s from before she had begun Revive Our Hearts and the ministry that she’s involved with today; but listening to that, here is the takeaway: “If you’re trying to find—as a woman or as a man, for that matter—if you’re trying to find fulfillment, and joy, and flourishing from some ideology that is not anchored in Scripture, you are barking up the wrong tree.”

I’d encourage our listeners—go to our website, FamilyLifeToday.com. We’ve got a number of resources available there from some of the guests we’ve heard from today that talk about how our soul can be anchored in what the Scriptures teach and how women, in particular, can find joy, and hope, and meaning, and purpose for their lives by embracing God’s design for them. Our website is FamilyLifeToday.com. We’ve got articles and books available there that talk about: “What is at the essence of biblical womanhood?”

And if you’re raising a daughter today, and she’s 13 or 14 or 15 years old, let me encourage you to take a couple of days and get away with her and have a Passport2Identity® getaway, where the two of you can explore some of these themes and help direct and shape her thinking around how god has created her, as a young woman—because, I promise you, the culture is speaking loudly to her. You need to make sure you’re speaking as loud as well. Find out more about the Passport2Identity.
resource that we’ve created for both young men and young women. Go to FamilyLifeToday.com; or call if you have any questions—1-800-358-6329. That’s 1-800-“F” as in family, “L” as in life, and then the word, “TODAY.”

You know, these subjects that we tackle on FamilyLife Today—sometimes, they are uncomfortable. We often find ourselves going against the grain of contemporary culture, but the book of Romans tells us that we are to go against the grain: “Don’t be conformed to the thinking of this culture,”—the Bible says—“but be transformed by having your mind renewed by what the Bible teaches.” And that’s our goal, here, on FamilyLife Today—we want to provide practical biblical help and hope for marriages and families.

When you invest in this ministry, what you’re investing in is for this message to be heard by more people, more often, all around the world. Your donations go to extend the reach of this ministry, and we’re grateful for the partnership we have with you as regular FamilyLife Today listeners. We’d love to say, “Thank you,” for your investment this month with a resource that Dennis Rainey has just completed. It’s a new book called Choosing a Life That Matters, and we believe this book really matters. In fact, we’d love to get it in as many hands / in as many homes as possible. So, it’s available when you make a donation of any amount today.

Just go to FamilyLifeToday.com—donate online—or call 1-800-FL-TODAY—donate over the phone and ask for your copy of Dennis’s book when you call to make a donation; or you can mail your donation to us, along with a request for the book. Our mailing address is FamilyLife Today at PO Box 7111, Little Rock, AR; and our zip code is 72223. Again, the title of the book is Choosing a Life That Matters.

Now, tomorrow, we want to look at what the Bible says about womanhood. Are there specific things that God’s Word says about the differences between men and women that go beyond the biological? We’ll talk more about that tomorrow. I hope you can tune in for that.

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

FamilyLife Today is a production of FamilyLife of Little Rock, Arkansas; A Cru® Ministry. Help for today. Hope for tomorrow.

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