



Eve in Exile and the Restoration of Femininity

Rebekah Merkle

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The swooning Victorian ladies and the 1950s housewives genuinely needed to be liberated. That much is indisputable. So, First-Wave feminists held rallies for women's suffrage. Second-Wave feminists marched for Prohibition, jobs, and abortion. Today, Third-Wave feminists stand firmly for nobody's quite sure what. But modern women—who use psychotherapeutic antidepressants at a rate never before seen in history—need liberating now more than ever. The truth is, feminists don't know what liberation is. They have led us into a very boring dead end.

Eve in Exile sets aside all stereotypes of mid-century housewives, of China-doll femininity, of Victorians fainting, of women not allowed to think for themselves or talk to the men about anything interesting or important. It dismisses the pencil-skirted and stiletto-heeled executives of TV, the outspoken feminists freed from all that hinders them, the brave career women in charge of their own destinies. Once those fictionalized stereotypes are out of the way—whether they're things that make you gag or things you think look pretty fun—Christians can focus on real women. *What did God make real women for?*

Eve in Exile and the Restoration of Femininity Details

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From Reader Review Eve in Exile and the Restoration of Femininity for online ebook

Douglas Wilson says

I read portions of this in manuscript, but have been working away at the final version since it came out. And it is, of course, fantastic. Now one of you will say to me that I am rating it this way because it was written by my daughter. But the fact that Bekah wrote this does not make me rate it this way. It would be fantastic (and greatly needed) regardless.

This book will be a great encouragement to women who want to think, live, and adorn biblically. I recommend it particularly to girls in high school and college -- a great time to get your thinking straight on these issues.

Aaron Ventura says

This is a short book every Christian woman (and man probably) should read. Rebekah Merkle does a great job of surveying our culture's feminist history and then lays out some of the principles for Christian women to redraw the lines of biblical femininity in a beautiful and glorious way. A delight to read.

Brianna Silva says

I've recently begun speaking out as a feminist, so I decided to read this book to better understand those women who disagree with me. Has it convinced me to reject feminism and embrace traditional gender roles? Resoundingly and emphatically, **no**.

But, it did accomplish one thing: It helped me understand those who think differently. So I'm glad for that.

Judging by the many positive reviews, it's clear that this book is resonating with *some women*. What does this tell me? That *some women* truly do long for the traditional picture of stay-at-home motherhood, ultra femininity, and even the conservative family structure with the husband taking the helm. Understandably, these women feel uncomfortable with modern feminism, and even looked down upon by our culture at large.

This saddens me, and demonstrates a failure on the part of third-wave feminists to effectively achieve our primary goal: Honoring and protecting the choices and preferences of *all women*, including stay-at-home, non-career mothers. This lifestyle is as dignified and important as any, which should go without saying. We need to do a better job at communicating this to women who *want* traditional roles: Their preferences here are valid and beautiful and deserve celebration.

Perhaps that is why so many conservative readers love this book, because that's exactly what it teaches. The author does a wonderful job at injecting meaning and glory into the life of the housewife, which I can imagine feels deeply validating, liberating, and inspiring to those who identify with such a calling.

But this, I'm afraid, is where my positive words for this book end.

Because this is

not

all

women.

The model of marriage she describes, with men at the head, and women centering their lives around the home, is not something I, personally, could *ever* willingly submit to. Without will, submission becomes slavery.

And yes, I use that strong word intentionally. Just reading the author's descriptions of so-called "Godly/Biblical womanhood" is physically stressful for me, because of how deeply it goes against my nature.

Funny how that's the whole basis of her argument (on top of "the Bible says so"): That this is *women's nature*. Maybe it is for some women that truly identify with, and find fulfillment in, the submissive helper role.

But even with her emphasis on the inherent equality of men and women, this role is still abhorrent to me. It has been ever since I first encountered it a decade ago, as an adolescent, while reading an even worse book called *So Much More* (the reading of which caused psychological damage that took years to undo).

I'd be willing to guess this is similar to the reason many women become feminists: *Our given gender role just doesn't work for us.*

The author's model of womanhood is especially unimpressive since (and this is where I'll loose a lot of conservative Christians) her *only* arguments for that model are from the Bible. An ancient text written in a different time for different people in different cultures.

Sorry, but that's not a sufficiently convincing way to prove that your model of womanhood is universally true... especially for those of us who fundamentally do not identify with it. And especially *more* for those of us who are more convinced by empirical evidence than by alleged revelation.

I'm not against revelation; only when it conflicts with empirical evidence. Or with **basic human decency**, which I feel is under threat by the disturbing arguments of this book.

Again, many women are in fact liberated by this traditional view of womanhood. Good for them. But many others feel suffocated by it, no matter how nicely one tries to spruce it up. There's simply no way you can present "submission to husbands" without making me want to gag. Sorry, it's not going to happen.

Now, there is another major aspect to this book that I need to address: And that is her take on the **history of feminism**, and why, to her understanding, Christians should not be a part of it.

A few things.

First, I admit that I'm not deeply educated on the history of feminism... yet. Her description of its major events and key players felt overly simplistic to me, but I'm curious to explore the subject more and see if that

is or is not the case.

Either way, I agree with her that feminism appears to have *some* disgusting roots. (For example, Mary Shelley having an affair with a married man in the name of "free love", which ended with that man's wife committing suicide? NOT. OKAY.) And certainly there are aspects of feminism I don't align with, such as its take on abortion.

But this is where the author and I don't agree: You do *not* have to align with *everything* in a movement in order to participate in it.

If that were the case, I wouldn't be a Christian, frankly, because there are plenty of Christian teachings and denominations that I disagree with. But it's the unifying **heart** and **soul** of Christianity I connect with.

It's the same with feminism. Heck, feminists frequently disagree with each other. **That's good and healthy for any movement!** You don't want groupthink; you want a group of people who challenge each other, who sharpen each other like iron, who grow and improve together. You need a variety of perspectives and opinions to do that. Conflicting ideas can and should coexist, as long as everyone is united around a core goal (full gender equality).

Third wave feminism has done the best at this. You might even say that the core goal of third wave feminism *is* to incorporate the full breadth of women's perspectives and experiences, including those that the author brings up here.

Which brings me full circle, and to what I believe is the book's largest weakness: The author failed to fully research modern feminism. On the back cover, it says "Today, Third-Wave feminists stand firmly for nobody's quite sure what." But a few minutes of Googling will show that's not the case; third wave feminism *does* have clear goals.

In fact, most of her grievances with feminism seem to be with second wave mentalities, which modern feminists admit were a bit of an extreme pendulum swing. There was a sense of separation from motherhood and reproductive biology, looking down on homemaking, and a departing from femininity.

But third wave feminism is trying to ***bring us to a health balance ...***

One where women are enabled to be mothers *and* have passions and vocations.

One where women have the freedom and dignity to choose careers, or a stay-at-home lifestyle, or a hybrid of both, and that none of these choices would be looked down upon.

One where the full breadth of femininity is embraced and praised, from ultra-femme ladies who love makeup and dresses, to tomboys and sports lovers, from quiet, submissive followers to bold, natural leaders, and everyone and everything in between.

Third wave feminism is, among other things, about accepting that there is more than one way to be a woman, and that all of our various personalities, passions, and gifts are good, valid, and encouraged.

What disturbs me about this book isn't that women would want the model of womanhood described in these pages. If it brings you meaning, purpose, and fulfillment in life, then by all means, do it! Be the lovely, submissive, glorifying woman that you feel called to be.

What **disturbs** me is this utterly false assertion that *every woman* must and should align with this.

I am deeply concerned for young girls reading this book, just like when 13-year-old me read So Much More, who will have their true calling and potential stifled by an arbitrary formula that, rather than liberating them, will rob them of their confidence, autonomy, and ability to think and dream for themselves.

I am concerned for the many girls who should be doctors or scientists or politicians or soldiers or astronauts, those who are meant to change the world, who are held back tragically because they thought those roles were for men.

The author is right to say that the home is just as important as the career world, but she is wrong to think that rigidly enforced, unnecessary gender roles are still the answer. They're not. The traditional family has evolved; it has not fallen apart. There are stay-at-home dads, and parents who work from home, and adults who choose not to have children because... they don't want to. (There are 7 billion people in the world. We're fine on babies.) There's more than one way to do this.

Yes, our society prospers when everyone is fulfilling their truest, best role. But those roles are not dependent on gender. Every human being is unique. And when you try to force people into roles they were *not* designed for, you don't create freedom.

You create oppression.

And that is exactly what this kind of theology has a history of doing.

Cattie says

Wow, where to begin? There are some authentic gems of wisdom in this book, but they're buried under a mountain range of sheer horsecrapery that is so formidable, entire parties of hikers have gotten lost in it and resorted to cannibalism rather than having to read another word of this book. Merkle's writing voice is the sort of tone deaf that makes you have to take breaks - not because she is so very very cutting edge and counterculturally witty and smart and we lowly readers JUST CAN'T HANDLE THE TRUTH, though she clearly fancies herself as such, but because she is just cringingly awkward and insensitive toward just about every group of people she touches with her words herein. I think some of it might be a feeble attempt at humor (?), but it falls completely flat as she ridicules feminists, liberal women, conservative women, underachieving housewives who have it super easy and should be fixing five course meals every day because that's God's will for every woman ever created - she has a lot of condescension and tongue clucks for all women, really, and she sure thinks she's the one to tell you what's what.

Let's just get the remaining negative things out of the way so that I can tell you what I did like: Merkle's treatment of research, facts, and statistics is dubious and flexible at best, dishonest and manipulative at worst. She so frequently bends data and history to fit her angle and her message that my fear is that a young woman who is not familiar with the historical events and data in this book (and might be reading this book explicitly for that purpose) might swallow Merkle's distortions without a second thought and thus be somewhat misled. She really needed an editor to critically look at the (sparse) research portions and fact check her. In some areas, she reports facts but twists the truth in her treatment of these facts in the surrounding narrative. Quoting every instance of Merkle's mishandling of historical evidence and facts would be daunting and I honestly don't have the space in this review, but one example is when she quotes a study that said that 21%

of women were taking antidepressants in the 1963 and 26% of women were taking them in the present day (2016 if we go by her publication date). She used this to drive home her point that women are vastly unhappier now than they were in 1963, and her reasoning is that this increase in unhappiness was because more women began to work outside the home. Whether this is true or not (and it might very well be!), her evidence doesn't imply causation *or even correlation,* because there are too many variables to draw the kind of conclusion she is trying to cobble together. For one, the medications she is comparing are extremely different from one another. She equates 1960s tranquilizers (she does not provide medication names - surprise) that are designed to decrease anxiety and often produced lethargy and actually worsened depression, with modern antidepressants that are geared toward healing a chemical imbalance in the brain, leading to increased productivity and quality of life. Not only are the types of drugs definitely not comparable, Merkle also fails to take into account the social stigma of psychiatric medications in the 60s vs. 2016, and how many women were afraid or unable to see a doctor for mental health purposes in each era, and how that might affect the data. Finally, the figures she reports - 21% vs 26% - is a tiny increase that is almost negligible when you factor in the above variables. Merkle's aim is to win your agreement at all costs, even if it means distorting the data, which is really sad because she has a few good points buried in all the mess. The sad thing is, her actual point itself might not be wrong - it might be true that women ARE unhappier now - but the evidence she chose is so mishandled that it does little to prove her point and actually makes her come across as less credible.

Another type of textual evidence mistreated by Merkle - and if you're a believer, a more important one - is Scripture. At one point, she cites 1 Timothy 2:12 - Paul's declaration that, at least in the cultural context of the church he was talking about, he does not permit a woman to teach or assume authority over a man. Merkle amputates the latter bit of this verse in order to bend it into supporting her strange agenda, which is that women should not be in a capacity of teaching *at all,* though Paul limits his instructions by saying that women should not teach *men.* Even without the cultural context of this verse, or any research into the translation or other factors, the wording obviously doesn't prevent women from engaging in teaching and leadership and ministry directed toward other women, children, etc. What's odd about her interpretation is that Merkle herself is a high school humanities teacher and sets herself up as a teacher and leader in that she writes books. If her interpretation of the Scriptures is that women are forbidden to use our voices and must be silent, not in leadership in any capacity, and not permitted to teach or preach in any capacity using words (that's the man's job, instead we must sing the Gospel through food and housecleaning), the author violates her own interpretation herself. Because books are, like, made of words and stuff. This is just one instance of the mishandling of Scripture in Eve in Exile; you can find a few more where she fails to take into account the cultural context of a passage, belittles other interpretations (suggesting that anyone who sees something different in the text or translation than she does is doing "gymnastical" readings) and upholds her own personal interpretation as the be-all and end-all, one true reading of the Bible, etc. Just more irresponsible reading and poor research.

Another thing that bothered me deeply about Merkle's take on the role of women was her way of making sweeping blanket statements that in some cases only apply to very privileged, married women with a husband and children. She all but ignores single women, young girls, women who cannot bear children, empty nesters, widows, and women in long term relationships but still unmarried - some of these women she tosses a crumb of acknowledgement to as an afterthought in a few places, but some are never even mentioned, as if they don't exist in Merkle's view of what a woman should be. Trans women and gay women she does mention, and with such disdain that it's actually embarrassing. Merkle tries so hard to be funny in these references in particular, but her misguided attempts at humor are completely transparent and only serve to reveal a very present transphobia and homophobia that is downright disturbing in a follower of Jesus. We are called to extend our hand to the marginalized - at least that's what Jesus did - not make fun of them. Even if you disagree with the way someone lives their life, it is no reason to be nasty to them. Does she really

think that will lead anyone to Christ?

Before I run out of space, I do want to mention the things I loved. Merkle hits on a few ideas that I really think are pure gold and need to be called out as such. One is the idea that homemaking has been unfairly cast as demeaning and inferior to work outside the home for decades, and this is untrue and to everyone's detriment. I agree wholeheartedly. One way in which feminism has failed in its mission to allow every woman a choice as to the direction of her life is that it has swung too far the other way, unfairly and inaccurately painting a life as a stay at home mom as dreary and entrapping and completely inferior to a life working outside the home, and chastising women who choose it, rather than acknowledging that voluntarily choosing to work within the home and pour into your children and your family is a valid choice that some women might genuinely want to make, and should be able to make freely. Merkle rightly calls out that our culture of extremes for women is a culture of landmines for women. Anywhere we step at this point in history seems to incite ridicule and shame from somewhere. She is right that this needs to change. As with any extremes, the truth is usually somewhere in the middle, and I think Merkle is correct that women (and for that matter, humans) have not collectively landed upon the balance between ambition and humility, home and work, etc. that God has for us yet.

There is also a lot of truth in the way she describes women's giftings and the ability to beautify and glorify and amplify. She is right that there is a lot of power in this, and while I agree that this is something women share, I do wonder about women who don't see themselves in this description/have different gifts, and how she would place those women. I do think that in the feminist search for total equality with men, many women have somehow forgotten to cherish and appreciate our own uniqueness. However, her descriptions of women's giftings and encouragement toward them somehow still stray off the path for me because in some sections, she veers a little too close to husband worship. There is a distinct lack of encouraging women to look to God for her calling and role and purpose, and instead this is replaced with encouragement to look to your husband to literally "[set] the brackets around your calling." I mean, whoa. She goes on to prod women to build their entire lives around the preferences and whims of her husband and calls this their calling and role. Don't get me wrong, I think it's a beautiful thing for a wife to know and understand and seek what makes her husband happy and healthy and to serve him in those ways (and he her). But to place a woman's identity and her calling solely in the middle of who her husband is and what kind of sandwich he likes (that is literally one of the examples she uses) negates a woman's direct connection to Christ and His leading for her life. Merkle stumbles into a false hierarchy in these sections wherein a wife pretty much worships her husband and the husband worships God. This is dangerous and scary theology. I do love her descriptions of how women need to reclaim their ability to translate holiness into beauty and grace, but I wish she hadn't fused it to a garbage pile of idolatry disguised as a marriage.

I really loved her description of the lost art of authentic homemaking - how her husband's grandmother worked shoulder to shoulder with her husband, working hard together and in partnership toward building something beautiful and true in their family. I love this, and I agree it is a better picture of true homemaking than a housewife who is meant only to look pretty and not realize her true potential - which depending on the woman, could very well be homemaking - but could also be something else entirely, which I think Merkle does not allow for, preferring to pigeonhole every woman in existence into her definition of what it means to be one. This she does rather than acknowledge that God's plan for one woman might look quite different from her sister next to her.

The thing is, I really do think a book LIKE this needs to be written - but maybe not by Merkle. I think the role and calling of women has been decided by everyone else since the dawn of time...except of course, the woman herself as she wrestles it out with God. The flaw with Merkle's conclusion is that she becomes one more voice trying to force all women into a box, except this time the box is of Merkle's choosing and

informed by her personal interpretation of the Scriptures, rather than the patriarchy's or the feminists' or what have you. It still falls flat because no book and no public figure and no movement can ever hope to dictate to women what our personal roles and callings are except for God Himself. And we would do well to remember that.

Ultimately, I don't recommend this book, but I do hope it will pave the way for better ones in the same vein. Yes, women do need to bloom into who we were made to be, but only some women will find who they are made to be depicted in this book - if they can find it at all amid the piles of insults, homophobia, transphobia, hostility, and disdain for everyone who isn't the writer herself. I have been trying to put my finger on exactly why this book so missed the mark for me when it actually did have several points I agreed with, and I think I have managed to finally discern why. The stark hard truth of Eve in Exile is that Merkle is missing love, and as such, this book is nothing but a clangy cymbal.

Sarah Oldland says

A must read for all women.

Kelli says

I found out about this book from the She Proves Faithful podcast and saw it was on Kindle Unlimited so I started a free trial. This was an excellent read. After the first paragraph I knew that the author was a no bull kind of writer. She said what she thought and stood by it despite the backlash she may have gotten.

The book was divided into a few parts; a brief history of feminism, what femininity was created to be, and how we can harness that in our lives. I appreciated all three sections. I don't have too much knowledge about the history of feminism, but this section intrigued me and made me want to look further.

I really loved the attention to put into making herself clear that while a wife and mother can certainly work outside of the home, her focus and direction should be on her family. I see so many families come into the behavioral health clinic I work in and the moms and dads will not make appointments for their suicidal children because of their work schedule. This is not right. And I loved that she called it out.

I agreed with most of this book and it was refreshing to read in a season of my life where I will be quitting my day job in March to have my husband and my first child. The third section on how to harness femininity and create work from daily tasks really struck me and inspired me to continue to learn and grow even while being "just" a stay-at-home mom.

This is probably one I will come back to for this last section alone. A great read. A controversial read. But one I think all sides of the argument could benefit from considering.

Christina Baehr says

If you're tired of restrictive gender stereotypes
If you secretly wonder what women are actually for

If you call yourself a Christian feminist or if those words make you want to throw up

THIS BOOK IS FOR YOU.

I believe this book will be remembered as a watershed. It's fast, funny, smart, painful, generous, practical, and full of soaring imagination. And it does what very few Christians are doing right now. It rejects the rightist and leftist views of femininity, which are hopelessly loaded down with ungodly cultural baggage, and articulates a picture of creational femininity. And that picture is scarily good. How did we miss this?

This is good news. This is how the gospel frees women from the gender crisis.

Valerie Kyriosity says

Reread June 2018 for book group (finally finished a couple of weeks after we met, but let's not be too picky about that). This time through was terribly convicting of what a crappy excuse for a woman I am.

* * * * *

I read this prepublication and had to give it back before I could write a review, so this is going to be a bit thin until I have a chance to reread it. For now I'll just say that REBEKAH MERKLE TAKES THE NINNY OUT OF FEMININITY! Women are called to work hard, taking our part in taking dominion of this earth. A woman's calling is not the same as a man's, but it is as real, it is as demanding, and it is as glorious. Neither feminism nor fainting couches will do.

I knew even in July that this was my Book of the Year. And don't make the mistake of thinking this one's just for the ladies. Gents will find much to benefit from here in learning how to read the world and how to honor and encourage the women in their lives.

Callie says

4.5/5 stars.

I picked up this book from the library after several girls who I trust recommended it to me! I've been interested in reading more about feminism lately, specifically it's negative effects and how it matches up to a biblical perspective on womanhood. "Eve In Exile" looked interesting to me because it attempts to answer the question of what God made women to do and accomplish.

I have to say, this book was really excellent and worth a read! But first, to get a couple minor disagreements out of the way...there were a couple points the author made in this book that I would contest. The first is in an earlier chapter where she is discussing some of the "experts" who have come out criticizing modern feminism in more recent years - the author suggests that we can't really take these women expert's opinions seriously because by achieving the "feminist ideal" of high profile careers, they have bought into feminism themselves, and their points are moot.

I don't agree with that. I think anyone, no matter their apparent "qualifications" or lack thereof, has a perfect

right and inherent qualification to speak against feminism, including men. I think no matter who you are in today's culture, you cannot escape being affected by feminism in some way, which gives you a right to speak about it.

In "Eve In Exile" Merkle also restrains a lot of her discussion to the effects of women being taken out of the home by 1960's feminism, but I do think there are a lot of other effects that she doesn't really address in this book, which is what "experts" are often discussing (ex: the downplaying of the importance of men and boys to society). I think all these elements are worth discussing. You don't have to be a certain kind of woman to observe some of the negative impacts and speak against them. You don't even have to be a woman. I don't think it's necessarily fair to shut down discussion based on arbitrary "qualifications".

The second thing I wanted to give an opinion on was her timeline and discussion of the history of feminism in this book. It was interesting, and I could see the connections she was trying to draw. I thought she made some good points, such as not getting caught up in how "ideal" it would have been in this-or-that century. Often we get wrong ideas about how things really were in history because of romanticized versions we see in movies or books, and she rightly criticizes some non-feminist women for not looking at history accurately.

However, I read this book at the same time as I was reading "The Flipside Of Feminism" by Phyllis Schlaffley, which also gives a brief history of modern feminism. It was interesting to read these two analyses side by side, because the perspectives are pretty different. In "Eve In Exile", Merkle assumes that there must have been widespread dissatisfaction among American housewives in their vocations as wives and mothers and in how they were treated by men, and Friedan's "The Feminine Mystique" tapped into that. The only evidence she gives for this assumption is that "The Feminine Mystique" sold so many copies, but I don't think the number of books sold necessarily means anything. Controversial books naturally sell a lot of copies...it doesn't mean everyone who reads it agrees with it. In Schlaffley's book, she argues that this "dissatisfaction" was present for some women, but wasn't nearly as widespread as feminists would like us to believe. This makes me wonder if Merkle may have fallen into the same trap of accepting as fact the characterization of all women being stuck as dissatisfied housewives in the 1960's, which is often portrayed in books and movies, when perhaps we should take a closer look. I'm more apt to buy Schlaffley's view of the history of feminist revolution in the 60's, since she actually lived through it.

All that said, I still appreciated reading Merkle's opinions about the history of feminism, because she made some good points about the different ways men and women have turned aside from God's design for women over the centuries, which was a necessary backdrop for the rest of her book. In this book Merkle presents biblically-based arguments about the role women are actually made to play, and why it's a role filled with honor, and a role that can provide deep satisfaction when we view it rightly. I also really appreciated the few practical examples she gave on the things we women could accomplish in our God-given spheres as wives and mothers when we take our creativity and intellects and really apply them to these roles.

Merkle holds a high view of the role of women and reading this book really inspired me to think of my role in the home differently as well. She encourages us to view our modern conveniences and the extra time they give us as a true gift from God, and an opportunity to apply our creative powers as women to accomplish even more for the Lord within the context of managing our families and our homes. This book gave me so much to think about, and is definitely worth a re-read...it's now on my to-buy list, since the copy I read was from the library!

Cristine Mermaid says

A quick and horrifying read! I actually agree that it's wrong to demean women who are stay at home moms and who devote themselves to running a household and raising children. However, this book and it's insistence that God created women for this specific purpose and that if you want anything outside of this, it's just because society tells you that you are supposed to is so dismissive and insulting to my own experiences. I could not disagree more with her theory that the reason housewives in the 50s were unsatisfied is because their lives were so easy that they were bored. How demeaning that is to women who worked relentlessly doing housework and caring for children. They were not lacking for things to do, it's that what they were required to do was mundane and tedious in of itself.

For her to say that it's obvious because women are still unfulfilled even though they are working means that they were happier at home is ludicrous. Women, today, suffer from stress and unhappiness more because they are still expected to do the vast majority of the chores/child rearing/household organizing and planning even though they have actual jobs on top of that. Women today have higher expectations placed on them and mothers have higher pressures on them than ever before so of course, that's stressful. It doesn't mean a longing to return to being housewives and not worrying our pretty little heads about it.

The author claims that today's feminists don't know what they're fighting for but they've been extremely clear about this. They are fighting for reproductive freedoms, maternity (paternity) leave, subsidized and high quality child care, the freedom to walk down a city block without being harassed , and an end to rape culture. (There are more issues but these are the most important to most)

Her chapters on submissiveness just made me sad. If this is typical of Christianity, then I can understand why so many don't identify with this religion and leave it.

The author's viewpoints make women seem simple and shallow when we are complicated individuals and not programmed to all be a certain way. Discouraging and disheartening.

I will give the book credit for saying that the past and the 50s were not this glory time for women that so many today make it out to be. So kudos for that.

Matt says

If I were a woman, this book would make me very excited about being a woman. Instead, it's just made me excited to marry one.

Anna says

There's so much that's wrong with this book. Her condescending tone. She, strangely, comes across as anti-woman. Although I disagree with probably 90% of her arguments, the point I'm most disappointed with is that she only addresses femininity in the context of a woman being a wife and mother. What does biblical femininity look like for a single woman? Or a woman struggling with infertility? Or, God forbid, a single mom? There is little to NO mention of these women who don't fit Merkle's perfect mold of womanhood.

Simply a terrible book that read like an angry, ranting blog series.

Rick Davis says

I have a few quibbles about some of the arguments and implications of the book. (Mainly holding out the carrot of emotional fulfillment for women who choose to be homemakers, or implying that depression rates are so high among women today because of a shirking of god-given responsibilities.) Most of this seems to amount to a poor use of statistics, a tendency to oversimplify the historical record, and some post hoc fallacies. However, the overall argument of the book is sound and much needed in our current cultural climate.

Becky Pliego says

Read again in the summer of 2018. Excellent and most needed in this generation.

2016: What a book! It is like a cold bucket of water thrown over the comfortable and conservative Christian women of our times (which we know are times in which the biblical role of women is being attacked from all fronts -including women in the church!). This book is a wake-up call to embrace our calling in this world, in our churches, in our homes and thus start rebuilding what the Feminists have torn apart. It is also a call to fight hard and to advance the kingdom of God steadfastly and cheerfully with all boldness.

This is a book that will be hard to quote on Pinterest or Twitter, because it doesn't give simplistic and easy answers. Hard questions have been asked to the women who embrace the historical and biblical role in their homes and churches, and Rebekah Merkle has done an amazing job in giving answers to those questions with biblical and historical arguments.

Rebekah Merkle has written in an intelligent, powerful, and captivating way a book that all Christian women (married or single, young or old) need to read soon.

NOTE: I was provided an advanced reader copy and they didn't ask me to write favorable review, but I felt compelled to do so, because it really is a great book!

Tara says

I was eager to read this book, though I went into it knowing that I would probably disagree with a fair portion of it. I spent a significant time in the same community as the author, and while I knew that feminism was considered bad, I didn't have a clear picture of what exactly the problem with it was. Reading this book did not necessarily change my mind, but it gave me a better understanding of where some of my friends are coming from.

The book seemed to have three major goals: to give a brief history of feminism, to give the stay-at-home-mom some good PR for once, and to discuss (albeit tangentially) the role of women in the church. I'm only going to talk about the first two in this review, since I don't think the discussion of the role of women in the

church was fleshed out enough to interact with, since it boils down to "the text says this, so duh." (Part of me is sympathetic to this sort of exegesis, because I have seen certain feminists who have definitely failed to interact with Scripture with humility. That said, I've also met genuine Christians who love Scripture and believe it is inspired who nevertheless have come to the conclusion that women may serve in church leadership, so I do think there is a profitable conversation to be had -- but I digress.)

I know the history section was supposed to be a quick overview, but I still felt like it was too simplistic. I was particularly unconvinced by the chapter about 1st-wave feminism and its ties to abortion, and I wished there had been more sources cited so that I could follow up. My understanding is that most of the 1st-wavers considered abortion a societal evil. Even Margaret Sanger (!) was against abortion, and that stance was part of her mission to educate women about birth control. I am not defending all of Sanger's beliefs, and perhaps one could say that she was short-sighted or inconsistent, but I think it's important to remember that she considered abortion barbaric. (Also, if you're pro-life, it's fun to tell pro-choicers that their hero actually agreed with you.)

Even more interesting is the fact that Betty Friedan was not initially pro-abortion but was finally swayed by two men (Lader and Nathanson--the second of which later repented and became a pro-life advocate) who fed her a bunch of propaganda about the number of back-alley abortions that were actually occurring. She had to be convinced that abortion should be legalized -- it wasn't her secret agenda from the start. Now obviously, in the end, she **was** convinced, and abortion and feminism did become linked, but I'm not willing to say that abortion rights and feminism are automatically a package deal. You can have one without the other. In general, I think my main disagreement with Merkle is her idea that you can't team up with someone unless you're doing what you're doing for the same reason. I don't have a problem supporting certain "feminist" ideas or even being lumped together with the feminists at certain, strategic times, even if we might disagree on the reasons why. Ideally, it would be great if we agreed, but I think I'm just too much of a pragmatist.

I appreciated Merkle's emphasis on the importance of the home, and her defense of stay-at-home moms. She is quite right that they have often been unfairly maligned or made to feel useless in society. That said, I don't think the way to fix that is to make working women feel like they're actually the useless ones. I was especially uncomfortable with the racehorse analogy -- that career women are like racehorses cooped up in the backyard who will run around aimlessly but never be satisfied, while stay-at-home moms are racehorses who have been given the freedom to run to their heart's content -- particularly because of its implication that single women will forever be in the backyard.

I was intrigued by her four duties of women (fill, help, submit, glorify), and I wish I had time to go into all of them. Two quick things. First, I was a little disappointed that the "help" section did not include a discussion of the word "ezer" ("helper") in the Bible, which really helped shape how I view my relationship to my husband. Second, the "glorify" section dovetailed nicely into an ongoing discussion I've been having with my husband. He would probably agree with most of what Merkle said because bless him, he thinks I really do glorify his life. I often push back against the blanket assumption that women glorify, partly because I am wary of virtue becoming associated with "having good taste." I know many women might, say, nicely decorate their kitchens because they want to reflect God's beauty -- but then that can turn into a nicely-decorated kitchen becoming associated with a godly woman, which is all backwards. I'm not sure I disagree with Merkle (and my own husband) on this point, but I am just cautious about it.

I have a lot more I could say -- things I agreed with and disagreed with -- but ironically, I think I'm going to go bake something for my husband now. (It's only fair; he made dinner.)
