A REMINDER FOR CHRISTIAN MEN AND WOMEN

By Ashby L. Camp

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Modern feminism has demonized men, fostered discrimination against them, and portrayed a wife's acceptance of her husband's leadership as treason against the sisterhood. An increasing number of men are reacting by embracing a "Bro culture" that views women as defective or inferior, mere objects for male service, satisfaction, and status.[1] This is a work of Satan, a perversion of God's design for men and women that will retard and destroy relationships and scar the children produced by them.

In this time of heightened tension, Christians need to be reminded of the following truths. They will be blessed if they hold onto them.[2]

1. Men and women are created equally in the image of God and together comprise mankind (Gen. 1:26-27, 5:1-2). In 1 Cor. 11:11-12 Paul points out that men and women are dependent on each other. In 1 Cor. 12:12-27, he makes clear that all who are in Christ are part of Christ's body and are equally precious; there are no second-class citizens in the kingdom. Peter describes husbands and wives as "co-heirs of the grace of life" (1 Pet. 3:7). In terms of one's standing before God, Paul says in Gal. 3:28 that there is neither male nor female in Christ Jesus.

2. Some traits are more common in men (e.g., strength, athleticism, competitiveness, stoicism, risk-taking) and others more common in women (e.g., emotiveness, empathy, communicativeness, cooperativeness, patience) but defining them as superior or inferior is fraught with problems. Moreover, there are no traits that are exclusive to men or women. Rather, they are all present in both sexes in overlapping distribution curves, the shapes of which vary according to the characteristic and culture in question. This is born out in Scripture where we see women who risk punishment or death to obey God (Ex. 1:15-17), a woman who conceives and executes the concealment and escape of Israelite spies (Josh. 2:1-16), a woman who judges the disputes of the people of Israel (Judg. 4:4-5), a woman who drives a tent peg through a commander's skull (Judg. 4:21), a woman who has the prophets of God and Naboth murdered (1 Ki. 18:4, 13; 1 Ki. 21:7-14), and a woman who has the competitors to her throne slaughtered (2 Ki. 11:1). On the other hand, we see men who comfort and have compassion on their wives and other women (1 Sam. 1:8; 2 Sam. 12:24; Lk. 7:12-13 [Jesus]), men who weep in grief and sorrow over deaths and various circumstances (Gen. 23:2, 27:38, 37:35, 50:1; 1 Sam. 30:4; 2 Sam. 1:12, 3:16, 3:32, 12:21, 18:33; 2 Ki. 20:3; Neh. 1:4; Job 2:12; Ps. 137:1; Mat. 26:75; Lk. 19:41 [Jesus]; Jn. 11:33-35 [Jesus]), and men who weep in love and joy (Gen. 29:11, 33:4, 45:14-15, 46:29; 1 Sam. 20:41). Therefore, it is a mistake, classic stereotyping, to impose on a woman or man a statistically prevalent trait of their gender and not to judge them on their individual qualities. (The same goes, of course, for racial stereotyping.) Indeed, I think it is sinful to do so, a violation of the "Golden Rule" (Mat. 7:12; Lk. 6:31) and the command to love one's neighbor as oneself (Lev. 19:18; Mat. 22:39; Mk. 12:31; Lk. 10:27; Gal. 5:14), because it is treating someone in a way one would not want to be treated.

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[1] Witness the popularity of the self-proclaimed sexist and misogynist Andrew Tate.

[2] The list is an edited compilation of things I have written elsewhere.

3. In the marriage partnership of two spiritually equal human beings, a man and a woman, the man bears the primary responsibility to lead the partnership in a God-glorifying direction (Eph. 5:23; 1 Pet. 3:1). God has placed on the husband the responsibility of headship or leadership, but in doing so, he is not suggesting that the wife is inferior to, less worthy, or less capable than her husband. Our leadership as husbands is not an acknowledgement of superior ability but a role assigned by God in his sovereignty. Just as one should not conclude from the fact the Levites were given the exclusive responsibility of carrying items of the tabernacle (Num. 1:48-51, 4:15, 24-33) that they must be the most capable at that task, so one should not conclude from the fact husbands (and men in the church) are given the leadership responsibility that they must be the most capable at that task. The election to those respective responsibilities is not merit based but tribe based (in the case of the Levites) and sex based (in the case of husbands). If a husband does not understand that fact, he can get puffed up, and as a result make poorer decisions as a leader because he neglects the wisdom and insights of his wife.

4. Submission to Christ is expressed in unquestioning obedience because he is God, the holy and infallible Creator and Savior. There can be no justification for questioning his will or attempting to enlighten him about anything. Husbands, on the other hand, are limited, sinful human beings. Unlike the Lord, we can make very foolish and even sinful choices. Of course, if a husband chooses a sinful course of action, the wife cannot support it. The husband's authority is from the Lord, and he has no authority to push one of Christ's disciples into sin. To follow one's husband into sin is not a submission that is "fitting in the Lord," to use the words of Col. 3:18.

5. Unlike the situation in submitting to Christ, the wife must help her flawed husband in the discharge of his leadership responsibility. This often requires her to inform, question, advise, and correct her husband. A wife's submission to her husband does not mean that she sits silently except to utter on occasion, "Yes, O Great One." She is a nonleading partner and is called to use her intellect, knowledge, abilities, and gifts to bless her husband and the family. That is part of what it means to love them (Tit. 2:4). Her input is to be desired and valued by a husband who wants to make the best decisions in leading the family to the glory of God.

6. In a healthy marriage, husbands and wives can almost always come to agreement on what course of action should be taken, but occasionally they cannot. In those situations where a mutual decision cannot be reached, either because of time or other constraints, the wife is called by God to yield to her husband's decision. I think the NT scholar James Hurley captures well the spirit in which such decisions should be made:

> The manner in which such decisions are handled is crucial. The husband may not be high-handed and stubborn, knowing that she will finally have to give way. That is not the model of Christ's headship. Neither may the wife be grudging and resentful. That is not the manner of our response to Christ. In the last analysis, when the two can devote no more time to individual and joint seeking of the grace of God to permit them to come to one mind or to be willing to yield to the other, an exchange along the following lines is in order:

> **Husband**: "Not because I am inherently wiser or more righteous, nor because I am right (although I do believe I am or I would not stand firm), but because it is finally my responsibility before God, we will take the course which I believe is right. If I am being sinfully stubborn, may God forgive me and give me the grace to yield to you."
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> **Wife**: "Not because I believe you are wiser in this matter (I don't) or more righteous, nor because I accept that you are right (because I don't or I would not oppose you), but because I am a servant of God who has called me to honor your headship, I willingly yield to your decision. If I am wrong, may God show me. If you are wrong, may he give you grace to acknowledge it and to change."[3]

7. In addition to leading the family, husbands are called to love their wives (Eph. 5:25-33; Col. 3:19). Indeed, we are commanded to love our wives "as our own bodies," and then we are reminded that we nourish and cherish our bodies (Eph. 5:28-29). Biblical love sacrifices for the welfare of its object, meaning husbands are to sacrifice for the welfare of their wives. That is why Eph. 5:25 refers to Christ's love for the church having been expressed in his *giving himself up for her*. This leaves no room for being selfish or uncaring toward one's wife, let alone for physically, verbally, or emotionally abusing her. Husbands are to be avenues of God's blessings on their wives, not sources of their frustration, discouragement, anger, or oppression. In fact, Col. 3:19 specifically says, "Husbands, love your wives and do not be bitter toward them," meaning we are not to be to them as something bitter, which is how harsh overlords were described in ancient literature. The NT scholar Eduard Lohse comments, "[Husbands] are forbidden to behave in an overbearing manner or to imagine that they belong to a superior species."[4]

8. Husbands are also called to pay honor to their wives. 1 Peter 3:7 says, "Husbands, likewise, live with your wives in an enlightened fashion (lit. "according to knowledge"), paying honor to the female as a weaker vessel and as co-heirs of the gracious gift of life, in order that nothing may hinder your prayers." A husband pays honor to his wife in how he talks to her and about her and in the kind of priority he gives to her needs and to their relationship. The female is a "weaker vessel" physically and positionally, but not mentally, morally, or spiritually. She is in a "weaker" position than her husband because God has assigned her a nonleading role in the marriage and because, at that time especially, the husband had greater social power. This physical and positional weakness makes the wife more vulnerable to mistreatment and therefore, in God's eyes, especially worthy of protection. God is the champion of the vulnerable, and he will not tolerate those who exploit them (see, e.g., Jas. 2:1-4). The wife is also to be honored as a co-heir of salvation. In terms of her relationship with God, the Christian wife is in no way "weaker." That was Paul's point in Gal. 3:26-29. This honoring of wives is so important that failing to do so will disturb the husband's relationship with God and thus hinder his prayers. The Christian who insists on mistreating his wife cannot expect to come to God as though all was well.

May this brief picture of God's design for men and women help us recognize the distortions that are prevalent in our culture. A disciple of the Lord Jesus should be the kind of

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[3] James B. Hurley, *Man and Woman in Biblical Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981), 151.
[4] Eduard Lohse, *Colossians and Philemon*, Hermeneia, trans. by William R. Poehlmann and Robert J. Karris (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971), 158.

husband that every woman would want or the kind of wife that every man would want, the very opposite of how they are often portrayed.