

A Woman's World

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Conventional wisdom says that we live in a man's world. Men have all the advantages, all the power. Women, even when they, of necessity, claw their way into positions of prestige and authority, never receive quite the respect that a man would. Conventional wisdom—society's accepted "truth"—is being turned on its head.

Move over men! It is no longer a man's world. A new power has risen in America and other "leading" nations—women. The feminist movement has sailed the female sex past mere equality into the uncharted realm of dominance and power. Batten down the hatches and prepare for rough seas, for this is a clear sign of the end!

Probably the clearest scripture on this subject appears in Isaiah 3:12:

As for My people, children are their oppressors, and *women rule over them*. O My people! Those who lead you cause you to err, and destroy the way of your paths.

This comes after God says:

Because their [His people's] tongue and their doings are against the LORD. . . . Woe to their soul! For they have brought evil upon themselves. (Isaiah 3:8-9)

Roles of the Sexes

This sounds condemnatory to women in positions of leadership, but this is only part of the story. Earlier in the chapter, God heaps most of the blame on the heads of men. Because men, whom God created and appointed to lead their families and the nation, abdicate their roles and positions in the home and society, women and "children" (the inexperienced and unqualified) take up the slack. In acting outside the bounds of their created makeup, God shows, women and children tend to hasten a nation's fall.

Obviously, exceptions exist. Margaret Thatcher, former Prime Minister of Britain, led her nation to regain much of its lost power and prestige in the 1980s. However, her accomplishments also prove the point. Britain's "Iron Lady" succeeded because SHE GOVERNED LIKE A MAN! Christopher Caldwell, in an article titled "The Feminization of America," published in the *Weekly Standard*, December 23, 1996, concurs:

[T]op leadership positions in any society typically go to the more aggressive, not to the smarter. . . . Women who do make it to the top tend to lead "male" lives.

Thus, it is not a matter that women cannot lead, but that, generally, women *should not* lead. From the beginning, God placed men in the role of leader and provider (Genesis 3:16-19) and women as partners with their husbands and homemakers (Genesis 2:18; 3:16). Paul's instructions in Titus 2:4-5 verify that these roles did not change under the New Covenant.

These scriptures show what God intends us to do. Though some situations prohibit us from filling these roles (such as single-parent families), this arrangement produces the most harmonious relationships and the best results. When we fulfill the roles God gave us, we prepare ourselves better for His Kingdom and our positions there. In the present, by doing our part, we also help our mate and children fulfill their roles more fully.

None of this is possible without the help of God's Holy Spirit. These roles can only be truly fulfilled by a converted Christian. Paul writes in I Corinthians 2:11-12, 14:

Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God. Now we have received . . . the Spirit [which] is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God. . . . But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can they know them, because they are spiritually discerned.

This is why, even among "traditional" families in the world, the tendency exists for men to dominate their wives or women to usurp their husband's authority. Without the strength and abilities God extends to us through His Spirit, people view these roles as confining and impossible, so they seek for "equality," "gender balance" or "gender-neutral" solutions.

Feminism

Some people trace the roots of feminism directly back to Mother Eve in the Garden of Eden because she took the lead in committing the first sin. God rebuked her for it in Genesis 3:16: "Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you." However, God indicted Adam for allowing it: "Because you have heeded the voice of your wife [to commit sin] . . ." (verse 17).

Eve's curse has resulted in the virtual subjugation of women ever since. Until the Enlightenment in the 18th century, women had few rights, if any. Fathers sold their daughters into slavery or wed them to the highest bidder. Wives existed to give the husband pleasure and sons and to keep the house. Many societies insisted that women be veiled in public, and some considered it a criminal act for a woman to walk out of her house without a chaperone. In short, a woman was chattel.

Not every society was this strict. Because of God's law, Israel was one of the most enlightened in this area. Israelite women had certain rights of inheritance, and they could even own land and run businesses (Proverbs 31:16, 24), situations unheard of in other nations. Deborah, an ancient Margaret Thatcher, judged Israel and gave her people forty years of peace (Judges 4:4; 5:31). An Israelite woman's life has frequently been better than her Gentile counterpart's because of Israel's acquaintance with the Bible.

Ironically, modern feminism began in England, the Israelite nation of Ephraim. In 1792 Mary Wollstonecraft wrote *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*, a challenge to the prevailing attitude that women existed only to please men. It called for women to be granted the same freedoms as men in politics, education and work. However, the fledgling feminist movement soon focused on women's suffrage rather than more universal rights and freedoms.

Having achieved this immediate goal in the early 20th century, the women's movement surged with the publication of Simone de Beauvoir's worldwide bestseller, *Le Deuxième Sexe (The Second Sex)*, in 1949. Its premise is that liberating women is liberation for men too, and as a result, many liberal men joined the movement.

In 1963 American Betty Friedan's book, *The Feminine Mystique*, attacked domesticity, the conditioning of women to accept dependence on men and passive roles. Already women were leaving their homes and entering the workplace in droves; in 1994 they comprised 46% of the U.S. labor force.

In 1966 Friedan and others founded the National Organization for Women (NOW), and yet other women began forming into local groups to fight for the cause of women's liberation. They marched, agitated and sued to overturn laws and practices that they felt subjugated, demeaned or restricted their sex. They concentrated on contract and property rights, labor issues, contraception and abortion.

Roe v. Wade, the landmark abortion case before the Supreme Court, gave feminism an impetus still visible today. Abortion distilled into a woman's "choice"—without regard for the "rights" of the unborn—and thus the Court handled it as a First Amendment right rather than a crime, murder. This ruling promoted feminism to become the law of the land.

Such gains came in tandem with the sexual revolution, civil rights advances and economic circumstances that "dictated" two-income families. These factors fed off each other, helping to produce the social chaos we see today.

A New Wrinkle

Despite these feminist gains, the mood of the American people swung toward the right in the early 1990s. The public grew tired of and increasingly vocal against the militant, radical feminism sponsored by NOW and other left-wing women's groups. The movement had to take a new tack.

In reviewing feminism's emphases in the '70s and '80s, the leadership recognized that stressing equality had caused polarization and distrust between the sexes. Their shrill demands, though met, had produced resentment. They needed a new angle to appear more mainstream.

In response, the women's movement of the '90s emphasizes the *differences* between men and women. Such recent books as Carol Gilligan's *In a Different Voice*, John Gray's *Men Are from Mars, Women Are from Venus* and Deborah Tannen's *You Just Don't Understand* have led the way in "raising consciousness" about distinctively feminine strengths and virtues. They are reviving traditional roles for women, but with a twist. Christopher Caldwell writes, "The new feminized vision is often the traditional sexist stereotype, overlaid with a shrill man-hating ideology."

It seems to be working, if the 1996 presidential election is any indication. The Clinton-Gore ticket considered a woman's vote more valuable than a man's, and this is in a way true because 52% of voters are women. Using women's stereotypical behavior as a guide, the Democratic candidates supported women's issues and shied away from reasoned positions on various topics, opting for more emotional stances.

They also knew that women tend to follow two general rules in voting: 1) They make up their minds later in the election, and 2) their allegiance to political parties is weaker. Clinton-Gore kept their noses clean—especially in the last several weeks before the election—emoted about the needs of "soccer moms," and rode a landslide victory into the White House primarily on the back of the women's vote.

The private sector has jumped on the bandwagon too. Businesses are more concerned about convincing consumers to switch brands than they are about getting them to buy their products. Advertisers know that women are just as fickle in the marketplace as in the voting booth, while men display a "puppy-doggish loyalty" to brands. So what do they do? Switch the focus of the ads to appeal to women!

Psychologists have found that women respond better to emotional appeals than to hard, rational arguments. So, for instance, if a company sells toothpaste, it drops its ads that say, "Four out of five dentists surveyed . . ." and runs new ones that say, "How could anyone resist a smile so bright?" Even products typically associated with men, such as auto parts, are being pedaled to women under the guise of safety, reliability and looks, rather than their actual effectiveness.

What to Expect

No matter how they must appear in order to gain power, radical feminists will not be content until they feel women have "arrived"—until they are the dominant sex. At this juncture, a slogan of the Feminist Majority Foundation is "Half the World, Half the Power." The United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing, China, in September 1995, lists "establishing gender balance in governmental bodies" as feminism's primary goal.

We must not overlook that some of feminism's victories have been worthwhile. Women should not be treated as inferior. Women may be physically weaker and in some cases unable to do certain jobs, but they can also be more intelligent and more capable than men in other areas. Spiritually, men and women have equal potential; Peter calls married couples "heirs together of the grace of life" (I Peter 3:7).

Men and women should have equal rights under the law, according to what God has revealed in His Word. Women should be able to buy and sell property, run businesses, make contracts, pursue education and hold jobs at equal pay as men can. However, all this must take second place to the vastly more important spiritual development that is enhanced by filling the divinely ordained roles of each sex.

Isaiah 3:16-26; 4:1 and Amos 4:1-3 paint rather uncomplimentary pictures of women in our time. Both predict captivity and great humiliation to the women who oppress the poor and needy, satiate their desires and proudly vaunt their power. We need not be terribly observant to recognize that we have reached such a state in our society. It will not be long before God acts to correct it.

The genie is out of the bottle. Radical feminism will not go away until Christ returns to usher in true cooperation and proper balance between men and women. When He sets up His government, "the times of restoration of all things" will begin (Acts 3:21), and He will declare the eternal end of the battle of the sexes. Then it will not be a woman's world—or a man's world—but God's world!