

270 Scripture and Feminism

We are currently examining feminism in the light of God's Word, and have identified the two key male-female ground-rules: our spiritual equality in God's sight, and our distinctive roles in practice. These ground-rules are expressed first in marriage and parenthood, and then in modified form in wider society.

Feminism certainly has some grounds for complaint concerning male dominance, which has no place in God's thinking in any shape or form. Polygamy for example apparently became common from early days, (hitting a low point with Solomon for example (I Kings 11.1-8)), yet this practice is clearly far removed from God's intention of monogamy, in which there is to be no dominance by either party (eg., Genesis 2.24 and Ephesians 5.31 / I Timothy 3.2 & 12 / I Corinthians 7.2).

Other forms of men's misbehaviour towards women, in the home or workplace, are also of course simply wrong, and strengthen the feminist view that men are sex-crazed bullies while women are the helpless innocents. But there is often rather more going on than such a soundbite suggests.

In student life for example, or in a stressful workplace where close working relationships develop and unsatisfactory relationships may exist at home, temptation on both the male and female sides, fostered by inappropriate dress, comments or behaviour, can easily arise. False assumptions thrive, such as "everyone does this" (though they don't), or "a bit on the side is harmless fun" (though it isn't), fanned by constant stories of misbehaving politicians or "celebrities", and ever more lurid story lines on TV soaps and films. Naivety, folly and hypocrisy can abound in such an environment, with those involved, the women as well as the men, surely bearing some responsibility when things go wrong. After all, "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3.23).

An on-side feminist is likely to reject the scriptural teaching about spiritual headship within marriage, (because it is assumed, wrongly, that such headship is a euphemism for male dominance), and may tend to be at least uncomfortable over motherhood. We hear for example strident talk of "pro-choice" – that is, the right of a woman to choose to abort the foetus within her womb that is seen as some sort of intrusive parasite getting in the way of her life. Such a demand ignores the fact that she had just such choice before allowing conception to occur in the first place.

The prevalence of "working mothers" in employment (not wrong in itself when kept in its place), can also give rise to the notion that being a home-based wife and mother these days is somehow odd, degrading or – (nothing could be worse!) – "outdated". We see governments offering "free" childcare so that Mum can get quickly back into work after childbirth, and Dad now having paid paternity leave (notice the blurring of the traditional mother-father roles here). Yet do we not generally find in Scripture that the roles of wife and mother are the usual and first call for a married woman as far as the Lord God is concerned? (eg., Titus 2.1-6). Can we imagine Elkanah taking time off to become expert with Baby Samuel's nappies, or Hannah leaving the boy with child-minders so she could get back to what really mattered - her paid job (I Samuel

1.20)?! What nonsense! – but sadly that approach is now widespread in our society. No society that sees motherhood as an interference and interruption, often a feminist theme, is going to thrive for long.

We also hear incessant demands for “rights” from feminists and others – women’s rights, civil rights, workers’ rights, fathers’ rights and so on. But hasn’t such talk of “rights” only become necessary because “the two great commandments” (as in Mark 12.28-34) have been set aside in human societies, so arrogantly and foolishly? If we still sought to take God’s Word seriously – by seeking to love God with all our being, and to look out for one another as much as we look out for ourselves – this “me-and-my-rights” approach would not exist, and even feminism itself would not exist for it would have no valid grounds for complaint.

We finish this brief scriptural review of feminism by mentioning “Three Rs”, which are simply some ingredients within those two “great commandments”: namely the need on both sides, in all male-female relationships, for Responsibility, for Respect, and for Restraint. These three Rs ensure that male-female relationships, both inside and outside marriage, are kept in good order, and provide a sound scriptural framework for allowing feminism’s legitimate concerns to be properly addressed, and for its less legitimate concerns to be properly rebuffed.

Praise God, He did make us male and female! – and He has set out in His Word all that that is to mean in practice. Truly, O Lord, “Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path (Psalm 119.105). God still knows best.

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