

Chapter 12.

Woman in the Law

The acupuncture rationale sees disease as resulting from an unbalanced energy flow. This theory sees dual forces of "yin" and "yang" moving through twelve meridians. "Yin" is female and negative, while "yang" is male and positive. The acupuncturist carefully selects the points for his needles, then inserts them to stimulate a balanced flow of energy through "yin" and "yang." The "yin" (female) is front body, the "yang" (male) is back.

This information, gleaned from a skilled acupuncturist, reminded me, among other things, that the Lord said to Moses,

"...you shall see my back; but my face shall not be seen." Exodus 33:23

The context was the giving of the Law to the people of Israel. The back provides structure, strength, and support to the body, while the front provides its social function and expression. In the letter of the Law we see the moral structure of our humanity in the context of the strength and authority of God, the Father.

In the living Word of God, the Lord Jesus Christ, we see "the image of the invisible God" (Colossians 1:15), "For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily" (Colossians 2:9), and "he reflects the glory of God and bears the very stamp of his nature, upholding the universe by the word of power" (Hebrews 1:3). In the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ we have the full expression of the moral character of God--both authority and submission, law and grace, prohibition and liberty. In him is the perfect harmony of masculinity-femininity. He is the full expression of the love of God "which binds everything together in perfect harmony" (Colossians 3:14). "He is both the first principle and the upholding principle of the whole scheme of creation" (Colossians 1:17, Phillips paraphrase). The Lord Jesus Christ is life's synthesis!

"For it is the God who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ."

We are told that Moses had a face-to-face relationship with God, that God spoke to Moses "as a man speaks to his friend" (Exodus 33:11). The Gospel of John tells us (1:18) that "no one has ever seen God; the only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known." Hebrews 11:23-28 tells the story of Moses' faith in the promised Messiah, which sustained and motivated him through insurmountable difficulties which "he endured as seeing him who is invisible." Moses saw beyond the letter of the Law, to the living reality of the Lord Jesus Christ who was to come, therefore, he had an intimate relationship with God.

In the new freedom of God's grace to us in his Son, we find provision to change our perspective from the futility of trying to please God in our own energy. Knowing the perfection of God's moral law, and our hopeless inability to keep it, we delight in the freedom of knowing God through the Lord Jesus Christ:

"And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being changed into his likeness from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit."
II Cor. 3:18

1. With unveiled face: no fig leaves; no hidden agenda; no cringing fear; openly transparent.
2. Cherishing the face-to-face relationship once known to Moses, now available to us!
3. Beholding Him changes us!

There were godly women, as well, who envisioned a God-anointed Savior, the Messiah. As did Moses, these women looked beyond the letter of the Law to its fulfillment in Christ. Such were Anna the prophetess, Elizabeth the cousin of Mary, and Mary the mother of Jesus. "Now the man Moses was very meek, more than all the men that were on the face of the earth" (Numbers 12:3). Anna, Elizabeth, and Mary are pictured as gentle, devout women of great spiritual beauty.

"Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth." Matthew 5:5

These humble persons were in stark contrast with the religious leaders who disfigured their faces "that their fasting might be seen by men," who blew trumpets in the synagogues to announce their almsgiving. Unsubmissive to the Lawgiver, they used his Law to gain personal prestige, and, blinded by their own self-centered perspective, they crucified the Lord of glory who was prefigured in the Law.

The Law was not given to redeem, but to reveal the need for redemption. Our failure to keep the law reveals our spiritual poverty, our yen for rebellion, and above all our self-centeredness. Law is a necessary containment of evil, but it is not the cure. The Law given by God to Moses contains three basic elements:

1. God's intent for our humanity, the moral framework within which we may image his character;
2. The stimulus to our sin nature, which produces either rebellion or humility;
3. In its sacrificial offerings, the symbolic revelation of God's redemption to be consummated in the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ.

In the Law, as in all of Scripture, we have God's view of sexual distinctives. A Law based on equality of worth. The Law challenges our self-centeredness by asserting the prior claim of the Creator-God "Thou shalt have no other gods before me", love thy neighbor as thyself: equal responsibility and privilege. In it there are also the distinctives of sexual function based on the creative purpose of God's own people, imaging God's fatherhood as well as His nurturance. I hope to demonstrate that Jesus and the apostles viewed the Old Testament Scriptures from this perspective.

The effect of human reasoning divorced from the revelation of God's Spirit is alienation from truth. It is like boarding a ship without a rudder. God's Law, interpreted by human reasoning, led to the crucifixion of his Son. Our view of God determines our perspective on ourselves and others. There is, in fact, no meaningful way to assess human equality apart from the creature-to-Creator relationship. If we do not belong to God, then we must compete for worth and status.

It is understandable, then, that much of the extra-biblical rabbinical teaching and tradition misapplied and misinterpreted the Divine intention of the Law as it relates to the male-female relationship. However, it is Jesus himself who warns us that we must expect to be judged by the same criterion by which we judge others. So is the male chauvinism of which we accuse the discriminating rabbis any more distorting to truth than the defensiveness born of envy and self-pity? A hostile misuse of Scripture and lack of reverence for God and others is often evident in feminist ranks (both non-Christian and Christian, sad to say). It seems to me it is one thing to establish right, another to fight for our rights.

With a light touch, but telling implications, *Christianity Today's* Eutyclus, March 16, 1973, twits a feminist method of Scripture interpretation. I quote in part:

"Too long we men have been silent about the sexist nature of the Bible. Without question an

anti-masculine stance characterizes the Scriptures in general. Paul, often pictured by feminists as the original male chauvinist pig, is in actuality a detractor of men. He boldly asserts that in Adam all die (1 Corinthians 15:22). If you will check the data closely in Genesis 3, you will find that it was mother Eve who took the first forbidden nibble. Paul blithely sails over this evidence and fixes the blame on poor old Adam. Gentlemen, we've been had. So there you have the whole unhappy business. It just goes to show that a little proof-texting and some phony exegesis will prove anything."--copyright 1973 by *Christianity Today* . Used by permission.

"Eutychus might ask, facetiously, "...and what about the iniquity of the mother?"

"It begins right at the beginning. Apparently Miriam and Zipporah got to Moses and muddled his mind. In Genesis 4:26 he comments about the third generation of the race that "at that time men began to call upon the name of the Lord." Moses apparently assumes that women either (a) did not need to call upon the name of the Lord or (b) were already doing so. The passage is an obvious, unforgivable slight to men."

"And who are the perverted in the city of Sodom? The men, of course (Genesis 19:4). Presumably the women had kept their virtue in the midst of all this masculine depravity."

"Moses' crowning insult to men is recorded in the first chapter of Numbers. When it was necessary to gird for war to take the promised land, notice who was numbered to go. Right again--the men! Women were too valuable to expend in war."

"And when the writer of Proverbs wants to describe wisdom to his son, does he picture a bearded sage with snowy locks? Surprise--wisdom is a *she* (Proverbs 1:20)!"(Copyright 1973 by *Christianity Today*. Used by permission.

Under God, male headship-responsibility is as supportive of woman as female submission is of man God is no chauvinist!

In Exodus chapter 20 the neuter language gender is consistently used throughout this recording of the Decalogue, with only three instances of sexual differentiation. The first occurs in verse 5: "You shall not bow down to them or serve them; for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me...". The second is with reference to Sabbath-keeping, verse 10, which is addressed to male responsibility as head of his household, and does not specify his wife's responsibility. The third, v. 17, has to do with covetousness, and again does not specify the woman's responsibility.

The prophetic pronouncement of Genesis 3:16, "yet your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you", assists our understanding of this passage. God is again addressing the headship responsibility of the male in the individual family unit, and the extended influence of man as father in society. The man whose worship is pure and undiverted from God will be the first link in a chain of family and societal healing. His headship in the home will be characterized by a reverent dependence upon God for the awesome responsibility of providing for his family in every dimension and for setting their moral compass.

If in his headship the man demands worship which belongs only to God, or evidences self-worship by materialism, self-indulgence, tyranny or arrogance, he will initiate attitudes in his children which will metastasize through them into society.

How responsible, then, is the mother and/or wife whose desires are a motivating influence, a catalyst giving incentive, negative or positive, to the man! Headship is God's way of assuring governmental responsibility in the family unit, and the extended influence of the family in society. It does not establish sovereign rights. They belong only to God. Neither does it absolve others from accountability. The somewhat different functional perspective of mother and father are just the complement needed to assure a balanced and sensitive approach to

parenting.

Eutychus will surely raise a question about the sabbath day as delineated in Exodus 20:10:

"...but the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God; in it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your manservant, or your maidservant, or your cattle, or the sojourner who is within your gates..."

Looks like a field day for male chauvinists--everyone gets a vacation except mom! Apparently, however, even the most astute rabbis failed to note the potential in this passage. Or could it be that with genuine reverence for the "one flesh" unity of marriage they concluded this commandment was addressed to man and woman equally, holding the man governmentally responsible for family compliance.

One more commandment, the last, is addressed to the male:

"You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his manservant, or his maidservant, or his ox, or his ass, or anything that is your neighbor's" (Exodus 20:17).

We will not be tempted to ask whether women are free to covet, aware of the sober words of the Apostle Paul in Colossians 3:5, "Put to death therefore what is earthly in you...and covetousness which is idolatry." Covetousness is the corruption of worship, and so we are again reminded that male headship-responsibility is authenticated in his worship of God alone. In this, too, he is the pace-setter for the family unit.

I believe the fact that this commandment is addressed to the man is an acknowledgment of him as the aggressor and initiator. In this case, it is not only a safeguard to his worship, but a protection for woman, who stands to suffer much from male covetousness.

The antidote to that root of all evil, the worship of our own independent agenda, is a God-centered perspective born of purity of worship. In this, man is to set the pace. This is to be the foundation, the cornerstone of his headship-responsibility.

Similar sexual distinctives are seen in the Levitical procedure. With a few significant exceptions, male animals are required for sin and guilt offerings--again acknowledging male headship-responsibility. Exceptions are found in Exodus 4:27, where a female animal is required "if any one of the common people sins," contrasted with sins of a ruler, and Numbers 15:27 and Leviticus 5:1-6 where a female animal is offered for sins committed "unwittingly." Again, this simply acknowledges the female symbolism for the complement to headship-responsibility. It cannot and does not imply inferiority, but distinctiveness of function. God is no respecter of persons!

"If a man's offering is a sacrifice of peace offering, if he offers an animal from the herd male or female, he shall offer it without blemish before the Lord" (Leviticus 3:1).

Peace, it's wonderful! How many times I have wished I could trace with the Apostle Paul the Old Testament passages which led him to conclude, as he does in Galatians 3:28: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus." It may be the above passage was one from which the Spirit taught him that in Christ there are no "dividing walls of hostility." Christ Jesus is our peace. In Ephesians chapter 2, we read He himself [Christ] is our peace who made both groups into one. "If you are Christ's," Paul says, "then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise" (Galatians 3:29), and children of the "free woman" (Galatians 4:31).

To quote C.H.M. on Leviticus: "The language of the peace offering is, 'it is meet that we should make merry and be glad, let us eat and be merry.'" Through Christ Jesus we have peace with God, and having peace with

God we have fellowship and communion with all the saints. There are no second-class citizens in the kingdom of heaven, nor in the Church of Jesus Christ. "For in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God" (Galatians 3:26), spiritually autonomous in identity, with mutual access to God, equal status as his children, and joint-heirs to every spiritual resource.

In the burnt offering, the Levitical priests could dispense their responsibilities as representatives of a sinning people; they symbolized this responsibility in the offering of a male animal. In the peace offering they witness the pleasure of God with a people at peace with him through obedience and repentance. This is the shared fellowship and communion with the God of all flesh.

Another passage which appears demeaning is Leviticus 12:2, "If a woman conceives, and bears a male child, then she shall be unclean seven days"; verse 4, "then she shall continue for thirty-three days in the blood of her purifying"; verse 5, "If she bears a female child, then she shall be unclean two weeks, as in her menstruation; and she shall continue in the blood of her purifying for sixty-six days."

An article in *Look* magazine, April 21, 1970, "How to Choose Your Baby's Sex" suggests a probable reason for the Levitical procedure. Dr. Shettles, a distinguished gynecologist, has made observations which indicate "the male is the weaker sex--even before conception." On the basis of his research, he offers procedures for sex-selection. I quote in part, first from the procedure for female offspring: "No abstinence from intercourse is necessary, until after the final intercourse two or three days before ovulation. A low sperm count increases the possibility of female offspring, so frequent intercourse, prior to the final try two or three days before ovulation, cannot hurt and may actually help."

And from the procedure for male offspring: "Prior abstinence is necessary: intercourse should be avoided completely from the beginning of the monthly cycle until the day of ovulation. This helps ensure maximum sperm count, a factor favoring androsperms."

It would appear that the Levitical procedure may be part of God's plan for keeping nature in balance. Another passage which appears to be discriminatory against females is Leviticus 27:2-8:

"When a man makes a special vow of persons to the Lord at your valuation, then shall your valuation of a male from twenty years old up to sixty years old shall be fifty shekels of silver, according to the shekel of the sanctuary. If the person is a female, your valuation shall be thirty shekels. If the person is from five years old up to twenty years your valuation shall be for a male twenty shekels and for a female ten shekels. If the person is from a month old up to five years old, your valuation shall be for a male five shekels of silver, and for a female your valuation shall be three shekels of silver. And if the person is sixty years old and upward, then your valuation for a male shall be fifteen shekels, and for a female ten shekels. And if a man is too poor to pay your valuation, then he shall bring the person before the priest, and the priest shall value him; according to the ability of him who vowed the priest shall value him."

Taxes, taxes! The Jewish community had them too. And if these tax evaluations appear demeaning, think how degrading it is for women and children to be considered tax exemptions! Obviously, however, these tax evaluations were based on earning power, past, present or future, and the male was expected to be the bread winner.

The foregoing is, of course, a cursory examination of the Law as it relates to sexuality. I offer it simply as a positive mode of interpreting the intent of the God who made us for himself, in whose eyes male and female are equal in identity, but different in function. I believe it evident that both Jesus and the apostles so viewed the Old Testament Scriptures, and that the full-orbed humanity of woman is unthreatened from Genesis to Revelation. God's Law acknowledges our spiritual mutuality as well as our sexual distinctives, and in it we are given a system of control over our propensity to misuse our humanity as sexual beings. The Law itself is perfect, but it must be interpreted, motivated, implemented and fulfilled by the Spirit of God.

And what was the response of the people to the Law given by God through Moses? "And all the people

answered together and said, 'All that the Lord has spoken we will do'" (Exodus 19:8). So they came, both men and women; all who were of a willing heart...dedicating an offering of gold to the Lord.

God's revelation is, of course, always a consistent fabric of Truth. His creative intent for his people never varies. Since the infiltration of evil in Eden, God has been restraining our rebellion, but always before the coming of our Redeemer there was the continuing promise of his advent, and the redemption which would follow. Those who anticipated his coming by faith offered up the Levitical sacrifices as symbolic of the Messianic atonement. For others, it was simply a performance, a nod to God, a bid for social prestige, a salve to conscience--all the gestures common to contemporary religiosity.

To God's men, then as now, the Law was not a pedestal for the display of their power and self-righteousness. To God's woman, then as now, the Law was not a put-down, but a guardian of the precious gift of womanhood. Proverbs chapter 31, most eloquent of all descriptions of a woman of dignity, was written by Lemuel, king of Massa, taught to him by his mother.

In the Old Testament women were given redemptive positions suitable to their gifts. Miriam, sister of Moses, is highly revered even in rabbinical tradition. Deborah was a capable judge. Two Old Testament books are named for Ruth and Esther, noble and godly women. Rahab, the redeemed harlot joins Sarah, wife of Abraham, in the Hebrews chapter 11 hall of fame, and is listed in the genealogy of Jesus Christ. But then, as now, the woman who tries to establish her own identity, to function as a slave to her own self-centered demands, demeans her womanhood and earns the ill-repute that breaks her heart and infects her society.

Teach us thy way, O Lord. Teach us thy way! And restore in us your image, through the Living Presence of the Lord Jesus Christ!

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