



*The way men have treated women throughout history is nothing to boast about. The gospel is our only hope.*

## *It's a Man's World! (to Our Shame)*

*by Desmond Ford*

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he Bible's first prophecy (which foretells future conditions in a fallen world), says that women will be subject to unceasing sorrow and oppression (Gen 3:16).

In a sinful world, both sexes must endure pain and sorrow. But the prophecy says that because of cruelty born in men's hearts due to the Fall, women would suffer the most.

Will Durant said, "It was a man's world, legally, socially, and morally."<sup>1</sup> Though he was speaking about England in the late eighteenth century, his statement is true of all time, and everywhere. It is said that man's greatest sin is "his inhumanity to man." Surely, man's inhumanity to woman is his greatest sin.

(I am speaking of other than the source of all sin: our neglect of God. To neglect God, who has given us life, abilities, and all good things, is truly the greatest sin.)

### **The Gospel Brings Progress**

Because of the Christian gospel there have been slow, but sure changes in the way society regards and treats women. Some progress has been made. The New Testament is revolutionary but just: "There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no

longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3:28 NRSV).

Paul's statement does not deny the scriptural teaching that women and men, though equal, are distinct in nature and gifts. Sexual apparatus is not the only difference between the sexes. Much of the charm, beauty, joy, and danger of life exists because the hormonal nature of women is so different and richer than that of men.

Scripture is not opposed to the teachings of modern feminism when those teachings strive for what is right—equality. But Scripture opposes those teachings which seek to deny sexual differences.

### **First Example**

Let me give you two examples of how women are treated. They serve as illustrations of how women have suffered throughout history.

A front-page headline in the March 12, 1989 Dallas, *Morning News* said: "Ritual Slaying Exemplifies Cultural Chasm in Mideast." In a village on the West Bank, a thirty-six-year-

old woman, unmarried, was found to be pregnant. Her father choked her to death (she chose this over beheading). The father announced this death to the three hundred villagers. "I have washed this stain from my family," he said. The men shook his hand and congratulated him.

Contrary to Islamic law, the corpse was not washed or shrouded. No one said prayers over her. She was dumped into an unmarked grave. All her possessions were burned, along with all pictures of her. She ceased to exist.

### **Second Example**

Robert Hughes offers some insight into the 'romantic' prelude to Australian aboriginal matrimony in the nineteenth century:

In the obtaining of a female partner the first step they take, romantic as it may seem, is to fix on some female of a tribe at enmity with their own.... The monster then stupefies her with blows, which he inflicts with his club, on her head, back, neck, and indeed every part of her body, then snatching up one of her arms, he drags her, streaming with blood from her wounds, through the woods, over stones, rocks,



hills and logs, with all the violence and determination of a savage, till he reaches his tribe.<sup>2</sup>

Hughes continues, "The unalterable fact of their tribal life was that women had no rights at all and could choose nothing.... Both before and after [marriage], she was merely a root-grubbing, shell-gathering chattel."<sup>3</sup>

### An Invisible History

It is almost impossible for us in the twentieth century to imagine how



bad the life situation for women has been throughout history. It is not the simplest thing to even gain information on this topic.

Recently, I worked in a library containing thousands upon thousands of books. I was staggered to discover, as I reviewed works of history and sociology, how rarely this topic is included. Traditionally, most books have been written by men, so this issue is not a favorite theme. There are, of course, glorious exceptions.

Most people are familiar with Helen Keller. Many are unaware that in her childhood it was practically unknown for women to attend college. One biography says, "For the first time in the history of the world, women had been admitted to Oxford as equals to men, only a very short time before Helen's birth. Not until 1894 had Radcliffe College in Cambridge, America, been open for girls."<sup>4</sup>

This inequality in education was also true of most other areas of existence, including the right to live, to own property, to separate from a husband, to vote.

How many contemporary young women are aware that only in this century has the right to vote become commonplace for women? Were it not for the news media, many would not know that in nations such as Saudi Arabia, women are not permitted to drive, or appear in public without a veil. And all this in the 1990s!

### Marriage and Sex

Often the worst unfairness is in sexual relationships and marriage. Adam Smith wrote: "In every society where the distinction of ranks has once been completely established, there have always been two different schemes or systems of morality at the same time; one of which may be called the strict or austere, the other the liberal, or, if you will, the loose system. The former is generally admired and revered by the common people, the latter ... more esteemed and adopted by what are called people of fashion."

These two systems usually find their chief exemplification in the opposite sexes. Durant says of the nineteenth century, "The double standard flourished. A thousand bordellos served

tumescent men, but those men branded female unchastity as a crime, which only death could atone"<sup>5</sup>

Of the eighteenth century Durant says, "In Boswell's own circle it was taken as quite ordinary that men should occasionally go to a prostitute. In the aristocracy—even in the Royal Family—adultery was widespread. The Duke of Grafton, while chief minister, lived openly with Nancy Parsons, and took her to the opera in the face of the Queen. Divorce was rare; it could not be obtained except by act of Parliament, and as this cost 'several thousand pounds,' it was the luxury of the rich; only 132 such grants were recorded in the years 1670-1800."<sup>6</sup>

### Divorce

From Old Testament times to modern times, as a rule, only men had the right to divorce. Only in this century, after five millenniums of supposed civilization, has there been a widespread change in this inequity.

Divorce is a calamity. Yet it is an amputation that at times, sadly, must be performed to avoid death.

Often, conscientious persons foolishly fulfill one duty at the cost of sacrificing another. Is it true a wife has a duty to remain at the side of her husband, even if he constantly menaces her very existence? God hates divorce (Mal 2:16). God hates murder even more. If a wife has to divorce her husband to save her own life, so be it.

Many husbands have so abused their wives that divorce is but a gentle reprimand compared to what they deserve.

My male ego was shattered and my ideals were affronted last year. I was studying background on certain nineteenth century English characters. I read it was perfectly legal, then, for a man to regularly beat his wife. However, the stick he used was to be no thicker than two fingers combined.

### Home and Family

Where God does not dwell in the heart, the devil does. The heart, like nature, abhors a vacuum. Not one of us is free, in the absolute sense. We serve either one supernatural master or the other.

Either our Maker and Redeemer



has been brought within our heart, or we have no control over the natural, tumultuous passions of unregenerated being. Too often anger, cruelty, and lust rule the life that knows not God, though the specific passions depend on our individual personality.

Remember, only in our own day has domestic rape been recognized as a crime; yet it has been an almost universal practice for millennia. Man has, throughout history, used his superior force selfishly to wreak his animal lust upon his spouse regardless of her desires in the matter.

It is a great wonder to me that more men have not been poisoned by their spouses.

The condition of home and family is the best reflector of the state of society. One reason we can give for civilization's rapid deterioration is the breakdown of home and family. Multiplied divorce, parallel domestic problems, adolescent suicide, and drug addiction, all rip at the fabric of society.

### Polygamy

History gives other illustrations of the difference between men and women. Wherever a culture has not professed Christianity, polygamy has prevailed. Harems in some cultures were perfectly legitimate. How many cultures do you know where a woman kept a string of men as sexual partners? Women are usually more inclined to monogamy. Men by nature before conversion seem to be polygamous whether they practice polygamy or not.

### War

War is another example. How many great wars have been triggered by the devices of women? How many new wars would begin if the final decision was made by women?

It is appropriate, while thinking of war, to ask about the result of masses of men living together (in the military) without the ameliorating influence of mothers, wives, sisters, and daughters.

Those who have lived in military units know the answer well. The tendency to moral deterioration usually prevails.

We like to think that only the enemy is guilty of torture and rape during war. The conclusive facts of history

testify otherwise.

And what is true of men in war-time is in general true of men in peacetime society. Males need the softening influence of the other sex.

### Superiority

Male pride has inadequate grounds for its pretensions of superiority. In heaven's view, physical forcefulness ranks very low. High moral caliber is best reflected in kindness, unselfishness, and genuine religiosity. Measured by this standard, woman is often supreme in society.

The New Testament witnesses that not one woman spoke against Christ. Women have always vastly outnumbered men in following Christ.

Male claims to natural superiority are frequently false. The masculine boast of superior vitality does not match the death statistics. In the U.S., the average widow outlives her spouse for nearly twenty years.

### Christ Our Pattern

Has this article stooped to the folly of suggesting the female of the species is comprised of angels in human form? No. Women too are fallen creatures. They were made the highest and can fall the lowest. Lilies fester worse than weeds.

This article is a reminder: the signs of a fallen world and fallen human nature are cruelty, oppression, greed, and inequity. These signs have been seen through all history in the relationship between the sexes.

Only in Christ can the situation be put right.

- It is impossible for a truly Christian man to remain unmoved by the injustices done to women throughout all of human history.
- The Christian man's ideals will transcend those of secular chivalry.
- He will think of the divine love that invented sex, and thus provided for matrimony and motherhood.

Christ, who numbered many women among his disciples, in his last agonies remembered and provided for his mother. In his resurrected glory he tarried on earth to minister to a weeping Mary.

Here, as in all else, Christ is a

worthy pattern for all his followers ❖

### Footnotes

1. Will Durant, *Rousseau and Revolution*, p. 730.
2. Robert Hughes, *Fatal Shore*, p. 15.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 16.
4. G.W. and Anne Tibble, *Helen Keller*, p. 66.
5. Will Durant, *Rousseau and Revolution*, p. 731.
6. *Ibid.*, pp. 731-732.

