

“If Women Governed the World”

Ephesians 5:21-33

Hyattstown Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)

May 12, 2019 (Mother’s Day)

“If Women Governed the World” ...

This is not an apology for Senators Kamala, Kristen, Amy, Elizabeth, or Congresswoman Tulsi, all seeking the highest office in our land.

On Mother’s Day, this is more an apology for women in general, if I may do so without appearing to be condescending. To the contrary, I have often stated what I firmly believe: “If women governed the world, we would all enjoy a more peaceful co-existence.”

Of course, history would quickly dispute the assertion that conflict would be obsolete if women governed the world. Cleopatra, in ancient Egypt, was not exactly known for her gentle pacifism. Devout Christian Joan of Arc was the savior of France, but the sworn enemy of England. Corazon Aquino led the Philippine rebellion against autocratic Ferdinand Marcos following the assassination of her popular husband.

Recorded history, before and after Christ, abounds with the bellicose behavior of women warriors. But it also replete with Presidents, Prime Ministers, and Queens who have championed harmonious internal and external relations. Britain and Bangladesh, Norway and New Zealand, Lithuania and Liberia, Germany and Sri Lanka have all beaten the United States to the punch, to use popular but pugilistic imagery.

The point is that women are generally known for such traits as caring, nurturing, sensitivity, and acceptance, while men are generally known for such traits as competitiveness, self-confidence,

aggression, even rebelliousness. Women are more inclined to want to engage in dialogue, while men are more inclined to want to engage in action. Women tend to talk things through; men tend to push things along. Though some social scientists insist that the genders are more alike than different, that women and men have more in common as human beings than they do in contrast with one another, it remains true that the social behavior of each is more predictable than not: in War and Peace! My friend William Sloane Coffin once preached on Mother's Day that "the woman most in need of liberation is the woman in every man"—the WOMAN in every MAN!

John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, said: "I learned more about Christianity from my mother than from all the theologians of England." So, too, for me, as I think about it. The primary lessons to which I was exposed in divinity school really only confirmed what my mother hoped to pass on to me: caring, nurturing, sensitivity, and acceptance.

Now isn't that a fair description of the Jesus we know and claim to emulate?! In my book—the "good Book"—the "woman" in him was liberated in Jesus!

Dorothy Leigh Sayer was an English novelist and Christian advocate in the first half of the last century. She offered this take on Jesus:

"Perhaps it is no wonder that the women were first at the Cradle and last at the Cross. They had never known a man like this Man—there never has been such another. A prophet and teacher who never nagged at them, never flattered or coaxed or patronized, who rebuked without querulousness and praised without condescension, who took their questions and arguments seriously, who never mapped out their sphere for them." The "woman" in him was liberated in Jesus!

So then, on Mother's Day, explain the most troublesome passage in all of the New Testament regarding the status of women: "Wives, be subject to your husbands." Explain the infamous verse that

seems to so blatantly fly in the face of political correctness: *“Wives be subject to your husbands as you are to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, just as Christ is the head of the Church...”*

In the Christian context, if we are going to ponder a world governed by women, we need to understand the context of a statement that seemingly pushes beyond the bounds of socially acceptable practice in our time.

Do not so quickly write off the Apostle Paul as a hopeless misogynist. He is preaching an ideal that illuminates the immoral world of his time, with the light of purity. In the Jewish culture, a woman had no rights whatsoever, no recourse. She was nothing more than a possession of her husband, who could ban her from relationship for any whim or cause at all. The situation in the Greek and Roman cultures was worse. The woman had no role in public; home and family life were nearly non-existent; women were deprived of self-esteem, and reduced to treatment as only “things”.

Against this background, in this passage, Paul is not stating the view that every man held. He was inviting women and men into a new purity and partnership in the marriage relationship. We cannot overstate, then, the cleansing effect that Christianity had on home life in the ancient world, and thus the positive changes that evolved for women. Remember that, like all of the early disciples, Paul originally thought that the Second Coming of Christ was imminent. After many years passed, he realized that he was living not in a temporary situation, but in a permanent one. By the time he was advising the Ephesians and other nascent congregations, Paul had concluded that no relationship was more precious than marriage, and that it was comparable only to the relationship between Christ and the Church.

So we must not make the mistake of reading the passage as if it defends the subjugation or subordination of one gender by the other, or one person by another. It is not about control. It is about love: purifying, caring, sacrificial love. In other words, it is about the kind of love that Christ has for the Church.

If women governed the world—that is to say if caring, nurturing, sensitivity and acceptance ruled relationships—young women in America might not be held hostage in isolated households of horror for years on end. Particularly if the woman in every man was liberated.

If women governed the world—that is to say if caring, nurturing, sensitivity and acceptance ruled relationships—young African girls might not be abducted, forcibly violated, and stoned to death. Particularly if the woman in every man was liberated.

If women governed the world—that is to say if caring, nurturing, sensitivity and acceptance ruled relationships—such basic rights as education, property ownership, employment opportunity, equal pay for equal work might each have a greater chance to see the light of day. Particularly if the woman in every man was liberated.

If women governed the world—that is to say if caring, nurturing, sensitivity and acceptance ruled relationships—the “me too” movement might never have been necessary. Particularly if the woman in every man was liberated.

According to Laura Schlessinger, in the book entitled *“The Proper Care and Feeding of Husbands”*: “Anyone who has had exposure to babies and children can tell you that boys and girls respond differently to the world right from the start. Give both a doll, and the girl will cuddle it, while the boy will more likely use it as a projectile or weapon. Give them two dolls, and the girl will have the dolls talking to each other, while the boy will have them engaged in combat.”

It’s no wonder that women were first at the Cradle, and last at the Cross.

If women governed the world....