

The Feminist Movement (9) What is Our Final Authority?

"In the late twentieth century, bereft of the biblical limitations by a generation that has turned away from Christian faith; history pursues its mad career, running amuck with saviors making rules that they crown with divine status." (Herbert Schlossberg, *Idols for Destruction*)

Feminism wants equality between the sexes, without the recognition of the distinctions or role differences. It demands legislative action to prop up what is unnatural. Feminist groups within and outside of the church are very active in their attempt to change society. One of the many pressure groups is the Unitarian-Universalist Women's Federation in the U.S. It was formed in 1963. Of all the lobby groups in Protestantism, it is the most militant. It produces a continuous flow of literature, sprinkled with radical terminology-for example, "God is a sex symbol-male." The Federation lobbies hard for equal federal and local legislation to ensure equality for women.

Feminist pressure groups have made great gains. The rapid secularization of our times, and the loss of moral absolutes, have contributed to the feminist cause. "As society changes so laws must change apace," they say. Unfortunately, the Christian resistance to feminism is weakening. There is a great desire to accommodate Christianity to our secular culture. John Whitehead, considered one of the leading constitutional attorneys in the United States, commented:

Surveying the pervasive secularism of our culture, it is harder still to deny that the Christian church has to a large degree made peace with it. In short, it has accommodated itself to a secular age, a serious matter since a dominant secularism, as Harvey Cox has pointed out, considers itself the sole belief system and never makes similar accommodations.

The mindset of accommodation has led to a corresponding willingness to dismiss the Bible's teachings as irrelevant, outdated, written by men in a male-dominated culture. "Times are changing," we are told. We must keep up with progress, with the new understanding of what it means to be a woman in this hour of history. History has brought constant improvement. We cannot turn back the clock. You cannot expect women to go back to the mindset of the biblical writers. Of course, the people who use the clock metaphor believe that their values are up-to-date and their opponents' values are not. But no age is normative for faith and action; neither the first century, the fifteenth century nor ours. We are not obliged to accept any movement just because it is modern or because it is rooted in history.

If we accept the Bible as God's inerrant Word coming to mankind – then we must submit to its teachings. We may not compromise ourselves lest the spirit of the age rather than the Holy Spirit sets the course of our action. Though those who oppose feminism may appear in the minority, there are still some vocal opponents, both men and women, who

don't hide their convictions under a bushel, and have warned against the disastrous consequences of radical feminism. Let us listen to the voices of the past and the present.

Dr. Abraham Kuyper

Kuyper's devotional books *Women of the Old Testament* and *Women of the New Testament*, translated by Henry Zylstra and published by Zondervan Publishing House, are well known in North American Reformed and evangelical circles. A lesser known work is *De Eerepositie der Vrouw* (Woman's Position of Honor), published in 1914 by J.H. Kok, Kampen, the Netherlands. In this little volume Kuyper says that no one disputes that women have been underestimated and oppressed, and in more than one way she still does not have her rightful place in society. A woman is not inferior to man. We are all of infinite equality before God as His image-bearers, and all of us are in total equality when it comes to our salvation. But equality between men and women does not mean sameness. The Bible does not speak of equality without distinctions. It takes into account the differences between men and women in every area of life. Because God created the differences between male and female, it is unnatural for the man to rock the cradle and for the women to be in the pulpit.

History has an honor scroll of heroines. France had Jeanne d'Arc, Holland had Kenau Hasselaar, and from Scripture everyone knows about Deborah, but these are exceptions. As long as we are on earth the rule remains that the husband is the head of the wife and that the wife submits to her husband (Eph. 5:22f; 1 Cor. 3:18; 1 Pet. 3:1). And the husband-wife relationship in marriage, and the relationship of the individual and the church to Christ, are intimately related. That is why there are different offices in the church. And also in the church the differences between male and female remain until death. A woman may not be an elder or pastor. She may be a deaconess, providing that she is 60 years of age. A woman of that age no longer has motherly responsibilities. In the ancient church deaconesses took upon themselves a partial task (een deel van de diaconale taak). She did not function as an assistant elder. Though a woman may not serve as pastor or elder, the Bible gives her a position of honor. Through the "seed of the woman" (Gen. 3:15) salvation shall come. In Bethlehem Joseph was in the background; Mary was the main character. She was highly favored by God. So the woman's position of honor should be recognized today.

Dr. Billy Graham

Billy Graham needs no introduction. He represents the mainstream evangelical conservative position. For Graham the feminist movement is just another example of America's moral corruption. He does endorse equal pay for equal work. He sees Jesus as the greatest liberator of women. But the women's liberation movement is viewed as undermining the proper roles of husband and wife. "God has appointed you husbands to be head of the home ... When a woman opposes that order, she rebels against the will of God." He has repeatedly declared, "The husband is the head of the home." Women's

liberation encourages moral permissiveness; it only leads to the further weakening of America's national fiber.

Mary Pride

Mary Pride became a Christian she had been active as a radical feminist. She earned a B.S. degree in Electrical Engineering and a Master's degree in Computer Systems Engineering. Later she studied theology at Covenant Seminary in St. Louis. Since her conversion her attitude toward radical feminism completely changed. As a former insider, she gives an outspoken assessment of the failures and threat of feminism. She minces no words. Pride blames churches for the growth of feminism.

Christian magazines have fallen over each other in their eagerness to endorse outside careers for wives, even mothers of infants. The general feeling in the church seems to be that women have no special God-given role, and that careers for wives are harmless, or even beneficial.

She claims that two or three generations have grown up and married without even hearing that the Bible teaches a distinct role for women, which is different from that of a man and just as important. Home-working is the biblical lifestyle.

Home-working is not just staying home either (that was the mistake of the fifties). We are not called by God to stay home, or to sit at home! Home-working is the exact opposite of the modern careerist/institutional/socialist movement. It is a way to take back control of education, health care, agriculture, social welfare, business, housing, morality, and evangelism from the faceless institutions to which we have surrendered them. More importantly, home-working is the path of obedience to God. Home-working is based on what the Scriptures say ... Home-working, like feminism, is a total lifestyle. The difference is that home-working produces stable homes, growing churches, and children who are Christian leaders.

She also points out, and rightly so, that biblical inerrancy and a "modern" role for women are at odds, and that in fact every advocate of Liberation within the church has abandoned inerrancy. And Pride doesn't have anything positive to say about evangelical feminists. She charges that they are really much more anxious to convert us to feminism than they are to convert feminists to Christ. Of Deborah, the biblical role model for feminists, she writes:

The most important thing to remember about Deborah's doing, and the activities of all the people in the Book of Judges, is that they are not normative . . . When the men are all dishrags incapable of leading, a woman may end up leading a country. Thus, Deborah was a leader, not a working wife; her example is not normative. Nothing in Scripture says we should abandon home-working and deliberately try to recreate the atmosphere of moral and social decay in the times of the judges, when Deborah ruled.

Edith Schaeffer

Edith Schaeffer, the wife of the late Dr. Francis Schaeffer, prolific author, well known speaker and counsellor, has repeatedly warned against the dangers of feminism. Though the Schaeffers have done much travelling, she still was able to build a genuine home spirit. She worked along with her husband, supported and encouraged him. She is concerned that the women's liberation movement takes women away from their true vocation, which is family life. The natural person to make the family a career is the woman. In her book *What is a Family?* she stresses the community aspect of the family. A wife who works out will find it hard to foster a genuine community spirit. When the marriage partners work on their own careers, something has to give. Tragic and unexpected results are in the offing when people forget the importance of the family.

She comments:

Psychiatrists' offices are already overfull. People are already going to pieces. Children are already mixed up to the point of having no norm from which to deviate! And it will get worse

Schaeffer strongly opposes the modern notion of equality without differentiation.

It was not by mistake that God made two very different kinds of people, a man and a woman. Eve was made from a rib in Adam's side. This is a marvelous fact in history to prepare us for the statement later in the Bible, as Paul wrote God's explanation to us of the relationship of the believers-the church-to Christ the Bridegroom. "For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones. For this cause a man will leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and the two shall be one flesh. This is a great mystery. . . ." (see Ephesians 5:30-32).

Elisabeth Elliot

Elisabeth Elliot is a former missionary to the Quichua and Auca Indians in South America. She has written a number of books, including *Through Gates of Splendor*, *Passion and Purity*, *The Journals of Jim Elliot*, *Discipline: The Glad Surrender*, *Let Me Be a Woman* and *The Mark of a Man*. She is a fascinating author with a superb literary style. And I have not only read most of her books, but also listened to some of her taped lectures. She deplores theological faddism, and the church's constant flirting with the spirit of the age. Biblical teachings are reorganized to fit humanism. In her book written for her nephew Peter, she challenged him to accept the divinely ordained role of manliness.

Feminists are busy rewriting all of history, psychology, mythology, sociology, and even theology to suit the spirit of the age, and, if you dare say, "Hey, wait a second!" you know what you'll be called. There is a difference besides the biological one. "You mean all those tired old stereotypes: Men are supposed to do this; women are supposed to do

that? Nothing but conditioning! Knee-jerk stuff!" I've heard that answer, too. Rosemary Reuther, professor of historical theology, in *From Machismo to Mutuality*, speaks of "exposing" masculinity and femininity as "so-called ideologies." Alas, Christians have lost their bearings when they accept a label like that.

In the created universe there is harmony and order. The role differences between male and female are clearly spelled out in Scripture. She asks: "Doesn't it seem strange that male dominance has been universal if it's purely social conditioning?" Equality is not a Christian ideal. We are created in the image of God. Not only the male but also the female is God's image-bearer. Because of this profound truth we can celebrate the differentiation between the sexes, and our inequalities are seen as essential to the Image of God.

. . . for it is in male and female, in male as male and female as female, not as two identical and interchangeable halves, that the Image is manifested.

In her essay *The Essence of Femininity, A Personal Perspective*, published by the Council of Biblical Manhood and Womanhood, she writes that women may not usurp the place of women.

We are women, and my plea is; Let me be a woman, holy through and through, asking for nothing but what God wants to give me, receiving with both hands and with all my heart whatever that is.

Nearly every Reformed and evangelical congregation is struggling to reach a consensus on women in ministry. The advocates for the ordination of women are earnest and zealous. Not for one moment do I question their motives. They sincerely think that they are leading the church into the twenty-first century. They claim that their opponents want to turn back the clock. To be led by the latest fad in society is tempting. The church has always been prone to surrender to the spirit of the age. Church history provides ample proof. But our standard for action must be the Bible, not the latest discoveries in the sciences, or whatever.

Johan D. Tangelder
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