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The High Calling of Motherhood

By Rev Walter J Chantry

"But women will be saved through childbirth, if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety." (1 Tim 2:15)

One of the greatest issues in our society today is the status and role of women. "Too often" writes Rev WJ Chantry, women have been "held in contempt... subject to verbal, social and physical abuses."

But, how are women to respond? How can a woman find a role in life which will bring real dignity and fulfilment, and stretch all her abilities to the full? Rev Walter Chantry gives an answer which would revolutionise our society if it were put into practice.

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Our generation has highlighted the oppression of women. The symptoms are not difficult to identify. Women have too often been held in contempt. Large numbers of them have been subjected to verbal, social and physical abuses. Women's magazines and social activists have pointed the finger at very serious ill-treatments which subject multitudes to misery.

Our world has little difficulty describing the quandary of women. But it has completely mistaken the root cause. Consequently, women are being offered a faulty solution to their real troubles. False diagnosis usually leads to improper measures of correction. In this case the cure proposed by the world simply compounds female misery.

SCRIPTURE SPEAKS

Contrary to popular assumption, the Bible has a number of things to say very directly about this issue: Paul, in 1 Timothy 2:11-15, alludes to the plight of woman. He suggests that she needs to be saved (verse 15). This cannot mean salvation from sin and God's everlasting wrath. In this context Paul joins salvation to childbearing. He must have in view a deliverance from some other extremity. In fact he is referring to the circumstantial calamities which attend a woman's life. In the passage Paul gives a solution. His views are not simply a parroting of the social philosophy current in his own age. Under divine inspiration he wrote not a private opinion but the very Word of God. CREATION AND FALL "Women's rights" proponents become livid when God's directives to women are read to them from this passage: "A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or have authority over a man, she must be silent" (vv. 11-12). "That is the very cause of woman's distress", they tell us. "She has been subject to man. We must go directly to the source of grief. Liberate woman from man's dominance".

The Apostle Paul vigorously disagrees. Woman's problem is not her social position of subordination to man. That is not her trouble.

The Apostle Paul first notes the reasons why full submission to man is expected of woman:

"For Adam was formed first, then Eve" (verse 13). Man existed before woman. Woman was taken out of man. This priority of man to woman and the derivation of woman from man were not incidental details of creation. They were intended to establish human social order. Woman was made for the man [Gen 2:18]. She was formed to fill the role of a help suited to the man. In Paradise, Eve found perfect happiness for a time in a role which was supportive of man in a social position which was subject to him.

A woman's griefs, therefore, are not the consequence of her social rank but a direct result of the fall. The experience of being subject to a sin-filled husband is not identical to submission under innocent Adam. It is sin in the man which makes him thoughtless of woman and abusive toward her. Sin in woman spawns discontent with even legitimate and ideal treatment in her true role. Satan was the serpent who brought every sting of displeasure to the woman.

The Apostle Paul then reminds women of the history of the Fall:

And gives the reason for the curse which they feel so keenly. "And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner" (v14). Scripture is not here heaping all of the blame of this world's suffering and confusion on woman. If anything, man is more directly incriminated. But Paul does expect woman to understand her share of the responsibility in the Fall which has ever since plagued her.

Adam was not deceived. This does not clear man of all responsibility in the tragedies which have haunted the human race. Adam walked into the evil rebellion against God with his eyes wide open. He took the fruit from Eve with no false illusions. His was the deeper sin. He transgressed fully knowing what he was about. But Eve was duped by Satan. She had "the wool pulled over her eyes". There is generally in the female constitution a confiding simplicity (which can become gullibility). This characteristic perfectly suits her to the role of help-for-man just as God had designed. There is in this constitutional difference of woman from man a beauty which defines femininity and is attractive to men.

The Apostle Paul's chief reason for directing woman's attention to her deception in the Fall was not to "rub it in". It was to reinforce the necessity of her being subject to man. The Fall with all of its consequences harmful to woman did not arise from her being subject to man. The exact opposite is the case! When she abandoned her role of submission to Adam, and decided to take matters into her own hands, the Fall came! Eve determined to lead man rather than follow. She became a temptress instead of a help. Stepping out of her God-given place and rebelling against the divinely instituted social order, she brought the world - and womanhood - to ruin. She is not a poor innocent victim of resulting desolations. Woman under the influence of Satan is the perpetrator of them all. Her restless defiance of man's authority is at the crux of human calamity!

This world's opinion is that there should be no distinction between man and woman in the social order. If only woman were emancipated from man's rule, her suffering would cease! Such an analysis indicts God's creation order and his post-garden directives as the culprits in woman's distress. God's Word cites the precise opposite as the cause of her trouble. This is no mere academic matter. Woman's liberation from oppression and suffering depends upon finding measures which correct the root of the malady. If the disease is fed instead of combated, her last end will be doubly wretched.

THE HOPE OF SALVATION

The Apostle Paul does not abandon woman with an indication that her misery is self-inflicted. A promise is given from the Most High: "But women will be saved" (v15). This is not a text on remission of sins but deliverance out of sin-related suffering and oppression. Woman will triumph over and emerge from the misery and curse under which she is held by forces of evil.

But how are women saved? By their joining militant organisations which demand rights equal to man's? By proving that women can "make it" in the world of business, politics, sports, and even the pastorate? By escaping from home where she has been buried in obscurity and where so many evils have been perpetrated by abusive husbands? Never! That approach only institutionalises her rebellion against her God-given place.

Her pathway to real salvation was appointed by the Almighty. It is motherhood. "She shall be saved through childbirth" (v15). The first gospel promise was given before any curse was pronounced on man or woman. And the promise wonderfully involved the means of motherhood. "I will put enmity between you [the serpent] and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel" [Gen 3:5]. God our Maker would not allow the human race to perish. Now that Adam and Eve had sinned and Paradise was shattered, the only hope lay in God himself. "I will" is the message of grace. One means was mentioned as the instrumental course of salvation from the devil's clutches. It was childbearing! Deliverance comes, not through man's vocational efforts in the cultural mandate, but through woman's childbearing. How wrong women are when they imagine that their hope lies in imitating men's careers. As they abandon motherhood for the office and factory, they despise God's carefully designed means of breaking the devil's yoke and fleeing the miseries he has inflicted.

It is to woman, not man, that God assigned this high calling. But her hope is not identified with her political savvy, her business acumen, or her social activism. It is in childbearing! Women today are so eager to abandon "mere" motherhood to duplicate male labours. How tragic, when the hope God has given woman and for all of our race is tied to childbearing! Of course the central attention of Genesis 3:15 is upon one seed of the woman, Jesus Christ. He who was born of the Jewess, Mary, delivered the decisive death blow to the head of the serpent on Calvary. He purchased salvation for all who are redeemed.

Yet, even before Christ came, a godly seed of the woman was set against Satanic forces. Childbearing prepared the way of the Lord. When about to raise up mighty leaders, Jehovah God, often sought out peculiarly able women. Jochebed, the mother of Moses; Hannah, mother of Samuel; Manoah's wife, mother of Samson, are leading examples. Through their childbearing the course of history was wonderfully altered. Since Christ has come, a godly seed carries the gospel to all the earth to gather God's elect and hasten Christ's return. Raising a godly seed is still of the profoundest importance to the cause of God in the earth.

Adam saw at once that the most profound work of the ages - God's work of grace - is directly related to motherhood. Appreciating God's purpose, "Adam named his wife Eve, because she would become the mother of all the living" [Gen 3:20]. Today, through contraceptives and abortions, women can avoid the "nuisance" of having children. Using these means, they are free to seek what they think are higher and more noble callings. What relief to the forces of darkness! Nothing crushes the cause of sin like godly childbearing.

TRUE MOTHERHOOD

It is obvious that more is intended by "childbearing" than the physical process of conceiving, carrying a child in the womb, and bringing him into the world, but mothering that person is assumed. More is expressly stated by Paul. "Women will be saved through childbirth, if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety" [1Tim 2:15]. Conscientious motherhood cannot follow the selfish pattern of having a child only to send him off as soon as possible to a day-care centre. Of course, at times this is essential for survival! But at other times it is produced by a selfish interest in one's own career or in acquiring more wealth. Women want to get on to more exciting things. This low view of a mother's task is damaging the church.

Many are saved out of homes in which parents did not care for their children. These have lived useful lives for the Lord. But most of the greatest servants of God who have dealt the mightiest blows to Satan's kingdom were raised in stable homes. It is almost always a mother who makes it stable. Today nothing can replace the care and training of a faithful mother. Those who lack this blessing in their childhood carry a burden throughout life. Emotional scars and character flaws from mother's neglect are handicaps in serving the Lord. Even grace at conversion does not eliminate these liabilities.

Our world sets its wares before women: Look at the money you can make! A pay-cheque is an immediate and tangible reward for labour. Look at the influence and respect you can command in a successful career! There is fun and excitement in the work world - the social stimulation of interesting people, the excitement of travel, the glamour of attention from others, the intellectual challenges, and so on. But in reality these often prove to be the baubles of Vanity Fair.

God has assigned a nobler work to woman than merely to parallel man's activities. There is no more pitiful person in the world than the woman who "has it all together" in business but whose family has fallen apart. She is the epitome of energy, organisation, talent, and efficiency - only her children have not turned out well.

Loneliness and non-recognition attend motherhood for a time. But that is the perspective of this world only. How does the Judge compare the socialite, the dynamic business "success" in comparison with the mother who is selflessly training children with an eye of faith fixed on a spiritual kingdom and her hope firmly fixed upon the Lord? Some will think this is an emotional appeal to put women down once again. Rather, it is a conviction that many women have abandoned their highest dignity and hope for lesser things.

What is involved in motherhood? After birth pangs bring children into this world, there come years of life pangs. It is a mother's task and privilege to oversee the forging of a personality in her sons and daughters. For this she must set a tone in the home which builds strong character. Hers it is to take great Christian principles and practically apply them in every-day affairs - doing it simply and naturally. It is her responsibility to analyse each child mentally, physically, socially, spiritually. Talents are to be developed, virtues must be instilled, faults are to be patiently corrected, young sinners are to be evangelised. She is building men and women for God. Results may not be visible until she has laboured for fifteen or twenty years. Even when her task ends the true measure of her work awaits the full maturity of her children. Moses would be much more than an Egyptian rebel and an obscure shepherd, but Jochebed would not live to observe the consequences of her motherhood.

A HIGH CALLING

If a godly mother is to succeed at this task, she must be a woman filled with faith, love and holiness. These must not be occasional, but consistent qualities of life [1 Tim 2:15]. It is no wonder that women spurn this task, preferring the halls of government, the materialistic empire or the busy office. There is no more demanding work in all the world, no more awe-inspiring job-description than raising a godly seed! It will challenge all the genius, talent, and grace that any human being could possess. Should women be educated? Assuredly the moral educators, psychologists, spiritual shepherds, and advisers of future generations must be well-trained!

Woman's hope, the church's hope, the world's hope is joined to childbearing with continuance in faith, love and holiness. Young women, here is a life-long calling! It is the highest any woman can enter. There is much more to it than the worldly images. Take it seriously and God will bless the generation to come.

Work at it spiritually and the Lord will give you the liberation you desire. Some day the glamour girls who leave their children in a nursery will reap their reward. They will sit in their plush houses holding fat bank accounts and will look with envy at a godly seed.

This is why Proverbs 10:1 tells those who are children that "A foolish son is the heaviness of his mother". Immorality is a public shame to the mother of one who breaks God's law. Her whole life was devoted to raising her son and daughter. Father has a career as well as a home. But all of mother's eggs have been placed in one basket. Motherhood could not be a part-time hobby. If you become a fool, you will break your mother's heart. Godly women do not live for kisses and nice little gifts, but to see their children walking with the Lord in righteousness. All of a godly woman's hopes in this world are bound up with the children of her motherhood.

SIGNS OF HOPE

One of the most encouraging signs in our age is an increasing number of young women who aspire to being godly. They are serious about motherhood. They have ordered their priorities biblically and already demonstrate the traits of faith, love and holiness. But they will come under fierce attacks. "Feminist" literature will belittle them as doing nothing significant. As sacrifices mount, temptations will increase to fall in with the world's system.

Young men, to follow the Lord fully your wife will need to be reminded that you share her vision for pleasing God through rearing a family. You must let her know that you admire her labours in motherhood. And churches must combat the deluge of worldly propaganda. They must continually hold out the biblical ideal of women's service to God and humanity in childbirth, and continuance in faith, love, and holiness. In due time faithful mothers will have the seal of God blessing on their labours.

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