

THE ORIGIN OF MALE LEADERSHIP & FEMALE INFERIORITY

What the Church Will Never Tell You!

Source:

What Paul Really Said About Women: An Apostle's Views on Equality in Marriage, Leadership, and Love. John Temple Bristow, Harper San Francisco, 1991

ATHENS: THE GREEK LEGACY OF DISDAIN FOR WOMEN

Aristotle

- **Aristotle:** In his discourse on insects, he noted that a single bee will lead a vast swarm of bees to a new location, where they will industriously build a new nest and establish their complex society. And because the swarm follows one individual, Aristotle unquestioningly assumed that this single leader must be male, the “king bee.” Centuries passed before naturalists corrected this with objective observation: the leader was a “queen bee.”
- **Aristotle’s premise:** “the male is by nature fitter to command than the female.” He added that this “inequality is permanent.” This was true of all creatures, especially humans.
- “The courage of a man is shown in commanding, of a woman in obeying.”

Aristotle's Legacy

- Aristotle explained that this difference between husband and wife is like that of man's soul and his body. The man is to his wife as a soul is to the physical body, meant to command and guide arms and legs with wisdom and intelligence. (Aristotle used this same analogy to defend the practice of slavery and define the relationship of master and slave.) Just as one's body, with its impulses and desires, should not rule his soul, so a wife should not rule her husband. And, he added, as a stern warning, the **“equality of the two or rule of the inferior is always hurtful.”** (Bristow, p. 6)

Aristotle's Legacy

- Aristotle thus laid a lasting philosophical foundation for the notion that females are inferior to males. He formalized the practice of sexual discrimination and offered learned authority to the belief in sexual inequality. Centuries later, church leaders who themselves were a product of Greek culture and education, interpreted Paul's writings from the perspective of Aristotelian philosophy, even to the point of assuming that when Paul wrote of the husband being the head of the wife, he was simply restating Aristotle's analogy of the husband being to his wife like one's soul to one's body. As will be seen, a careful reading of what Paul wrote demonstrates that this apostle was **actually challenging Aristotle's idea instead of supporting it. (Bristow, pp. 6-7)**

Homer and Socrates

- **Homer**, author of *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, sang of the struggles of distant heroes and how “each one gives law to his children and to his wives.”
- **Socrates** (c.470-399 B.C.) immortalized the Athenian disdain toward women.
 - He often referred to woman as “**the weaker sex.**” He argued that being born a woman is a divine punishment, since a woman is halfway between a man and an animal.
 - He humorously advised a young man, “By all means, get married. If you get a good wife, you will be happy. If you get a bad one, you will become a philosopher.”
 - He also argued that in the ideal society, marriage would be abandoned. “No one will deny that it would be the greatest good to have women in common and children in common.”

Socrates

- **Socrates** (c.470-399 B.C.) immortalized the Athenian disdain toward women.
 - Conversation between husband and wife was neither valued nor expected. Socrates asked Athenian men: “Is there anyone to whom you entrust more serious matters than to your wife, . . . And is there anyone to whom you talk less?”
- Socrates’ teachings came down to us through his star pupil, Plato (c. 427-347 B.C.). And Plato’s most distinguished disciple was Aristotle (384-322 B.C.)

Xenophon, Demosthenes, Zeno

- **Xenophon**, a disciple of Socrates, argued that the ideal Athenian woman was one who “might see as little as possible, hear as little as possible, and ask as little as possible.”
- **Demosthenes**, Greek orator, analyzing the roles of Athenian women: “We have courtesans for our pleasures, prostitutes for daily physical use, wives to bring up legitimate children and to be faithful stewards in household matters.”
- **Pericles** stated that it was the duty of an Athenian mother to live so retired a life that her name would never be mentioned among men, either for praise or for shame.
- **Zeno** (the originator of asceticism) taught that sexual intercourse is justified only if its purpose is procreation. All passions and pleasures are to be disdained by those who would truly pursue wisdom.

Epictetus

- **Epictetus**, Stoic teacher in Rome until A.D. 90 constantly wrote of women as a temptation to men, how they lure “with softer voices” a young philosopher who is no match for “pretty girl.” He taught that women, from the age of fourteen, think of nothing and aim at nothing but lying with men.

The Legacy of Athenian Philosophy

- The philosophers of Athens, then bequeathed to the world, a double indictment against womanhood. From the classic period, especially in the teachings of Aristotle, came the conviction that women are inferior to men. Therefore, women are to be commanded by men and used for the pleasure of men. Then, from the stoic philosophers came the conviction that women are a distraction and temptation to men. Therefore, women are to be avoided by men who would thereby be free to pursue those qualities that make men superior. **Both points of view underlie the traditional interpretation of the writings of Saint Paul regarding women and marriage. (Bristow, p.9).**

Jewish Devaluation of Women

- Paul's Gentile converts to the faith were heirs to Greek philosophy, with Aristotelian and Stoic disdain for women.
- For the most part, the rabbis of Judaism devalued women:
 - “Girls are but an illusory treasure.”
 - “Besides, they have to be watched continually.”
 - “A woman has more pleasure in one *kab* (measure) with lechery than in nine *kabs* with modesty.”
- ❖ Every Jewish male thanked God every morning that “He did not make me a Gentile, . . . a woman, . . . a boor.”
- On the education of women, “It would be better to see the Torah burnt than to hear its words upon the lips of women.”
- ❖ “Teaching a girl is the same as starting her on the road of depravity.” (Bristow, p. 19)

Jewish Devaluation of Women

- The tenth commandment, “Thou shalt not covet your neighbor’s wife; and you shalt not desire your neighbor’s house, his field, or his manservant, or his maidservant, his ox, or his ass, or anything that is your neighbor’s.” (Deuteronomy 5:21, RSV) became the basis for the legal principle within Judaism that married women are the property of their husbands.
- Why? Because “Rabbinical interpretation reasoned that all the potential objects of a person’s coveting, as listed in this commandment, are the possessions of that persons’ neighbor: his ass, his ox, his servants, his field, his house—and his wife.”

Jewish Devaluation of Women

- Consequently, women were granted few legal rights of their own in ancient Israel.
 - Husband's refusal to acknowledge any business agreement entered into by his wife. No recourse for the injured party.
 - An unmarried woman was regarded as the possession of her father, and a widow as the possession of her husband's male next-of-kin. She could inherit, but her inheritance would be put in trust for her, managed by the man who was in charge of her care.

The Hellenization of Jewish Thought and Scripture

- The belief that women are inferior to men has its source in the Hellenization of Jewish thought after the conquest of Judea by Alexander the Great. Many of the Jews welcomed the customs and philosophy of the Greeks.
- “At that time, lawless men arose in Israel and seduced many with their plea, “Come, let us make a covenant with the gentiles around us, because ever since we have kept ourselves separated from them we have suffered many evils.” The plea got so favorable a reception that some of the people took it upon themselves to apply to the king, who granted them liberty to follow the practices of the gentiles. Thereupon they built a **gymnasium** in Jerusalem according to the customs of the gentiles and underwent operations to disguise their circumcision, rebelling against the sacred covenant. They joined themselves to the gentiles and became willing slaves of evil doing.” (1 Maccabees 1:11-5 RSV). (Bristow, p. 24)

The Hellenization of Jewish Thought

- It was in the gymnasium that men engaged in exercise in the nude, which would have brought attention to the matter of circumcision (and which would have shocked the conservative Jews). And in the gymnasium young Jewish men learned the philosophical insights of Plato and Aristotle and the Stoics, which contained the doctrine of the inferiority of women. (Bristow, p. 24)
- **Philo**, a Jewish scholar at the time of Christ, sought to harmonize the teachings of Plato

The Hellenization of Jewish Thought

- **Josephus**, a Jewish historian (in the next generation after Philo) who also studied both Greek and Hebrew literature, viewed the Old Testament with the same disdain toward women. He wrote how the Jewish law declared that the wife “is inferior to her husband in all things.”
- He even went beyond the Jewish law in the matter of witnesses in a court of law, insisting that the testimony of women should not be admitted “on account of their levity and the

A CALL FOR ACTION

A Call for Action

- Women, unite, and stand-up to end gender discrimination.
- Men who have a monopoly on ecclesiastical, economic, and political power will not share power with you willingly unless you want and demand it. It's not in their self-interest to do so.
- Stop believing the lie that men are de-facto “heads of the home and the church” because they are better suited for leadership.

This is the Year of the Lord's Favor

- Church leaders, acknowledge the wrong you have perpetrated against humanity and society in promoting a theology of male dominance.
- You should own and redress the church's passive violence of silence against women that allows men to abuse women with impunity.
- Isaiah 61: 1-3: The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has **anointed** me to proclaim good news to

References

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Thank You !

Go and change your world!