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## **Under the Curse *or* the Curse? Hope for the Church of the Nazarene in Africa**

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In a world and culture in which women are still being discriminated against, I am proud to be part of a denomination that values and encourages women in areas of leadership. Moreover, I am honoured to be one who currently has the privilege to serve under and alongside a godly female pastor, both in the parish and in the classroom. One thing for which I am less than ecstatic is the stark reality that there are still many in the Church of the Nazarene (and the church universal) who do not see this as a privilege. In contrast, they regard the mere idea of women ministers as unbiblical and ungodly. The problem is, of course, much larger than this one issue. In actuality we commonly are not dealing with the issue of ‘women in ministry’ but rather with the underlying issue of ‘women in control.’ After all, the place of a woman is below her husband, or at very best, beside him, right? The heart of this matter is either consciously or unconsciously rooted in a person’s understanding (or lack thereof) of ‘woman.’

While I cannot deny that the Bible is full of stories which have painted a rather subservient picture of women and will not deny that Scripture has often been interpreted (or misinterpreted) to defend such a stance, one thing I must not deny is the reality that God’s Word, from beginning to end, clearly declares humanity in the created and redeemed order, both male and female, as fashioned and functioning on level ground. Stated more plainly, man is in no way superior to woman; and yet, man is not inferior to woman. We have been created to complement one another and are, therefore, equally inferior apart *and* equally superior together.

Many of those who regard women as inferior have often treated Scripture as though chapter two or three of Genesis is its beginning; however, the

unequivocal reality is that Scripture begins in chapter one. And so, our discussion begins here, in verse 27 of chapter one, where we read:

And God created *adam* (Heb. humanity) in His own image, in the image of God He created him; **male and female He created them** (italics and bold added for clarity and emphasis).

It is unfortunate that the bewildering grammatical structure of this verse has left some to focus on the unimportant, and further, led others to ignore the verse all together, or, at the very least, ignore the focal point. *Male and Female He created them*; this is the story of our beginnings. This is who we are! Both genders have been created in God's image and yet there is the strange and ironic reality that both genders are needed to fully see this image. We have been created with the desire and necessity to live in community with God and with each other. Without each other we are nothing; together we are one body. It would be like telling your left arm that it is not as important as your right arm and is therefore not needed (cf. 1 Corinthians 12).

In chapter two of Genesis, where the story of humanity's creation is retold from a different perspective, we see this same truth being posited. Genesis 2:18 reads:

Then the LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper suitable (Heb. equal) for him."

God voices that man (*adam*) was not intended to be alone but rather was intended to live in community, in relationship. Therefore, he created a woman to be equal, and thus, compatible, to this man. The emphasis of this whole story is not that man came first and thus is superior, but, rather, both man and woman were created from the same flesh and bone (cf. Genesis 2:23), and having been separated they longed to be reunited into one flesh (cf. Genesis 2:24). It is absurd, as well as unscriptural *and* ungodly, for anyone to derive a hierarchical doctrine of man's dominance over woman from either of these two creation accounts.

On the other hand, if someone did want to find a foundation by which to build a biblical understanding of man's position as 'ruler' over woman, then he or she may look no further than Genesis 3:16b, "your desire shall be for your husband, and he will rule over you." I can picture a slight

smirk presently coming over some readers' faces; yet, before anyone starts to build some monumental construct upon this paltry foundation, be warned...he or she is on shaky ground. While I will not refute the statement made by this passage, nor the implications and effects on humanity resultant from this statement, likewise, I will not deny its context. These are neither words to celebrate, nor are they words of blessing; rather, these words are spoken in the context of God's curse on humanity's sin. So I say, you may indeed rule over your wife, or any other woman for that matter, but in so doing you are continuing to spread the curse for which Christ himself gave his life to abolish (cf. Galatians 3:13).

In Christ we are a new creation, the old has passed away (2 Corinthians 5:17), and along with the passing of this 'old,' so passes the curse of sin. Now "there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28). Through the redemption, which is Christ Jesus, we are a restored people. This means that we have been recreated in God's image and must therefore presently live as God originally intended. In God's perfect creation we were created as equals, to live in relationship and to complement one another. Through Christ, the curse is broken and we can once again live as equals. In fact, we *must* live this way or we inevitably taint the perceived image of our creator; we distort the image of Christianity, and non-admittedly, we denounce Christ's sacrifice on Calvary.

So to those men who see women as inferior or subordinate, and to those persons who do not believe that women have a place in ministry or behind the pulpit, I leave you with the following warning—Christ has already broken the curse of man's 'rule' over woman. You may continue to live your life under the curse but in so doing you are no longer just one who is *under* the curse, you *are* the curse!

What will be the role of the Church of the Nazarene in an age such as ours? Will we continue to live under the curse of Genesis 3:16, or moreover, will we aid in promoting this curse? In the church it is customary to talk about 'hope.' Yet it seems that often this *hope* is restricted to the future. This

line of thinking is neither healthy nor biblical. Christ's death brought the future near. Christ's death opened up a whole new reality for us. We as the church must presently live in this new reality. We must be a people who are aware of the power of Christ's death to break the curse of sin and we must show the world that this New Kingdom is governed neither by the standards of culture nor by societal norms. We must be a people who presently promote change: a people who live out *hope*. The Church has the responsibility to continue to break the curse of sin and to spread the hope of equality. There is hope for the Church of the Nazarene in Africa but it is to be found in the endorsement of the same values for which Christ gave his life. If we fail to live out the reality of this New Kingdom then we, above all, are guilty of leaving the world around us with no hope!