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Response to the lies and distortions of christian missionaries about the position of women in islam



Part 3, Written by Kevin el-Karim

“The most perfect of believers are those most perfect of character; and the best of you are the best of you to your spouses.” Tirmidhi, Ibn Hibban

"None but a noble man treats women in an honourable manner. And none but an ignoble treats women disgracefully" At-Tirmithy

He wrote:

We conclude our discussion with comments taken from a Salafi Muslim website who provide the opinions of other writers and scholars to support the exegesis given in answer to specific questions. The main page to the website we will be using is www.islamqa.com.

Response:

The website used by the christian missionary is well known for their extreme stances on certain issues. I recommend the reader to visit other sites like ourdialogue.com and sunnipath.com, who have a lot of good fatwas published on their websites. I also strongly advise readers to visit websites like islamtoday.com and livingislam.org , which contain a lot of great info.

He wrote:

Regarding whether Islam allows for women rulers, this Salafi site responds: the evidence from the Qur'aan and Sunnah indicates that it is not permissible for a woman to assume positions of senior public authority, such as the caliph (khaleefah), minister of state (wazeer or vizier) or judge (qaadi) and so on.

Evidence from the Qur'aan: Allaah says (interpretation of the meaning): "Men are the protectors and maintainers of women, because Allaah has made one of them to excel the other, and because they spend (to support them) from their means" [al-Nisa 4:34]

Al-Qurtubi said: The words "Men are the protectors and maintainers of women" mean that they spend on them and protect them, and also that they (men) are the rulers and governors, and the ones who go on military campaigns, and none of these are the role of women. Tafseer al-Qurtubi, 5/168.

Response:

Soerah 4:34 is one of the most misquoted quranic verses by both muslims and non-muslims. In my response i shall clear up all the misconceptions and misinterpretations of this ayah. I shall now quote a fatwa of qualified scholars on this soerah, which explains it's true meaning. The scholars of the European Council for Fatwa explain this verse:

Qu'ran 4:34

Men are the protectors and maintainers (Qawama) of women, because Allah has given each preference over the other, and because they support "them from their means

The beauty of the Quranic expression is illustrated in the statement that: "Allah has given each preference over the other " and not merely that Allah gave preference to men over women. This is because men are preferred in some aspects and women are preferred in others; particular the emotional aspect of life, whilst the man is obliged to pay the marital gift or which is known today as Dowry or 'Mahr', to establish the marital house and support it. Therefore, if a man ever attempts to harm this family; he will be the very first victim of this act of destruction. ¹

My own note:

The verse intends to establish a responsibility of men for the protection and maintenance of women in a restricted social context. Biologically, only women can bear the future generations of Muslims. The Qur'an creates a harmonious balance in society by establishing a functional responsibility for males to facilitate this biological function of females.

This verse does not give men inherent superiority or authority over women. It establishes mutual responsibility in society. Responsibility is not superiority. Even though men are responsible for women in this restricted context, the verse is not intended to mean that women cannot handle their own affairs, control themselves or become leaders, whether among women, men and women or even of nations, as has been assumed.

He wrote:

Ibn Katheer said: It means the man is in charge of the woman; he is her leader, the ruler over her who disciplines her if she goes astray. "because Allaah has made one of them to excel the other" means, because men are superior to woman, and a man is better than a woman. Hence prophethood was given only to men, as is the role of caliph, because the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: "No people will ever prosper who appoint a woman in charge of them." - Tafseer

Qu'ran 4:34

Men shall take full care of women with the bounties with which Allah has favored some of them in greater measure than others, and with what they may spend of their own wealth. The righteous women are devout, guarding the secret which Allah has willed to be guarded

Although the verse goes on to point out certain rulings in matrimonial relations, the part to which you have referred is the one I have quoted. As it is translated above, the verse gives no suggestion of superiority. Indeed, it relates to the way the family is organized in Islamic society.

To explain its meaning and what is really involved in assigning responsibilities to man and woman within the family, there is little that I can do better than quote you at length from the commentary written by the late Sayyid Qutb in his priceless work "In the Shade of the Qur'an"

Commentary by Sayyid Qutb on soerah 4:34 , quoted from his book 'In the shade of the quran':

“The family is the first institution in human life, in the sense that its effect is felt in every stage of human life. It is within the family that man, the most noble of all creatures, according to the Islamic concept of life, is brought up. The running and administration of much inferior institutions, such as those engaged in financial, industrial and commercial affairs, is normally assigned to those who are most qualified for the job by their education, training and natural abilities. It is only logical that the same rule be applied to the family, the institution which looks after the upbringing of the most noble creature in the universe, namely, man.

The divine code of living takes him and his nature in consideration, as well as the natural abilities given to both man and woman to enable them to discharge the duties assigned to each of them. It maintains justice in the distribution of duties, giving to each of them only the type of duties to which they are suited. It is needless to say that both man and woman are the creation of Allah who does not wish to do injustice to anyone He has created. Indeed He gives each of His creations the abilities and talents which befit the duties assigned to him or her.

Allah has created human beings as males and females, following the "dual" role which is central to the system of creation. He has given the woman the great tasks of child-bearing, breast-feeding and looking after her children. These are not tasks of the type which may be fulfilled without careful preparation, physically, psychologically and mentally. It is only just, therefore, that the other part, i.e. man, should be assigned the task of providing the essential needs and the protection required for the woman to fulfill her highly important duties. She could not be given all those tasks and be still required to work in order to earn her living and to look after her children at the same time. It is only fair as well that man should be given the physical, mental and psychological qualities which enable him to fulfill his duties in the same way as the woman is given the abilities to help her fulfill her duties. All this is part of the reality of human life, because Allah maintains absolute justice among all.

Among the qualities the woman has been given are tenderness, good reaction and instinctive response to the needs of childhood without waiting for much deliberation and reflection. The essential human needs even of a single individual are not left for leisurely reflection and planning. Response to them is made instinctively so that they may be met more or less involuntarily. There is no external compulsion in this. It is an impulsive reaction which the woman enjoys, despite the fact that it requires sacrifice from her. This is part of Allah's work which is always perfect.

These are not superficial qualities. Indeed, they are implanted in the woman's physical, mental and psychological constitution. Some leading scientists believe that they are present in each cell in the woman's constitution because they are rooted in the first cell which multiplies to form the fetus and the child.

On the other hand, among the qualities the man is given are toughness, slow reaction and response as well as proper thought and reflection before action. All these functions, ever since he lived on hunting in the early stages, to fighting for the protection of his wife and children, to earning his living in any way, require some deliberation and consideration before taking any decision and implementing it. These qualities are also deeply rooted in the constitution of man.

It is man's qualities which make him more able and better equipped to take charge of the family. Similarly, his duty of supporting his family as part of the distribution of duties, makes him more suitable to be in charge. That is because earning the living of his family and all its members is part of being in charge. Moreover, looking after the finances of the family is closer to his family duties.

There are two elements which the Qur'an highlights as it states that in Islamic society, men are required to look after woman. It is an assignment of duties on the basis of natural abilities and fair distribution of responsibilities. Each party is assigned the duties to which he or she is most suited by nature.

That man is better equipped to be in charge is part of human nature. He has the proper natural abilities for that role which is essential for the proper progress of human life. It is a simple fact that one party is equipped for this role and assigned the duty to play it while the other is not. Hence, it is totally unfair that the latter should be required in any situation to take up these responsibilities in addition to her own natural duties. If this latter party is given the necessary practical and scientific training to fulfill these duties, her ability to play the other role, i.e. that of motherhood, is undermined. That is a role which requires certain abilities of the type we have mentioned, such as good reaction and immediate response along with the natural physical and mental abilities.

These are very serious questions which may not be left to human beings to decide at will. Whenever they have been left to human beings to decide, whether in the past or in recent times, the very existence of mankind was threatened and the essential human qualities which distinguish men from other creatures was in danger of extinction.

There is plenty of evidence which points out that the rules of human nature force themselves on man even when people deny them altogether. One aspect of that is the decline in the quality of human life and the serious danger to which it has been exposed whenever this rule which gives man the task and the authority to look after the family has been violated. Such violation leads to serious repercussions. Another indication is that the woman prefers that man assumes his role of being in charge of the family. Many women experience feelings of worry, dissatisfaction and unhappiness when they live with men who relinquish their role of being in charge for any reason. This is readily admitted by women who try to challenge man's role.

Another example of the social repercussion of this unnatural family situation, where the father does not play his role either because of his weak character which allows the mother to overshadow or control him, or because of his early death or in one-parent families, is that very often the children suffer instability which may lead to mental perversion and behavioral deviation.

These are only a few examples through which nature indicates its presence and the need to organize human life according to its laws. It must be finally stated that the way Islam distributes family responsibilities does not by any means lead to the negation of the woman's character or role in the home and in society at large. Neither does it mean the cancellation of her civil status.

It simply defines her role within the family and how it is run. For the family is a very important institution which must be protected and maintained. In any institution, the observance of certain values does not mean the abrogation of the character or the rights of the partners or the workers. Islam defines the role of the man and what his being in charge means as well as his duties as one who takes care of his family, protects it and earns its living."

I trust this lengthy quotation from Sayyid Qutb amply explains the meaning of the verse to which you have referred and in which there is no suggestion of any superiority given to men. ²

My own comment:

The verse intends to establish a responsibility of men for the protection and maintenance of women in a restricted social context. Biologically, only women can bear the future generations of Muslims. The Qur'an creates a harmonious balance in society by establishing a functional responsibility for males to facilitate this biological function of females.

This verse does not give men inherent superiority or authority over women. It establishes mutual responsibility in society. Responsibility is not superiority. Even though men are responsible for women in this restricted context, the verse is not intended to mean that women cannot handle their own affairs, control themselves or become leaders, whether among women, men and women or even of nations, as has been assumed.

And again the verse speaks about men's nature and qualities to be leader of the family, this does not mean that women cannot held leadership positions in offices or can't be judges, on the contrary women can. However her main task and first priority should be being a mother and queen of her house, which requires qualities that only women have at best !

Secondly we have seen that scholars of ourdialogue.com and the european council of fatwa, clearly rebuked the statement that 'men are superior to women' and that 'men are better then women'. These statement are clearly not supported in the qu'ran nor in the authentic hadith and sunnah of our prophet. Therefor these statement are not supported in islam, and don't represent islam and it's true meaning. Another renowned scholar Fathi Osman comments on this:

Fathi Osman comments:

The view that a man is superior to a woman because he is physically 'stronger' lacks the support of the Qur'an and authentic Sunnah. The divine sources mention 'care' and 'responsibility' within the family, but not superiority. Muslim men and women are equal in their individual and social responsibilities, being in charge (protectors) of one another and of the whole society (awliyya), as stated in Surah al-Taubah 9:71

Source:

Fathi Osman (1996), Muslim Women in the Family and the Society, Reprint, Kuala Lumpur: SIS Forum (Malaysia) Berhad., p. 48

The next comments made by renowned sunni scholar Shayk G.F. Haddad moreover clearly refutes the statements quoted on the website from which the christian missionary quotes (to attack islam).

Shayk Gibril Fouad Haddad comments:

"Ar-rijalu qawwamoona ala an-nissaa." Many translators give this as showing men have superiority over women. Is that a fair reflection of the meaning? I suggest the answer is No! "Men shall take full care of women with the bounties which God has bestowed more abundantly on the former than on the latter, and with what they may spend out of their possessions. And the righteous women are truly the devout ones, who guard the intimacy which God has ordained to be guarded." I believe this is well put by Muhammad Asad. It is not a question of superiority or inferiority. Rather it is a question of defining responsibilities. The word which causes much of the misunderstanding is "qawwamoon" which some people take to mean authority. If you check in the Lissan Al-Arab, which is the most authoritative and voluminous Arabic dictionary you will find Muhammad Asad's translation exactly matches the explanation in this dictionary."³

Finally we can see that our beloved Prophet Muhammed himself rebuked statements like 'men are superior to women' and 'men are better then women' , since he said:

Narrated by al-Tirmidhi, 113; Ahmad, 25663

The prophet said: " Yes, for women are the twin halves of men." Classed as saheeh by al-Albaani in Saheeh al-Tirmidhi

In the Arabic text, the Prophet, peace be upon him, uses here a word, which implies total similarity and equivalence. Hence, the Prophet's statement suggests no inferiority attached to women. The Qur'an and the Sunnah assign the same duties to both men and women, and promise them the same reward. If this does not mean the same status, I would like to know what does.

Sources:

1:

<http://www.e-cfr.org/eng/article.php?sid=33&PHPSESSID=f68bfd8af71bea7ec44852e47b6dbfff>

2:

<http://www.ourdialogue.com/m23.htm>

3:

http://www.abc.se/~m9783/fiqhi/fiqha_e22.html