

WIVES OF THE BIBLE

A Cross-Section of Femininity

by

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CHAPTER SIX

THE WOMAN WHO NAGGED A NOBLE HUSBAND JOB'S WIFE

Then said his wife unto him, Dost thou still retain thine integrity? curse God and die. But he said unto her, Thou speakest as one of the foolish women speaketh. What? shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil? In all this did not Job sin with his lips (Job 2: 9-10).

THIS sermon is the sixth in the series on women. Its place in this order of subjects is purely accidental. We have considered these characters as we came to them in Old Testament study, having brought them from the Books of Genesis, II Samuel, I Kings, II Kings and now Job. We plan to conclude this volume with such themes as may produce a pleasant climax.

Nagging is enjoyed by nobody—least of all by an enduring husband. In a recent meeting of ministers this was illustrated by the story of the husband whose wife made home a hell. Finally, the World War came and he promptly volunteered. But she followed him there with daily and nagging letters. Finally he wrote her vigorously, saying, “Wife, stop these nagging letters! I want to enjoy this war in peace.” Job’s wife was of that sort.

To say the least, this text evidences a somewhat nasty spirit, involves bitter speech, and hints at an approaching infidelity. In contemplating it one is led to see that Her Tests Were Severe, Her Failure Was Complete, and Her Speech Was Foolish.

HER TESTS WERE SEVERE

The loss of property was a staggering blow.

The Scriptures teach that **the love of money is the root of all evil** (I Timothy 6:10), and observation proves that woman loves money even more than does man. Covetousness, which is idolatry, has cursed many of her sex since the day when Eve looked on the forbidden fruit, desired, and secured it.

Dr. Frank Divine, of New York, the expert in church and Christian finances, speaking before our

Thursday night congregation, said something like this:

“There are men whose hearts are responsive and whose hands would open generously were they backed by the help-meet at home, but who dare not do what the Spirit of God prompts in giving because the economy-head of the house might make the home a hell for the husband who so dared.”

Then he facetiously remarked:

“Probably you have none such in this First Church, but they exist about the country.”

My church is an exceptional one in many respects, but I am grieved not to be able to say that it is an exception here. More than once, in the years of my pastorate, have I had good men and true pass me money for the church treasury, or a subscription toward some Christian enterprise, and attend the gift with the request, “Don’t let my wife find it out!”

Possibly because the woman spends most of her life in a home, she covets and desires the most elegant one that her husband’s earning capacity can create; and while woman is not so often a gourmand as man is, in expensive dress her ambitions are both known and conceded. This applies not to herself alone but her children as well. The average wife and mother craves money both because of its purchasing power and the position in society that it can buy.

She feels as Dr. George Jackson said:

“Money is the golden key which unlocks all doors. Money is the lever which removes all difficulties.”

And with all too many the love of wealth grows faster than even wealth itself. To have it and to lose it, that is a dire hardship for man; but he is not so stricken in the circumstance as is woman.

In a church that I served in my early ministry I knew a man of fortune who, when his financial affairs suddenly changed front, and he found himself facing bankruptcy, so feared to communicate that fact to his wife and three daughters that he shut the secret in his own heart, worried through the days, prayed through the nights, until, by and by, his reason broke and after a forty-eight hour search they found him wandering aimlessly in the fields, not knowing whither he went or what he did. His grief was not for his own sake. His fear of their attitude was such that he dared not face it.

The tragic death of her children was more terrible still.

Personally I believe there are fathers who love their children quite as well as, if not better than, the mothers do; but society does not so hold, and probably history does not so prove.

The Scripture text, **When my father and my mother forsake me, then the Lord will take me up** (Psalm 27: 10), means to emphasize an order—the father’s love is great, the mother’s love is greater, and God’s love is greatest.

To see her children smitten, therefore, as they were by the cyclone, and to know they had gone to their death from an experience of revelry and drink, was indeed a stunning blow to Job's wife.

A child is literally of the mother's flesh and blood. That is why the inspired and historic incident of uncomforted mourning is not assigned to Jacob but to Rachel instead:

Rachel weeping for her children, and would not be comforted, because they are not (Matthew 2:18).

There was a time when Jacob was sore stricken, and in his grief he said:

Me have ye bereaved of my children; Joseph is not, and Simeon is not; and ye will take Benjamin away: all these things are against me.

But Jacob did find comfort; not so for Rachel.

I am fully persuaded that when death invades a home, the one person in it stricken as no other is stricken, is the mother. The child is more to her than to anybody else; more by birth, more by sustenance, more by constant association with infancy and helplessness, more by the opportunities of reciprocal love. Little wonder that they said to Mary as they anticipated the death of her Son: **Yea, a sword shall pierce through thine own soul** (Luke 2:35).

And it is not a surprising thing that when the mother of Job's children received the report, **Thy sons and thy daughters were eating and drinking wine in their eldest brother's house: And, behold, there came a great wind from the wilderness, and smote the four corners' of the house, and it fell upon the young men, and they are dead** (Job 1:18-19)—her stock in life went down; it crashed as the commercial mart crashes occasionally, and she felt that all was lost and life was not worth living, and that All is vanity and vexation of spirit.

But even this is not the end for Job's wife.

A diseased and disabled husband excited despair.

If the loss of property and the death of children were difficult, there was yet an experience even more hard to bear.

The opening sentences of this book give us a picture of a **perfect and upright Job**. That perfection may have referred to his physical frame as well as to his moral character. When she married him he was doubtless good to look upon, a husband of whom any woman would have been justly proud; and, if money makes its appeal to womankind, personal appearance is more potent still. I have yet to know a woman who cared even moderately for her husband who, if his appearance was exceptional, was not pleased in the fact, proud in proportion.

“Your handsome husband” is a dulcet sound to any woman's ears. No wealth is prized beyond that of personal appearance. Vigor, and health, and fine features—what fortune!

To lose one's money, to lose one's children, to see one's handsome partner in life suddenly smitten by a disease that covered him with disgusting boils from head to foot—truly this woman was tested as few women have ever been! She could not help contrasting the hopes of a few years before with the experiences to which she had come. When she parted from her father's house she was filled with delightful anticipations—her visions of wealth, family, fine partnership, and all that a woman naturally holds dear—but now all dreams are disappointed, all visions eclipsed; flowers had faded in the path; yea, even worse, the roses had turned to thorns, and life itself, which she had hoped to see flow on, like Tennyson's brook, forever, had suddenly ceased and the stream was dry. The very pebbles over which her tender feet were passing were sharp rocks, every one!

Unfortunately we have had to condemn Job's wife, and justly; but beyond all debate the character of few women ever went into such a crucible. The souls of few women were ever so savagely tested, and the hopes of few women were ever so effectually dashed to earth! She was flat!

HER FAILURE WAS COMPLETE

Her marriage vow was forgotten.

We do not know the phraseology of the marriage ceremony of Job's day, but since he was a man of God it must have been as the ceremony of the present day—something divinely ordained—and if so, then she had solemnly promised to link her life with his “for better or for worse”; and now, when the “worse” came, she failed!

Doubtless had she been given a chance to defend herself she would have answered as the old woman did, who was in court applying for a divorce. The judge on the bench said to her:

“Madam, pardon this question; but didn't you take this man to be your husband for better or for worse?”

“Yes, sir, Mr. Judge, I sure did; but he's a heap sight worser than I ever thought he was going to be!”

The curse of the marital relation is at this point— inconstancy. Glibly we take our oaths as we stand together at the altar; but when the day of testing overtakes us, all too many stand ready to break the sacred pledge.

There is a fable to the effect that Inconstancy wanted to have her picture drawn, but every artist who undertook it failed because her face and shape altered so often. At length, however, Time appeared with brush in hand and said, “I will paint her face!” But Time had no adequate paper upon which to work and so he said, “I will use a woman's face.”

That accounts for the popularity of Reno. Inconstancy — that explains broken homes, “orphaned” children whose parents are still living, but living apart.

My advice to every young woman in this house tonight, yea, to every reader, is this: If you lack constancy, keep away from the marriage altar. If you cannot endure through sickness and health, if you cannot remain faithful when the tides of life are adverse, then leave the pledge unspoken and choose single lonesomeness rather than marital felicity, for without constancy the latter will fail.

Sympathy, the strength of femininity, vanished.

Balzac once said: "To feel, to love, to suffer, to devote herself will always be the test of the life of a woman."

At this point there is no question that the favors have always been with the feminine gender. In the exercise of sympathy, woman has always shone.

Washington Irving wrote: "There is one in the world who feels for him who is sad a keener pang than she feels for self; there is one to whom reflected joy is better than that which comes direct; there is one who rejoices in another's honor more than in any which is her own; there is one on whom another's transcendent excellence sheds no beam but that of delight; there is one who hides another's infirmities more faithfully than her own; there is one who loses all sense of self in the sentiment of kindness, tenderness, and devotion to another—that one is WOMAN."

Consequently when a woman fails at that point we feel that she well-nigh unsexes herself. And certainly Job's wife did fail. There is not in our text a hint of sympathy; not a vestige of love. On the contrary, the language indicates her weariness at the sight of this stricken man and her perfect willingness to get rid of him.

In that respect she has had her successors. The newspapers of this past week have been filled, yea even flooded, with the court trials of women who murdered their husbands.

It is not necessary to imagine that Mrs. Job had approached this point, but it is easy to conceive that his death would have been looked upon as a deliverance.

Her pledged affection had changed into loathing.

There are people who are wedded to the body instead of to the spirit; who are married to riches rather than to men; whose domestic happiness depends upon prosperity rather than upon mutual love. The marital experience of such seldom runs smoothly.

To make a true home it should be built as birds build their nests. Henry Ward Beecher said: "I have seen them gather rude sticks and pliant twigs and bend them to shape; and then with mud, or glutinous secretions, they fill up the interstices. On this foundation they lay feathers and soft grasses and hair. When all is gathered and laid down they settle themselves into the rounded nest and, turning about and about, they smooth and finish the nest with their own breasts. So it is with men that make homes. It is the bosom that does it finally, and not the bill nor the claw."

But without pausing further upon Mrs. Job's spirit, we turn now to consider her speech.

HER SPEECH WAS FOOLISH

At least that was the judgment of her noble husband, and he dared to voice it: **Thou speakest as one of the foolish women speaketh. What? shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not, receive evil?** (Job 2:10).

He saw some things clearly and was seeking to bring her to see them. He saw that to her, integrity depended entirely upon prosperity!

Unfortunately it is too often so! People feel an obligation to pay their debts if they have plenty of money. If they run short of cash, their honor departs with it.

When I was a lad my father was a comparatively poor man, but I used to hear his neighbors say, "Branson's word is as good as his bond!" I did not fully appreciate then what they meant. I know now, and the further understanding increases my admiration. Joseph Parker once said: "It is truly something splendid to be God's proof-man; to be singled out as dependable; to be listened to as truthful, to be trusted as firm, unchangeable, and conscientious."

Such men are always in demand; such characters carry an appreciation in themselves.

It is said that George Washington had within his power the appointment to an important office. Two men applied. One was a warm, personal friend of Washington and the other a political enemy. To the surprise of everybody, the latter was appointed. Certain politicians went to Mr. Washington to remonstrate that he should have given his enemy an office and so denied it to his friend. Washington replied: "My friend I receive with a cordial welcome to my house and welcome to my heart, but with all his good qualities he is not a man of business. His opponent is. My private feelings have nothing to do with this case. I am not acting as George Washington, the neighbor; I am acting as the President of the United States, and as President I can do nothing other."

Integrity is a God-given trait; yea, it is a trait divine. "**He changeth not.**" Again:

He saw in her speech that faith was contingent upon divine favor.

So long as God's blessing was abundant she would believe, but when the reversal of fortune came, her faith perished; her confidence took wings; her allegiance was gone!

What a rebuke in the words:

What! shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?

Job was even then clearly apprehending a New Testament truth, **For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth** (Hebrews 12:6).

It is a foolish father who gives his children everything and chastises them never; who answers every request, but never indulges in a correction. The reform schools and the State penitentiaries are filled with the sons and daughters of such. One reason this age to which we belong is a century in which crime is a common custom with children in their teens, is explained in that fact. Parental authority has been abandoned. Filial obedience is no longer required. We have had certain philosophers and teachers of the age who have denied the right of correction to parents and have even publicly denounced it as an imposition upon youth. We are reaping the result!

When the last word is spoken that may be spoken upon the subject of parental control, the words of Scripture will be found to have been words of wisdom:

He that spareth his rod hateth his son . . .

Job bared his back to God's rod as each additional stroke fell, cutting into his flesh and even into his soul; he answered, **Blessed be the name of the Lord . . . In all this did not Job sin with his lips.**

But his wife shouted defiance in God's face and suggested to her husband that he become an infidel; expressed to him her preference that he die and be done with it.

I know not a few folks who are Christian when all goes well, but misfortune is experienced at the expense of faith. No less an authority than Goethe, the great German infidel, actually explains his infidelity on the ground that he sought God by a ceremony, to acknowledge Him in worship. He burned a beautiful table on which he had lighted his tapers and had to take his father's correction in consequence. That day he lost his faith and landed in infidelity. It is certain that Goethe did not have much to lose.

This whole story would suggest that Job's wife's religion was a mere profession incident to her rich and honored husband's station and spiritual reputation and not to a personal experience of God's grace.

Finally, life to her was a mere matter of meat and raiment.

Before the cattle, the sheep, and the asses were carried away; before the elder son's house was crashed in; before boils smote her husband, she was outwardly pious. While plenty of money remained with which to purchase dresses, hats, coats, and shoes in abundance, she was a church belle; but when these were no more, the house of God was anathema, songs of praise to Him left her lips and for even the pretense of former times she was more than apologetic.

Faith, if it be properly fixed, is not so easily shaken, not so soon disturbed.

At times I love to bathe my own soul in the eleventh chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews where, after having told how the Old Testament worthies had believed God, he tells us that through faith they,

“subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight, the armies of the aliens. Women received their dead raised to life again: and others were tortured, not accepting deliverance; that they might obtain a better resurrection: and others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment,: they were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins: being destitute, afflicted, tormented; and these all, having obtained a good report, through faith, received not the promise: God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect” (Hebrews 11:33-37, 39-40).

Truly, as the Bible teaches, faith is the victory that can face disappointments and not fail; it can look on failures and retain praises on its lips; it can endure hardness as a good soldier, or even torment and death, and never deny the Lord. Through faith we are saved!

The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart: that is, the word of faith, which we preach; That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved (Romans 10:8-9).

I set over in contrast, then, to the words of this faithless woman, Curse God, and die, the sentiment of sacred Scripture itself, **“Believe God, and live!”**

~ end of chapter 6 ~

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