

## 8 Men in Charge?

Now we come to an issue, which provides more clear inequality than we have seen so far: the understanding men have charge of women.

This concept floored me when I first encountered it.

I come from a family of strong individualists. My parents left their homes and struck out on their own far from either family's influence. My mother always worked and contributed an integral part to the family wealth. She wanted us, her three daughters, to know how to take care of ourselves, to have a means of making our own living, and building our own lives.

It felt very foreign and unfair to me for a man to have charge of me just because of his gender. However, this matches the teachings of the Bible quite well. In Genesis 3:16 God tells Eve her husband shall act as her master:

*"I will make most severe  
Your pangs in childbearing;  
In pain shall you bear children.  
Yet your urge shall be for your husband,  
And he shall rule over you."  
(Genesis 3:16 - The Torah: The Five Books of Moses, 1992)*

At the same time Genesis also contains a passage that makes the equality of men and women clear since God created us all the same:

*And God created man in His image, in the image of God He created him; male  
and female He created them.  
(Genesis 1:26 - The Torah: The Five Books of Moses)*

In the New Testament throughout his epistles Paul says women should submit to their husbands and husbands should love and care for their wives. For example:

*Wives should be submissive to their husbands as if to the Lord.... Husbands  
should love their wives as they do their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself.  
(1 Ephesians 5:22 & 28 - New American Bible)*

This understanding also exists in the Quran. For me coming from a non-religious background, I found this concept offensive. As much as I wanted to skirt the issue I could not. It does not come from a cultural understanding that crept into the religion. This comes from a solid Quranic source. Here I quote the first part of the verse as translated by Rashad Khalifa:

*The men are made responsible for the women, and God has endowed them with  
certain qualities, and made them the bread earners. The righteous women will cheerfully  
accept this arrangement, since it is God's commandment, and honor their husbands  
during their absence.  
(Quran: The Final Testament 4:34 – first portion)*

This didn't seem too bad. After all men have traditionally acted as the protectors of their families and the bread earners. In those circumstances it makes sense the protector should have the ultimate say. How else can he protect his family? When caught in a dangerous situation, if people do not listen to him, he cannot protect them.

Rashad Khalifa's footnote for this portion of the verse made sense to me:

This expression simply means that God is appointing the husband as "captain of the ship." Marriage is like a ship, and the captain runs it after due consultation with his officers. A believing wife readily accepts God's appointment, without mutiny.

When I honestly examined this concept I had to say it does not indicate inequality. In the United States we elect public officials but no one would consider himself essentially unequal to those officials. It simply provides a way of organizing the society in a manner that works.

I'm not certain exactly what happens in a situation where the woman works outside the home. Personally it seems in that case she no longer has a protected position. She also faces the dangers and stresses of the working world. However, the marriage still needs an organizational leader and God specified the husband to play that role.

A growing body of scientific evidence shows some basic biological differences between the genders. These differences better adapt each gender to their different roles. For more information on this see for instance the book *BRAIN SEX: The real difference between men and women*, Anne Moir, Ph.D. and David Jessel, 1992. Also *Sex on the Brain: The Biological Differences Between Men and Women*, Deborah Blum, 1998. And the more recent article "Two minds: cognitive differences between men and women" by Bruce Goldman from the Spring, 2017 issue of *Stanford Medicine* found on line.<sup>1</sup>

No one can argue the fact women bear the children. The Quran honors this crucial role for the society, as we will see later. And who would know better about these matters than God?

So far I felt satisfied the Quran does not see women as unequal. Rather the family's organization creates different but equally important roles for each gender.

The rest of this verse held a bombshell for me though:

*If you experience rebellion from the women, you shall first talk to them, then (you may use negative incentives like) deserting them in bed, then you may (as a last alternative) beat them. If they obey you, you are not permitted to transgress against them....*

*(Quran: The Final Testament 4:34 – later portion)*

I accepted if you have a captain of the ship he might sometimes need a means of keeping order. But *beating*?

Fortunately Rashad Khalifa's footnote calmed me considerably. (Please note here a *sura* is a chapter of the Quran.)

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<sup>1</sup> Please see <https://stanmed.stanford.edu/2017spring/how-mens-and-womens-brains-are-different.html> (last accessed 02/02/2020).

God prohibits wife-beating by using the best psychological approach. For example, if I don't want you to shop at Market X, I will ask you to shop at Market Y, then at Market Z, then, as a last resort, at Market X. This will effectively stop you from shopping at Market X, without insulting you. Similarly, God provides alternatives to wife-beating; reasoning with her first, then employing certain negative incentives. Remember that the theme of this sura is defending the women's rights and countering the prevalent oppression of women. Any interpretation of the verses of this sura must be in favor of the women. This sura's theme is "protection of women."

With this approach, we can see God tells men not to beat their wives. If a righteous husband goes through all these steps he will not beat his wife. Enough time will have passed to defuse the situation and both parties will have had a chance to rethink the problem.

I will never forget the horror of hearing my Muslim neighbor through a thin apartment wall. He often shouted a lot, clearly verbally abusing his American wife and her daughter by a previous marriage. One night it turned much worse than usual. I believe he finally got physical with his wife; she ended the marriage.

However, many years before this incident, I experienced a very different one. One of my Sufi friends shared with me that she had become hysterical and her husband slapped her once on the cheek to help her break loose from the emotion that had gripped her with such strength. She thanked him for the slap, which shocked her back to her normal sanity. While a slap on the cheek might not equate to beating, it does show there may be situations where a physical response *may* be helpful.

Because of their strength and other qualities, God gives men the last say in a marriage but they must also provide for, protect, and take care of women. They must not harm them.

Recently a brother and I discussed this verse. He referred me to the website [IslamAwakened.com](http://IslamAwakened.com), which provides a great many different English translations of the Quran. In some of the translations 4:34 is translated so rather than beating, the husband leaves the wife. My strong personal preference is to follow Rashad Khalifa's understanding.

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I wasn't going to take any chances. When I remarried I made certain I could trust my husband to talk things out.

Perhaps that provides a clue. Knowing a husband can either beat or leave his wife, a believing woman needs to take care of whom she chooses to marry. If women marry only men who will treat them with dignity, eventually abuse will die out. No excuse ever exists for spouse abuse; however, women can take an active part in protecting themselves by carefully choosing their spouses.

This requires us to take an active role, which is well thought out, in our selection of a mate. No more quick courtships. You need to know someone for a good while and in as many possible righteous circumstances as you can before you can really judge their

suitability as a husband. The criteria for a good mate also change when one looks at it from this perspective. A man's spiritual, moral, and emotional character becomes much more important than his looks, or profession, or standing in the community. In fact, they become the only important things.

Shouldn't that be the case? We will choose someone to live with for the rest of our lifetime, someone with whom to form a family. They will act as a big factor in our own spiritual growth, just as we will act as a factor in their spiritual growth.

It's our own necks. Only we can take care of them.

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*Sister MeauVell speaks here of how God has provided a safety net for women. Men may have the role of captain but they protect the women.*

### **Amazing Grace**

The grace of God as shown for me throughout my life has taught me directly His amazing grace for the female of the human species. The Quran in 36:6-10 speaks of people whose parents were never warned, and are therefore totally unaware. Well, my biological parents seemed to be among those. As a result of their not knowing, or simply not following the guidance of God in the Quran, eleven children and at least one adult, my mother, endured hardships that could have been different. God knows best however, and had those things not happened, I would not have this experience to share with you.

The Quran instructs the male on the proper way to have more than one wife. When the criteria are followed, then women like my mother and her children can be properly cared for, and accepted in the society with dignity rather than dishonor. When the plans for marriage fail, the woman is still provided for, says the Quran. My mother as another wife could have been protected had she followed the Quran. She would not have had to literally give away her children to others who could and would provide for them. It cost her and the children. I was one of the six that were sent to be raised by someone else. Again, God knows best for each of us.

I finally did meet my mother and my ten other siblings just before attaining adulthood. God is amazing, the criteria of keeping the name of the child, as described in the Quran, did provide the link to my lineage when the time came. My name was my ID.

I was raised by the people that adopted me, at age two, as a Baptist. I began to study Islam shortly after marrying. I joined what was then the Nation of Islam under the leadership of the Honorable Elijah Muhammed. It was here that I came in direct contact with the idea of women being special, and therefore to be protected by the men of the family and the community. My husband who was "verbally" Muslim, was taught to be the bread-earner, and I stayed home to raise our children and manage our home. That was my job. Modesty was the dress code, but still even if I went to the park with the children, I was escorted for our protection.

I soon learned that I was studying about the Quran, rather than studying the Quran itself. I changed my mode of practice; I left the Nation, and joined what was the *Sunnah*<sup>2</sup> of Islam.

It was awhile before I recognized again that I was studying something other than the Quran. We studied the *Hadith* for an hour and then discussed those sayings as they related to our lives. Well, we would find no real answers for the problems we shared. I began to study the Quran finally, and to my surprise I found there were answers to women having rights, property, making judgments, and being witnesses, etc. Unfortunately, these were not answers the community was ready for. My own spouse of thirty-two years was not ready for them, and slowly began to leave the guidance of God. The result was a legal divorce initiated by me. When it became clear to me that he and I could not agree on following the guidance of the Quran only, I followed the Guidance and ended the marriage. I waited the four months as instructed in the Quran, and found that it corresponded with the waiting period of the courts. The children and I stayed in our home and were not mistreated. My former spouse was unable to provide for us, but God is quite sufficient. I kept my possessions as stated in the Quran, thus I have assets. The rules set in place by God became the “safety net” for me and my children.

Well, as time continued, my brothers and the believers assisted the children and me, again through the criteria of the Quran. The charity extended to us over those months allowed my children to never be deprived of the needs of everyday living. God is so amazing to me. To date there have been no offers of marriage from believing men that I felt were sanctioned by the Almighty. Surely God would compensate the male that could and would take on that responsibility. In spite of my circumstances, I reside safely within God’s Amazing Grace and attempt to patiently wait on Him. I enhance the waiting by studying the Quran. Mainly I study alone, but when the opportunity arrives, I study with others. I relate to the concept of worshipping God alone in all of its contexts. I feel so very blessed to be allowed the knowledge of the Quran. God be ever praised, highly glorified is He. It has been my supreme pleasure to be given an opportunity to communicate to you, and share what is probably many peoples’ story. Perhaps some day I’ll be allowed to share so those who have the same or a similar story can know that they are not alone, and we are blessed to have submitted to the design God ordained for our lives so that we would know Him with certainty. God’s Grace is Amazing.

—*MeauVell, U.S.A.*

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*In the story that follows sister JC speaks out at the glaring inequity she often sees in the way men act when “in charge”.*

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<sup>2</sup> *Editor’s note:* Traditional Muslims often refer to the practice of their faith as the *Sunnah*.

## In Charge Or In Control?

My feelings about the way the concept of men being in charge in our world is summed up by a card sent to me by a friend. The picture shows six people sitting around a board table, only one of them a woman. The director is saying, “That’s an excellent suggestion, Miss Triggs. Perhaps one of the men here would like to make it.”

I’ve always been told by the wise old women in my community that in order to get your way with a man, you must learn how to make what you want look like it is his idea. Many times I have not shared my opinion because I didn’t want to be perceived as a troublemaker. So I formed the habit of denying my truth because I thought that was required to be a good Muslim woman.

I have witnessed that it is generally worse even than that in several Muslim societies. Not only are the opinions and wisdom of women ignored and denied, we know that in many Muslim countries (within your very religious communities) you very seldom see women out in public. Women must wear the *shidowa*, and are covered completely from head to toe; even to see women’s eyes is forbidden.

Back in the day of our Urban-based Muslim communities, we were apartment dwellers. It was always interesting to me how, when we had functions at various homes, though there were always more women and children than men, the men always had the nicest facilities and accommodations. The women were made to endure with the children behind the scenes somewhere in small cramped quarters. Even many of the *masjids* [mosques] require the women to occupy only the smallest rooms in the smallest areas.

As I traveled through the Middle East, it struck me that despite the blazing heat of many of these countries, it is a culturally accepted norm that women wear black and the men wear white. Now we all know how black attracts heat and I was wondering, “Why are the women having to wear this black. It’s so hot!” I know that they have physicists and chemists in their society that can tell them that this is not comfortable. Could men survive in black, in such a hot terrain?

Despite God’s elucidation in the Quran on the value and parity of women, I constantly struggle with the fact that Muslims have been acculturated to hate and deny the female. Instead of believing that God is neither male nor female, we act like we believe that God is only masculine and does not like anything female.

—JC, U.S.A.

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To me, the concept of men having the responsibility for a woman does not in any way diminish my own responsibility to and for myself—especially for my true self, my soul. I see it simply as a means of organizing society and it should never be used in an oppressive manner by or against either gender. One of the things that I love about the Quran is its recognition of women as absolutely equal to men on the spiritual as well as

worldly level. Unlike the early fathers of the Christian church, which Sue Monk Kidd reports as having debated whether or not women even have souls!<sup>3</sup>

God in the Quran not only recognizes my soul but also tells me that it is the only important part of me, for my soul will continue into the life of the next world, the hereafter. So though it appears that Muslim men are in charge of the women in this world, we are all ultimately in charge of ourselves. Thus, women can be just as powerful as men in the areas that really matter, and in fact, we will see in Chapter 23 that women actually have the most powerful position in society.

So my sisters, do not feel in the least slighted by God. God sees you as equal to men and has given you tremendous power!

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<sup>3</sup> Sue Monk Kidd, *The Dance of the Dissident Daughter*, HarperCollins Publishers, 2016, p. 27