

One More Vicious Attack on "Conservatives"

Dub McClish

Introduction

The extreme to which some liberals in the church are willing to go in an attempt to discredit those who reject their agenda was demonstrated at the 1991 annual lectureship at David Lipscomb University. A June 15 article in *The Nashville Tennessean* by Ray Waddle, Religion News Editor, reported on the comments of four panelists. The article began as follows: "Rigidly conservative churches attract power-addicted preachers and encourage incest and pornography at home because they too often teach distortions about sex."

Serious Assertions Against "Conservatives"

Gayle Napier, "family life minister" at Harpeth Hills Church of Christ in Nashville (formerly in a similar position at Richland Hills Church of Christ, Fort Worth, Texas) was one of the outspoken panelists who addressed a crowd of about two hundred people. He opined: "The more conservative the church, the more incest you have in families."

The ground upon which Napier based his contention was that we (he means "rigid conservatives") have missed what the Bible teaches about "headship" of the husband and "submission" of the wife. He claimed: "We've [excluding himself and his superior liberal buddies, of course] so distorted the concept of 'headship' and 'submission' that we've produced a pathological marriage model." He charged that this could lead to "emotional incest" and/or physical incest. By "emotional incest" he means that the typical "conservative" Christian husband is a "power-controlling addict" or dictator, treating his wife more like a daughter than a wife. Thus, he alleged, each sexual experience of such a couple eventually constitutes "emotional incest" (father-figure husband with daughter-figure wife) in the mind of the wife. According to Napier, after several years of such, the wife may refuse all sexual contact with her husband, which then "might" drive him to physical incest with a daughter. While he was at it, he took a harshly gratuitous slap at Gospel preachers in his comments: "There's one socially approved place for power addicts besides the home, and that's the pulpit. We attract people [preachers] who love to 'beat us up'."

Another panelist, Gary Wilson, a Nashville psychologist, theorized that "distorted church teachings" that paint a negative picture about sex relations can drive Christians to pornography or homosexuality. (No doubt these "distorted" teachings likewise come solely from "rigidly conservative" churches and preachers.) Because our sexual desires have been so

inhibited by all this erroneous teaching on sex in these awful "conservative" churches, he found a chance to add his voice to some old, baseless, and well-worn liberal whines: "We're eaten up with guilt. We don't know grace and mercy." For good measure, he accused us of teaching that sex, or even life itself, should not be pleasurable. Interestingly, when he commented on sexual attraction a Christian may feel toward another member of the church not his/her spouse and with whom one is closely associated in church work, he said such an attraction was "normal." Curiously, then he said, "The problem is we haven't taught people to set limits on those feelings" (that sounds almost like "rigid conservative" talk).

What Does the Bible Teach About Authority in The Home?

Does or does not the Bible teach the headship of the husband over the wife and the submission of the wife to her husband? To ask it is to answer it, and even a neophyte in Bible knowledge could do so. This teaching begins at the gate of Eden and is consistent in both Old and New Testaments (Gen. 3:16; 1 Cor. 11:1-3; Eph. 5:22-33; Col. 3:18; 1 Pet. 3:1-6; et al.). These five passages show that from the beginning God intended for the husband to "rule" over his wife. As Christ is the head of the church, so is the husband head of the wife and as the church is to submit to Christ, so is the wife to submit to and "fear" her husband (Eph. 5:22-24, 33b). It is "fitting [appropriate] in the Lord" for the wife to "be in subjection" to her husband (Col. 3:18). The wife is to subject herself to her husband (even if he is not a Christian) and "holy women" thus behave, "obeying" their husbands (1 Pet. 3:1,5-6).

While 1 Corinthians 11:1-9 deals with the more general subject of the headship of man over woman, it also applies to the husband-wife relationship. The headship of man (the husband) is argued on the following bases in Scripture:

1. Woman was created from man (v. 8).
2. Woman was created for man (v. 9).

Paul stated additional reasons for the headship of man over woman in 1 Timothy 2:13-14:

1. Man was first created (v. 13).
2. Woman, not man, was beguiled by Satan (v. 14).

Now some may not (obviously **do not**) like what these inspired statements say, others may deny their inspiration or authority over us, and still others may disagree with the practical implementation of the headship and submission taught, but no man or woman can deny that

the Scriptures teach that the husband is the head of the wife, and the wife is to be in submission to her husband.

Having said that, I hasten to point out that none of these passages (nor any others) give the husband the right to mistreat or abuse his wife. In fact, there is a balancing edict in all of the New Testament contexts cited above that places both limits and weighty responsibilities upon the husband toward his wife. He must love his wife as sacrificially as Christ loved the church and as he loves, nourishes, and cherishes himself (Eph. 5:25, 28–29, 33a). He must love his wife and not be bitter toward her (Col. 3:19). He must give her honor and protect and care for her as one who is weaker and in need of protection, treating her as a joint heir of life (1 Pet. 3:7).

It is inexcusable for any husband (Christian or otherwise) to so misapply these passages, which give him the responsibility of headship, to justify abusing his wife, whether physically, verbally, emotionally, or otherwise. These passages do not license him as a tyrant or despot whose word or decisions are never to be questioned. They do not imply in any way that the wife occupies a "second-class status" nor that a husband has the right to so treat her.

However, there is also no excuse whatsoever for any Christian (man or woman) to take the position that, since some husbands have abused their wives based on some perverted concept of "headship," therefore the Bible does not teach the headship of the husband and the submission of the wife to him. (An elementary rule of hermeneutics is that the abuse of a principle is never a legitimate argument against the principle itself.) Considering what the Scriptures so plainly teach on this subject, it is all but incredible to see Napier quoted as follows: "Headship in the New Testament had nothing to do with control and power but was seen as the source of love. Guys, love your wives the way Jesus loves the church."

Illustrations can only go so far. If we press them beyond what they were meant to illustrate they become absurd nonsense. If we press the Christ-is-head-of-the-church and the husband-is-head-of-the-wife illustration too far, the husband would have absolute rule and the wife would be in absolute subjection, for just so it is with Christ and His church. However, we do not believe that Paul had this in mind because he tempered the teaching with strong and repeated reminders to husbands to love their wives. However, Napier obviously wants to totally eradicate any idea of authority for the husband, replacing it with "love" alone, if we understand his words. It is just as much an abuse of Scripture to deny the husband any authority as it is to invest him with cruel and despotic authority. Paul is not teaching headship **or** love in these passages, but headship **and** love.

The essence of the Napier claim may be seen in syllogistic form:

1. The teaching that the husband is head of the wife causes incest in families where such is practiced.
2. The Bible teaches that the husband is the head of the wife (Gen. 3:16; Eph. 5:23; Col. 3:18; 1 Pet. 3:1-6).
3. Therefore, the Bible causes incest in families where such is practiced.

It may also be framed as follows:

1. The teaching that the husband has no authority over the wife prevents incest.
2. The teaching that the husband has no authority over the wife is contrary to Bible teaching (Gen. 3:16; Eph. 5:23; Col. 3:18; 1 Pet. 3:1-6).
3. Therefore, to prevent incest in our families we should disobey the Bible on the authority of the husband in the home.

Napier's basic argument seems to be that incest has in some cases been caused by husbands/fathers who have abused the headship principle; therefore, we must deny that the Bible teaches what it teaches about headship. Such an attitude in effect either denies that what Paul and Peter taught on the subject is inspired of God, or, admitting its inspiration, by implication, accuses God of making a gigantic mistake when he made the husband the head of the wife.

Additional Observations

Napier and Wilson both erected a "straw man" for which they offered no proof of existence, namely, that all conservative preachers teach that husbands have the right to be despots and tyrants and to mistreat their wives. Now it may be that we have not taught as much as we should on the husband's Scriptural obligations to his wife in the areas of love, emotional support, tenderness, protection, and similar elements. However, I have never heard any preacher or teacher of God's Word in my many years of preaching even hint that headship of the husband over the wife excuses despotic, tyrannical, cruel treatment of her. While at times the panelists seemed to be speaking in definite terms of cause and effect, at other times they were not nearly so certain. Notice the "iffiness" of some of their statements: "incest **might** follow," "distorted teachings about sex **can** drive Christians to pornography or homosexuality [emph. DMJ]." If this were such a prevalent occurrence and one of such importance as to need

airing at a university lectureship, the panelists would have come armed with some statistics to prove their points. Where are the figures from carefully controlled test cases, surveys, polls, or other well-known fact-gathering measures? If the newspaper article is to be trusted as factual and representative of the panel's presentation, statistics should have been cited. There was no evidence presented. There were only assertions made which we are apparently to accept just because the panelists are "specialists" and perhaps some of them have doctor's degrees. Sorry, fellows, but we need something more than that before we start wallowing in the guilt and blame you seek to lay upon us conservatives.

Do you see the part of a larger pattern here? Several years ago, there arose the teaching by some brethren that elders have no authority in the local congregation, except the "authority" of leading by example. More recently the "New Hermeneutics" advocates have been doing their best to destroy any authoritative quality in the New Testament by crying, "It's not a constitution, but merely a 'love letter' from God." Now some of the marriage and family "experts" are trying to tear down God's structure for authority in the home. When you put all of those together there is not much authority left anywhere, is there? Of course, this is precisely the aim of liberals, so they can think, believe, and do whatever they desire in morals or religion. Why don't they quit being hypocrites and stop pretending to have some reverence for the Word of God? They long ago threw it out the window of their hearts. They would at least be consistent (and perhaps more credible) if they literally trashed their copies of Holy Writ. Better still, if they will send their Bibles to me, I will send them to some people who still hunger and thirst for God's Word.

An Incredible Statement

One of Napier's statements especially caught my eye: "The more conservative the church, the more incest you have in families." If this be the case, then I suppose our brethren who oppose church support of children's homes and the cooperation of churches to preach the Gospel have a higher rate of incest in their families than the likes of us "mere" conservatives. Further, it would seem to follow that the non-class, one cup, no preacher churches should have even more than the previously mentioned class. By Napier's rule, the Mennonites must be plagued with incest in every family.

If the rule works one way, then it should work the other as well: "The more liberal the church, the less incest you have in families." If this is not an argument for absolute, no-holds-barred, pedal to the floor liberalism, I can't recognize one. By this rule it should follow that the

"moderately liberal" churches that have not embraced the fullness of "preach anything, believe anything, practice anything, and fellowship everything" should have few cases of incest. Those who have just about let down all the barriers (e.g., Woodmont Hills [Nashville], Richland Hills [Fort Worth], Bering Drive [Houston], and a multitude of others) should have hardly any cases of incest. The Unitarian Churches should be absolutely free of incest in their families! "Absurd," you say? I agree, but such is the logic of Gayle Napier if there is any logic at all to his averment about "conservative" churches.

The truth is that liberalism is what promotes both doctrinal and moral corruption. It is not "conservative" churches or preachers that have filled the minds of Christians with fifteen or more "loopholes" by which to circumvent the Lord's teaching on divorce and remarriage in Matthew 19:9. It is not "conservative" churches or preachers that have encouraged people who are living in adultery to continue doing so. It is not "conservative" churches or preachers that have encouraged wearing immodest apparel, social drinking, dancing, and other similar worldly practices. The Unitarian Church likely demonstrates theological and moral liberalism in its "purist" form (while claiming to hold on to a vestige of "religion"). Many of its leaders, if not its members, are secular humanists who deny the existence of any higher form of life than mankind. Their credo is do whatever brings you pleasure now because now is all you have, with no final accounting. In their absolute liberalism they advocate the respectability of homosexuality and lesbianism. If they do not advocate the rights of one to practice incest, it must be merely on the grounds of pragmatism rather than principle. Their liberalism leaves them no grounds on which to oppose it on principle. I cite these matters to show that it is liberalism, not conservatism based upon the Word of God, that would at least defend, if not produce such moral horrors as incest, homosexuality, pornography, and all such like.

Some of this cancer is already at work in the church. A few years ago, a handful of homosexual "Churches of Christ" who were striving to gain respectability surfaced. I have not heard if any of our high-profile liberal professors, marriage and family experts, or preachers are yet defending such. (I would not be surprised if some already have. I may have just missed it.) If they would so wrest "let each man abide in that calling wherein he was called" (1 Cor. 7:20, 24), as to justify the continuation of the moral evil of adultery, why should they not so wrest it to justify a continued homosexual relationship? Indeed, consistency would require such, it seems to me. In a world in which no moral aberration is taboo anymore, justifying incest is actually but a short step beyond justifying homosexuality.

Conclusion

Let me make it plain that there is a place of great need and usefulness in the kingdom for men and women who devoutly believe in God and in His Word and who have equipped themselves to deal with grievous marriage and family problems. I appreciate them and the good work they do and that sometimes cannot be done by others who have not their training. However, the key to the appreciation I have for such is their devotion to God and His Word **first**, regardless of what society practices or what the infidel professors and experts in their field might say to the contrary. We appeal to brethren Napier and Wilson and to others like them who are working in marriage and family counseling to "let God be found true, but every man a liar" (Rom. 3:4).

On this allegation that "conservative" churches foster incest, pornography, and homosexuality, with the pundit we say, "We reject the allegation and deny the allegater"!

[**Note:** I wrote this article at the request of Michael Hatcher, editor of the *Shield of Faith*, and mailed it to him on September 15, 1991

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