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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:

On the issue of whether men and women are equal in Islam, these Salafis unashamedly quote Ibn Kathir's comments on Sura 2:282 and claim: Ibn Katheer said: Two women are to take the place of one man because women are lacking in reason, as Muslim narrated in his Saheeh from Abu Hurayrah that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: "O women, give in charity and seek forgiveness a great deal, for I have seen that you form the majority of the people of Hell." A wise woman among them said, "Why is it, O Messenger of Allaah, that we are the majority of the people of Hell?" He said, "Because you curse too much, and you are ungrateful to your spouses. I have seen none lacking in common sense and failing in religion but (at the same time) robbing the wisdom of the wise, besides you." The woman asked: "O Messenger of Allaah, what is wrong with our common sense and our religion?" He said: "Your lack of common sense (can be well judged from the fact) that the evidence of two women is equal to that of one man, that is a proof of the lack of common sense, and you spend some nights (and days) in which you do not offer prayer and in the month of Ramadan (during the days) you do not observe fast, that is a failing in religion." - Tafseer Ibn Katheer, 1/336

Response:

The hadith ad quranic ayah quoted by ibn kathir has nothing to do with intelligence or wisdom. I shall now quote a fatwa about this hadith from the scholars of ourdialogue.com:

Fatwa by the scholars of ourdialogue.com :

Question:

My daughter keeps asking me about the Hadith that women are deficient in mental ability and in religion. Could you please explain it? Why does the Prophet, peace be upon him, say that most women will be in hell ?

Your daughter is not alone. Many are those who question the meaning it conveys. This is largely due to the fact that the Hadith is quoted only in part and the relevant statement is cited out of context. People always attribute to the Prophet, peace be upon him, the suggestion that women are inferior to men on grounds of a deficient mind a lack of faith. This is far from true. Let us look at the Hadith in full:

Related by Al-Bukhari and Muslim

On the occasion of Eid, either that of sacrifice or that of ending the fast, the Prophet, peace be upon him, went to the prayer place, and then went to speak to women and he said: "Ladies! I have not seen people deficient in mind and religion yet can get away with a rational man's mind like any one of you." They asked: "How are we deficient in mind and religion, Messenger of God?" He said: "Is it not true that a woman's testimony counts as half that of a man?" When they answered in the affirmative, he said: "This is her mental deficiency. Is it not true that when a woman is in her period she neither prays nor fasts?" They again answered in the affirmative. He said: "This is her religious deficiency.

To start with, the Prophet, peace be upon him, was speaking to a congregation of women on a joyous occasion. Exemplary in his care for others, particularly his companions, and kind and compassionate as he was, it is inconceivable that he would insult them by such a statement, if he meant it as a statement of fact, like some of us do. The Prophet, peace be upon him, simply used this phrase “deficient in mind and religion” to alert them to what he wanted to say to them. The Prophet, peace be upon him, frequently uses such a method, inserting some words that may not be relevant to the point he wants to stress, so that they serve to attract the attention of his audience. Furthermore, his statement expresses amazement at a well-known situation, when a man is infatuated by a woman to the extent that his behavior changes in character. He may be wise and intelligent, yet he could easily behave in a way that is inconsistent with his intelligence and wisdom when he is so infatuated. This is a case where a woman who is generally weaker (faster overcome by emotions, less physical strenght) than a man can control him.

The Hadith mentions that the Prophet’s women audience asked him to clarify what he said. His clarification pinpoints certain aspects that suggest no inferiority whatsoever. The mental deficiency is related to the fact that in certain cases, two women witnesses are required in place of one-man witness. This has to do with the role of each of the two sexes in Islamic society. It is no reflection on a woman’s mental ability. As for religious deficiency, the Prophet, peace be upon him, states the fact that a woman is exempt from prayer and fasting when she is in menstruation. While God gives a woman the reward for prayer and fasting as if she has done them, since she stops only because of her condition and in response to God’s orders, still the fact that she does not fulfill these duties means that her worship is less in terms of what she offers. It does not mean that she is a lesser believer.

As for a relevant statement of fact in this regard, the Prophet, peace be upon him, says, “Women are full sisters of men.” 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.

May I add here that the translation of this Hadith as quoted by you is wrong, because it splits the relevant sentence and gives the Prophet's words in such a way that they appear to make a statement of fact. This is wrong, as I have explained.

As for the other part, a full translation of it goes as follows: “ I have seen hell and I have never seen any thing more horrific than what I saw then. I also saw that the majority of its dwellers are women. They asked: “On what grounds, Messenger of God ? He said: “By their denial., They said: “Their denial of God ?, He answered: “No. Their denial of their spouses and their denial of kindness. You may be kind to one of them all the time, but when she finds fault with you she says: I have never received any kindness from you. ”

To start with, the Hadith does not say that most women are in hell. It says that the majority of hell dwellers are women, which simply signifies that more women fail in this worldly test than men. Then the Prophet, peace be upon him, points out their failure, which is not based on denying God. Rather, it is denying kindness, particularly in marital situations. The Prophet, peace be upon him, has pointed this out in more than one Hadith, warning women against grumbling and frequent complaints. He is also warning them here against denying kindness by their husbands, highlighting a failing that is often expressed in denying past kindness.

The Hadith shows that women can easily avoid such a destiny by being fair and appreciative of kindness. They should always be grateful to God for what He has given them and also be appreciative of any kindness done to them by others, particularly those with whom they live, be they their husbands, parents or other relatives. ¹

Ruqaiyyah Waris Maqsood comments on Soerah 2:282

It has been suggested that the Prophet, peace be upon him, regarded women as inferior to men for two reasons - the inheritance laws in which a daughter received half the share of a son; and the fact that two female witnesses were regarded as the equal of one male witness.

In fact, the Qur'an actually taught that the witness of a woman was just as valid as that of a man, and made no distinction regarding the sex of a witness in every single reference except one – the concession of granting two female witnesses in legal cases where women had little knowledge or expertise. The intention of this concession was to prevent women being tricked or cheated by unscrupulous men who could take advantage of their inexperience in business matters.

Qu'ran 2.282:

O believers ! When you deal with each other in lending for a fixed period of time, put it in writing. Let a scribe write everything down with justice between the parties. The scribe, who has been given the gift of literacy by Allah, should not refuse to write; he is under obligation to write. Let the debtor dictate, fearing the Almighty, his Lord, and not diminishing anything from the settlement. If the borrower is mentally unsound or weak or is unable to dictate himself, let the guardian of his interests dictate for him with justice. Let two witnesses from among you bear witness to all such documents, if two men cannot be found, then one man and two women of your choice should bear witness, so that if one of the women forgets anything the other may remind her. Witnesses must not refuse (to bear witness) when they are called upon to do so.

In every other kind of case, there was no reason why the witness of a woman should not be just as reliable as evidence as that of a man, and no distinction of either sex was made or necessary. For example:

Qu'ran 24:4

Those who accuse a chaste woman of fornication and do not produce four witnesses to support their allegation, shall be flogged with eighty lashes and their testimony shall not be accepted ever after, for they are the ones who are wicked transgressors

The text implies any four witnesses, who could be of either sex. In societies where it is insisted that the witnesses should all be male, this is really a cultural gloss on the rule, since any text in the Arabic masculine plural grammatically includes both men and women, unless specifically stated otherwise. Assumptions that women's evidence would be unreliable because of the inferiority of women in intellectual capacity, memory, or character stem from a patriarchal perspective in a male-dominated community which tried to limit the appearance of their women in public. The Qur'an does not bear this attitude and established the equality of men and women before Allah. The restrictions against public appearance are a nonsense in this century, when the medical evidence of the rape could be presented by a woman doctor to a female litigator in front of a female jurist! It is certainly a travesty of justice to deny a victim of rape the right to testify to this violent attack merely because she is a woman.²

Dr. Muhammad Sharif Chaudhry comments on Soerah 2:282

Qu'ran 2:282

And get two witnesses, out of your own men, and if there are not two men, then a man and two women, such as ye choose for witnesses, so that if "one of them errs (through forgetfulness) the other can remind her..."

From this verse, it is generally contended by the critics of Islam that Islam renders two women equal to one man in the matters of evidence. However, this criticism is totally baseless and unfounded if judged by an unbiased mind. Firstly, this injunction of the Qur'an pertains to the business and commercial transactions only which are so often very complicated and ambiguous to understand even by an expert businessman. A woman being generally not involved in such difficult transactions has no knowledge or understanding of them and, therefore, she is likely to get confused. Secondly, from the words of the Qur'an it is clear that actually evidence would be given by one woman and the other would be present merely to remind her if she forgets. Thirdly, the presence of two women is for the purpose of moral support and boosting the confidence of the woman witness as the company of the other woman would raise the morale of the female witness. The atmosphere of courts being dominated by men-the judges, the lawyers, the litigants and the witnesses being generally men-- woman is likely to get confused and, forget in such an awe-inspiring atmosphere.

In no other matters, except the commercial transactions of complicated nature referred to in verse No. 282 of chapter 2, does the Qur'an command its believers to equate the evidence of two women with one man. In the matter of Lian or imprecation where the husband charges his wife of adultery, the testimony of the woman would be equal to her husband (Al-Qur'an 24:6-9) On the Day of judgement, God will ask the infant female child who was buried alive and only on her evidence, He would punish the person guilty of this heinous crime even without listening to or looking at the offender. (Al-Qur'an 81:'8-9). Traditions of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him); reproduced above establish beyond any doubt that the Prophet of Islam punished the Jew guilty of grinding the head of a girl between two stones on the evidence of the girl alone, and on the evidence of a woman alone who had been raped, the Prophet (peace be upon him) punished the man who was guilty. So much so that the evidence of a woman who had fostered the man and the woman of very respectable families in their infancy, caused the breach of their marriage, since foster brother and sister cannot be united in marriage according to Islamic Law.

In the matters which pertain to women specially-and mind it ! these are not few matters since the women constitute half of human beings-the evidence of a woman would carry rather more weight than the evidence of man.³

Encyclopaedia of Seerah says:

However, in some other fields, a woman witness may not only suffice but may also over-ride the evidence of many men and women, especially in fields where expert and sound knowledge is needed in which women may be more proficient than a men.

Sheikh G.F. Haddad writes:

The proof that the meaning of the above verse applies only in a very narrow and technical context is that many scholars of Islam have permitted “women to be judges. Further, all Sunni schools agree that a woman may be a mufti just as a man can. Based on that consensus, moreover, al-“Tabari, and probably al-Shaybani, were also of the position that a woman could be a judge (qadi) for all types of cases, because a fatwa is more “important (a'zam makanatan) than a judgment (qada').

To go back to the meaning of the verse: Al-Zuhayli said the second woman was needed to remind the first of any detail she might have forgotten “(as explicitly mentioned in the aya), just as the second man - if there actually were two male witnesses - would have done with the first. For men “socialize with men, and women with women; they do not mix so, a priori, they would not be able to correct each other as easily as a member of “their own sex. Another reason is that from the psychological perspective men and even little boys tend to be more finicky about rules and details – “even meaningless details - whereas women and little girls often brush off the rules as unimportant and overlook minutiae that to their minds may “seem irrelevant. Also, contractual and commercial life tends to be male-dominated i.e. of greater access and familiarity to men, although there are “social situations where only women are present.

Further: In Muslim countries, usually only women are present at the time of a birth; whether they are the mid-wife, doctor etc. In some cases only “one woman may be present. There are serious legal implications in inheritance as to whether the baby is still-born, lives, or breathes (is alive) and “then dies almost immediately. Yet, if only one woman is present at such times, her testimony is taken as valid. In the case of two spouses each “accusing the other of adultery with no other witnesses: each spouse may witness four times, the fifth time they invoke the curse of Allah on them if “they are telling a lie. In neither of these two examples is the man's word equivalent to that of two women.”⁴

Sheikh Shaltut writes:

There is a stronger proof for equality in the Qur'an's statement that the woman is just like the man in the type of testimony known as the oath of condemnation [Translator's note: An oath in which either the husband or the wife accuses his or her partner of adultery and the only witness is one of them.]

"And as for those who accuse their wives but have no witnesses except themselves, let the testimony of one of them be four testimonies (i.e. testifies four times) by Allah that he be one of those who speak the truth. And the fifth (testimony) (should be) invoking the Curse of Allah on him if he be one of those who tell a lie (against her). But it shall avert the punishment (of stoning to death) from her, if she bears witness four times by Allah, that he (her husband) is telling a lie. And the fifth (testimony) should be that the Wrath of Allah be upon her if (her husband) speaks the truth". [Surah 24:6- 9]

That is, four repetitions of the oath or testimony by the man concluded by an invocation of his damnation by Allah if he is lying, countered by and invalidated by four repetitions of the woman's counter statement, also followed by an invocation of Allah's wrath upon her if she is lying.

Source:

Islamic Beliefs and Code of Laws, Sheikh Shalt, p.111 – 112

Allama Muhammad Asad writes:

The stipulation that two women may be substituted for one male witness does not imply any reflection on woman's moral or intellectual "capabilities: it is obviously due to the fact that, as a rule, women are less familiar with business procedures than men and, therefore, more liable "to commit mistakes in this respect. ⁵

The scholars of ourdialogue.com comment on the soerah:

This is in business transactions only. It does imply that, as a rule, women are less familiar with business procedures than men and, therefore, more liable to commit mistakes in this respect. Besides, there are certain cases when only women witnesses are acceptable, and one woman witness is sufficient to prove her case. ⁶

So here we clearly see that the hadith quoted by Ibn Kathir and Soerah 2:282 have nothing do with women's intellectual capabilities or brain capacity, these interpretations have no support in the quran nor in the autentic sunnah. Therefor to say that woman are defficient in intelligence is not correct and not islamic.

He wrote:

There may be some women who are wiser than some men, but this is not the usual rule and such women are not in the majority. Sharee'ah is based on what is general and most common. The fact that women are lacking in reason does not mean that they are crazy, rather their reason is often overtaken by their emotions, and this happens to women more often than it happens to men. No one would deny this except one who is arrogant.

Response:

The fact that woman are more often overtaken by emotions then men does not mean that women are less intelligence then men ! These things have nothing to do with potential of brain or capacity of talent or skill. Moreover the arabic word in the hadith which is translated as 'reason / intelligence' is 'aqal' , which actually means 'mind' and not 'reason / intelligence'. The same word 'aqal' is therefor in: Sahih Bukhari, Witnesses, Volume 3, Book 48, Number 826, translated as 'mind'. This refers in general to a women's nature and emotional character, she gets faster scared then men and is earlier in panic then men and / or overtaken by her emotions. Moreover the prophet told us that men and woman are equal, see:

Narrated by al-Tirmidhi, 113; Ahmad, 25663

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

He wrote:

They also quote Ibn Kathir on Sura 4:34: Ibn Katheer said: Allaah says "Men are the protectors and maintainers of women" meaning that the man is in charge of the woman, i.e., he is the leader and head of the household, the one who disciplines her if she goes astray. "because Allaah has made one of them to excel the other" i.e., because men are superior to women and are better than women. Hence Prophethood was given only to men, as was the position of khaleefah, because the Prophet said, "No people shall ever prosper who appoint a woman as their ruler." This was narrated by al-Bukhaari from the hadeeth of 'Abd al-Rahmaan ibn Abi Bakrah from his father. The same applies to the position of judge etc.

Response:

It is not correct and not possible in Islam to say that men are better and superior to women. Muslim scholar Dr. Ahmed Shafaat comments on this commonly misquoted Soerah:

Dr. Ahmed Shafaat comments:

The verse begins with the statement that "men are qawwamun over women". The root of the key word, qawwamun (pl. of qawwam), is qama which means "to stand or to make something stand or to establish something". It is often used in the Holy Qur'an in the sense of establishing religion or prayer. A related word is qa'im which means "one who stands or makes something stand". Qawwam is an intensive form of qa'im and has a sense of continuity in the action involved. So it means one who is continuously standing over something (as, for example, a guard or caretaker) or one who is continuously making something stand, i.e. is maintaining it. In the Qur'anic usage of qawwam and related words there is almost always present an idea of propriety. For example, aqamah of salah is not only praying but also praying properly. The function of qawwam is also understood in the Qur'an to be characterized by fairness. Thus in 4:135 and 5:8, the only other passages in the Qur'an where the word is used, the believers are told:

"O you who believe! Be qawwamin with fairness..."

"O you who believe! Be qawwamin for God as witnesses to fairness..."

Thus to be a qawwam over something or someone is to guard, maintain or take care of that something or someone in a proper and fair manner (protector, guardian, maintainer).

The meaning of The Holy Qur'an" Abdullah Yusuf Ali , Page 195, An Nisa, Note 545:

Qawwam: one who stands firm in another's business, protects his interests, and looks after his affairs; or it may be, standing firm in his own business, managing affairs, with a steady purpose.

Muhammad Asad "The Message of The Quran", Dar Al Andalus Limited, Gibraltar, page 109, Note 42:

"more on some of them than on the others" – The expression qawwam is an intensive form of qa'im ("one who is responsible for" or "takes care of" a thing or a person). Thus, qama 'ala 'l-mar'ah signifies "he undertook the maintenance of the woman" or "he maintained her" (see Lane VIII, 2995). The grammatical form qawwam is more comprehensive than qa'im, and combines the concepts of physical maintenance and protection as well as of moral responsibility: and it is because of the last-named factor that I have rendered this phrase as "men shall take full care of women".

Thus to be a qawwam over something or someone is to guard, maintain or take care of that something or someone in a proper and fair manner.

Moreover, the Holy Qur'an makes it clear that while there are many favours of God that He bestows on His creatures in different measures, there is only one favour which determines the superiority of one member of the human species over another and that is taqwa or God consciousness. Thus wealth, strength, health, position, education, etc. are all favours of God but we cannot say that a wealthier person is superior to a poorer person, a stronger person is superior to a physically feeble person and so on. we can say only that a more muttaqi person is superior to a less muttaqi person. In the words of the Holy Qur'an:

Qu'ran 49:13

"The nobler among you in the sight of God is the more muttaqi (righteous) among you."

Hafiz Ibn Hibban reported in al-Sahih 11 / 203 / 4862 , via his isnad, from Fadalah ibn Ubayd:

The prophet, peace be upon him, said: "All mankind is from Adam and Eve, an Arab has no superiority over a non-Arab nor a non-Arab has any superiority over an Arab; also a white has no superiority over a black nor a black has any superiority over white except by piety and good action. Learn that every Muslim is a brother to every Muslim and that the Muslims constitute one brotherhood. Nothing shall be legitimate to a Muslim which belongs to a fellow Muslim unless it was given freely and willingly. Do not, therefore, do injustice to yourselves."

Hafiz Ibn Hibban authenticated it by including it in his al-Sahih. Shu`ayb al-Arna'ut said in his comments that its isnad is sahih. The hadith more over proofs that a person in islam can only be viewed superior to the other in matters of piety and good actions. Thus the fact that man has been favoured in some ways (with physical strenght) more than woman does not make him superior to her. It is only when his taqwa is more than hers that he can from the Qur'anic point of view be considered superior to her. And when a person's taqwa increases to a worthwhile level the question of his superiority does not interest him, for he or she realizes that all praises are due to God.

Source:

A commentary on the qur'an 4:34 by Dr. Ahmad Shafaat , First published in Al-Ummah, Montreal, Canada in 1984. Copyright Dr. Ahmad Shafaat

Note:

Dr. Ahmad Shafaat has clearly showed and proven us that it is not islamic and not correct to say that men are better and superior to women, neither the quran nor the authentic sunnah of our beloved Prophet support these statements. Moreover on page 8 of this booklet, we have seen that the prophet with his statement "women are the twinhalves of men " clearly refuted the statement that "men are superior to womem".

As for the hadith quoted by Ibn kathir that "No people shall ever prosper who appoint a woman as their ruler" , i have discussed this hadith and it's meaning in great detail in "part 3 k" of my booklet. I strongly recommend the reader to read part 3 k of my booklet, to get all the required information and answers about this hadith.

He wrote:

Allaah says: “and because they spend (to support them) from their means” refers to the mahr and the spending on women's maintenance that Allaah has enjoined upon men in His Book and in the Sunnah of His Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him). So a man is inherently better than a woman, and he is superior to her because he spends on her. So it is appropriate that he should be in charge of her, as Allaah says, 'but men have a degree (of responsibility) over them' [al-Baqarah 2:228].

Response:

In my previous reponse i clearly showed with proof that soerah 4:34 to which ibn kathir refers, has nothing to do with superiority. The soerah refers to the role of each gender in the family. Like Dr. Ahmad Shafaat explained before: “there is only one favour which determines the superiority of one member of the human species over another and that is taqwa or God consciousness.” So it's not correct and not islamic to say that men are better and/ or superior then women because men are maintakers and protectors of women, due to their physical strenght and nature. More proof this statement can be found in the next quotation from the scholar Fathi Osman:

Fathi Osman writes:

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

Soerah 2:228, which is quoted by Ibn kathir has also nothing to do with men being superior to women or better, since this soerah refers to men’s extra responsibilites towards their wives. Therefor this soerah can’t be used as an argument to say that women are inferior or cannot become judges or head of a company etc. These arguments are clearly not supported in the qu’ran nor in the authentic sunnah of our beloved Prophet Muhammed.

Qu’ran 2:228:

And women shall have rights similar to the rights against them, according to what is equitable; but men have a degree (of responsibility) over “them. And Allah is Exalted in Power, Wise

Shayk Gibri Fouad Haddad comments:

“In other words, Allah gave men and women similar rights; then he gave the men a greater degree of responsibility over the women than that of women over men. It follows that the rights owned to the wife are unnegotiable, whereas the husband has to give up certain rights. This is not a feminist reading but the actual explanation of Ibn `Abbas according to al-Tabari in his Tafsir, and the latter preferred it over all other commentaries of that verse. “⁷

Imam al-Tabari argued that the degree referred to in this verse exhorts men to treat their wives better than they expect to be treated; in other words, the husband should not require his wife to fulfill all of her obligations to him, but he should still fulfill all of his obligations to her.

Source:

M.H. Sherif, *The Muslim Woman Between the Truth of Sharia and the Fallacy of Falsification*, Dar al-Marifa al-Jamiyya, 1987, p. 141 (citing al-Tabari, Tafsir, 1954, vol. 2, p. 454)

The view held by Imam al-Tabari, that husbands should treat their wives better than they expect to be treated by them, was apparently the interpretation given to this verse in the early years of Islam. The degree speaks about extra responsibility and caretaking, not about superiority or status. Men Have to spend extra time, care and love to their wives because they are “qawwamuna” of women (protectors and caretakers).

Abdullah ibn Abbas said:

I adorn myself for my wife as she adorns herself for me, and I would not like to exact all my rights that she owes me, so that she also would not claim all what is due to her...” The degree is a cue to invite men to pleasant cohabitation and to extend to women more money and good manners, “ because the one with more gifts should impose more upon himself.

Source:

M.H. Sherif, "Women and Political Power in Muslim Thought", Lecture, Cornell University, 1987 (citing al-Tabari, Tafsir, 1954, vol. 2, p. 454)

He wrote

Ali ibn Abi Talhah said, narrating from Ibn 'Abbaas: 'Men are the protectors and maintainers of women' means that men are the leaders of women and they should obey them in areas where Allaah has enjoined obedience. Obedience may mean treating his family kindly and protecting his wealth." (Tafseer Ibn Katheer, 1/490)

Response:

Ibn Abbas comments on soerah 4:34, which says;

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. And the righteous women are the truly devout ones, who guard the intimacy which God has [ordained to be] guarded

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.

Muhammad Asad "The Message of The Quran", Dar Al Andalus Limited, Gibraltar, page 109, Note 42:

The expression qawwam is an intensive form of qa'im ("one who is responsible for" or "takes care of" a thing or a person). Thus, qama 'ala 'l-mar'ah signifies "he undertook the maintenance of the woman" or "he maintained her" (see Lane VIII, 2995). The grammatical form qawwam is more comprehensive than qa'im, and combines the concepts of physical maintenance and protection as well as of moral responsibility: and it is because of the last-named factor that I have rendered this phrase as "men shall take full care of women".

In islam men bear the major responsibility of earning for a living, harnessing and developing the resources of the earth, facing life hardships, and defending his family and the community against dangers. A man is responsible to financially support his wife (even if she is rich), his daughters until they are married, his sons until they are able to support themselves, his needy parents, as well as other blood relatives. To fulfill these major responsibilities, he should assume the role of Protector/ Guardian/ Leader, moreover to fulfill his duty as "Qawama of Women" (which means protector / caretaker). Moreover the function of qawwam is also understood in the Qur'an to be characterized by fairness, like dr. Ahmad Shafaat explained on page 9 of this booklet.

Dr. Jamal Badawi writes:

Such degree is Quiwama (maintenance and protection). This refers to that natural difference between the sexes which entitles the weaker sex to protection. It implies no superiority or advantage before the law. Yet, man's role of leadership in relation to his family does not mean the husband's dictatorship over his wife. Islam emphasizes the importance of taking counsel and mutual agreement in family decisions. The Qur'an gives us an example:

Qur'an 2: 233

"...If they (husband wife) desire to wean the child by mutual consent and (after) consultation, there is no blame on them..."

Qur'an 9:71

The believing men and women, are associates and helpers of each other. They (collaborate) to promote all that is beneficial and discourage all that is evil; to establish prayers and give alms, and to obey Allah and his Messenger. Those are the people whom Allah would grant mercy. Indeed Allah is Mighty and Wise.

Over and above her basic rights as a wife comes the right which is emphasized by the Qur'an and is strongly recommended by the Prophet; kind treatment and companionship. The Qur'an states: ⁸

Qur'an 4: 19

"...But consort with them in kindness, for if you hate them it may happen that you hate a thing wherein God has placed much good."

Ibn-Hanbal, No. 7396

Prophet Muhammad said: "The most perfect believers are the best in conduct and best of you are those who are best to their wives."

So the leadership to which Ibn Abbas refers in his explanation of soerah 4:34 has nothing to do with dictatorship over women. Islam commands men to treat their wives well and with respect, moreover the Qur'an emphasizes the importance of taking counsel and mutual agreement in family decisions. In the authentic hadith we can even see that man's treatment of his wife is a measure of the perfection of his faith. Therefore the leadership to which Ibn Abbas refers is a leadership position which is characterized by fairness (see page 9), moreover to fulfill his duty as "Qawama" (protector and maintainer of his wife and family) he should assume the role of Protector/Guardian/Leader in the house. Ibn Abbas himself in his comments on soerah 2:282 explains how men should treat their wives, while being in position of leader/head of the house:

Al-Tabari in his Tafsir narrated from Ibn `Abbas:

"The daraja mentioned by Allah Most High here is the forfeiting, on the man's part, of some of his wife's obligations towards him and his indulgence towards her, while he is fully obligated to fulfill all his obligations towards her, because the verse came right after { And they (women) have rights similar to those (of men) over them in kindness} . Hence Ibn `Abbas said: "I would not like to obtain all (astanzif) of my right from her because Allah Most High said { and men are a degree above them}"

Source:

al-Tabari, Tafsir, 1954, vol. 2, p. 454

Moreover Muslims must follow the sunnah of our beloved Prophet Muhammad, who is the best example for husbands to follow in marriage and treatment of one's wife. Ibn Kathir in his tafsir on soerah 4:19 writes:

Ibn Kathir in his tafsir writes:

(And live with them honorably) , by saying kind words to them, treating them kindly and making your appearance appealing for them, as much as you can, just as you like the same from them.....

It was the practice of the Messenger of Allah to be kind, cheerful, playful with his wives, compassionate, spending on them and laughing with them. The Messenger used to race with `A'ishah, the Mother of the Faithful, as a means of kindness to her.⁹

The Qur'an teaches us the importance of following the example of our beloved Prophet Muhammad.

Qur'an 33:21

Ye have indeed in the Apostle of God a beautiful pattern (of conduct) for any one whose hope is in God and the Final Day, and who engages much in the Praise of God.

And finally i would like to quote the scholar Maulana Fazlul Karim, who gives an excellent commentary on the ideal of wifehood in Islam:

The eminent muslim scholar Maulana Fazlul Karim in his book 'Al-Hadis' writes:

The ideal of wifehood in Islam is love and affection and not subordination and servitude. She is regarded as the safeguard for husband against sin "and not the `road to inequity', a strong fortress against inroads of the devil and `not the gate of the devil' a light house of virtue that saves man "from shipwreck when tossed by the raging waves of passion, and not the instrument of devil's works, and a great transformer of a brute husband into an angel. A virtuous wife is the best treasure which a man can justly be proud of. She is the queen of the household because the Prophet said "that a woman is a ruler over the household of her husband. She forms the greatest factor in the formation of the character of husband and wife.

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