

JOCELYNE'S RESOURCE-OF-THE-MONTH: August 2017

My Commentary on: The Retrouvaille Marriage Help Program for Couples

Website Link → <http://www.retrouvaille.org>

True Feminism, Part 4: The “Head” and “Heart” of the Family

In part one of this series on feminism, I spoke of the God-given gift of womanhood. In part two, I looked at abortion and contraception as two main fruits of the movement of feminism, and in part three I wrote of the relationship between men and women according to God's design.

In order to do this, I highlighted some biblical passages that have been controversial because they have been largely misunderstood... by both sexes. The Biblical creation accounts (in the book of Genesis) show us the undeniable equality of woman and man, who are both made in the image and likeness of God, and who are meant to be complimentary “helpmates.” I spoke of the resource that aided me in understanding that when the Bible says, “let women be subject to their husbands” that this absolutely does not mean that she is to be a servant to him, waiting on him as he orders her around. The interpretation of this passage as meaning that women should be subservient to men in a sort of forced slavery would be a false interpretation. What is actually conveyed by this passage (Ephesians 5:22-32) is that marriage requires the self-sacrifice of BOTH husband and wife. They are equal partners, working together to achieve their salvation and that of their children.

What does this mean when we consider the roles of men and women in marriage and in the life of the family? That is the topic that I wish to explore this month. According to God's divine revelation (the Bible), the man is the “head” of the family; the woman is its “heart.” The following passages provide a good reference to support this.

Man as “head:”

“But I would have you know, that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God (Corinthians 11:3).”

Woman as “heart:”

“The heart of her husband trusteth in her, and he shall have no need of spoils (Proverbs 31:11).”

The head and the heart are both essential to the proper functioning of the human body; they are also both life-giving in different ways. The body would not survive without either one. Neither head nor heart is superior, or more necessary than the other. As the head and the heart have different and complimentary, but equal, roles in the human body, so too do men and women in their families.

It is interesting to note that the head is higher up in the body than the heart is. The brain inside it directs the functioning of the rest of the body, including the heart. Does this mean that women are lesser than men? No. It has already been established that men and women are equal. Does this mean that men should dominate women and that women should be slaves to their men? A firm NO! The heart ensures the proper functioning of the head by pumping blood and oxygen to it. Therefore, the head (and the entire body) is not able to function without the heart. And as the brain occupies itself according to what is best for the health of the entire body, including the heart, the husband should do the same for his family. The heart complies because it also wishes to ensure the health of the body. If the husband or “head” of the family is always sacrificing his personal interests to make the decisions that are best for the health and well being of his family, it will be in the best interests of his wife, as the “heart” of her family, to work with her husband to ensure that her family thrives.

“Let women be subject to their husbands” also does not mean that she will be incessantly mute and agreeable, ceding at all times to the wishes of her husband. No. That is never how this passage is to be understood. It means that husband and wife should work together, discussing respectfully all matters of impact to the family, and when no agreement can be made, the husband should, in consultation with God through prayer, make the decision that will be of greatest benefit to his family. In fact, men are instructed: “Husbands, love your wives, as Christ also loved the church, and delivered himself up for it (Ephesians 5:25).” This is a tall order! Jesus provided us the ultimate example of what it means to love; love means that we are willing to humble and sacrifice ourselves (even unto death) for the good of others! Thus the “heart” of the husband will have a great influence on his decisions, and he will trust her and sacrifice himself for her and for the good of his family. Consequently, his wife, as equal partner, can be at peace with the decision made. For men and women, the sacrifice should be mutual! This Divine design ensures the harmony of the family. The man as “head” therefore will be held accountable for the decisions he makes for his family, and the woman, as “heart,” will be blessed for trusting in God’s design and for helping her husband maintain the health and peace of their family. We are to remember always that God is the true Head of the family, so both husband and wife should be consulting Him often, and trusting in Him.

This brings me now to male and female roles in running the household. Does God’s design mean that all women should be wives and mothers who stay at home and tend to domestic tasks and childrearing, while all men work outside of the home? No! It certainly does not. Men and women are “helpmates;” they are to help each other in an equal partnership, sharing all tasks, so that neither is overburdened. But I think it is important to mention that, if a woman chooses to stay at home and raise her family and tend to domestic tasks, we should not fault her or ridicule her for this. She is not undermining the cause of women, as popular feminist thought would have you believe. A true feminism recognizes that the role of mother-at-home is essential and important and that a woman has every right to it if this is her calling. The circumstances influencing every family are different. Spouses should work together at discerning and following God’s will for their lives and families. If God wills it, it should be your will also.

If we really trust in God, and in His design, the “head” and “heart” model is the ideal model to strive for. However, this is extremely difficult to achieve in our society of “me-first” and “if I judge that you are holding me back, I should get rid of you” attitudes; we live in a society in which people are disposable. I can also anticipate the questions that you could be asking at this point, questions I have asked myself: What if my husband/wife does not follow this model? What if my husband/wife is not Christian? What if my husband/wife disrespects me? These are valid questions. In my personal opinion, the best we can do in instances such as these is to pray incessantly for our spouse, trust in God and in His plan and do the best we can to follow His guidance ourselves. We can also gently and respectfully remind our spouse of his/her duties as “head” or “heart” of the family. Abuse should also never be tolerated. God does not condone the mistreatment of those made in His image and likeness. In these situations, it may be helpful to consult a trusted clergy member for guidance. All situations are different, so I cannot be more specific than this.

Families function as a domestic church, so when men and women work together to ensure the harmonious function of the family, then the Church (the Body of Christ) will experience harmony as well. Unfortunately, families today are faced with many struggles. Our secular society has made it difficult for families to function ideally, and when the domestic church is dysfunctional, the Body of Christ suffers. This is why it is so important that we work together to rebuild the family in our society. We can do this by starting with our own families. Just imagine what our families and our world would look like if we all sacrificed and loved, as Jesus has shown us by His example!

No marriage is perfect. If you are discouraged at the current state of your marriage, never give up and never stop praying! You may also offer your struggle to God for the good of your family. I will admit that there have been times when I have felt unable to love my husband (I’m sure he has had similar experiences when it comes to me). I have learned, through the grace of God, that when emotionally I feel unable to love, I must make the choice to love anyway. I do this by offering prayers and my emotional struggle to God for him. In these moments, I have also found it helpful to remember and make a list of all of the reasons I fell for my husband and of all of his virtues, because there are many. Currently, as I look out the window of my office, he is working hard caring for our lawn, so that we can enjoy it as a family. I feel blessed.

The concept of choosing to love was one that I learned recently when my husband and I attended a weekend Retrouvaille experience and follow up sessions. This is the resource that I have highlighted for this month. I will not go into the details of our struggles, but I will tell you that prior to Retrouvaille I had little hope in the survival of our marriage. We had already

tried marriage counseling, to no avail, and I felt as if we were trying to climb Mount Everest with no training and faulty equipment! Retrouvaille gave us the communication tools that we needed to navigate our “Mount Everest” and I am happy to report that, although it is certainly not perfect, we are slowly seeing new fruits being produced in our marriage.

Retrouvaille, meaning “rediscovery,” first started in Quebec, Canada, however there are now Retrouvaille communities all over the world. It is a program open to married couples from all religious backgrounds, or none, and does not require that you share personal details of your relationship with anyone other than your spouse. We benefitted greatly from the stories of the presenting couples and we were encouraged that if they could overcome their difficulties, then so could we. Check out the Retrouvaille website for more information on this healing program for marriages.

Part of the positive change in my marriage has also been in learning of God’s design for man and woman and in entrusting my marriage and my family to God. Love ultimately means sacrifice, and when we are unable to “feel” love, we must make the choice to love.

When we are faced with a “Mount Everest” struggle that seems impossible to resolve, it is vital to remember that: “with God all things are possible (Matthew 19:26).” I can personally attest to the truth of these words, as I have seen many heartfelt family and marriage-related prayers answered due to perseverance. Do not give up! If you desire a happy, holy marriage, one that follows God’s divine design, you need only ask. “Ask, and you shall receive; that your joy may be full (John 16:24).”

A true feminism recognizes and embraces the truth of what it means to love. A true feminism will not promote the destruction of families, but will strive to protect and support families in all of their imperfection.

A true feminism will also embrace the fact that women and men are different and have different strengths and gifts given them by God. These strengths and gifts will impact how we perform our duties and how we attend to our families. Next month, I will be highlighting resources that speak to the unique gifts of men and women and how these impact families, our world and the Church. I invite you to check back on the first of September for my commentary on these and to learn more from the Resources-of-the-Month.

Your sister in Christ,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Jocelyne". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned to the right of the typed name "Jocelyne".

Jocelyne