

A Call to Repentance
A Reaction to
Trisha Famisaran, *Repenting of Our Patriarchy & Heterosexism*

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I recently watched a presentation given by a professor who teaches Religion and Philosophy at a Seventh-day Adventist university, entitled: "Repenting of Patriarchy." *Spectrum* magazine has correctly retitled it, "Repenting of Our Patriarchy & Heterosexism." The presenter was speaking at an Adventist church then preoccupied with Lent (a Roman Catholic tradition associated with Ash Wednesday), and addressing five deadly sins. In this sermon she discusses two of the sins of which she believes Seventh day Adventists need to repent.

I watched with interest. The speaker endeavored to explain why those who believe in the principles behind the Bible teaching of the Patriarchal System as it relates to men's responsibility, headship, and leadership role--are wrong, and need to repent. I also found it most interesting--but not so surprising anymore, that she tied together the problems of heterosexualism with patriarchy.

The presenter believes that heterosexism is a problem (sexual relations between just a man and a woman). She says, "Heterosexism is this idea that to be straight is the norm, and that if you are anything but straight, you are on the outside, and subject to discrimination." She believes that when we accept heterosexism as the Biblical standard of truth, it interferes

with the rights of practicing homosexuals to be accepted and fully integrated into the church.

These were the twin issues in this sermon. Again, anyone accepting the Bible definition of sexuality and marriage with only the opposite sex--as well as accepting the clear Bible teaching against homosexuality, in the "Patriarchy & Heterosexism" presentation is also called upon to repent.

Repentance is a good thing, and is certainly a teaching of the Bible that is crucial and necessary! When John the Baptist preached, he called for people to repent (Matthew 3:1, 2). When Jesus was preaching, He called for repentance (Mark 1:15). The Bible is full of calls for repentance.

What is Bible repentance? The Bible teaches that genuine repentance has to do with turning from evil ways that are against what God teaches. He calls us to turn in a new direction--back towards what God says, with godly sorrow, humility, and genuine reform (John 3:7-14; 2 Corinthians 7:8-11).

But there is also a terrible danger--of repenting of and denying something that the Bible clearly teaches to be truth! God's Word says,

Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter! Woe unto them that are wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight! (Isaiah 5:20, 21).

Satan will work with all his deceptive power to influence the heart and becloud the understanding, to make evil appear good, and good evil (*Acts of the Apostles*, p. 431).

One would get the message from the presentation we are considering that the patriarchal system is not only outdated but a very bad idea in the first place. The speaker acknowledged that one of Ellen White's books was entitled *Patriarchs and Prophets*, but indicated that this was an unfortunate way of reporting history.

Speaking of Patriarchy, the speaker said: "Patriarchy literally means 'rule of the

father'. . . "Patriarchy, as it manifests itself in sexism and heterosexism, constrains the humanity of both men and women by limiting who they are and what they might become." She also stated that she did not believe it to be the will of God.

This has prompted me to think more about the patriarchal system; what it really was, what it stood for, and ask some questions. Shall we throw out what God designed because some have abused it and to the detriment of women? Or was, and are there, principles from this system that God clearly has ordained? Is the problem with what God ordained, or with how men have misused it for their selfish designs? Further, were these principles intended to continue and be a blessing for both men and women even in our day, or do we need to repent of them?

It is both interesting and significant that it appears that the first individual to abandon the patriarchal system was Nimrod (Genesis 10:9, 10). In setting up this kingdom, "he subverted the existing patriarchal order of society" (Jamieson, Fausset and Brown, *Commentary on Isaiah 37:37*).

Nimrod and Abraham were contemporaries and stood for two different religious systems, the religion of the Bible and the counterfeit religion of Babylon. The contrast is between Nimrod, the first king, and Abraham, the great patriarch. When Israel begged for a king, God gave them what they wanted, but not without serious and negative consequences. Monarchy replaced patriarchy and each step of compromise came because of the failure of God's people to fulfill and obey His plan.

Abraham is he of whom God said, "Abraham obeyed my voice, and kept my charge, my commandments my statutes, and my laws" (Genesis 26:5). Abraham was called the friend of God (James 2:23). God said of him,

I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment, that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him (Genesis 18:19).

No discussion of the patriarchal system should be had without considering Abraham. Abraham took his calling very seriously.

And he would not only fear the Lord himself, but would cultivate religion in his home. He would instruct his family in righteousness. The law of God would be the rule in his household (*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 141).

This patriarchal system of government Abraham endeavored to perpetuate, as it tended to preserve the knowledge of God (*Ibid.*).

What kind of arrangement was this?

It was a wise arrangement, which God himself had made. . . . His own example, the silent influence of his daily life, was a constant lesson. The unswerving integrity, the benevolence and unselfish courtesy which had won the admiration of kings, were displayed in the home. There was a fragrance about the life, a nobility and loveliness of character, which revealed to all that he was connected with Heaven" (*Ibid.*, pp. 141, 142).

It sounds like this was a good thing rather than a bad one. What do you think?

We may not agree with every thing they did or the way they did it; but years ago an organization was formed that I'm sure brought joy to the hearts of many wives and children. It was called "Promise Keepers." And one of the reasons it was formed was to call men to step up to the plate and be the loving spiritual leaders in their home. Rather than sitting on the sidelines, watching their football, drinking their beer, and being uninvolved (while their families struggled on--desperately needing a loving leader); the men were challenged to stand up and be faithful to their God-given role and lead.

Speaking of our day in the context of Abraham's example, Ellen White says:

Let the Father, as priest of the household, lay upon the altar of God the morning and evening sacrifice, while the wife and children unite in prayer and praise. In such a household, Jesus will love to tarry (*Ibid.*, p. 144).

But the question remains; was this patriarchal model just temporary; was it something to be "repented of," changed and dismantled after Jesus' sacrifice on the cross in New Testament times? Looking into the New Testament, the answer is No. Peter, under inspiration, describing what is to happen in the home and how wives can be truly beautiful and reflect the meek and quiet spirit of Jesus, says,

Likewise, ye wives, be in subjection to your own husbands; that, if any obey not the word, they also may without the word be won by the conversation [conduct] of the wives. . . For after this manner in the old time the holy women also, who trusted in God, adorned themselves, being in subjection unto heir own husbands: Even as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord; whose daughters ye are, as long as ye do well, and are not afraid with any amazement. Likewise, ye husbands dwell with them according to knowledge, giving honor unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life; that your prayers be not hindered. Finally, be ye all of one mind, having compassion one of another, love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous (1 Peter 3:1, 5-8).

Paul gave counsel to Titus how he should minister in New Testament times. Notice the instruction and how it is in complete harmony with the system that God ordained:

But speak thou the things which become sound doctrine: that the aged men of sober grave, temperate, sound in faith, in charity, in patience. The aged women likewise, that they be in behavior as becometh holiness, not false accusers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things; that they may teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children, To be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed (Titus 2:1-5).

There is no appeal here in the New Testament to "Repent" or "Change" God's principles, but rather it was a model for the families of that time.

Now notice how Mrs. White brings this patriarchal model down to families of *our* day.

His name, 'house-band,' is the true definition of husband. . . I saw that but few fathers realize their responsibility. . . The husband and father is the head of the household. The wife looks to him for love and sympathy and for aid in the training of the children; and this is right" (*Adventist Home*, p. 211).

All members of the family center in the father. He is the lawmaker, illustrating in his own manly bearing the sterner virtues; energy, integrity, honesty, patience, courage, diligence, and practical usefulness. . . Morning and evening the father as priest of the household, should confess to God the sins committed by himself and his children through the day. . . The father must not betray his sacred trust. He must not, on any point, yield up his parental authority (*Ibid.*, p. 212).

What a tremendous responsibility! Who is sufficient for these things? Yet God has asked us as men to be loving care-givers and protectors of our families. What Jesus said is so true. "For without me ye can do nothing" (John 15:5).

Back to the presentation. The speaker had such convictions against patriarchy, that she was grateful that the church where she was speaking had changed the words of a hymn to refer to God as feminine, and later went on to say, "It is God who creates the diverse parts, just as 'She' thinks they should be." This is a stark reminder that those who embrace this feminist and homosexual crusade must either reject Scripture or change it to accommodate their beliefs and lifestyle!

When Jesus taught us to pray, He did not say, "Our Mother which art in heaven or our Mother and Father which art in heaven; but He simply said, "Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name" (Matthew 6:9). In John 3:16 it does not say, For God so loved the world that she gave her only begotten son but rather, "he gave his only begotten Son." Jesus did not say in John 14:9, he that hath seen me hath seen the Mother, but rather, "he that hath seen me hath seen the Father." And this is consistent with all of scripture, including the fact that He says to us that His commitment and care for us is even stronger than a mother nursing her child.

In both paganism and Gnosticism the worship of female goddesses was very important. A Gnostic feminist writes:

. . . [T]he main thing distinguishing the Gnostic gospels from the Orthodox gospels is their abundance of powerful feminine imagery of the Divine. They reveal that many early Christians described and worshiped God as a dyad, a being consisting of both masculine and feminine elements. They prayed to both the divine Father and the divine Mother--to Mother--Father. One of their prayers, still intact, begins, 'From thee, Father, and through thee, Mother. . . ' The Gnostic gospels also referred to the Holy Spirit as female (Sue Monk Kid, *The Dance of the Dissident Daughter*, p. 151).

But, here again, there is a problem. The Holy Spirit is not female or feminine in the Scripture. The word for "spirit" (*RUACH*) is feminine in Hebrew, but in Greek, it is neuter. More than this, when in the Gospel of John the Holy Spirit is referred to as the Comforter (*PARAKLATOS*) (John 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7) the word used is grammatically masculine. Thus, in the New Testament where the doctrine of the Holy Spirit is actually spelled out, the representation is *not* feminine. In any case, we should probably not push grammatical gender very hard as a determinate of gender for God. We should permit the inspired writers to represent God's person as they do and leave it at that.

In the presentation, the same kind of "androgyny" (dismissing sex differences and uniting them in one) is seen.

The presenter said that we needed to repent of our heterosexual mindset and realize that God has made homosexuals the way they are and they should be accepted into every area of life—which, of course, would include families and marriage as well as members in regular standing in the church. "No person should be treated as anything less than equal because they were born into one kind of body or one kind of sexual orientation and not another." Presumably she also means accepting their sexual practice.

But let's think this through. Would God make someone a homosexual, and then at the same time, condemn this type of behavior and lifestyle? What about Leviticus 20:13, Genesis

19:1-24, and Romans 1:22-28? If this does not sound fair, or really like God, you are exactly right! This is what God calls sin and He also calls for repentance from this sin. We need to remember that God did not create Adam and Steve for the first marital union but rather Adam and Eve. In 1 Corinthians 6:9, 10 Paul says,

Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived; neither fornicators or idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind. . . shall inherit the kingdom of God.

The word effeminate here as used in this context, has to do with homosexuals (*Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 699).

But, praise God, this is not a hopeless situation for these individuals or any of us! Paul goes on to say in v. 11, "And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God."

I have a friend who was heavy into the homosexual lifestyle for several years. He was upset with his situation and at that time felt that God had created him as a homosexual. But finally the truth of God's Word and the power of the Gospel broke his heart and he repented of both, his unjust charge against God and of his sinful behavior. He forsook that lifestyle, surrendered to Jesus and accepted Him as His personal Savior. He now is a minister of the Gospel, has a wife and family, and is calling others who are where he was, "to repent" and go free. Praise God!

It was amazing to hear this presentation. Where does this kind of belief and teaching come from? Certainly not from a careful reading of the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy. It has to come from a "new" approach to Scripture, and from reading material that redefines God, the order of the family, and what is right and what is wrong. But the sad reality is that there are some even in our church that feel this same way, and now they are calling us to repent of patriarchy and heterosexism! What shall we do?

We don't need to repent of simply taking God's Word as it reads or from our support of

God's underlying principles of male responsibility, or of the biblical pattern of one man married to one woman sexuality. But there are a number of things from which we do need repentance.

1. Attempting to change God's Word to accommodate this sick world all around us, and it's present fascination with androgyny.
2. Attempting to change God's beautiful complementarian plan for men and women in the home and in the church.
3. Rebellion against authority in God's church, and striking out independently as some churches and unions have done, bringing confusion and division and encouraging increasingly "congregational" church governance.
4. Support of those practicing a homosexual lifestyle and for such individuals being received as members in regular standing.
5. Treatment of women that is unlike the way Jesus would treat them.
6. Treatment of homosexuals that is unlike the way Jesus would treat them.
7. Failure by men to step up to our responsibilities in our homes. Failure to be a loving leaders in our families, protecting them, praying for them, and living a Christian example before them.
8. From offering presentations such as "Repenting of Our Patriarchy and Heterosexism," which confuse and mislead young people and others--calling good, evil, and evil, good.

Repentance: we sure do need it. May God help us to only repent of what He condemns; and hold on firmly to what He has spoken and blessed.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE: Lonny and Gerita Liebelt have served in pastoral ministry in the Carolinas, Indiana, California, Wyoming, Washington, and Montana. They presently live near Libby, Montana.