Second Class?

"Likewise, husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way, showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel, since they are heirs with you of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered." (1 Peter 3:7, ESV)

Second class?

It is difficult to read the Bible without recognizing that men and women did not ordinarily occupy the same social position in the ancient world. Men governed households. Property commonly passed through sons. Public authority was overwhelmingly male. Even the genealogies of Scripture usually move from father to son.

Against that background, Peter says something easily passed over.

Christian husbands are to honor their wives because they are "heirs with you of the grace of life."

Heirs with you.

Peter does not deny differences between husbands and wives. In the very verse containing those words he acknowledges a distinction between them. Yet whatever distinctions may exist, the Christian wife does not stand beneath her husband in her possession of the grace of God.

She is an heir with him.

That is an extraordinary statement when heard against the world in which Peter wrote. A woman might live in a society in which her husband possessed privileges she did not possess. Her legal standing might differ from his. Her opportunities might be fewer. Her place within the social order might appear subordinate.

But none of those things determines her standing in Christ.

Paul makes the same point when he writes:

"There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." (Galatians 3:28, ESV)

Paul is not saying that every distinction among people has disappeared. Jews did not cease being Jews. Slaves did not magically cease being slaves when they believed. Men and women certainly did not cease being male and female.

Something else had happened.

None of those distinctions could establish a higher or lower standing before God.

The ground at the foot of the cross is level. The man does not come with a better claim upon Christ because he is a man. The woman does not come through her husband, father, pastor, or any other man. Both come as sinners. Both are justified by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. Both are adopted into God's family. Both receive the Holy Spirit. Both are heirs.

There is no first-class salvation and second-class salvation.

There is no greater justification for the man and lesser justification for the woman. There is no larger portion of Christ for one and a smaller portion for the other. There is no inner room in the Father's house reserved for His sons while His daughters remain somewhere nearer the door.

This does not require erasing every distinction Scripture makes between men and women. Equality of standing before God does not mean sameness in every calling or relationship. But biblical distinctions must never be turned into degrees of belonging.

That would contradict the very gospel those distinctions exist within.

A Christian woman belongs completely to Christ. She has been redeemed by the same blood, clothed in the same righteousness, adopted by the same Father, indwelt by the same Spirit, and promised the same resurrection life as her Christian brother.

When Peter tells a husband to look at his wife, therefore, he tells him to see more than his wife.

See an heir.

Someone who will stand with him in the resurrection. Someone whose inheritance was purchased by Christ. Someone to whom the Father has promised eternal life.

Second class?

Not in the household of God.

There are no second-class heirs.

Just a thought.

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