

Building Christian Case Against Wife Beating: A Passionate Advocacy

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Abstract

In this paper we contend that the measure for assessing our Enduring Problem is our teacher and Lord. How do the traditional practices of the cultures we live in measure up to the values and behaviors that Jesus Christ preached and demonstrated? This paper will address the Enduring Problem as it relates to domestic life in East Africa today. The specific focus will be violent interactions of husbands against wives. Of course wife-beating is only a part of domestic violence. Sometimes husbands are beaten, sometimes parents are beaten, and often children are beaten. Like Cain and Abel, brothers and sisters sometimes hurt or even kill each other (Genesis 4:8). In addition to physical abuse, such as beating, there are other kinds of abuse. Abuse includes withholding food, denying someone education or training, and isolating a person by forbidding them to visit with friends or family. Some family members use emotional abuse, such as telling a wife she is worthless or telling children that giving birth to them was a mistake. These are important concerns and deserve a study of their own. For our purposes we will narrow the focus to wife-beating. In our first step, we will consider the relationship of Jesus to his ancestral culture, as recorded in the four Gospels. Second, we will look at the relationship of the apostle Paul to the Jewish culture of his ancestors and the pagan culture of his ministry. Third we will consider the teachings of the Gospels and Pauline letters and early Quaker life about the coming Kingdom of God and the New Creation. The fourth section will compare Christian and Quaker values to the East African traditions of wife-beating. These last two sections will be very brief and will serve as introductions to more detailed discussions by East African Friends.

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I. INTRODUCTION

1a) Different Native Cultures & Christianity

How do Christians around the world relate to their native cultures? This question has been an ongoing challenge for every generation of Christians on every continent. Thanks largely to the apostle Paul, the good news of Jesus Christ travelled quickly from the eastern shore of the Mediterranean Sea to Rome, on the north-central shore of the Mediterranean. Within 35 years the Gospel message had spread through vastly different cultures:

From the ministry of Jesus	To ministries of Paul and contemporaries
East of the Mediterranean	North-central coast of the Mediterranean
Land-locked geography	Ports and rivers on the Mediterranean
Oral tradition	Written tradition
Aramaic	Greek and Latin
(Semitic Language family)	(Indo-European Language family)
Jewish religion	Pagan religions
Mystical spirituality	Rational philosophy
Rural poverty, mostly	Urban, cities small and large
(farmers, fishermen, craftsmen)	(slaves, artisans, merchants)

Look again at the seven differences listed above. We can easily understand why different rituals, practices, behaviors, beliefs, and expectations would develop as a result of differences in geography, religion, language, and economics. A similar example is the different traditions of the Masai (Nilotic) and Luhya (Bantu) peoples.

Let's look at one concrete example of a Jewish tradition. The first followers of Jesus were Jewish Christians living in rural Palestine. Like Jesus and Paul, all the male disciples had experienced ritual circumcision on their eighth day of life. As Christianity moved into the pagan world of uncircumcised men, this

Jewish traditional ritual was challenged (1 Corinthians 7:18-19; Romans 2-4; Galatians 2-6). Must a convert first become a Jew before becoming Christian? Paul said “no.” Paul helped to make the tradition of male circumcision optional (Romans 3:29-30). Let’s look at a Jewish tradition that didn’t change but instead caused a change in the Greek-speaking culture. Paul insisted that the traditional belief that the Messiah¹ would be born of the royal line of David was central to the Gospel message (Romans 1:1-4). Paul’s converts had probably never heard of the Jewish King David. But it was essential for Paul that they accept this tradition.

When we try to understand the relationship between Christianity and native cultures, we must work through several levels of discernment. It is like peeling an onion. As we finish with one layer we see another layer appear. Our first layer of discernment is to decide which traditions are optional and which are essential to the Christian life.

In modern times, Christianity moved from America and Britain to East Africa. Many of our traditions² were different and some remain so today. For example, churches in Europe and America had pianos and organs, not drums. Nobody danced. These were Western traditions. When the Christian missionaries came to East Africa, most assumed that the local traditions of drumming and dancing during worship were unchristian or at least undignified. They feared that drumming and dancing in their Christian services might somehow subvert or belittle the Gospel message. These missionaries, however, had forgotten relevant biblical traditions, which predated Western Christianity. Psalm 150 urged worshippers to dance before God and make joyful noises with tambourines and even “loud, clashing cymbals!” Pianos and organs and drums and dancing are not essential to Christian worship. On a personal note, however, we find different types of music can refresh our worship and make the worship experience more inclusive.

Now let’s look at another layer. We need to discern the difference between a Christian tradition and a secular tradition practiced by Christians.

The nations of north-western Europe gradually converted to Christianity. For them, Christmas came during the darkest and coldest time of their year. In the centuries before conversion, the pagan natives had found that alcoholic drinks were a welcome relief during the long cold nights. Some nights lasted more than fourteen hours. (“A Historical Overview of Alcohol and Alcoholism,” Mark Keller, July 1979 p.3, cancerres, aacrjournals.org) This tradition of alcoholic drinks on cold, dark December nights didn’t change much when the natives became Christian. In fact, some groups of Christian priests and monks made and sold wine and beer.

Drinking to the point of drunkenness was still very common during the time of George Fox and Margaret Fell. Drunkenness at Christmas time had become another secular tradition. It was one that some Christian churches largely ignored but the early Friends rejected. Today a few alcoholic drinks are still part of the American and British Christmas traditions. Drinks that are warm, such as mulled wine, are especially welcome in areas that are cold and dark in December. Hardy drinks, such as eggnog (eggs with milk, cream, and brandy or rum), are also welcome. These are *secular Christmas* traditions of some Christians. Mulled wine and eggnog are *not Christian* traditions. To our knowledge, getting drunk is not acceptable behavior today by any of the many Christian churches.

To summarize, we have reviewed the rapid spread of Christianity after the resurrection of Jesus. Within 35 years it moved from rural areas in the Near East to urban centers in Southern Europe. For the next 1,800 years Christianity kept spreading as people in Western Europe, America, and East Africa received the good news of what God has done for us in Jesus Christ. Each of these cultures had different traditions. Some traditions were compatible with the Gospel message and others were not. Some traditions were optional, such as male circumcision or the type of music played during worship services. Some were essential, for example understanding Jesus as the culmination of God’s promises to the Jewish people and David, their king. Some secular traditions are still practiced by Christians, like enjoying mulled wine. This does not make them Christian traditions.

1b) *Christ and Culture* – the Enduring Problem

So far we have discussed the easy decisions. But there are more difficult decisions when we consider the challenges presented when Christianity moves from one culture to another, across geographic boundaries or generations. In his classic book *Christ and Culture*, published in 1951, H. Richard Niebuhr calls these challenges the “Enduring Problem.” Niebuhr was a leading Christian ethicist and theologian in America during the middle part of the twentieth century. What makes a tradition a *Christian* tradition is an ongoing problem.

¹Messiah is the Hebrew word that means the same as the Greek word “Christ” and the English words, “Anointed One.”

²As you have probably assumed from the earlier examples, we are using the word “tradition” to cover a wide range of social activity. We will use it to include rituals, practices, behaviors, beliefs, and expectations that have been shared by most members of a culture for several generations. They are now considered normative or standard.

The reason this is a problem is quite simple. We *live in this world*, with our own culture and traditions, by virtue of being human. But as *Christians*, we are no longer *of this world*. We are to live our lives *in Christ*³ (Colossians 2:6). We are not to cling to worldly things, including traditions (1 John 2:15). Our first and foremost identity is as citizens of Heaven (Philippians 3:20). Together we belong to the Tribe of Jesus Christ.

As members of the Tribe of Jesus Christ, our third task is to discern whether or not a tradition is unchristian. It is a common practice in many countries for husbands to beat their wives. Is this biblical? Is this Christian? When Joseph learned that Mary was pregnant, did he beat her? The apostle Peter had a mother-in-law (Matthew 8:14). Therefore, Peter had a wife, even though she is not mentioned in the Gospels. Would Jesus have approved of Peter beating his wife? When the soldiers came to arrest him, Jesus told Peter to put his sword away (John 18:10-11). Could Jesus have also said, "Peter, put your wife-beating stick away."

Do you remember the woman caught in adultery? Adultery was a serious sin in ancient times. It was not like burning the dinner ugali or spending too much money on tomatoes at the market. The ancestral tradition of the Jews dictated that any woman who committed adultery should be stoned to death. Yet Jesus said to her, "Neither do I condemn you. Go your way, and from now on do not sin again (John 8:1-11).

The Gospel of Mark begins very suddenly. Jesus proclaimed, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent" (Mark 1:14b-15) Jesus calls us to live in the Kingdom of God. But before we can do this we must repent. We must repent of worldly things interfere with the true Christian life. Some of our traditions and the way we live in this worldly culture are not compatible with the Kingdom of God. Jesus drank wine. Jesus did not say if there will be wine in the Kingdom of God, but according to the parable of the wicked servant, there will not be drunkards (Matthew 24:49). Repent of your drunkenness. Repent of your violence, for the Kingdom of God has come near.

2) Teachings, Sacrificial Life, & the Resurrection of Jesus

2a) Jesus Affirms Tradition

As said above our measuring stick for analyzing Niebuhr's Enduring Problem, as it applies to the tradition of wife-beating, is our teacher and Lord. Of his ancestral traditions, which ones did Jesus follow and which ones did he challenge or reject? What was his relationship with his earthly culture and the culture of the Kingdom of God, which he proclaimed? The Bible tells us that Jesus was born into the Jewish culture of the first century in Roman occupied Palestine (now known as Israel/Palestine). Like John the Baptist, the apostle Paul, and other Jewish men Jesus was circumcised on the eighth day (Luke 2:21). As he was growing up, Jesus studied his tradition (Luke 2:46). He made pilgrimages to Jerusalem, especially to celebrate Holy Days at the Temple (Mark 11:11). He also attended the synagogue near his home (Mark 3:1). Jesus learned to read Jewish Scripture (Luke 4:16-21). He could quote Scripture from memory (Mark 12:28-34). He taught in the synagogues of Galilee and surrounding areas and in the Temple in Jerusalem (Matthew 4:23). Other Jews recognized Jesus as a rabbi (John 3:2). A rabbi is a Jewish religious teacher. Before beginning his active ministry, Jesus submitted to the Jewish cleansing ritual that many Christians call baptism (Mark 1:9).¹

According to the Gospel record, therefore, Jesus was steeped in his native traditions. He even warned his listeners, "Do not think I have come to abolish the [Jewish] law or the [ancient Hebrew] prophets; I have not come to abolish but to fulfill." (Matthew 5:17) And yet, the Gospels also tell us that Jesus began his ministry with the word, "Repent!" (Matthew 4:17; Mark 1:15) From what were they supposed to repent? Were they to repent from *not* following all of their traditions? Or were they to repent from following human traditions that negated God's love and desire for all God's People? To answer these questions, let us examine the accusations and complaints recorded against Jesus.

2b) Jesus Challenges Tradition

The four Gospels record that Jesus challenged the traditions observed in the Temple in Jerusalem. God had ordained the Jerusalem Temple to be the single place where Jews could come to celebrate the Holy Days. The Temple was the only place Jews could have a priest perform the ritual sacrifices of thanksgiving or petition (2 Chronicles 29:20-36). The Temple priests were descendants of Aaron, the brother of Moses. God had ordained Aaron and his sons to be Israel's priests (Exodus 28:1). To make an offering, a Jew had to first exchange his local money into Temple money. Then a Jew had to use the Temple money to buy an animal that was ritually pure and acceptable to God, according to the standards set by the priests' interpretation of the scriptures. Finally a Jew had to negotiate with a priest to perform the sacrifice. The priests of Aaron controlled the exchange of money, the purchase of animals, and the ritual sacrifice. Temple worship had become big business! The religious leaders of Judea accused Jesus of overturning Temple traditions. And Jesus did. His challenge was a forceful and unequivocal condemnation of clerical corruption!

³See footnote #1. The Greek word "Christ" means the "Anointed One." The meaning is the same as the Hebrew word "Messiah."

The Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. In the Temple he found people selling cattle, sheep, and doves, and the money changers seated at their tables. Making a whip of cords, he drove all of them out of the temple, both the sheep and the cattle. He also poured out the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. He told those who were selling the doves, "Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father's house a marketplace!" (John 2:13-16)ⁱⁱ

Jesus broke with many other ancestral traditions. He healed on the Sabbath—the seventh day of the week. The commandment prohibiting work on the Sabbath is recorded immediately after the story of the Exodus. The Book of Exodus tells of God freeing the ancestors of Jesus and other Jews from bondage in Egypt. This commandment of rest on the Sabbath was given as one way to remember and honor God for delivering them from slavery to Pharaoh (Exodus 20:8-11). Healing someone was work. The Jewish tradition-keepers were infuriated every time Jesus healed on the Sabbath! The week had six other days when Jesus could heal. Even so, Jesus continually placed the well-being of God's People over his ancestral traditions. When he was teaching in the synagogue in Capernaum on the Sabbath a man entered who was possessed by an unclean spirit. Jesus healed him (Luke 4:31-35). He healed a man with a withered hand on the Sabbath (Mt. 12:9-14). He healed a man with dropsy on the Sabbath (Luke 14:1-6). On the seventh day of the week (the Sabbath) Jesus healed a woman who had been crippled for eighteen years (Luke 13:10-16) and a man who had been crippled for thirty-eight years (John 5:1-16). John 9:1-12 relates the story of the man who had been born blind. Jesus met him on the Sabbath and gave him his sight—right then and there!ⁱⁱⁱ

By tradition, Jewish rabbis in the first century separated themselves from anyone who was not a Jew and from any Jew who was a sinner. Samaritans were not Jews. Jesus had a long conversation with the Samaritan woman at the well. John's Gospel tells us that his disciples were astounded! (John 4:7-27) Eating or drinking with non-Jews or sinners was especially prohibited. Jesus asked the Samaritan woman for water.

We think of a sinner as a liar, a thief, an abuser, a murderer or anyone who worshipped idols. But in first century Judaism sinners were anyone who was ritually unclean. Sinners included tax collectors, someone who worshipped idols, and anyone who touched blood, for example a butcher or a fish seller. Jesus ate with tax collectors (Matthew 9:10-11).^{iv} We have many records of Jesus feeding thousands of people (Mark 6:35-44).^v However, we do not have a single record of Jesus or his disciples requiring each and every one to be Jewish. No one asked if there were any tax collectors, or children with a nose bleed, or menstruating women in the crowds. Jesus fed everyone who was hungry.

In addition, if a Jewish traditionalist came in direct contact with blood or with anyone who was bleeding, they became unclean. They were required to purify themselves in a ritual bath. When the woman who had been hemorrhaging for years touched Jesus, he did not castigate her. He did not immediately go and cleanse himself. Instead Jesus declared her healed (Luke 8:43-48). And so she was!^{vi}

By tradition rabbis did not often keep company with women. In the synagogue men and women sat separately. Even today, in Orthodox synagogues women and men, even family members, sit apart from each other. But Luke's Gospel tells us that women were among the disciples who traveled with Jesus (8:1-3). This Gospel also tells us that Jesus allowed Mary to join his disciples and sit at his feet to learn as he taught (10:38-42). Jesus allowed a woman to anoint him (Matthew 26:7-12). Jesus trusted women to spread the good news of his resurrection (John 20:11-18).^{vii}

2c) The Gospel Difference Between Affirmation & Challenge

Jesus followed some of his ancestral traditions but challenged others. Is there a difference? In reading the Gospels, we find that Jesus followed the traditions that confirmed his membership in the tribe. He was circumcised. Jesus followed the traditions that helped him spiritually. He learned to read Scripture, he memorized Scripture, he attended synagogue, he made pilgrimages to the Jerusalem Temple. Jesus did the work of a rabbi. He taught in the synagogues and in the Temple. Jesus even submitted to the Jewish ritual of cleansing before beginning his active ministry.

Nevertheless, Jesus also challenged his ancestral traditions, according to the Gospel record. As discussed above, he challenged Temple practices of corruption. Corruption is economic injustice. He drove the money changers and the sellers from the Temple. Jesus challenged injustice. In a parable he applauded the persistent widow who kept appealing an unjust verdict. She continued to demand justice until the judge finally agreed, "Though I have no fear of God and no respect for anyone, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will grant her justice, so that she may not wear me out by continually coming" (Luke 18:4-5). Jesus also warned people against clergymen who "devour widow's houses." (Luke 20:47) He insisted that God wanted acts of mercy and justice. Matthew 23:23 tells us that Jesus castigated the pious men who are satisfied to "tithe mint, dill, and cumin" while neglecting "the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith." When the scribes and Pharisees challenged Jesus for allowing his disciples to eat without washing their hands, he pointed to their own wrong doing and demanded, "And why do you *break the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition?* (Matthew 15:3 Emphasis added.)

Jesus elevated the present well-being of the People of God over tradition. As discussed above, He healed people on the Sabbath. Jesus shared food and drink with the People of God who had been marginalized. He accepted water from the Samaritan woman at the well. He ate with Jews who were considered sinners. Listen to the story of Zacchaeus in Luke 19:1-9:

He [Jesus] entered Jericho and was passing through it. A man was there named Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was rich. He was trying to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was short in stature. So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree to see him [Jesus], because he was going to pass that way. When Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, hurry and come down; for I must stay at your house today." So he hurried down and was happy to welcome him [Jesus]. All who saw it began to grumble and said, "He has gone to be the guest of one who is a sinner." Zacchaeus stood there and said to the Lord, "Look, half of my possessions, Lord, I will give to the poor; and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will pay back four times as much." Then Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house..."

Jesus lifted up the poor and the marginalized. The word marginalize describes people who live on the edges or margins of society. They are often ignored. They are very vulnerable and sometimes they are mistreated as outcasts. Luke 6:20-21 reads:

Blessed are you who are poor,
for yours is the kingdom of God.
Blessed are you who are hungry now,
for you will be filled.
Blessed are you who weep now,
for you will laugh.

First century Palestine was a Jewish colony ruled by the Roman Empire. Both Jewish and Roman cultures were patriarchal. Patriarchy is the rule of privileged men. Only a small percentage of men are highly privileged but less privileged men still have more social status than their wives and daughters. In a society governed by privileged men the most marginalized people are those without a native-born man to protect them:

1. women (especially widows)
2. children (especially orphans), and
3. foreigners (including men from other lands).

Jesus lifted up women—he traveled with them and he taught them. He even made women, who were not considered valid witnesses, the first witnesses to his resurrection. Jesus lifted up children. He said, "Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs." (Mark 10:14) Jesus lifted up foreigners. He told a story about the Samaritan, who was a better neighbor to the beaten and dying Jew than the Jewish priest or Levite who passed him by. Jesus healed the daughter of the Canaanite woman (Matthew 15:21-28). When the first man and woman rejected God's purpose in their lives (Genesis 3), God's ideal for humanity was spoiled. Humanity now endures sorrowful or painful work in order to survive. Marriage was no longer based on the unity and love for which we were created and became instead a tool of the fight against the ground.

Women work very hard in producing children and caring for them and for their husbands. This workload in the home makes them dependent upon men for cash and protection. Men have to worry about competing with and getting power over men. It is difficult to reach the Creation ideal – "one flesh, naked and unashamed" – in this kind of world.

3) Paul—From Pharisee to Apostle: Submissiveness

3a) Why Paul?

For the purposes of examining the "Enduring Problem" we can think of the apostle Paul as a man walking on a narrow beam just a half meter wide. This beam spans a divide, forward and behind, between Culture and Christ. On either side of the beam is a deep gap. To borrow an image from the book of Daniel, we can imagine that on Paul's right side is a twenty meter drop into a den of hungry lions. On his left side is a twenty meter drop into a fiery furnace. The lions on his right represent the traditionalists of his birth, Judaism. The fiery furnace on his left represents the traditionalists of the Gentiles, to whom the Risen Christ had called Paul to be a missionary.⁴

Fortunately Paul came to Christianity with some skill in walking across this divide. Paul was born about the time of Jesus' birth. The big difference between the two revolves around geography. Jesus was born in Palestine, among unemployed or working-class Jews who spoke Aramaic. The Roman Empire occupied and ruled their land, keeping most Jews poor. Paul was born in Tarsus (modern day Turkey) among an artisan class

⁴The Bible refers to anyone who isn't a Jew as a Gentile. Gentiles in the world of Paul were Greek-speakers. They were pagans and usually worshipped many gods.

of Jews in the Diaspora. Tarsus was a successful commercial city on the Tarsus River, about 20 kilometers from the Mediterranean Sea. Paul's parents had enough money to send him to school where he polished his Greek language skills and learned the rules and techniques of Greek rhetoric. (Greek was the common language throughout the Roman Empire and Paul's native language. Rhetoric is the art of giving an oral argument and debating.)

Paul probably also spoke Aramaic and perhaps he could read Hebrew. Diaspora Judaism refers to the Jews who lived outside of Palestine in the Roman Empire. Diaspora is from the Greek word for "scattered"—as in scattering the seed at planting time. Several times over the centuries Jewish people had been forced out of Palestine or other areas where they had settled. They had scattered into many other countries for refuge. Many of them prospered and put down roots. They learned to live with and understand their pagan neighbors. (E.P. Sanders, *Paul*, Sterling Publishing, NY, 1991, pp13-35)

The Risen Christ had chosen a missionary who had learned to live in two worlds. Paul could walk the narrow beam between the Aramaic-speaking Jewish world and the Greek-speaking pagan world. In his own words Paul wrote:

To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. ... To those outside the law [Gentiles] I became as one outside the law... so that I might win those outside the law. To the weak I became weak, so that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people what I might by all means save some. I do it all for the sake of the gospel, so that I may share in its blessings. (1 Corinthians 9:20-23).

3b) Jew by Lineage - Pharisee by Training

Paul was proud of his Jewish heritage. In 2 Corinthians he claims generations of Jewish lineage, going back to its first father, Abraham (11:22). In writing to the Philippians Paul elaborated his lineage as "a member of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews..." In relation to Jewish law Paul says that as an infant he was circumcised on the eighth day and as a man he became a Pharisee (a powerful group of Jewish laymen who observed the ancient Jewish Law in their daily lives). He was personally righteous according to the Law. When Christ met Paul, however, Paul realized being a Pharisee of impeccable Hebrew lineage was not enough. Paul changed his allegiance from the tribe of Benjamin to the Tribe of Jesus Christ. He changed; then he changed others.

3c) Tradition Keeper - Tradition Changer

To a pagan, polytheistic, and idol-worshipping world Paul preached the Jewish message that God is One (Romans 3:30). He quoted Hebrew scripture to his Greek-speaking churches. He brought them into the story of Israel and the Risen Christ:

For I handed on to you as of first importance what I in turn had received: that Christ died for our sins *in accordance with the scriptures*, and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day *in accordance with the scriptures*, and that he appeared to Cephas [Aramaic for Peter], then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers and sisters at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have died. Then he appeared to James [brother of Jesus], then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me (1 Corinthians 15:3-10, Emphasis added).

To the Jewish world Paul preached that God's promise to them had been fulfilled in Christ. As foretold by many of Israel's prophets the time had come to accept non-Jews as co-heirs of the salvation and righteousness, which God had promised to the Jews. Paul told the Jews that it was no longer necessary to follow the old laws. The churches in Rome had both Gentile members and Diaspora Jewish members. Paul wrote to them:

For I am not ashamed of the gospel; it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed through faith for faith; as it is written, "The one who is righteous will live by faith" (Romans 1:16-17).

Because of the sacrificial life and resurrection of Jesus Christ, traditions changed. Paul declared that the New Creation had begun. The old traditions of both Jews and Gentiles, which clashed with the values of the coming Kingdom of God, had to end. Pagans and Jews had lived in separate worlds with many different traditions. They did, however, share some traditions in common—slavery and patriarchy (meaning rule by elite men). Paul wrote:

There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise (Galatians 3:28-29).

Tradition places a burden on men by telling them that "real men" should have control and authority over other people. Even if a man is poor and cannot command other men, culture or tradition says that he should have authority within his own household.

3d) New Creation , New Relationship

Talking of new creation and new relationship, is not talking about the new eschatological order! It is the understanding of the proper meaning creation and implication on relationships. In the creation account, the words God used to describe the partner the man needed are *'ezerkenegdo'*. These words are often translated into English as “helper as a partner”, a help suitable”, or a help meet”. Queries arise as to how people usually understand the statement that woman was created to be a help to man?

The problem with translating *'ezerkenegdo'* as “helper” is that it implies that the woman was created to inferior and subordinate to man. A helper sounds like someone we might employ to do dull tasks that we do not want to do ourselves, like wash dishes, or dig holes. There is a word in Hebrew for house maid or inferior worker which is not the word used by God to describe what the man needed. Instead, God said the man needed an *'ezerkenegdo'*:

The noun, *'ezer*, is found 21 times in the Hebrew Bible. It means “help” someone. In most cases, the “help” is God himself...in those instances where *'ezer'* does not refer to God, it is used of such people as kings, who come to the help of another...there is no connotation of inferiority or subordination attached to the word “help” (Fleming, 1992:43).

Psalms 46:1, “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble” speaks to the meaning of *ezer* or to *help*. The second word, *kenegdo*, means suitable for or like. The Hebrew word literally means “facing” – God meant woman to be face-to-face, or on the same level, with man.

What is emphasized is the common nature and essence of the two beings as well as their equality. Paul’s mission work and subsequent ministry to us was held together by an amazing vision. His was an inclusive vision of newness and oneness. The sacrificial life and resurrection of Jesus Christ had shaken the world we once knew. Before Christ our world and our lives in it were like a ball, spinning on the same axis. If we choose the Risen Christ, if we become members of the Tribe of Jesus Christ, our lives are in Him. We are no longer spinning in the same old circle. We have been freed and are moving toward God. In Paul’s second letter to the Corinthians he wrote:

So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself.... 6:17-19a

Paul gave us two images to help us understand our new place in God’s New Creation through Christ. They are “temple” and “body.”

Temple—Both Jews and Gentiles thought of temple as a place. The Jews worshipped at the Temple in Jerusalem. Inside the Temple was a sanctuary, covered by a veil. In the Sanctuary was the Presence of God. No one went there, except for the high priest. One day a year he could enter this Holy of Holies. (Peter Connolly, *Living in the Time of Jesus of Nazareth*, Steimatzky, Israel, pp34-37) For the Gentiles there were many temples. Some were large and parts of them were open to the public. Others were small, maybe belonging to the butcher who performed a ritual before slaughtering the animals for the meat he was going to sell. Paul changed all this when he said that “temple” was a person, not a place. To Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians alike, he said, “Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you were bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body(1 Corinthians 6:19-20).*To the individual Christian*, Paul said that a person’s body is God’s temple. In it lives the Holy Spirit. Our bodies belong to God. They were bought with the blood of Christ.

Body—*to the Christian congregation* Paul said that together the members are one body in Christ. They must care for one another, because if one member of the body suffers, the entire body suffers. Have you ever hurt your foot or your hand? Even though they are what are called the extremities of your body, your whole body feels it. At least mine does. It’s even worse if you have a terrible stomach ache. Paul wrote:

For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another. We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith; ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching; the exhorter, in exhortation; the giver, in generosity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness. Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; love one another with mutual affection... (Romans 12:3-10; See also 1 Corinthians 12:14-31).

What is interesting is that after both the Romans and Corinthians passage about us being one body in Christ, Paul writes about love. In 1 Corinthians he writes an entire chapter ending with “And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.” (13:13)

Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends (1 Corinthians 13:4-8a).

Paul tells us that he strives to imitate Christ (1 Corinthians 11:1). In as much as he is an imitator of Jesus Christ, Paul gives us a second measuring stick with which to evaluate traditions. Is a tradition a loving tradition? Here's what Paul, as an imitator of Christ, would say:

You have heard it said of old that if a husband does not beat his wife, how will she know he loves her? But I, Paul, say to you, "Beating your wife is not an act of patience and kindness. Your arrogance leads you to beat your wife.

You have heard it said of old that because a husband pays a dowry, he has bought a wife and now he owns her. She is his to do with as he pleases? But I, Paul, say to you, "Husband and wife are together one body. They are one body in Christ. When you beat your wife, you beat yourself. When you strike out at your wife, you strike out at Christ."

You have heard it said of old that family life is private. But I, Paul, say to you, "God sees your family life. It is not private. Your body is not even private. You do not own your own body. It has been bought with the blood of Christ. What makes you think you own your wife's body? Her body belongs to God, not you. It too, has been bought with the blood of Christ."

Apparently, one of the consequences of living in a world of thorns and thistles is that the woman became valued mostly for her ability to bear children, run a household, and satisfy a man's sexual urges. Jesus, however, releases us from the burdens that resulted from the fall. He redirects attention away from false expectations to point out what is really important in any one, male or female.

4) Jesus, Paul, & Early Friends

Jesus preached the Kingdom of God has come near. Paul urged us to start living in the New Creation that has begun to unfold. The early English Friends proclaimed, "Christ has come to teach His people Himself." Four generations later, the American Friend Edward Hicks painted "The Peaceable Kingdom," based on Isaiah 11:1-9. This passage prophesied that when the Messiah comes to bring God's reign to the earth, everything will be so peaceful that "The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them." These four images are all very much alike. They are different ways of describing God's eternal plan for us.

4a) Peace-seeking & Peace-keeping

The date usually given for the beginning of the Religious Society of Friends is 1652. During the years before and after, England was embroiled in a civil war. Many people on each of the warring sides were divided along the lines of religion and social class. Chaos and violence reigned. During this time George Fox, Margaret Fell, and other early Friends felt the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding (Philippians 4:7). They experienced the Presence of Christ clearly and deeply. This Presence led them to begin to live as if the Kingdom of God had already come. They felt their behaviors should be testimonies to life in the New Creation.

If our lives in East Africa today are to testify to life in the Kingdom of God, we must examine our traditions. Early Friends examined the English traditions they had inherited to discern if they fit with God's eternal plan for us. The England of 1652 was a place of war and violence. Friends asked themselves, "Would there be wars and violence in the Kingdom of God?" They answered, "No, certainly not!" Jesus had told Peter to put away his sword. One of the Ten Commandments is "You shall not murder" (Exodus 20:13). Friends became pacifists in public and in private. Quaker men refuse to join the military and fight in wars. Quakers believed that our relationships within the family and with others should be peaceful and respectful.

In the fallen world, women's sexuality became the property of men. Most cultures have created rules to protect male's to women's sexuality, especially her chastity, which greatly restrict women's everyday freedom to move about or interact with other people. As a result, some people think of woman – and the sexual desire that men feel for them – as the source of evil. They blame women for men's lust, and believe that contact with women is defiling. In Jesus' time, a Jewish man could divorce his wife for simply speaking to another man on the street. Men caught up in these cultures view female family members as threats to their honor, as a woman who was thought to practice bad behavior brought great shame on the family.

Jesus upheld biblical standards of sexual contact, but shocked people many times when he refused to let fear of women keep him from ministering to them – or from putting them to work in spreading the gospel.

4b) Equality in the Kingdom of God, Equality in Creation

In the Genesis creation account, God creates a woman from a man's rib, His intent is that she will be – unlike the animals – "a power (or strength) equal to him" (Freedman, 1983:58). God created the woman to be someone strong enough – spiritually, intellectually and emotionally – to help man carry his burdens. Only as his equal could she provide the help needed. To find this partner equal to man, God had to take her from the man's own flesh. God put His creation into deep sleep, and took part of his side and built the woman from it.

Friends found that other English traditions were incompatible with Genesis 1:27, that we are all created equally in the image of God. The England of 1652 was very hierarchal with a king, lords, ladies, duchesses, earls, judges, members of Parliament, doctors, lawyers, priests, bishops, and so on. Many English traditions, which people were expected to practice every day, reinforced this political hierarchy. English men had to tip their hats to their social betters. People of lower social status were expected to use formal, deferential language when talking with their English social betters. They stood when someone of worldly power entered the room—for example when the judge entered the courtroom. Women did not preach. Our Quaker ancestors did not believe that these traditions of the Kingdom of England accurately anticipated life in the Kingdom of God.

As a witness to the equality of God's Kingdom and God's creation, Friends replaced many old traditions with new ones. Quaker men stopped tipping their hats to their social betters. Quakers stopped using flowery deferential language. Quakers didn't stand when the judge entered the courtroom. Quaker women took the opportunity to speak and even preach in public. Powerful people did not like any of this. These Quaker traditions undermined their "superiority" and privilege. Powerful people saw these new traditions as treason against their hierarchal political and social order. They arrested many Quakers. Quakers were fined or put in jail or both for living in a way, which they believed would prepare for the Kingdom of God to come nearer. Many Friends responded to persecution by calling the people of England, including the ruling class, to repent.

These and similar traditions were passed down to us by our Quaker ancestors. Our heritage is to live now as we would live in the Kingdom of God. Our lives should be a preview of our eternal relationships with God and with each other. These are our corporate testimonies. How do we translate the Quaker traditions of seventeenth century England into the Quaker traditions of twenty-first century East Africa?

In Paul's thought in Ephesians 5: 20 – 31, Paul means for man and woman to be equal and united. The question then arises why the husband is named as the head, rather than the body, the foot, or the heart. According to Cervin, 1989, Paul uses head to suggest being the first to go first, that the husband is the first among servants. Apparently, we would take this suggestion even further. Service was expected of women. A woman's self-sacrifice had no necessarily Christian meaning, as it was her role in life. Wifely obedience was required by law. Thus for a couple to make their relationship one of unity, the husband had to be the head – the first to surrender the privilege – because the woman had no authority to give up. For the husband such service was sacrifice of everything he had been raised to expect as a man. This parallels Paul's statement that Jesus, as head of the church, "gave himself up for her". When a man behaved in the way Paul suggests, it undoubtedly came solely from Christian love.

According to Bilezikian, 1985, p. 159-161:

Because man continues to love (his wife) sacrificially as his own body in marriage, in return a Christian wife binds herself to her husband in a similar relationship of servant submission that expresses their oneness. The imposition of authority structure upon this exquisite balance of reciprocity would paganize the marriage relationship and make the Christ/church paradigm irrelevant to it...submission is the proper response to servant hood. It is the very meaning of mutual submission.

For purposes of realizing equality in the Kingdom, it should be affirmed that to be the head is not a privilege but a sacrifice, requiring a man to put his wife's needs at least on a level with his own. Paul asked men to imitate Jesus, who in his role as head gave himself up for the church. Similarly a "savior" according to Ephesians 5: 23, was someone who provided a great benefit to someone else, often a great cost to himself.

5) East Africa & Wife-Beating

Jesus taught that the ideal relationship is not to be found in tradition, or even in the law of Moses. Rather, God's true intent for humanity is found in how He created humanity. In Genesis 1, God created both man and woman in his own image, and gave them both responsibilities for ruling the earth and for child upbringing. Wife-beating is a tradition in many parts of East Africa. In Kenya it is illegal. Is this a bad thing? Some call upon their human heritage and say that wife-beating is a valid tradition. Our Teacher and Lord, Jesus Christ, followed many of his human traditions, but ignored the ones that were hurtful to others. Some say that beating is the way to teach someone.

5a) Leading =Effective Teaching

Today we might ask "Is beating an effective form of teaching? Do people learn better if they are beaten? Does it fill the beaten person with love or with fear?" The only way to answer these questions is to ask the person who has been beaten.

George Fox, Margaret Fell, and early Friends believed we must live today as if the Kingdom of God were already here. They would ask, "Is there wife-beating in the Kingdom of God?"

In his parting words to the Tribes of Israel, Moses talked about teaching. He described how one human, created in the image of God, should teach another human, who is also created in the image of God:

Give ear, O heavens, and I will speak;
let the earth hear the words of my mouth.

*May my teaching drop like the rain,
my speech condense like the dew;
like gentle rain on grass,
like showers on new growth.*

For I will proclaim the name of the Lord;
ascribe greatness to our God! (Deuteronomy 32:1-3 Emphasis added)

Paul might remind us that many of the psalms speak of teaching as “leading.” Psalm 23 describes God as the Good Shepherd. We can trust the Good Shepherd to lead us beside still waters, restore our souls, and always lead us in right paths. The Shepherd’s rod and staff are comforting; perhaps they even are protection against enemies (2-4).^{viii}

Before his crucifixion and resurrection Jesus showed his disciples how a Good Teacher teaches. Jesus washed their feet.

After he had washed their feet, had put on his robe, and had returned to the table, he said to them, “Do you know what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord—and you are right, for that is what I am. So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. Very truly, I tell you, servants are not greater than their master, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them (John 13:12-16).

5b) Punishment ≠ Teaching

There is another aspect to wife-beating—punishment. What is the difference between punishment and teaching? Punishment and teaching (or some might call it instructing or educating) are not equal (≠). Punishment is not teaching. Jesus punished the money changers and the sellers in the Jerusalem Temple. But remember how Jesus taught: “Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and curing every disease and every sickness among the people” (Matthew 4:23).

Do you remember the story of the scribes and Pharisees who wanted permission to stone the woman caught in adultery? The woman had sinned. According to the law, she should be punished. But instead of punishing her, or allowing others to punish her, Jesus chose to teach her.

When they [the scribes and Pharisees] kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, “Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.” And once again he bent down and wrote on the ground. When they heard it, they went away, one by one, beginning with the elders; and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him. Jesus straightened up and said to her, “Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?” She said, “No one, sir.” And Jesus said, “Neither do I condemn you. Go your way, and from now on do not sin again.” (John 8:7-11).

Jesus, himself, was without sin, yet he did not throw a stone. He used his words and his caring, not a stone or a stick, to teach her. Who among us is without sin? In a fallen world, women are valued for their bodies and their ability to produce children, labor, and physical satisfaction for men in terms of sex. Jesus taught that women’s value was far greater than any of these things. He said instead that a woman’s true value lay in her relationship with God. As he does with men, the Lord Jesus tells us that the new woman in Christ is free to seek first the kingdom of God.

II. CONCLUSION

To summarize, Jesus rejected ancestral traditions that oppressed people, traditions that kept people poor and in need, traditions that hurt people, and traditions that pushed people to the very margins of society and social well-being. He chastised people who were self-righteous and haughty. Jesus elevated people of low social status, such as women, children, and foreigners. He welcomed outcasts and those who were otherwise labeled “unclean sinners.” Jesus preached a faith and practice of equal mercy and justice. The Gospel message calls people to repent, meaning to return to God. The message calls those who desire to belong to the Tribe of Jesus Christ to become an inclusive community that cares for all of God’s creation in body, mind, and spirit.

The tradition of wife-beating is not a practice of equal mercy and justice. Wife-beating is oppressive and hurtful. It hurts everyone involved. It hurts the wife in body, mind, and spirit. It hurts the minds and spirits of the children who witness such violence against their mother. The tradition of wife-beating hurts the husband also because it rewards haughtiness and gives him the illusion of self-righteousness. Repent, for the Kingdom of God has come near! Jesus’ life and teachings shows humanity the way back from anxiety, agony, and pain to the life in a garden for which humanity was created.

ENDNOTES

ⁱSee also:

Regarding circumcision, John the Baptist, Luke 1:59; the apostle Paul, Philippians 3:4-5

Regarding pilgrimages to Jerusalem and the Temple, Luke 2:41-43; Matthew 26: 17-19; Mark 15:12-16; Luke 22:7-13; John 2:13-14

Regarding quotations of Jewish Scripture, Matthew 22:34-40; Luke 10:25-28

Regarding preaching and teaching in the synagogues and the Temple, Matthew 9:35; 21:23; Mark 1:21; 12:35; 14:49; Luke 4:44; 13:10; 19:47; 20:1; 21:37; John 6:59; 8:2; 18:20

Regarding being recognized as a rabbi, a Jewish title for teacher, Mark 9:5; 11:21; John 1:38; 1:49; 4:31; 6:25; 9:2; 11:8

Regarding the Jewish Cleansing ritual, Mathew 3:13-15; Luke 3:21 The Gospels call this ritual baptism.

ⁱⁱ See also Temple

ⁱⁱⁱ See also Sabbath healings

^{iv} Eating with tax collectors

^v feeding

^{vi} Women with hemorrhage

^{vii} See also: Mary studying ,Woman anointing, resurrection

^{viii}For readers who are not familiar with Psalm 23 as translated in the New Revised Standard Bible (NRSV):

The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want.

He makes me lie down in green pastures;

he leads me beside still waters;

he restores my soul.

He leads me in right paths

for his name's sake.

Even though I walk through the darkest valley,

I fear no evil;

for you are with me;

your rod and your staff—

they comfort me.

You prepare a table before me

in the presence of my enemies;

you anoint my head with oil;

my cup overflows.

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me

all the days of my life,

and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD

my whole life long.

®Biblical citations are to the New Revised standard version unless otherwise noted.

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