

It Ain't In the Bible

By: No One

To begin, the Bible speaks of “wraths, strifes, backbitings, whisperings, swellings, tumults” as undesirable (II Corinthians 12:20). It likewise speaks to the dangers of a “tongue [that] deviseth mischiefs; a sharp razor, working deceitfully (Psalms 52:2)” and warns against those who “have sharpened their tongues like a serpent; adders' poison is under their lips (Psalms 140:3).”

Anyone who has watched a bad marriage is aware that it all too often includes the wife's ridiculing the husband. Likewise, anyone who has had to deal with a smug and sharp-tongued woman knows full well the power of its ability to cut like a knife - even to destroy those around her.

The Bible also says that “The north wind driveth away rain: so doth an angry countenance a backbiting tongue. It is better to dwell in the corner of the housetop, than with a brawling woman and in a wide house (Proverbs 21:9).” So the Bible knows that there can be problems and permits men to express anger over it.

In a brief biblical listing of things which “the earth is disquieted . . . which it cannot bear,” one is an “odious woman when she is married (Proverbs 30:23).” Among the synonyms for odious are hateful, insufferable, evil, unpleasant, nasty - but not sweet, pleasant, or delightful to be around.

So, the question then arises, how shall a man married to an odious brawling woman live with her? Shall he capitulate to matriarchal rule? The problem becomes more difficult because if he differs with his wife, his house shall become divided. And the Bible clearly states that “a house divided against itself cannot stand [‘shall not stand’ or ‘falleth’] (Matthew 12:25, et. al.)?” Then, too, the house divided is very much like one of “a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it (Matthew 7:25).” Only, the storm created by the odious brawling woman is within the walls, dividing the house so it will fall.

Likewise, the Bible says, “Every wise woman buildeth her house: but the foolish plucketh it down with her hands (Proverbs 14:1).” Yet, is anyone who has seen a marriage come apart really going to claim that the only way for a woman to destroy her house is to physically dismantle it? Since the result is the same - a house pulled down or a house that falls down; is anyone really going to split hairs and say that there is a difference between the foolish woman who is wrecking her house or odious woman who is foolishly dividing her house so it will fall? Regarding to the foolish woman who is wrecking her house or the odious woman who is foolishly dividing her house so it will fall, the Bible advises “stripes for the back of fools (Proverbs 19:29)” and “The blueness of a wound cleanseth

away evil: so do stripes the inward parts of the belly (Proverbs 20:30).”Thus, while the Bible may not specifically command it, comes very close to saying that a woman who is wrecking her house - by whatever means - deserves to be punished until she is bruised.

The long-established way to punish a wayward woman in European cultures has been with stripes - meaning to whip her backside, where she has ample protection, rather than on her weaker back (as demanded by literal biblical interpretation). Spanking is just a more modern echoic word, coined after the Bible was widely translated into the English language, describing what can be a punishment administered to the buttocks (backside) with a biblical rod of correction or suitable proxy - such as a stick (switch or paddle) or strap.

So, in the end, if a woman who is wrecking her house gets spanked black and blue, it is not possible for anyone to say that the Bible expressly forbids it. Nor is it possible to say that the Bible does not suggest the possibility of lumps and bruises is preferable to divorce since “they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder (Matthew 19:6 [the “one flesh” reference appears several times, including Genesis 2:24]).”

Furthermore, Jesus said that the only ground for divorcing a woman was if she committed adultery (Matthew 5:32). So, anything else is the man's responsibility to live with or to change if he cannot live with it.

Parenthetically, it might be worth noting that the biblical punishment for adultery was death (Leviticus 20:10). Since an adulterous woman getting beat with a stick until she thought she would die might be considered preferable to being hit with stones until she died (John 8:3) since the former is less harmful remedy. Along the same lines, death was also the punishment for a disobedient child (Deuteronomy 21:21, 22) - the same unruly child subject to the rod (Proverbs 23:14).

By the same token, a man was not immune from chastisement for contemptible behaviour (Deuteronomy 22:18), so that the idea of punishing a woman, even with a whipping, for similar conduct is not unthinkable since the Bible is patriarchal text in which men are considered superior to women. It is possible that the references to possible stoning for egregious behaviour existed to put things in perspective for those who thought whipping too severe a punishment for a recalcitrant youth or a badly behaved woman. After all, as the Bible says, “Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child; But the rod of correction shall drive it far from him (Proverbs 22:15).” How much more true should this be for a grown woman who should know better!

It is also interesting that Paul - who was whipped five times for a combined total of 195 lashes (II Corinthians 11:24) - did not condemn whipping!

Instead, Paul spoke well of “One that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity (I Timothy 3:4).” The Bible also says of men recommended for church office, “so must their wives be grave, not slanderers, sober, faithful in all things (I Timothy 3:11).” The words grave and gravity are not that dissimilar - coming from the same Latin word meaning heavy. So, how does a parent have “his children in subjection with all gravity?” The Bible advises “Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child; But the rod of correction shall drive it far from him (Proverbs 22:15).” It is reasonable to assume that, given the expectations place on the Christian family patriarch, the same cure would work for the child's mother if she is not appropriately serious - a synonym for grave.

In the Christian tradition, it is understood that parents are to “withhold not correction from the child: for if thou beat him with the rod, he shall not die (Proverbs 23:14).” and “let not thy soul spare for his crying (Proverbs 19:18).” The use of the rod on a child is considered an act of love (Proverbs 13:24). The Bible also says, “The rod and reproof give wisdom: but a child left to himself bringeth his mother to shame (Proverbs 29:15).” Now, if a child can be beat with a rod hard enough to make the parent wonder if he is going to die, so that he will not bring his mother shame, it stands to reason that the woman should not be allowed to bring shame upon herself by employing the same remedy.

The Bible says that correcting a child will also give the parent peace of mind (Proverbs 29:17), which is very close to the antithesis of calumny visited on a house by an unrestrained odious woman. Conversely, the Bible also speaks of “holy women”; being in subjection unto their own husbands” (I Peter 3:5) It advises, “Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves” (Hebrews 13:17) Specifically it admonishes, “ye wives, be in subjection to your own husbands . . . (I Peter 3:1).” The Bible also promises women, “thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee (Genesis 3:16).” Now, to rule is to have power over; to be in subjection to is to be powerless to the powerful; and to submit is to surrender.

While the Bible cautions “Husbands [to] love your wives (Ephesians 5:25),” it also says a verse earlier that “the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church . . . as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing (Ephesians 5:24).” Would not everything include surrendering to even a very hard spanking if the husband thought it necessary?

Why the Bible does not mention correcting a wife with rod can be understood from the perspective that the Bible is a patriarchal book - in it, men rule. The biblical attitude toward women is very much in keeping with what Paul's decree that “women keep silence in the churches . . . they are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith the law, and if they will learn any thing, let them ask their husbands at home . . . (I Corinthians 14:34-35).” Not unlike the assumption that there is a God - which the Bible makes absolutely no attempt to prove - it

was implicitly understood that a man would take rod to a woman when necessary since there is nothing expressly forbidding it. Thus, while there are circuitous references to whipping women - that seem awkward in late twentieth and early twenty-first century America with women in public life, the event was sufficiently common that a patriarchal society did not made a big deal out of it.

More importantly, however, is the fact that it is impossible to construct a reverse argument- that a man should never take a woman in hand and correct her behaviour - from the received text. So, while the Bible does not specifically command husbands to beat their wives - as is the case with children - it most certainly does not forbid it and, in fact, suggests there are times when it might be a very good idea!