



SOUL CARE

CHRISTIAN COUNSELING + SPIRITUAL DIRECTION

“Wearing White”

An excerpt from “Heart to Heart about Men” by Nancy Groom

“If men retreat instead of move toward us with tender strength, we do not do them honor by ignoring their unkind or ungodly behavior. When men sin against us they sin against God who has called them to love us, and they distort the image of God in them. God doesn’t pretend their sin makes no difference. What makes us think it’s respectful to act as though *we* don’t mind?”

Our usual response to man’s sin, however, is to try to control their behavior by shaming them or by speaking words to convince them how wrong they are, or by instructing them in how they *ought* to act. Generally, this approach disrespects men by moving the initiative for their behavior away from them and into our own hands. Because God honors our right to make choices about what we believe and how we act, we honor men by refusing to tell them what to do. Usually they already know what they should be doing. In any case, they are men, answerable to God regarding their actions. Our attempts to control them may, in fact, deflect their attention away from what God might want to say to them if He could be heard above our strident words.

Yet God also does not interfere forever with the consequences of what His children choose. Adam and Eve had to leave Eden when they ate the forbidden fruit. Hagar’s pregnancy caused Sarai incredible pain. Moses’ disobedience kept him from entering Canaan. The child born of David and Bathsheba’s adultery died. The people of Israel were exiled to Assyria, the people of Judah sent to Babylon. We are not God’s puppets, but neither do we escape His just judgment sooner or later. What we sow we reap. This is rich evidence of God’s respect for us as His image-bearers, held accountable for making our own choices.

The question is, Who is responsible for executing God’s judgment against men’s sins? “It is mine to avenge,” declares the Lord (Deut 32:35). But we women sometimes take it upon ourselves to rain down on men the just deserts of their misdeeds. We wrest judgment from God’s hands and bring on men the consequences of their sin. We make them pay for their wrongdoing by our harsh words or our martyred silences or our calculated acts of retribution. In this we dishonor both God by usurping His role as Judge and men by heaping shame on their heads. There is a better way.

We give evidence of our respect for men not by *bringing* them the consequences of their sin, but by *showing* them the consequences of their sin as it affects us. We can show them our sadness when they let us down. When they do not bring us their hearts, we can let them know how lonely we are. At whatever point they do not protect us, we can tell them about our fear. When they do not treasure us or when they value the wrong things in us, we can offer them our tears of disappointment. In short, we can bleed when they wound our hearts—not to make them pay for their sin but to let them see what their sin has done.

Perhaps the most respectful thing we can do for men is to don a new emotional wardrobe, wearing white so that the blood drawn by their wounding of us shows most clearly. Instead of our words, we can sometimes offer them our eyes. There they will see our hurt and pain and fear. This is not the same as sulking or withdrawing, which is revenge. This is about sorrowing in men's presence when they do us harm, even as we continue to treat them kindly and remain willing to forgive them as often as they repent. We cry in front of them, but we refuse to close our hearts to them. We tell them how hurt or angry we are, then we prepare them their favorite meal. This is the hard work of the gospel God calls us to do, grieving as He grieves at our own sin, calling men to repentance and grace as He consistently does for us.

One woman put it this way: "When a husband hurts his wife, she must give him a picture of the gospel by weeping and then being kind, not in a condescending, manipulative way, but in a way that disturbs him. A husband will come to know more of God in a woman's tears and kindness than in her arguments or acts of vengeance."

Honoring and trusting men means we expect their goodness and are unwilling to ignore their unrestrained anger or verbal attacks or vindictive silence. We show we believe they can treat us kindly by standing unequivocally, even legally, against their physical abuse. Our failure to tell them we are hurt or afraid or repelled by their actions simply affirms what they already fear—that they are irredeemably bad men incapable of making godly choices. If we believe in men's good intentions and in their desire to be good men (God looks on the heart and so should we), then our faith in them will be evident in our surprise and sorrow when they fail us. *I know this is not the real you*, our astonished sadness says. *What will you do about the blood on my white dress you just drew with your harshness?* If their hearts are indwelt by Christ's Spirit, we are right to ask them to live out of the best parts of those hearts. Wearing white is not just respectful, it is redemptive."

Nancy Groom in *Heart to Heart about Men*, Nav Press, 1995