

Concept of Gender Equality in Islam (part 2 of 2): Substantive Equality of Men and Women

Description: Spiritual equality of men and women as mentioned in the Quran, and a glance at the differences between the genders in other aspects of life.

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Published on 25 Dec 2006 - Last modified on 25 May 2007

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Islam recognizes that while men and women have some physical differences, spiritually they enjoy absolute equality before God. The Quran and Sunnah are unequivocal in stating that one's gender will have absolutely no bearing on their reward or punishment in the next life.

"I shall not lose sight of the labor of any of you who labors in My way, be it man or woman; you proceed one from another..." (Quran 3:195)

"If any do deeds of righteousness,- be they male or female - and have faith, they will enter Heaven, and not the least injustice will be done to them." (Quran 4:124)

"Whoever works righteousness, man or woman, and has Faith, verily, to him will We give a new Life, a life that is good and pure, and We will bestow on such their reward according to the best of their actions." (Quran 16:97)

"He that works evil will not be requited but by the like thereof: and he that works a righteous deed - whether man or woman - and is a Believer- such will enter the Garden (of Bliss): Therein will they have abundance without measure." (Quran 40:40)

"Indeed, the Muslim men and Muslim women - the believing men and believing women, the obedient men and obedient women, the truthful men and truthful women, the patient men and patient women, the humble men and humble women, the charitable men and charitable women, the fasting men and fasting women, the men who guard their private parts and the women who do so, and the men who remember God often and the women who do so - for all has God prepared forgiveness and a great reward." (Quran 33:35)

"O mankind! We have created you from a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that you may know one another. Verily, the most honorable of you with God is the most pious. Verily, God is All-Knowing, All-Aware." (Quran 49:13)

Therefore, Islam openly declares that men and women have an equal status and value before God, and piety alone differentiates one individual from another.

In legal and practical aspects, the general rules are the same for men and women. Both have the same acts of worships, the same Islamic etiquette and manners, and are subject to the same legal penalties. But there are also many cases where the rulings are different. Women are exempted from fasting and prayer during their period. Men are prohibited from wearing gold and silk while women are allowed to, as it is women's nature to beautify themselves. Friday prayers are obligatory for men but optional for women. Men must spend their money on the family but a woman's money is entirely her own to spend as she chooses. There are differences in clothing requirements as well, since the physical appearance of men and women is dissimilar. All of this is reflective of the natural differences between men and women. So in lesser jurisprudential matters, Islam treats men and women according to their inherent differences as per substantive equality and in the interest of justice.

In conclusion, Islam affirms the absolute spiritual equality of men and women, and assigns both an equal rank before God. In jurisprudential matters, Islam promotes the substantive equality of men and women, recognizes their unique strengths and capabilities, and rules accordingly protecting the rights of both.

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