

The Elisabeth Elliot Newsletter

July/August 1986

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Who Will Speak to My Husband?

(The following is an article by R.C. Sproul, first published in his magazine *Tabletalk* in February, 1986. Reprinted with permission.)

“Wives, submit yourselves to your husbands”—this Biblical admonition is one of the most abused exhortations of Scripture. It is abused on two sides, twisted and distorted beyond recognition by both parties in the dispute.

On the one hand, feminists frantically seek to escape the clear teaching of the Apostle on the matter of headship in the home. They enlist the aid of theologians and New Testament teachers who commit exegetical acts of despair to neutralize a Biblical mandate—all in a good cause. To stop the apparently incessant acts of domestic tyranny committed by arrogant husbands, these exegetes turn the Bible into a nose of wax to be shaped to conform to the latest wind of public opinion.

Wifely subordination to her husband is not a popular viewpoint to espouse these days. The fierce militantism of liberated women gives pause to the man who dares to interpret these injunctions in traditional fashion. What kind of ministry can one have if he alienates 50% of the population on an issue like this?

But enough of this feminist distortion. It will pass. It is the other side that frightens me. Those with a zeal for Biblical orthodoxy can also twist these admonitions to wives into destructive orders. Consider the popularity of the view that is epidemic in the evangelical world today that declares women should always

obey their husbands in everything. This simplistic application of the exhortation ignores other Biblical principles by which we are called to obey God rather than men.

When controversy rages over the issue of wives' submission, men who speak to the issue are a bit suspect. We have a vested interest in this debate. I'd rather hear what Elisabeth Elliot has to say about it.

Recently a woman said to me, "I know what the Bible says about wives being submissive. But who will talk to my husband about his responsibility?"

Hear this woman's plea. She speaks for thousands of Christian wives. It is almost impossible these days for a Christian wife to be unaware of what the Bible says about submission. The wives all know it and, to make matters worse, their husbands know it too. The problem is that men don't know and/or don't care to know what God commands of them.

Here is the bad news, men. "*Husbands, love your wives.*"

Why is this mandate not the center of controversy? Why don't we find endless articles about what loving our wives means? Why don't we see essays that speak of "mutual love"?

This mandate has not become a hotly contested issue because husbands systematically ignore it. Who will speak to the husbands?

God has spoken. God has laid down a law. That law is clear and inescapable. The law states: "*husbands, love your wives*" (Eph 5:25). How are we to love our wives? Let me count the ways, Elizabeth Barrett Browning to the contrary. Scripture lists basically *one* way we are to love our wives: AS CHRIST LOVED THE CHURCH AND GAVE HIMSELF UP FOR HER.

No wonder men want to focus on the wives'

responsibility in marriage. Our responsibility is to love our wives in a sacrificial way, in a way that demonstrates we are ready to lay down our lives for them.

Christ is the head of the church. The church is not the head of Christ. The church is to submit to Christ; Christ is not subordinate to His bride. Yet Jesus has never tyrannized the church. The bride of Christ has never received a black eye from the brutal fists of her husband.

If husbands loved their wives as Christ loves His church, the question of wifely submission would never be an issue. There would be no need for women's liberation. What Godly woman would ever feel demeaned if she were called to be submissive to Christ? If Christ were her husband, would she ever need to hoist a picket sign to denounce him?

If I am called to love my wife as Christ loves the church, that is my responsibility before God. It would be easier for me to concentrate on my wife's responsibility. Everybody else seems to be more interested in the woman's responsibility. Why can't I be also? But then, who would speak to the husbands? (R.C. Sproul)

"When we choose deliberately to obey God, then He will tax the remotest star and the last grain of sand to assist us with His almighty power." (Oswald Chambers, *My Utmost for His Highest*, December 1.)

Notice about Books in Print

The May/June 1986 Newsletter carried a list of most of my books which are in print. We have discovered that the booksellers' reference book, *Books in Print*, is not by any means complete, and that some of mine are listed under various Elliot spellings. No wonder booksellers are always telling my friends that my books are out of print. Alas!

From My Journal

February 21, 1986, Autaugaville, Alabama. Beautiful guest cottage on the vast farm (cotton, pecans, hogs, cattle, etc.) of Buzz and Diane Wendland. Walt and Val (my daughter) and the four children are given another guest house. Lovely arrangement—all of us together, since Walt, Val, and I are speakers in the same conference.

Walter (8) prayed last night as I was tucking him in, "Help Christiana (4) to have a sweet heart, and help Jim (22 months) to have an obedient heart, and thank you for Elisabeth (6)." (I'm quite sure I didn't think of my brothers as cause for thanksgiving when I was that age.) I asked Walter if he had read George MacDonald's *At the Back of the North Wind*. "Oh yes! It was so good—but I need to be more like Diamond. He was so kind."

Tour of the farm. In the farrowing shed little Jim watched the birth of a piglet. "It came out!" was the awed comment. As we drove through Prattville he said, "Mama—Pettibone crane?" "Yes, Jim, Pettibone crane." Like his brother at that age, he has a thing about heavy equipment and has learned the make of some of them.

Elisabeth picked out tunes on the grand piano in the Wendlands' living room. I asked if she could do "I Am So Glad That Our Father in Heaven." Never tried it before, but without hesitation she banged it out with verve and astonishing speed. Only four or five sour notes.

Christiana, directing an imaginary choir, unaware of an audience: "Well, if y'all don't want to sing, you can just go home." No use talking to her during one of her performances—she isn't available.

During one of the meetings Christiana and Jim went to the nursery. It was full that evening—twenty-four children, one adult and one teenager to "sit" them. The sitters were in the room with the infants while the toddlers played in the adjoining room. Christiana ap-

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pears in the doorway of the infants' room. "Y'all better get in there and watch those kids because I have to go to the bathroom." A take-charge person.

Lord, for each of these little children I pray: equip them thoroughly for the doing of Your will; effect in them everything that pleases You through Jesus Christ. (This is the prayer of the writer to the Hebrews, chapter 13:20, 21, J.B. Phillips' translation.)

The Master's Will

Years ago I spent a night with a Welsh shepherd and his wife in a place called Llany-mawddwy. In that short time I saw many spiritual lessons enacted in the relationship between the shepherd, his dog, and his sheep. Mari, the shepherd's wife, told me many others. The following is from her book, *In the Shelter of the Fold*.

"A farmer from Peebles, Scotland, had bought some sheep from another farm a good way off. All by herself, his faithful dog started out to drive the sheep to her home on the other side of the mountain. Her master was tempted to linger awhile, over his pint, perhaps, with the vendor. When he returned home later that night, he realized to his consternation that the sheep and the dog had not arrived. In real anxiety he and his son set out in different directions to look for them. But what did the farmer see almost immediately coming to meet him but the flock of sheep with the dog behind them, and in her mouth a new-born puppy, still wet from the womb.

"On her way home, the expectant mother had given birth to her pups. She had delivered herself of them while keeping the sheep together lest they mix with other sheep on the mountain. Then, when she was able to resume her duties and the responsibility of bringing the sheep home, she picked up one member of the little family in her mouth, to bring him with her to the shelter of the farm. When she had finished the work of getting the flock safely into the fold, she made a warm snug nest and laid the pup in it. Then she disappeared into the darkness and reappeared later with the second pup

in her mouth, and then a third. When she arrived back with the fourth, the poor little thing was dead.

"Her duty and faithfulness to her master and her work came first in her life. It was as though she were consecrated, as though she had dedicated her life to please her master and to do his will before considering her own instincts."

The sheep dog puts me to shame. I find it easy to "go with my feelings," but that is no way for a Christian to live. "Indeed," said St. Paul (Romans 8:12, 13, Phillips), "that way of living leads to certain spiritual death. But if on the other hand you cut the nerve of your instinctive actions by obeying the Spirit, you will live."

How to Read the Bible

"It shall greatly helpe thee to understande Scripture if thou mark not only what is spoken or wrytten, but
of whom
to whom
with what words
at what time
where
to what intent
with what circumstances
considering what goeth before
and followeth."

Letter from a Reader

"I hope you don't mind my writing to you. I just wanted to share that you are still being held up in thoughts and prayers after two years. Remember the van full of ladies from Springfield who trooped through your house? . . . Your words changed little facets of our lives (here she tells me some of them). I have written you at least ten letters (now don't look at your mailman that way!). I realized you weren't a 'Christian Ann Landers,' and so instead of getting out a stamp each time, I got on my knees." Thank you, Michelle.

How Things Go in the Carpentry Business

Jeff Becraft of the Fellowship of Christian Athletes writes, "In trying to recruit college athletes to serve as 'huddle leaders' at our summer camps I get a lot of responses such as, 'Well, I'd like to go, but it depends on my job, and I'd like to do some traveling this summer . . . etc.'"

"Jesus didn't say, 'Well, I'm going to see how things go in the carpentry business and if things don't work out . . . well, I might go save the world or something.' No. 'We are going to Jerusalem.' This is no seeking of adventure. This is no whim. This is the will of God. That's all that matters."

Jewels on the Sidewalk

My dear friend Katherine Morgan (the spiritual mother I wrote about in the May/June '85 issue) writes from Colombia:

"I have long felt that most of the family and social problems today can be traced directly to the fact of woman being out of her God-given place and consequently forcing man out of his. Most women cannot see the slightest thing wrong with it, and neither can their shortsighted husbands. Their argument here is that even with two salaries coming in, they can hardly scrape by. When one points out that half

of the things they have they don't need, and that what they call their 'needs' are not nearly so great as their children's need of them as parents, they just look at one and look blank. I often ask mothers if they ever leave their color television set or their jewel box with the jewels in it out on the sidewalk when they go to work. They look astonished at the silly question. Then comes the query, 'Do your children compare in value with those things? Yet you leave them out all day on the street to have their morals, their culture, and their souls stolen by thieves who play in the neighborhood.'"

Travel Schedule July/August 1986

July 21

Christian Booksellers Convention, Washington, D.C.

August 15, 16

Lake Wales, FL; SPRINT Re-Entry Conference; Howard Lisech, 305-293-7200

September 20

Lenox, MA; Stevens School of the Bible women's seminar; 413-637-2241

September 26, 27

St. Petersburg, FL; Moody Bible Institute women's seminar; Josephine McCarthy, 312-329-4000

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