

## Sabotaged Submission

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“Wives should submit to their husbands in everything.”<sup>1</sup> So says Paul in his instructions to the Ephesians when outlining several examples of Christian submission in society.

Evangelical denominations today do not suggest that *all things* would include actions that violate specific laws of God. Nevertheless, many women in evangelical churches live in constant turmoil of conscience because they have been taught they should always obey their husbands, regardless of how sinful or abusive the husband’s orders may be. Going against their husband’s wishes, they are told, is going against God. The husband, as God’s designated head of the wife, is accountable for the results of his commands and so his wife, even though she is technically disobeying God, does not bear the guilt of the sin.

Such views persist among some evangelicals because the scriptural teaching is being sabotaged by individual ministers, organizations, and churches within Christendom who all label their distorted views as Christian submission. A husband who buys into this extreme view is in danger—at the very least—of spiritually abusing his wife by setting

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<sup>1</sup> Eph. 5:24. All quotations are taken from the New International Version.

himself up as a god to whom complete honor and submission are due.<sup>2</sup> The wife who willingly practices such submission is guilty of idolatry.

### Out of the Garden

Those within the Christian culture who teach absolute submission claim to take their instructions from the Bible. What they don't admit is how much tradition, culture, and the sinful nature have influenced the way they interpret Scripture's teachings on submission and authority. Nor do they recognize that their very insistence on wives' submitting to their husbands instead of God is a reenactment of Eden's tragic drama.

### Cursed submission

It is claimed that woman's fate and man's responsibility were determined in the curse of Gen. 3:16: "Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you." Tradition has interpreted this to mean that wives will desire their husbands<sup>3</sup> and husbands will not only have the right but also the responsibility to govern their wives. All other scriptural passages regarding husband-wife relationships are then interpreted in light of this one statement. The concept is so much a part of Christian culture that few stop to ask:

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<sup>2</sup> Physical abuse is also a real danger, but this paper will deal more with the more hidden aspects of spiritual abuse that can lead to physical abuse in Christian families.

<sup>3</sup> A misinterpretation of *desire* in Gen. 3:16 can contribute to a view of extreme submission. One opinion is that it refers to a sexual desire. Some Bible translations have even translated the Hebrew *l'shûqâ* [לְשׁוּקָה] with a word that is specific (e.g., Indonesian *berahi*). However, one needs only to observe relationships between husbands and wives to know that this kind of desire is not a universal principle! Furthermore, the context would then demand interpreting sexual desire as punishment.

A second interpretation construes the word to mean *that which a woman desires*. According to this view, a woman must ask her husband's permission for anything she wants: "Wives must make their desires known to their husbands and the husbands are to rule over their wives" (John R. Rice, *Bobbed Hair, Bossy Wives and Women Preachers* [Wheaton: Sword of the Lord, 1941], 17).

A third view, the view of this paper, holds that *desire* in Gen. 3:16 is the same as that in 4:7, i.e., a desire that wishes to control. For an explanation of this view see Grudem's *Systematic Theology* 463-464. The properly balanced submission and authority designed for marriage was distorted by sin in such a way that each party exhibits a sinful desire to control the other.

“If this is a command for Adam, why is God giving it to Eve?” The idea that God would give instructions to a man through a woman is normally unacceptable to total submissionists.

What they fail to understand is that God is simply stating the way things are going to be, not giving commands. In other words, “You have disobeyed; now here are the consequences.” Both the context of Gen. 3:16 and the Hebrew words point toward issues of control. The woman’s sinful desire to conquer her husband and the husband’s sinful domination of his wife are indicators of relational changes that destroyed the divinely designed headship and submission of the previously perfect couple. Neither aspect of this curse is intended for God’s redeemed.

#### War between the sexes

Even though we still live in a cursed world, the Christian’s responsibility is to live out the freedom that redemption paid for. However, instead of seeking the peaceful relationships of Paradise, some Christians prefer to maintain the battlefield that began in Eden. They make marriage analogous to a military hierarchy. Submission [*ὑποτάσσω*] in Eph. 5, it is said, demands complete obedience. Even as a soldier must submit to the authority of his commanding officer, so the wife must submit to the authority of her husband *in everything*. An enlisted man is not allowed to question authority or deviate from his orders. In the same way, the wife is not to question her husband’s right to rule her or the wisdom of his decisions since his right to command her has come from God.

This argument is spurious, however. The use of *hupotasso* [*ὑποτάσσω*] to portray military relationships is irrelevant. A word’s ultimate meaning is determined by its context, and the military is only one context of several in the New Testament in which

*hupotasso* is found.<sup>4</sup> Even a precursory look at the context of Eph. 5:24 shows the inappropriateness of making marriage parallel to the military. When has the military ever been known for the humility of mutual submission (Eph. 5:21) or for an exhibition of love (5:25, 28)? A husband's taking on the role of commanding officer over his wife is not a display of Christ's love but an exhibition of the curse from Gen. 3:16.

### Deification of man

When a husband demands that his wife obey him regardless of what he asks, even to the point of sin, he is forcing her to ignore her position in Christ and her responsibility to worship God alone.<sup>5</sup> Claiming to stand in the place of God or Christ, he actually represents neither, for “God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone.”<sup>6</sup> Instead of caring for his wife's spiritual well-being as a godly husband should, he is turning her into an idolater while raising himself up as a mini-god. The tragedy of Eden being reenacted here is not the curse but the actions that brought about the curse—succumbing to the Serpent's lure to become gods.

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<sup>4</sup> “This word [*ὑποτάσσομαι*] which belonged originally to the sphere of worldly order is now filled with new content as a term of order. . . . In exhortation the middle [voice] embraces a whole series of meanings from subjection to authority on the one side to considerate submission to others on the other. As regards the detailed meaning this can finally be decided only from the material context. . . . The distinctions in meaning in the various material contexts should not be overlooked.” Kittel, TDNT, vol. 8, 45.

<sup>5</sup> Some evangelicals find it hard to believe that Christians would teach that a wife should obey her husband to the point of deliberate sin. It is actually very common, though the degree to which this is taken varies. The most frequent example given is lying, with Sarah's lying at Abraham's request cited as justification. Few take it to the extreme of one Sunday school teacher in a Baptist church in Florida that insisted a wife must even commit adultery if her non-Christian husband asks her to, thinking it will improve his chances with his boss for job promotion (Personal interview, Jan. 14, 2002). The rationale given, based on an interpretation of 1 Pet. 3:1-2, was that her complete submission would lead her husband to Christ. Tragically, even though the class normally engaged freely in discussion, no objection was raised. This is not an isolated case.

<sup>6</sup> Jas. 1:13-14.

How much more relevant is the biblical picture of the believing husband and wife as joint-heirs of Christ,<sup>7</sup> running the race together toward the heavenly city! Both are to fix their eyes on Jesus.<sup>8</sup> The total submissionist, however, would have the wife fix her eyes instead on her husband. In this system, the wife who resists such complete control is labeled as unspiritual and unsubmitive. Forced between the natural desire to please her husband and the greater desire to please God, she must decide: Will she obey her husband in order to gain some temporary peace at home, or will she obey God and take an emotional pounding from the man who batters her with the Bible in order to get her to submit?

Or is she perhaps wrong and her husband right? Does she indeed need to be more submissive? Many women live from day to day hearing the conflicting messages that demand answers, but where do they go for help? If a woman is fortunate, she will find assistance from a pastor or counselor who is wise enough to know that submission must have limits, and that increasing submission in a spiritually abusive situation only creates more difficulties.<sup>9</sup>

Not many are that fortunate, however. Instead of receiving help that will stop the abuse, they only hear that their difficulties would disappear if they would submit more wholeheartedly.

When she musters up the courage to go public with “her” problem (very likely to her pastor or a church member), what little human dignity she has retained can soon be “trampled underfoot” with comments like: “What have you done to provoke him?” “Well, you’ve got to understand that your husband is under

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<sup>7</sup> 1 Pet. 3:7; Rom. 8:16-17.

<sup>8</sup> Heb. 12:1-2, a command given to all Christians.

<sup>9</sup> Statistics show that husbands who demand submission from their wives tend to become more abusive when that submission is actually given.

a lot of pressure right now,” or “How would Jesus want you to act? Just submit and it won’t happen again.”<sup>10</sup>

The most common advice is “Go home and submit.”

Even where wise pastors exist, many abused women are reluctant to go to them. For one reason, evangelical pastors are usually male. A woman who is already being abused by her husband will normally be reluctant to open up to another male. Second, she is suspicious that she will only hear the “S” word again.<sup>11</sup> Third, she often is afraid of what her husband will do if he finds out because, after all, he thinks he represents Christ. How could it be possible for an outsider to give better advice than his own?

As a result, women turn to outside help. They listen to the radio, they watch TV, and they read. The privileged ones will find truth and be enabled to act upon it. The rest will become further victimized by the saboteurs of submission.

### The Saboteurs of Submission

Since the fundamental problem lies in the curse upon the entire human race, we can expect that in every generation teachers will arise who insist upon the inferior status of women and the right of men to do whatever it takes to control them. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, at least in the West, it is not politically correct to suggest that women might be inferior, so the concept is reworded to suggest an essential equality that only has role differences. Actions, however, still betray the ancient belief that a woman needs a man to interpret spiritual reality and to lead (or force) her into submission in all aspects of life.

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<sup>10</sup> James Alsdurf and Phyllis Alsdurf, *Battered into Submission: The Tragedy of Wife Abuse in the Christian Home* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1989), 132.

<sup>11</sup> Charles Swindoll called *submission* the “S” word in *Grace Awakening* (Dallas: Word, 1990), 251.

Such actions deny the doctrine of the priesthood of every believer and the individual presence of the indwelling Holy Spirit.

Who are some of the saboteurs that have affected families in today's evangelical churches?

### 1. Our Fundamentalist cousins

Since Fundamentalists have deliberately disassociated themselves from evangelicals, evangelical churches sometimes assume that they can detach themselves from Fundamentalist teachings. Furthermore, since we share so many critical doctrines, the differences are sometimes thought of as only matters of preference or taste. Many people in the pew will refer to themselves as either evangelical or fundamentalist without being aware of some very real distinctions.

Former Fundamentalists often find their way into evangelical churches. In the freer environment, it is comparatively easy for them to discard extrabiblical rules concerning worldly amusements, cosmetics, and the length of a dress, but it is not as easy to abandon skewed interpretations of Scripture. Men and women indoctrinated with Fundamentalist views of patriarchy carry these beliefs over into their new environment. They hear the same words—"Husbands, love your wives; wives, submit to your husbands"—but the instructions are filtered through a grid already encrusted with the rough residue of legalism.<sup>12</sup>

Fundamentalists also reach evangelicals through writings, radio, and TV. Elizabeth Rice Handford, daughter of deceased Fundamentalist leader Dr. John R. Rice,

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<sup>12</sup> "Legalism is an attitude, a mentality based on pride. It is an obsessive conformity to an artificial standard for the purpose of exalting oneself. A legalist assumes the place of authority and pushes it to unwarranted extremes . . . It results in illegitimate control, requiring unanimity, not unity" (Swindoll, 81).

is typical of such writers. Her small book, *Me, Obey Him?*, has had an influence that far outweighs its size and price.<sup>13</sup> Originally published in 1972 and revised in 1994, it has gone through several printings (600,000 copies).

Handford promotes total submission to a husband's will, right or wrong, without exception: "If you are intellectually honest," she says, "you have to admit that it is impossible to find a single loophole, a single exception, an 'if' or 'unless.' The Scriptures say, without qualification, that a woman ought to obey her husband."<sup>14</sup> It does not matter whether the husband is a believer or unbeliever.<sup>15</sup> The husband is the ruler, the wife is the helper.

Handford learned well from her father. *Me, Obey Him?* reiterates what her father wrote in 1941 in *Bobbed Hair, Bossy Wives and Women Preachers*. Neither Handford nor her father gives a satisfactory answer to the question of women needing to submit to husbands who want them to sin. Both claim that a truly submissive wife will never face such a predicament because God will step in to resolve the conflict. "If a miracle is needed in order for God's child to fulfill both obligations," Handford argues, "God will do a miracle to make it possible."<sup>16</sup> Since God gives only good gifts to his children, he would not put a woman in that kind of bind.<sup>17</sup> Her "miracle" is argued from a different standpoint by her father:

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<sup>13</sup> Elizabeth Rice Handford, *Me, Obey Him?* (Murfreesboro, TN: Sword of the Lord, 1994). This book of 126 pages (paperback) currently sells for \$3.95.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 34-35.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 39. Handford also says, "God never gives two commands impossible to obey. He will never make a woman choose between two wrongs [i.e., disobeying her husband or disobeying God] if she wholeheartedly follows the Scriptures" (50). And there is the catch: it is assumed that the woman who *does* find herself in

The plain, simple fact is that when a lost man sees his wife transformed before him [through submission] . . . [and that she] is more anxious to make him happy, and is easier to live with, such a man then is going to be glad of the great improvement in his wife. And however wicked he is, he will not want that beautiful and holy character desecrated and spoiled.<sup>18</sup>

If you were that kind of a wife, being subject to your husband as unto the Lord, your husband would not want to desecrate and defile and lead into sin such a lovely Christian character.<sup>19</sup>

Both Rice and Handford show an incredible naiveté! They have ignored the amount of hatred evil has for good or the delight that evil has when good is despoiled.<sup>20</sup> They dismiss women's claims of injustice with a trite condemnation that they have not submitted enough.

According to Handford, a wife must not listen to her conscience because a woman's conscience can become distorted.<sup>21</sup> She must instead listen to the voice of God through her husband.<sup>22</sup> Submission to her husband is submission to God. Having properly turned everything over to her husband, she is now free of any responsibility in making decisions.<sup>23</sup>

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such a bind has not "wholeheartedly" followed the Scriptures in being submissive to her husband. The entire responsibility for a successful marriage is put upon the wife.

<sup>18</sup> Rice, 33. *Bobbed Hair* is still in print.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

<sup>20</sup> Rom. 1:32.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 40-41. This, of course, is taken from Paul's reference to the "seared conscience" of the false teacher (1 Tim. 4:2). Handford doesn't say what happens if the husband's conscience is distorted, but in this case it would be irrelevant. If she obeys her own conscience in violation of her husband's command, she is guilty. On the other hand, if she obeys her husband's distorted conscience, she remains guiltless. In such ways women become supporters of false teachers. Will they then be able to say to God on Judgment Day, "I was just obeying orders"?

<sup>22</sup> Such a teaching is very self-centered, though it is masked as a total *giving* of one's self. The ultimate concern is being able to blame someone else for one's own sin. Scripturally, however, the question is moot: participating in another's sin makes one guilty. Committing evil in obedience to authority is submitting to Satan rather than the God of truth. The Proverbs 31 woman is praised because she fears the Lord, and the one who fears the Lord hates evil (Ps. 97:10, Prov. 8:13).

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 65-66.

*Me, Obey Him?* has received both accolades and denunciations. The multiple copies still being purchased for use in Christian women's groups is a testimony to its popularity. Its popularity, however, masks a danger.

Lucy Tisland was one who paid the price of the book's intolerant advice. Her husband Robert, a Baptist preacher in Minnesota in the 1980s, was a wife and child beater, physically demanding submission while constantly repeating, "Wives, be subject to your husbands as unto the Lord." Lucy testified that one of her two bibles on wifely submission was *Me, Obey Him?*<sup>24</sup> With a mixture of fear and love, Lucy fully attempted to live the life of the submissive wife but was rewarded with continual abuse. After three beatings in one day and under threat that she would be dead before the day was finished, she shot her husband. A Minnesota court acquitted her of murder after hearing testimony about the abuse she suffered.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> The second was *Woman the Completer* by Jack Hyles (Hammond, IN: Hyles-Anderson, 1981. Hyles, pastor of First Baptist Church of Hammond, IN (membership over 50,000) from 1959 until his death in 2001, has had no small impact. Besides his pastoral ministry, he was founder of Hammond Baptist Schools and Hyles-Anderson College that enroll thousands of students. He authored 49 books and pamphlets. His obituary claimed that his ministry "has touched and influenced the lives of over a million people nationwide as well as untold millions worldwide" (Obit., <<http://www.baptist-city.com/summary.htm>>).

Hyles compares the family with the Trinity. The father as head of the family represents the Father; the children represent the Son. "By process of elimination" the wife represents the Holy Spirit. His advice to wives begins with these words: "If you want to know what your duties are in the family, all you have to do is find out the duties of the Holy Spirit in the Trinity, for you are the Holy Spirit of the home" (Chap. 1).

In Hyles' view, the wife is inferior to the husband. "A wife gets in trouble when she doesn't yield herself to her husband. Every human problem is caused originally because that which is inferior and that which is subordinate refuses to yield itself to that which is the stronger or the superior . . . It is a greater sin for the wife not to be submissive than for the husband not to love" (Chap. 4).

Daughters are to be raised with complete submission in view. "Whereas the boy is trained to be a leader, the girl is being trained to be a follower. Hence, obedience is far more important to her, for she must someday transfer it from her parents to her husband.

"This means that she should never be allowed to argue at all. She should become submissive and obedient. She must obey immediately, without question, and without argument. The parents who require this have done a big favor for their future son-in-law" (Hyles, *How to Rear Children* [Hammond, IN: Hyles-Anderson, 1972], 158).

<sup>25</sup> Alsdurf and Alsdurf, 13-15.

With what kind of logic can one say that a husband is to be regarded as Jesus Christ while requiring his wife to obey him in following commands from Satan, even to the point of committing adultery?<sup>26</sup> How can one justify a wife's being forced to ignore God's commands in order to follow the dictates of a human authority? We are the slaves of the one we obey.<sup>27</sup> Our obedience demonstrates our allegiance, an allegiance that rightfully belongs only to God. God will not tolerate his glory being given to anyone or anything else. Considering another human being—even one having authority—as God or Christ is idolatry.

*Me, Obey Him?* twists Scripture to promote an offensive and potentially deadly version of Christian submission. Husbands who try to enforce its principles upon resistant wives are guilty of spiritual abuse. Wives who submit to its philosophy are not only surrendering their responsibility to obey the voice of the indwelling Holy Spirit but are also guilty of contributing to the spiritual downfall of men who would try to be God.

## 2. Marabel Morgan, the <sup>®</sup>Saran Wrap Queen<sup>28</sup>

According to *Publisher's Weekly*, Marabel Morgan's *The Total Woman* was “the best-selling cloth book in general bookstores in 1974. In its first four years it sold almost 3 million copies.”<sup>29</sup> *The Total Woman* became a guide for attaining marital happiness through staying at home, practicing submission, and making one's self attractive to be with. It tried to strike a moderate position between the outspoken feminists of the day and

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<sup>26</sup> See footnote no. 5.

<sup>27</sup> Rom. 6:16.

<sup>28</sup> Marabel Morgan earned the epithet because of her suggestion that women greet their husbands in sexy costumes when they come home from work. The <sup>®</sup>Saran Wrap idea was actually sent her by a reader.

<sup>29</sup> “The Story of Fleming H. Revell Company,” (Jan. 26, 2002 <<http://www.bakerbooks.com/corporate/revell3.shtml>>). Taken from *Fleming H. Revell Company: The First 125 Years, 1870-1995* (Grand Rapids: Revell, 1995).

the stereotyped doormats, but it also placed the responsibility for a happy marriage squarely upon the shoulders of the wife: “It is really up to her. She has the power.”<sup>30</sup>

In the end, however, Morgan focuses on the wife’s “making herself desirable and available” and not on becoming a woman of God.

Her chief interest seems to be in giving suggestions on how a wife can revolutionize her marriage to make it “sizzle”. . . . A wife is encouraged to improve her marriage by admiring her husband, building up his masculine ego, and lavishing hero-worship on him—all in cute, manipulative, or childish ways that demean his intelligence.<sup>31</sup>

With words even more explicit than those used in *Me, Obey Him?*, Morgan turns her husband into a god: “It is only when a woman surrenders her life to her husband, reveres and worships him, and is willing to serve him, that she becomes really beautiful to him. She becomes a priceless jewel, the glory of femininity, his queen!”<sup>32</sup> As a result, according to Morgan, her husband will give her what she wants.

*Surrender, revere, worship, serve*—these are religious words. Once again woman is encouraged to give to man what rightly belongs only to God. A man who accepts such worship from his wife does not remain innocent.<sup>33</sup> Wives are to love and respect their husbands, not worship them.

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<sup>30</sup> Marabel Morgan, *The Total Woman* (Grand Rapids: Revell, 1973), 80. This view is widely held. Alsdurf and Alsdurf quote Marvin De Hann: “The primary responsibility for a good relationship in marriage lies with the wife. If the wife is submissive to her husband, they’ll have a good relationship” (85; quoting “Have You Excommunicated Your Spouse?” in *The Good News Broadcaster*, March 1982, 47). Alsdurfs cite similar views from John MacArthur.

<sup>31</sup> Jeanne Kun, “A Woman of Strength, Who Can Find?” Reprint. *The Alliance for Faith and Renewal*. 1981.

<sup>32</sup> Morgan, 80.

<sup>33</sup> When this author recently read these words to a women’s group, most of whom remembered *The Total Woman*, the ©Saran Wrap, and the popularity of the book, they wondered how in the world Marabel Morgan ever became the rage among women in Christian circles.



*A rose for the submissive wife in 1973 and 2001*

*The Total Woman* is now out of print, but its popularity among women during the 70s still affects today's marriages. Its concept of submission as manipulation is being revived in a more recent book, *The Surrendered Wife* by Laura Doyle.<sup>34</sup> Even the book jackets are similar: both sport a single red rose. The latter, however, in spite of its shortcomings, is not as likely to do as much spiritual damage. First, it does not claim to be Christian, so it is less likely to be used as a bible for Christian marriages.<sup>35</sup> Second, it does not promote surrender in all situations.<sup>36</sup> Third, it advocates women trust their husbands instead of controlling them; it does not in any way suggest adoration or worship.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>34</sup> Laura Doyle, *The Surrendered Wife: A Practical Guide to Finding Intimacy Passion, and Peace with a Man* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2001).

<sup>35</sup> Doyle advocates faith and trust in a "higher being" (235-236).

<sup>36</sup> Whereas Fundamentalist authors try to preserve the marriage even in cases of severe abuse, Doyle specifically recommends separation or divorce (Doyle, 27-28).

<sup>37</sup> Doyle approaches submission—which she calls *surrender*—from a common sense standpoint. The similarities with *The Total Woman* show up in the extent of the surrender and the reasons for it. In advising wives to replace "inappropriate control" of their husbands with total trust, she says: "Respect means that when he takes the wrong freeway exit you don't correct him by telling him where to turn. It means that if he keeps going in the wrong direction you will go past the state line and still not correct what he's doing. In fact, no matter what your husband does, you will not try to teach, improve, or correct him" (35). However, Doyle recognizes that a husband has to have earned that kind of trust (31).

Nevertheless, *The Surrendered Wife* contains elements of dishonesty. "One of the keys to success in surrendering is to pretend you have faith—or, as the old expression goes, to 'fake it 'till you make it.' You may feel like an actress at times . . . . But I promise, there's no better time to do an acting job worthy of an Oscar nomination than when you are surrendering . . . . When you have faith in your husband, even

### 3. Bill Gothard and the Chain-of-Command

Perhaps the most pervasive influence surviving in evangelical churches from the 70s was promoted by Bill Gothard's Institute of Basic Youth Conflicts, now the Institute of Basic Life Principles (IBLP). IBLP began in the 60s and spread rapidly during the 70s. Hundreds of thousands attended the week-long seminars where they received the "red notebook" that would teach them how to live successfully by submitting to all established authority and by following Gothard's rules for Christian living.

Initially, evangelical churches welcomed Gothard with open arms. Gothard, with his charismatic personality and seeming humility, looked as if he had the solution for American parents struggling to keep control of their rebellious teenagers. Many benefited from Gothard's emphasis upon the memorization of Scripture. This benefit was compromised, however, by Gothard's own misuse of the Word, especially his legalistic use of Old Testament Law to prescribe present-day behavior.<sup>38</sup> Dr. Ron Allen, at the time professor of Hebrew at Western Baptist Seminary,<sup>39</sup> describes his experience at a seminar in Portland, OR:

The week that I spent at Basic Youth Conflicts in 1973 . . . was one of the most difficult of my life. In this seminar I was regularly assaulted by a misuse of the Bible, particularly the Old Testament, on a level that I have never experienced in a public ministry before that time (or since). All speakers, including myself, fail to interpret and apply the Bible rightly from time to

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when you're stretching it, you will bring out his very best efforts and awaken his tenderness . . . and he'll go to new lengths to please and pamper you" (136-137). Surrender, then, becomes just another form of manipulation, serving the same purpose as submission in *The Total Woman*.

<sup>38</sup> For a discussion of the legalistic aspects of Gothard's program, see Don Veinot, Joy Veinot, and Ron Henzel, *A Matter of Basic Principles: Bill Gothard and the Christian Life* (Springfield, MO: 21<sup>st</sup> Century Press, 2002), 119-137. This newly published book exposes the cultish aspects of Gothard's movement, including Gothard's authoritarianism, his own unwillingness to submit to authority, and his claims of having received revelations of God for new teaching. "It is our conviction that Bill's extreme authoritarian control and improper interpretation of Scripture are every bit as scandalous as the sexual immorality that went on behind the scenes of the Institute" (61). Doubting Gothard is equated with doubting God (67, 72).

<sup>39</sup> Dr. Ron Allen is now at Dallas Theological Seminary.

time. But in the Gothard lectures, Old Testament passages were used time after time to argue points that they did not prove. I was as troubled by the errors made from the lectern as by the seeming acceptance of these errors as true and factual by the many thousands of people in attendance.<sup>40</sup>

The legalistic teaching for which Gothard has been most criticized is the “chain of command,” the principle that is fundamental to the rest of his program. From childhood, everyone is under human authority: children to parents (especially fathers), employees to bosses, churches to pastors, and wives to husbands. Those having authority speak for God. According to Gothard, submitting to the person higher on the chain will result in an “umbrella of protection” that will safeguard one from spiritual danger. “The essence of submission,” Gothard claims, “is not ‘getting under the domination of authority but rather getting under the protection of authority’. Authority is like an ‘umbrella of protection’, and when we get out from under it, we expose ourselves to unnecessary temptations which are too strong for us to overcome.” That puts us in real spiritual danger, he continues—at which point he deftly switches to the subject of witchcraft so that he can equate any refusal to obey authority with “subjecting ourselves to the realm and power of Satan.”<sup>41</sup> When one umbrella develops “leaks,” “Satan is given greater freedom to defeat those who are under that authority.”<sup>42</sup>

An attitude of non-submission, he claims, can even cause physical illness in another member of the family. Only when a woman gets under “her umbrella” can she

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<sup>40</sup> Ron Allen, “Issues of Concern—Bill Gothard and the Bible: A Report,” May 30, 1984 (Rest Ministries, Jan. 2, 2002 <[http://www.geocities.com/Athens/Forum/9575/goth\\_allen1.html](http://www.geocities.com/Athens/Forum/9575/goth_allen1.html)>).

<sup>41</sup> “Authority and Responsibility,” *Institute of Basic Youth Conflicts*, 1969, 1975.

<sup>42</sup> Gothard, *Understanding the Winds of Adversity*, Supplementary Alumni Book Vol. 7, 1981, 10.

expect her own umbrella to protect her children.<sup>43</sup> Any sign of an “independent spirit” removes the umbrella and exposes the wife to “destructive temptations.”<sup>44</sup>

Whether it is called a chain or an umbrella, the teaching is unbiblical, denying those in the lower levels of the system immediate access to God. Don Veinot, of Midwest Christian Outreach, writes, “Not only does this type of system tend to be abusive, but it sets up a mediatorial role between the individual believer and his God—a position which has already been filled by the savior of us all!”<sup>45</sup> Buying into this unbiblical teaching, many Gothard alumni left the seminars to begin shackling their families with chains of command that required wives to submit to some very holey umbrellas.

The chain is presented as God’s tool to refine character, but the illustration used for many years in the seminar notebook makes it appear more of a weapon.<sup>46</sup> The husband, using God’s authority, hammers a chisel—his wife—in order to perfect the teenaged “diamond in the rough.” The illustration, with its implications of harshness, offended many, but the concept of yielding unquestioningly to authority had its effect.

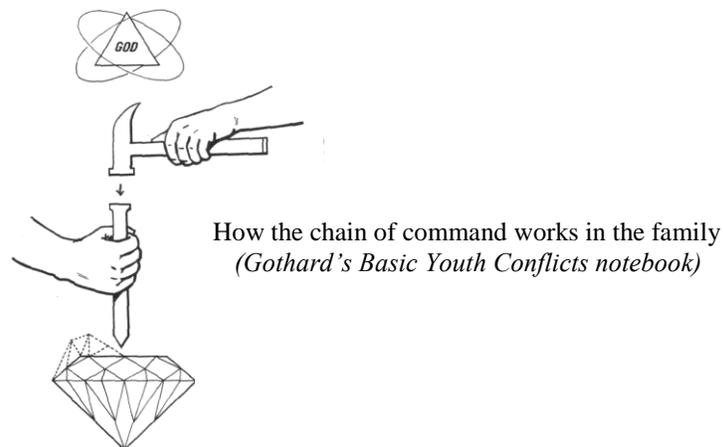
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<sup>43</sup> Gothard, *Conquering Impossible “Mountains,”* Supplementary Alumni Book Vol. 13, 1983.

<sup>44</sup> Gothard, *Be Alert to Spiritual Danger,* Supplementary Alumni Book Vol. 6, 7.

<sup>45</sup> Veinot, 50. Midwest Christian Outreach is an apologetics group devoted to combating cults.

<sup>46</sup> The illustration was present in the notebook until 1984, after which time it was replaced with a less offensive graphic. The teaching that gave birth to the hammer and chisel, however, did not change. Veinot, 253.



In all fairness, Gothard's notebook does not overtly teach that one should obey in matters contrary to Scripture. However, he prefaces any permission for noncompliance with several *if*-clauses:

If the basic intention of [one in authority] is actually to get him to violate God's moral laws, and [if] he has tactfully presented a creative alternative [and if he has] given God time to change their minds [and if he] has had the right attitudes, then he must appeal to their understanding that he cannot do what [the one in authority asks].<sup>47</sup>

A huge burden is placed upon the one being asked to disobey authority. He not only has to be sure of his own motives but he also has to discern the "basic intentions" of the one in authority, suggest "creative alternatives," and give time for an appeal that will show "how the [creative alternative] will reach his goal." Only after applying all these steps is one scripturally ready to "suffer for not doing what is wrong." The unlikelihood of this happening, however, is accentuated when Gothard says, "In my experience, I have met very few who have actually been called upon to take [this step of suffering]."<sup>48</sup>

<sup>47</sup> "Chain of Command: Basic Questions and Answers," *Institute of Basic Youth Conflicts*, 1974.

<sup>48</sup> "Authority and Responsibility," 1975. In its application to marriage, Gothard endorses the need for women to embrace suffering as part of submission. He rejects any concept of mutual submission, claiming this is only a ploy of humanism to turn men into gods (Alsdurf and Alsdurf, 88-89). Gothard defines humanism as "an expression of 'The Lie'—that man is equal with God." When Christian women attempt to

Imposing so many conditions upon obedience to God's Word, however, gives more honor to the authority figure than to God. Respectful appeals may be appropriate in some situations, but there are also times when a respectful but immediate "No!" is necessary. Evil cannot be relied upon to be reasonable.

Gothard's seminars lost momentum in the 80s, largely due to serious sex scandals in the organization. In spite of continued problems, IBLP continues to spread its doctrine through seminars and other programs, including a very strict home schooling movement, the Advanced Training Institute of America (ATIA).<sup>49</sup> IBLP now claims two and a half million alumni.

Now that the seminars are no longer the rage, it is easy to overlook how many men and women today are still bound by the chain of command they learned years ago. Gothard's unbiblical chain of command is perpetuated by those who learned well in his seminars. Other groups have endorsed his principles that promote obedience to husbands over obedience to either the written Word of God or the voice of the Holy Spirit.

The chain-of-command is very appealing to men who want to practice the unhealthy control predicted in Gen. 3:16. It is also appealing to women who do not want to be bothered with the responsibility of thinking for themselves or making decisions. Nevertheless, men do not turn into umbrellas when they say "I do," nor should women leave behind their God-instilled minds and consciences when they cross the honeymoon

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gain equal rights with men, they are falling victim to The Lie: "When we resent the authority which God placed over us and demonstrate a spirit of willfulness, we accept the delusion of Humanism which promotes rebellion through 'equal rights'" (Gothard, *Applying Basic Principles*, 1984, 10-13).

<sup>49</sup> Allegations of sexual misconduct still plague IBLP, both from the past and the present. In February 2002, Gothard's Indianapolis Training Center came under scrutiny for alleged child abuse. The investigation is ongoing.

threshold. A woman's protection is the Lord God: "There is no other rock"—or umbrella.<sup>50</sup>

The root problem is not submission but usurped authority. The top human link in this theoretical chain has assumed more authority than God has given him. He becomes like the pagan that lords his authority over others, reminding them how they must submit.<sup>51</sup> In *The Subtle Power of Spiritual Abuse*, David Johnson and Jeff VanVonderen describe such persons:

They spend a lot of energy posturing about how much authority they have and how much everyone else is supposed to submit to it. The fact that they are eager to place people *under* them—under their word, under their 'authority'—is one easy-to-spot clue that they are operating in their *own* authority.<sup>52</sup>

Both submission and authority are legitimate teachings of Scripture, but they must be interpreted in the light of *all* Scripture. Scripture gives limits so that neither submission nor authority gets out of balance. "*It is only appropriate to obey and submit to leadership when their authority is from God and their stance is consistent with His.*"<sup>53</sup>

In the ongoing debate in the church on male-female relationships, Gal. 3:28 has been much used and sometimes abused. Nevertheless, it *does* proclaim a freedom that was not present under the Law prior to Christ. In the context, Paul is stressing that *all* have become one in Christ as sons and daughters of God. Therefore, each wife is entitled to all the spiritual rights granted her Christian husband, including the ability to interpret Scripture and listen to the indwelling Spirit, the privilege of praying directly to her God

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<sup>50</sup> Isa. 44:8.

<sup>51</sup> Matt. 20:25.

<sup>52</sup> David Johnson and Jeff VanVonderen, *The Subtle Power of Spiritual Abuse: Recognizing and Escaping Spiritual Manipulation and False Spiritual Authority Within the Church* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1991), 64.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 66. Italics in the original.

and exercising spiritual gifts, and the responsibility to reject sin in any form. The church must not at any time deny a woman what God himself has given her.

#### 4. Patriarchs, priests, and homeschooling

Gothard's Advanced Training Institute of America is only one among several homeschooling programs emphasizing the husband's rule in the family. Our concern here is not with alternative forms of education but with the authoritarian control that is maintained by isolating wives and children from the rest of society.<sup>54</sup> "Never even consider sending your children to private Christian schools, much less the public, automaton factories," say Michael and Debi Pearl, authors of several books for homeschoolers.<sup>55</sup>

For many, Christian homeschooling is an honest attempt to thwart the godless education of the public schools, an opportunity to integrate a Christian worldview into all of learning. At the extreme end of the homeschooling movement, however, the agenda is not just a superior education for children but a total control over influences that will shape children's lives—and the number of adherents is growing. Strict discipline decides every move. Only "positive" influences are allowed—those that will train boys to become patriarchal masters of their homes and prepare girls to grind their own grain, bake their own bread, and obey their husbands. The philosophy tries to move backward in

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<sup>54</sup> The homeschool-only movement arises from a very literalistic view of Old Testament commands for parents to teach their children the commands of the Lord, such as Deut. 4:1-10, 11:19; Ps. 78:5-11, et. al. Doug Wilson, who favors private Christian schools, argues against such a misuse of Scripture: "But why is it legitimate for parents to delegate the responsibility for *research* to others, but not legitimate to delegate the responsibility for actual teaching?...The answer to this, of course, is that the responsibility of parents is not to do everything themselves. The Scriptures require parents to provide food for their children; it does not require every father to be a farmer, growing the food his children will eat. The key is responsible, diligent oversight." Douglas Wilson, *Recovering the Lost Tools of Learning: An Approach to Distinctively Christian Education* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1991), 129.

<sup>55</sup> Michael Pearl and Debi Pearl, *To Train a Child* (Pleasantville, TN: Pearl, 1994).

time to an idealized—and fictional—era when men ruled unquestioned, women stayed at home to serve them, and daughters were courted only by honorable suitors under the strict supervision of parents. It's a fuzzy mixture of Old Testament patriarchalism and Victorian romanticism, with a little Amish work ethic thrown in.<sup>56</sup>

The movement's supporters claim that God gives responsibility for children's education to the father. He is to be the family priest, policy-maker, and program-director.

Before he even concerns himself with how to be involved in the day to day [*sic*] workings of the homeschool, a father must begin to take his place as the priest of the household. The most important role he can fill in the home, and the one the absence of which will most impoverish the family, is that of spiritual leader.<sup>57</sup>

Designating the father as family *priest* is disturbing. His authority is said to make his prayers more powerful. The philosophy is similar to the chain of command, in which the husband acts as mediator between his family and God, protecting those under him from attacks of Satan.<sup>58</sup> This regression to patriarchy tries to restore a system that was

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<sup>56</sup> This writer wants to reassure the reader that homeschooling itself is not being attacked here. On the contrary, homeschooling is a legitimate educational method, and when pursued wisely can be an outstanding experience for both teacher and student. The issue being considered here is an extreme philosophy of control that endeavors to eliminate individual thinking, demanding strict obedience to the father's authority and tending toward abuse.

<sup>57</sup> "The Family Priest." *Patriarch*, posted 25 Jul. 2001.

<sup>58</sup> The author appeals to Job as evidence: "The father is strategically placed at the head of the family to wage spiritual warfare on their behalf. His pleas for his wife and children place a special hedge of protection around them that no one else is so authorized to provide. Satan realized that Job's prayer had been effective in moving God: "Have you not put a hedge around him and his household and everything he has?" (Job 1:10) The evil one could not penetrate the barrier which God, by Job's prayers, had constructed" (Ibid.).

Note the switch in story elements. If this were a true parallel, the hedge of protection would have been around Job's children in response to Job's prayers. Scripture, however, does not show a connection between God's "hedge of protection" and Job's prayers. Job's prayers for his children did not prevent the hedge of protection from being removed when the cosmic battle began.

Scripture says that it is the prayer of a *righteous* person that is powerful (Jas. 5:16). Righteousness is unrelated to position in the family. The authority for prayer is given to all Christians by Christ himself.

eliminated under the New Covenant, one that even predates the Law. It ignores the significance of the priesthood of every believer.

Whereas homeschooling is considered an option by most of the church, some fellowships are now making it recommended or even required.<sup>59</sup> In fact, new churches, usually based on covenant theology, are being formed around families of homeschoolers.<sup>60</sup> At the center of their teaching is the role of the father in the covenant community. Sunday schools and youth programs are frowned upon because these divide the family. Some are pushing for home-based businesses so that fathers can remain at home and can actively participate in their children's day-to-day schooling, even through college.<sup>61</sup>

Many of their goals and practices are commendable.<sup>62</sup> Leaders stress that these family patriarchs should love their wives as Christ loved the church and not become dictators or tyrants. They even teach voluntary, mutual submission between husband and wife. In the end, though, final decisions belong to a husband, and his wife must submit—*even to the point of sin*. Typically, Sarah's having lied in obedience to Abraham is used

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<sup>59</sup> Members of the Confederation of Reformed Evangelicals (CRE), with headquarters in Redmond, WA, "warmly receive" all but stress the need for Christian parents to take responsibility for the schooling of their children: "Parents who do not fully understand the indispensability of Christian education should be warmly received into membership. However, the leaders of Christ's church must thoroughly understand and plainly teach the divine imperative to disciple our children, the divine prohibition of rendering unto Caesar those who bear God's image (Matt. 22:20-21), the divine warning to those who cause their little ones to stumble (Matt. 18:6) and the divine promises to those who raise their children in faith (Deut. 7:9, Ps.102:28 Ps. 103:17-18, Prov. 22:6, Lk. 1:48-50, Acts 2:39)." (CRE homepage, March 2002)

<sup>60</sup> Examples would be "family friendly" churches recommended by *Patriarch*. They stress covenant, no age segregation, and are often home based.

<sup>61</sup> "The Father's Heart: God's #1 Priority." *Patriarch*, posted 25 Jul. 2001. For more information on these issues, see the *Patriarchy* website as well as the many books written for parents of homeschoolers. Bibliographies are available on multiple websites, many having links to related issues.

<sup>62</sup> Many of their aims would match those of other Christian communities. However, one of the acknowledged problems of the patriarchal systems is that the emphasis upon husbands taking firm control over everything related to the family leads to the abuse of their wives and children.

as proof, bolstered by Peter's reference to Sarah in his instructions to husbands and wives.<sup>63</sup> In spite of all the genuinely worthy goals of modern patriarchy, it nevertheless entails the same danger as the humanism it is trying to avoid: man can become a god, deciding what is good and evil and forcing other people to obey. At the end of patriarchy's road, however, only males can become gods, whereas humanism leaves that option open for all.

The priesthood of the patriarch is not found just in the homeschooling movement, nor is it a new doctrine. Puritan Matthew Henry preached it in 1704,<sup>64</sup> and the sentiment has remained strong among those who ascribe to covenant theology, but it is also found among Baptists, especially those having some affinity with their Reformed brethren.<sup>65</sup> Much more recently, Tony Evans of Promise Keepers wrote that Job "understood that a father is to be the priest of his home" and encouraged his readers to become the same.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> "What a heroine of faith Sarah was! She experienced the vulnerabilities that are so characteristic of a wife's role: you follow your husband and leave family to head off for who knows where; you are told to tell the half-truth that you are your husband's sister and end up in a king's harem; you are expected to believe that you will have a baby at 90 years old. In all this Sarah obeyed, calling her husband her lord, and entrusting herself to her God, knowing the He was her ultimate Lord and protector. She did not give into the terror that a wife might quite understandably indulge in given her husband's (not always perfect) sense of his duty to God. If a man is a hero in his activism, his wife is a heroine in her quiet acceptance of her calling to support her husband." "Quiet Heroes," *Patriarch*, posted Jul. 25, 2001

<sup>64</sup> "Masters of families, who preside in the other affairs of the house, must go before their households in the things of God. They must be as prophets, priests, and kings in their own families; and as such they must keep up family-doctrine, family-worship, and family-discipline: then is there a church in the house, and this is the family religion I am persuading you to." Matthew Henry, "On Family Religion," *The Complete Works of Matthew Henry* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1978).

<sup>65</sup> "I am prophet, priest, and king in my home. . . . I am the one responsible to provide for my family, to train my children, and to govern my household. Every husband must be the head of his family. The decisions of the family, the welfare of the family, and the government of the family rest on his shoulders alone. . . . It is the responsibility of a wife to reverence and obey her husband as her head. . . . To rebel against him is to rebel against God. To dishonor him is to dishonor God." Don Fortner (pastor of Grace Baptist Church, Danville, KY), "Would you be interested in three things which would guarantee a happy home?" Radio message.

<sup>66</sup> Tony Evans, "Spiritual Purity," *The Seven Promises of a Promise Keeper* (Colorado Springs: Focus on the Family, 1994), 76.

Some undoubtedly use the term to indicate nothing more than a husband's leadership role in the family. Its use in certain segments of the homeschooling movement, however, indicates something much more authoritarian and exclusive that will continue to infect the next generation with the belief that wives must submit to their husbands in all things, even when it means going against God's moral laws. When husbands maintain self-control and high ethical standards, the problem remains below the surface; but when they succumb to temptation themselves, they drag their wives down with them.

### Fighting the sabotage

Wife abuse in the church does not usually begin with kicks and blows but with a wrong theology that continues to let husbands become gods. The deceived human heart has turned the curse of Gen. 3:16 into a command that not only allows but encourages a man to continue in sin by ruling harshly over his wife, all under the guise of loving her.

Evangelical churches unwittingly reinforce this harsh spirit with a popular exegesis of *love* that separates *agapaō* [ἀγαπάω] from *phileō* [φιλέω]. *Phileō* represents the natural affection of friendship, it is said, while *agapaō* represents God's sacrificial love for us. This *agapē* [ἀγάπη] love "is a decision" that determines what is best for the person loved, even if it means great sacrifice on the part of the lover.<sup>67</sup> Husbands are to love their wives with *agapē* love in the same way that Christ loved the church.

Besides being exegetically unsound,<sup>68</sup> this attempted separation of divine love and friendship has a tendency to make love cold and calculating, devoid of emotion and

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<sup>67</sup> "Love is a decision" was popularized by Gary Smalley's seminars of that name and the later publication of the book with John Trent (Dallas: Word, 1989).

<sup>68</sup> For a discussion of the supposed distinction between *agapaō* [ἀγαπάω] and *phileō* [φιλέω], see D. A. Carson's *Exegetical Fallacies* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984), 25-54; and *ἀγαπάω* in Kittel's *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 1.

passion.<sup>69</sup> When combined with a usurpation of authority, it becomes another tool in exercising unhealthy control. Such love does not just *do* what is best for another but also determines what that best should be. Has a wife disagreed with her husband? It is for her own good, then, that she be corrected until she is stripped of wrong thoughts and wrong beliefs. Is she resistant? Then it is for her own good that she be turned over to Satan to be pummeled by spiritual forces until she is willing to repent and submit not just her body but her spirit to her husband.<sup>70</sup>

This kind of spiritual abuse is easy to keep hidden from others because no bruises or broken bones give it away. Some wounds, however, cannot be covered by long-sleeved blouses and turtleneck sweaters. The injuries are of the spirit and mind, hidden behind dull eyes and a lifeless demeanor, too easily attributed to a bout of depression or illness. The dull eyes may even be hidden behind a mask of “Everything’s fine, thank you” for the same reasons that wives avoid revealing physical abuse—fear of consequences and a sense of hopelessness. The courts used to call it mental cruelty, and cruel it is. It is not love. It is the curse of Gen. 3:16 kept alive by poor theology. It can remain hidden until the spiritual abuser crosses the line into physical abuse and the wife finally becomes brave enough to blow the whistle and call the police. Since many spiritual abusers will not cross that line, their sin goes unheeded.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> The traditional doctrine of God’s impassibility also contributes to the passionless love that drives an authoritarian husband to decide what his wife should do, think, and believe. He becomes like the God of his imagination, exacting discipline and retribution without grace.

<sup>70</sup> Gothard calls this a “hedge of thorns” that those in authority are supposed to pray around the one who is being “rebellious” (*Conquering Impossible Mountains*, 5). Describing similar actions on the part of church leaders, Johnson and VanVonderen say that “this system does not foster holiness or obedience to God, it merely accommodates the leaders’ sick interpretation of spirituality and their need for control” (66).

<sup>71</sup> Verbal and spiritual abuse, however, can escalate into physical violence. “James warns us dramatically that the tongue is like a fire which consumes the whole person . . . Physical violence is an example of this desire [to act as judge over another’s life] put into motion. It becomes a means of taking another person’s

Whereas churches are more likely now to provide safety for the woman whose life is in danger and to report a brutal husband to the local authorities, they are less likely to recognize or to interfere in matters of emotional and spiritual abuse. These are not concerns that call for police intervention, and so the tendency is to regard the situation as not truly damaging. In fact, wives continue to receive the same advice they have received for years: “You must be doing something wrong. Just submit, and your marriage will improve. Your husband is basically a nice guy.”

Occasional sermons on a biblical view of marriage cannot undue the damage created by centuries of wrong teaching, both in society and the church, that a husband’s word is law even when that law results in abuse. Resistance to change is understandable in a world without Christ. However, it is impossible to justify the church’s role in contributing to beliefs that destroy a woman’s good conscience before God and reinforce sinful pride in her husband.<sup>72</sup>

Spiritual leaders often fail to recognize that spiritual abuse constitutes spiritual evil. Shepherds of the flock allow wolves to influence their congregations, some of whom are serving as deacons, teachers, and pastors. These men usurp authority by setting themselves up in the place of God, demanding submission from their wives not only in actions but in thought. They hold two tools in their hands: the sword of the Spirit to threaten and manipulate, to bruise and to batter, and to uphold man-made law instead of grace; and the umbrella to silence and pummel into obedience those below them in the

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life into one’s hands, usurping the divine prerogative of judgment and misusing it. Just as anger begets anger, so verbal abuse often signals the physical violence that is to come” (Alsdurf and Alsdurf, 56-57).

<sup>72</sup> In fact, it is not the church that stimulated England, Canada, and the United States to recognize the injustice of wife abuse—physical, emotional, and spiritual. The church has belatedly addressed the issue, and that only partially.

chain of command. “The problem of wife abuse is not one of feminism, secular humanism or a lack of headship in the home. It is the problem of evil—unseen and unopposed.”<sup>73</sup> It is true that in the world evil often prospers, but the church should not be encouraging it.

In some cases, the problem may stem from a lack of biblical teaching on love, authority, and submission. In other cases, though, the problem is that the teaching has not been thorough enough. In spite of good exegesis and faithfulness to God’s Word on the subject, pastors have not always anticipated the distorted grid through which the listener may interpret the words *love*, *submit*, and *obey*. Good counsel from the pulpit is competing with input from other sources. As we have seen, not all sources are pure.

When the apostles found themselves competing with false teachers, they did not hesitate to identify deceptive doctrine and denounce it. On some occasions they not only dared to name the perpetrator but also announced in no uncertain terms what the future of such persons would be—both in this world and in the next. Although a modern pastor may need to exercise caution in order to avoid unwanted litigation, a verbal attack against false doctrine, backed up by careful research, is sometimes necessary.

Truth does counter error, but it is a mistake to think that *affirmative* statements alone will undo the effects of false teaching. A mind that has already believed a lie cannot perceive clearly an unadulterated version of truth. In such a way, *submit in everything* becomes a license for a husband to usurp God’s authority and attempt to force his will upon his wife.

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<sup>73</sup> Alsdurf and Alsdurf, 62.

Sabotaged submission will not be seen for the perversion it is unless it is named  
and exposed.

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*This copy of "Sabotaged Submission" is a revision of a paper originally presented at the annual Northwest meetings of the Evangelical Theological Society in March 2002 and in November 2002 at the national meetings.*

## Appendix

### What is submission?

*Some considerations about the biblical teachings on submission and authority*

1. To submit, in most cases, means to put one's self voluntarily and humbly under another person's authority or leadership. It is to be contrasted with *subjection* that comes from the top down. Since these are *flash words* in our society, the wise teacher will avoid mixing the terms indiscriminately. (Eph. 5:21-24, Col. 3:18)
2. Submission is not carried out the same way in all elements of society. Some established authorities, operating under law, have the right to enforce submission of those under them, e.g., the government and the military. But these are not the analogies used to describe authority and submission in the family. The New Testament analogy is based on Christ's relationship to the church for which he died—a relationship established on grace and love. (Rom. 5:8; Eph. 5:1-2, 23-33; Tit. 2:11-14)
3. Submission to God is to be total. He is the ultimate authority and Master, the sovereign Lord of us all. (Exod. 20:3, Matt. 4:10, 23:8-10)
4. Submission to human authority is partial. No one can serve two masters, and obedience to the Master of the universe must take precedence. As long as divine authority and human authority (leadership) agree in what is to be done, there should be no conflict. (Matt. 6:24)
5. When human authority comes into conflict with God's authority, God wins. In this case, submission to human authority means humbly and respectfully refusing to follow orders of the one who is out of God's will. (Acts 4:19, 5:21; Tit. 3:1-2)
6. Each person bears the responsibility of his or her own sin. In other words, the one in authority does not take on the sin of someone "under" him, even if that sin has been performed at his command. The one in authority is guilty of misusing his authority in causing someone else to sin, and the one under authority is guilty for disobeying God's command and giving in to that human authority. (Ps. 49:7; Ezek. 18; Rom. 2:6-11, 3:22-24, 14:10-12)
7. In cases where clear commands of God are not involved, submission involves giving deference to another. Submission and humility go together. Mutual Christian submission involves two (or more) persons acting in humility together, searching for God's wisdom while still recognizing the proper role of the head (which is united to the rest of the body). This is the kind of submission that is expected in marriage. (Eph. 5:15-21, Phil. 2:1-11; 1 Pet. 3:7-12, 5:5)

8. God has arranged authority and submission patterns for the peaceful operation of society, but these patterns depend upon other God-ordained principles for successful operation. Authority and submission are not the only issues involved. We are to live peaceably with all persons only insofar as it is possible to do so without compromising righteousness. (Heb. 12:14)
9. Holding a position of authority does not make one either right or wise. The scriptural emphasis is to seek wisdom, not demand submission to personal authority (Prov. 2:1-6, 3:13-15, 4:7; Jas. 1:5). Wisdom will often mean not exerting one's supposed "rights." The Father and the Son are examples. God often delays or withholds action that he has every right to carry out (Exod. 34:6-7, Isa. 48:9, 2 Pet. 3:9). Jesus gave up his rights as the Son to provide our salvation (Phil. 2:6-11).
10. Wise use of authority is exhibited by humans who recognize that they are under authority to someone greater than they, whether they be king, master, or husband. (Prov. 20:27-28, Isa. 10:12-15, Eph. 6:9)
11. Wisdom calls for a discerning use of authority and rejects authoritarianism. In a marriage, it first of all *leads* other family members; it doesn't order people around. (Matt. 20:25-28)
12. Both submission and authority have limitations. A person with authority never has the right to suggest, ask, demand, or coerce someone to sin against God or even against conscience, nor is a person obligated to commit a sin in the name of submission. (Ps. 1; 5:5, 34:15-16; Prov. 8:13)
13. A person with authority never has the right to demand belief in a particular doctrine or even in God, nor is a person obligated to follow any other in the name of submission. The biblical principle to use in changing a person's mind is compassionate persuasion (Acts 18:4, 2 Cor. 5:11, 1 Pet. 3:15-16, 1 Thess. 2:7-8). Paul specifically mentions that legalistic persuasion does not come from God (Gal. 5:7-8).
14. A person with authority never has the right to set himself or herself up in place of God as the final authority. When we submit to God-ordained authority, it is because we ultimately are submitting to God. When that authority is disobeying God, we are not to follow if it would mean committing a sin of our own. (Acts 5:29, Col. 3:25)
15. A person with authority never has the right to consider himself (or herself) of greater value or greater importance than those under authority. A person receives authority because of a position; in other words, authority resides in the position, not in the person. (Rom. 12:3-5, Phil. 2:3)
16. A person with authority never has the right to represent himself as a necessary intermediary between another person and God (i.e., as priest). Jesus Christ is the only priest, and everyone has individual access to God through him. This is an

area where Gal. 3:28 *does* apply. Husbands are *heads* of their wives, not priests of the family. All members of the family are equally priests under the New Covenant. (Gal. 3:26-28, Eph. 2:17-22, 1 Pet. 2:9)

17. A husband never has the right to abuse his wife or children— physically, emotionally, or spiritually. The same is true of other authorities. (Ps. 11:5, 58:1-12, Prov. 10:11; Mal. 2:13-16)
  
18. Submission involves respect for authority; but outward respect does not mean that the respect has been earned. Christians in authority should be more interested in leading the kind of life that will earn respect based on character than in demanding respect just because they hold a position. (Being *worthy* of respect is a necessary requirement for holding office in the church.) Nevertheless, even when respect has not been earned, those in submission should still act respectfully—as they should to *everyone*, not just to those in authority. (Eph. 5:33, 1 Tim. 3:8,11; Tit. 2:2; 1 Pet. 2:17, 3:7)

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