

The Elisabeth Elliot Newsletter

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A Christmas Offering

Instead of incense, blessed Lord, if we
Can send a sigh or fervent prayer to Thee,
Instead of myrrh if we can but provide
Tears that from penitential eyes do slide,
And though we have no gold, if for our part
We can present Thee with a broken heart,
Thou wilt accept; and say those Eastern kings
Did not present Thee with more precious things.

Nathaniel Wanley

Men, Women, and Biblical Equality

A few months ago a double-page advertisement with the above heading appeared in Christian magazines, containing a statement drawn up by seven Christian leaders, and signed by (if I counted correctly) 164 others. It appeared to be a direct rebuttal to The Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood which was formed several years ago. [address of this Council: P.O. Box 1173, Wheaton, IL 60183. I recommend a fine little booklet they publish, John Piper's *What's the Difference?*]

In the section on Creation, the MWBE advertisement states: "The word 'helper' (*ezer*), used to designate woman in Genesis 2:18, refers to God in most instances of Old Testament usage (*e.g.* Sam 7:12; Ps 121:1,2). Consequently the word conveys no implication whatsoever of female subordination or inferiority." That makes sense. The English word would convey no such

implication either. But let's not overlook texts which do clearly convey subordination (not to be confused or equated with inferiority of worth). While we know that the Lord is our Helper, and human helpers are often superiors (parents, teachers, coaches, public servants who hold political office), we also take for granted that a helper may be a subordinate (an assistant, a flunky, a gofer, a servant). The Lord of the Universe Himself was willing to accept the status of a slave. The position in no way diminished His worth, much less did it cancel His lordship, but He did not consider equality something worth grasping (see Philippians 2:6).

It's the idea behind that expression "biblical equality" that gags me. For years we've been told that biological sexual differences mean nothing beyond reproduction. Isn't this anti-Christian? We look not only at the reality of physical things but beyond the visible to the invisible meaning. Research and logic have been twisted to support the idea of an "androgynous," a wonderful new blending of masculine and feminine traits into a supposedly new human type. Unfortunately this concept has taken strong hold of theology, with vastly destructive results. It's a hoax, of course, for the design (our respective human forms) is the vehicle of deep theological mysteries—the relationship between Christ and His bride. The Genesis account shows clearly who was made first, and what God's purpose was in creating Eve.

She was meant to be a helper. So far as I can see, this is not in the least demeaning—for her or for any of us who follow the Master. It is a privilege and a vocation. Much resentment has arisen in women's minds because of the suggestion (strong in the advertisement and in nearly all feminist literature) that one's position defines one's worth, a grossly secular view. Ought not Jesus' position (born in a cattle shed, raised in poverty, rejected by those to whom He came, then acting the part of the household slave when He washed the disciples' feet, and, at last, forsaken by His nearest friends, bound and imprisoned and flogged and finally nailed to a cross) prove to us beyond any least doubt that there is no such

equation? Was His worth impaired by these humiliations? He told His followers that whoever is chief is meant to be the servant of all. Why should we who have the high and holy calling of being His servants, ever protest for equality in the sacred realms of marriage, home, and church? These are not political arenas, for here a much higher law than the civil one is in operation, the law of love.

Most of what MWBE's advertisement says I think most Christians would accept. It is what they have chosen not to say that disturbs me deeply. The section on Community deals with the Holy Spirit's coming on both men and women; both have spiritual gifts. True enough, but were there not certain restrictions (for both men and women) placed on the use of these gifts? Is there no such thing as church order which manifests a heavenly hierarchy?

Why no mention of this? Hierarchy—that graduated splendor in which cherubim, seraphim, archangels, angels, saints, apostles, prophets, and martyrs have their divinely appointed places—is treated, in fact, as a bad word. Is not Christian marriage a mysterious representation of the ineffable love between Christ and His Bride? Must we insist on “mutual submission,” as does MBWE?

Years ago I heard Letha Scanzoni lead a seminar on “Egalitarian Marriage,” in which she used Ephesians 5:21 (“Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ”) as her proof text, omitting the following verses which spell out the specifics of that subjection (wives to husbands, children to parents, slaves to masters). During the discussion period I asked whether she saw any difference at all between a wife's submission to her husband and his submission to his wife. The answer was no. “May I then reverse the nouns in the verses which follow?” Yes. So I began to read, “Husbands, be subject to your wives as to the church, for the wife is the head of the husband as the church is the head of Christ.” She stopped me. “Oh, you can't carry the analogy that far.”

Well? Can we drain the analogy of its mystery? Can we infer nothing but mutual submission? May the Lord give to us, men and women alike, His sublime indifference to secular categories, and His perfect willingness to be subject to the Father—a subordination which did not end with His earthly life, as I Corinthians 15:28, 29 (JBP) so clearly shows: “When everything created has been obedient to God, then shall the Son acknowledge himself subject to God the Father, who gave the Son power over all things. Thus, in the end,

shall God be wholly and absolutely God.” Yes, we are to “fit in with each other,” as Phillips translates Ephesians 5:21. We are to sacrifice, give in, forbear, forgive. But is that all? Is there no special command to us wives? There is. “Wives, be subject to your husbands, as to the Lord” (Eph 5:22). Why is this verse in the Bible? Why does MWBE omit it? Well, they think it's dangerous. Anything the Bible teaches can be dangerous, of course, if misconstrued, misunderstood, misapplied. It's not our business to edit the Scriptures because they are often disobeyed. It is our business to obey, and to speak out for that obedience, no matter how we may be reproached for so doing and no matter how difficult we women (none of us was born submissive!) find it to be.

The word to husbands is far more difficult. They are to love their wives as Christ loved the church. This kind of love is radically sacrificial and radically cuts across a man's nature (they were not born with any great desire to lay down their lives). Both husband and wife must be submissive and obedient to the will of God—he in loving, she in accepting his appointed headship. Jesus found His very meat in submission. It is the route to fulfilment and joy. To aim at a mere fifty-fifty accommodation of each other is a half-hearted way of pretending to obey. It is not the love of Christ and the church. It does not demand that kind of sacrifice.

Men have disobeyed by misusing their authority, and women have disobeyed by refusing it. We are not therefore at liberty to drain the word headship of its obviously hierarchical meaning. Let's be careful not to overlook the all-important word *as*: “Wives, be subject to your husbands as to the Lord, for the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is head of the church” (Eph 5:22, 23). In what sense is Christ head of the church? It's a physical metaphor Paul is using. Is not the human head of the human body the part from which all other parts take orders? Yes, I've read pages and pages of arguments about that Greek word *kephale*. Some would insist that it means only source, and carries no thought of authority. But I insist that metaphors are metaphors

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and they mean more, not less, than the mere words could mean in another context. One wonders if these humorless, nearsighted, nit-picking, theological pedants have ever read a book in their lives! (At least one of them has, I know—my friend Roger Nicole is not humorless, and he does read books—he has about 35,000 or so in his basement—but oh Roger, what will you do with the mystery we’re talking about here? Please tell us about that mystery!)

No wonder churchgoers are bored and men don’t know how to court women anymore and marriages are dissolving. God’s arrangement of things (so much more fascinating than “equality”) has been discarded. A concern for fairness doesn’t fit in at all with the concept of sacrifice. It is in suffering and sacrifice, willed and accepted because of a deep and disciplined love, that the still, small Voice is heard: Lose your life for Me and find it! It is in losing ourselves that the ego is transcended and real happiness discovered. One can’t help trying to picture what this “biblical equality” looks like at the breakfast table, in the bedroom, or when it’s pouring rain and two separate but equal spouses have to decide whose turn it is to race through the parking lot and bring the car to the door of the restaurant. It has never occurred to Lars to allow a discussion about this. He is my protector (and, of course, my helper here), which means he’s the one who gets wet! He has the greater responsibility before God. The buck stops with him. (No letters, please, asking for more details!)

As Mrs. Bush said in her commencement address last spring to the women of Wellesley, feminists must not indulge in self, but must “believe in something larger than yourself.” In a rebuke to the ill-humored feminist leadership (“anyone seen Molly Yard smile lately?” asks columnist Cal Thomas), she told them that, first and foremost, “life really must have joy.”

Something larger than yourself. That’s what we need, isn’t it? A much grander vision of things than politics can ever provide, busy (as it must of necessity be) about terribly banal things like rights and equality. God forbid that we Christians should introduce politics into marriage or the church. A glad surrender to the divine order is like a dance—one leads, one follows, each by his or her obedience freeing the other to do what God assigns. There is harmony then, true liberation, and peace. I know. I’ve tried it both ways (my way more often than I like to remember), and only God’s way works. [My books on masculinity, *The Mark of a Man*, and femininity, *Let Me Be a Woman*, attempt to spell these things out in greater detail.]

A Reader Writes

A woman in Michigan felt relieved when she got the May/June Newsletter, having felt “a little intimidated by your pronouncements and unshakable opinions, not to mention your portrayal of your daughter, who seemed to me to be held up as an unattainable model.” To learn that Valerie sometimes experienced dryness in her devotions, that the Shepard family had health problems, and that Lars calls me a sensitive “Possum” convinced her that there was a human side, so she read those bits to a friend who had cancelled her subscription “in part because she didn’t see enough sympathy with her daily struggles” in what I wrote.

I’m truly sorry for coming across so fiercely, and Val would be horrified to be thought of as an unattainable model. She’s not one of those. Many are the struggles she has, many are the tears I’ve seen her shed, but thank the Lord, He’s not finished with us yet.

Return That Card!

People keep on asking us why we aren’t sending out the Newsletter anymore. The answer is simple: we are, but if your friends are not getting it, tell them it’s because they didn’t return the card we send out periodically. If we don’t get the card, you don’t get the letter. Money is *not* the requirement. The return of the card *is*!

Prayer Requests

- for Colleen, my granddaughter, four, for healing of the seizures she has occasionally, and for wisdom for Val and Walt and the doctor.
- for God’s own will to be done about a possible film dealing with the Auca story.
- for older men and women to obey the Lord in teaching younger adults (by example and by caring enough to give them *time* individually) how to walk with Him, preserve virginity, love their spouses, discipline their children, shine like lights in this dark world.
- for God’s control over the floods of printed matter rushing into Eastern Europe and Russia—everything from Bibles to pornography.

Travel Schedule November 1990 - February 1991

November 9 - 11 North East, MD; Women Alive Ministries (301) 287-5433.

November 13 Gordon-Conwell Seminary, women's seminar; Dr. Robert Fillinger, (508) 468-7111.

November 23 - 25 Colorado Springs, CO; Navigators singles conference; Randy Eims, (719) 598-1212.

November 28 Corona del Mar, CA; Grace Fellowship Church; Linda Roberson, (714) 854-9635.

November 29 Newport Beach, CA; Grace Fellowship Church women; Bill Beck, (714) 645-6276.

December 8 San Diego, CA; Spirit of Christ Christian

Church Fellowship, Rita Cefalu, (619) 483-5106 or 581-0982.

December 16 Daytona Beach, FL; First Baptist Church.

January 18-20 Winnipeg, Manitoba; Missionfest; David Robbins, (204) 956-5379.

January 22 Waco, TX; Columbus Ave. Baptist Church; Beth Durham, (817) 752-1655

February 16 Tucson, AZ; city-wide women's seminar, Christ Community Church; Cynthia Heald, (602) 298-5810.

February 26 Laguna Niguel, CA, Aliso Creek Presbyterian Church women's day.

Keep in Touch

Are you moving? Getting married? Leaving school? *Don't forget to send us your change of address.* The post office DOES NOT FORWARD third class mail like the Newsletter. *Please remove your address label below and send it with your new address to:* The Elisabeth Elliot Newsletter, Post Office Box 7711, Ann Arbor, MI 48107.

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