



## THE DUTY OF DEFERENCE

HOY LEDBETTER

Reactions to articles in *Integrity* indicate widespread and especially keen interest in two aspects of the question of subjection, namely, that of church members to elders, and of wives to husbands. Apparently many readers cannot live with what they have heard and have not heard what they must live with. Since some of the scriptural data on this subject has not been included in previous articles, additional exposition seems desirable, for I feel very strongly that it is spiritually dangerous for people to try to live with conflicting theology and practice. Hence some results from my study will follow, beginning with two quotations.

The first is from an elder in the contemporary church: "The members of the church have to do what the elders say, even if it is wrong. If it is wrong, then the elders will be held responsible, and not the members. But they still have to do it."

The second is from the Jewish historian Josephus: "Says the Scripture, 'A woman is inferior to her husband in all things.' Let her, therefore, be obedient to him; not so

that he should abuse her, but that she may acknowledge her duty to her husband; for God hath given the authority to the husband."<sup>1</sup>

While it is doubtful that very many of us would agree with both of these statements, they should not be dismissed as too radical for attention, for they rest on theological concepts that are common. The elder has really just brought to its logical conclusion a point of view that is widespread. Being a little ahead of his time, he has seen and expressed the implication of the claim that elders may make decisions and bind them upon the members without their advice and consent. It is often true (from the members' perspective) that they have to do what the elders say, even if it is wrong, the only alternative being to cut themselves off from the fellowship of the congregation.<sup>2</sup> And Josephus' citation of "chimney-corner" scripture (the statement is not in the Bible) is not out of harmony with the common opinion that the husband always has the last word in domestic decisions.

1. *Against Apion*, II, 25. (It seems best not to identify the elder quoted.)

2. Various instances could be cited where elders have dictated under threat of excommunication whom the members could associate with in private, what journals they could write for, what sort of meetings they could attend or have in their own homes, and even what they could believe.

## Members and Elders . . .

The expression "be in subjection" (from the Greek *hupotasso*) occurs frequently in the New Testament.<sup>3</sup> Although it is used several times in regard to women, there is no unquestioned reference to the eldership.<sup>4</sup> The only certain application to the ministry (one from which we can draw some very interesting conclusions) is in 1 Corinthians 16:15-16: "Now I urge you, brethren (you know the household of Stephanas, that they were the firstfruits of Achaia, and that they have devoted themselves for ministry to the saints), that you also be in subjection to such men and to everyone who helps in the work and labors."

"Be in subjection" (*hupotasso*) not only applies to the household of Stephanas, but also to all others like them. Moffatt correctly renders: "Well, I want you to put yourselves under people like that, under everyone who sets his hand to the work." "Devoted" is literally *appointed* (Greek *tasso*). Note the corresponding word usage in Romans 13:1: "Let every person be in subjection (*hupotasso*) to the governing authorities . . . those that exist have been instituted (*tasso*) by God." The parallel terminology indicates that (except for possible contextual modifi-

cation) the household of Stephanas had the same credentials and were to be accorded the same respect as civil governors.

The "ministry" of Stephanas is literally *diakonia*, the work of the deacon (*diakonos*). Thus the sentence could well be rendered: "They have appointed themselves to serve as deacons on behalf of the saints, and you must put yourselves under such."

But the striking thing about this passage is that it says they appointed *themselves* to the *diakonia*. "They were not appointed by Paul; they were not appointed by the church; in a spirit not of self-assertion but of service and humility they appointed themselves. In other words, they were appointed directly by God, who pointed out to them the opportunity of service and (we may suppose) equipped them to fulfil it. It is now for the church to recognize this ministry, as Paul does."<sup>5</sup> Such a view, although hardly in accord with some modern theories of ministerial authority, should not surprise us, for in fact the New Testament stresses the subjection of all Christians to all other Christians: "Be subject to one another in the fear of Christ" (Eph. 5:21).

But the church soon lost the pattern<sup>6</sup> and in general has never found it. Today it is a real challenge to clear away the accumulated

3. Including *hupotage* (cognate noun), over 40 times. Most frequently it refers to submission to deity, but it is also used (in addition to the instances cited) of submission of slaves to masters, of children to parents, of demons to disciples, etc. It is also common in the apostolic fathers, esp. Clement and Ignatius.

4. 1 Pet. 5:5 ("you younger men . . . be subject to your elders") apparently refers to "older men," not elders in the so-called official sense. See the commentaries, esp. E.G. Selwyn.

5. C.K. Barrett, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 394.

6. "Very soon after New Testament days . . . a development set in which changed the Christian organization with its dynamic ministries into an organization with institutionalized offices. When Paul wrote to the Corinthians he urged them to submit to Christian leaders in recognition of the quality of their service (1 Cor. 16:16). When Clement wrote to the Corinthians, hardly half a century later, he urged them to reinstate their deposed presbyters because they had been properly appointed (1 Clem. 44). The Christian fellowship had begun to give way to the ecclesiastical institution. The dynamic view of ministry had begun to give way to the static view of 'office.' The servant had begun to savour of the master" (Michael Green, *Called to Serve*, 30).

rubbish and rediscover the foundation of the ministry which the Lord laid. God, in his knowledge of human nature, anticipated some problems with his people, and he gave numerous correctives through the New Testament scribes. One of these is 1 Peter 5:3, where the elders are charged: "Nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock."

Peter here merely echoes the directive of Jesus: "You know that those who are recognized as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them; and their great men<sup>7</sup> exercise authority over them. But it is not so among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant; and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be slave of all" (Mk. 10:42-44).

Paul (as an apostle) lived by this instruction. To the Corinthians he said, "Not that we lord it over your faith, but are workers with you for your joy" (2 Cor. 1:24). This statement corrects a possible misunderstanding of what he said in the previous verse ("to spare you I came no more to Corinth"). Since Paul did not want to imply that he was a lord who could graciously spare his subjects, he was careful to make clear the nature of his relationship to them: the apostles were not "lords over" but "workers with" them.

This is not to suggest that the apostles had no authority; but that authority had to

be understood in Christian, not worldly, terms. Paul's approach to the Thessalonians seems to be typical: "We have never sought honour from men . . . although as Christ's own envoys we might have made our weight felt; but we were as gentle with you as a nurse caring fondly for her children" (1 Thess. 2:6-7 NEB).

One writer has truly said: "If we find ourselves thinking of the ministry in terms of office and status, of authority and validity, we go far astray from the thought of the Bible. Of course, ministry and authority are not mutually exclusive in the teaching of the apostles any more than . . . in that of Jesus. But the minister's authority does not demand obedience because of his position but because of his service."<sup>8</sup>

#### Obedience to Leaders . . .

But what of passages that include words like "rule," "oversee," "obey," and "submit" in reference to the ministry? I discussed the first two of these words in a recent article.<sup>9</sup> The last two occur together in Hebrews 13:17: "Obey your leaders, and submit to them; for they keep watch over your souls, as those who will give an account." It should be clear that this verse does not refer to elders, at least not in the modern sense, because verse 8 defines "leaders" as those "who spoke [*elalesan*, aorist tense] the word of God to you." This

clause must refer to those missionaries who brought the gospel to the Hebrews to begin with,<sup>10</sup> a work not usually associated with elders today.

It may be of interest to note that this same word "obey" (Greek *peitho*) is used in John 3:36 as the opposite of "believe," and the versions vary from "disbelieve" to "not obey." Since the original literally means "to be persuaded," those who do not obey are in reality those who are not persuaded. The authority of ministers, from the apostles on down, is to proclaim the word, to persuade, and to be examples in living and service.

Nowhere does the Bible contradict the statement that "Christianity knows nothing of a spiritual *elite* occupying positions of special privilege."<sup>11</sup> On the contrary, it supports the concept of ministry expressed by A.T. Hanson: "The task of the minister is not to undertake some specialist activity from which the rest of the faithful are excluded, but to pioneer in doing that which the whole Church must do . . . the ministry does not really do anything that the rest of the Church cannot do or must not do. . . . It does not carry out Christ's work instead of the Church; it rather enables the Church to carry out that work in its (the Church's) own life. . . . It is responsible to Christ and it has authority in the Church, but it cannot accurately be described as ruling the Church, since its main aim is to serve the Church. If we ask, what are its specific tasks, we must answer: first and foremost, to preach the gospel. But this preaching the gospel is not limited to speaking alone; the ministry must preach the gospel by living the life of Christ

in the world. We could almost say: the ministry must *be* the gospel."<sup>12</sup>

#### Husbands and Wives . . .

The subjection of wives to their husbands is stressed in the following texts: Colossians 3:18; Ephesians 5:22ff.; Titus 2:5; and 1 Peter 3:1, 5. (Two other important verses—1 Cor. 14:34 and 1 Tim. 2:11—have been dealt with in previous articles<sup>13</sup> and will be ignored here.) Colossians 3:18 tells wives to "be subject to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord." A similar statement is made in Ephesians 5:22: "Wives, be subject to your own husbands, as to the Lord." A basis for such subjection is also given: "For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, he himself being the Savior of the body. But as the church is subject to Christ, so also the wives ought to be to their husbands in everything."

Paul's argument is disconcerting to many of us today. He comes uncomfortably close to supporting Josephus' view that "a woman is inferior to her husband in all things"—an outlook that our society finds intolerable. We are also aware of a tension between his argument, as we understand it, and actual domestic practice. We sometimes pass this off with bad jokes ("the husband may be the head, but the wife is the neck"), but a viable theology requires us to be more serious. Some relief is found in the fact that the Christian husband will love his wife as his own body, which is good as far as it goes, but it is inadequate for 1 Peter 3:1, where the wife is apparently bound to be in subjec-

10. F.F. Bruce (with several others) holds that "the same persons are probably referred to in Ch. 2:3, where the gospel was confirmed unto us by them that heard" (*The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 395).

11. Leon Morris, *Ministers of God*, 35f.

12. *The Pioneer Ministry*, 72, 76, 85. Hanson uses *ministry*, as I have, to denote all church "offices."

13. See the articles on women in the church by Dr. Parks and me in *Integrity*, January, 1973.

7. "If the reference in *hoi megaloi* is not merely to the authorities, it is likely that the word implies the tendency towards compulsion or oppression which is immanent in all earthly power, and not merely in political" (Werner Foerster, "*Katexousiazō*," *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, II, 575).

8. Green, *op. cit.*, 27. The tenacity of our grip on the unbiblical distinction between clergy and laity is illustrated by the fact that although Green bemoans the use of "ecclesiastical courtesy titles, 'the Venerable,' 'the Very Reverend,' 'the Most Reverend' and so on" (n. 3, p. 16), the foreword to his book is written by "His Grace the Most Revd. Hugh R. Gough"!

9. "Ready to Rule?" *Integrity*, March, 1973. My discussion of *proistemi* (rule) did not include 1 Th. 5:12, but the conclusions drawn will apply to that passage also.

tion to a husband who is not a Christian.

### Meaning of "Head" . . .

Since the demand for subjection is based upon the declaration that the husband is *head* (note: he does not say lord),<sup>14</sup> we should take a close look at that expression. 1 Corinthians 11:2ff. provides a fuller discussion of headship. There Paul argues "that Christ is the head of every man, and the man is the head of the woman, and God is the head of Christ." His use of *head* rather than *lord* is not accidental, for he is thinking of origin rather than rank. Man, says he, is "the image and glory of God"; but woman is "the glory of man." Woman reflects man as man reflects God.

But what does this have to do with headship? He explains in verses 7-8: "For man does not originate from woman, but woman from man; for indeed man was not created for the woman's sake, but woman for the man's sake." The point is this: woman reflects man's glory (as man reflects God's) because her *origin* and *reason for being* are found in man.<sup>15</sup> Man as a created being points directly to God, but the woman points to man, and *through him* to God. Since this is true, a woman who participates in public worship with her head unveiled honors man (whose glory she is) rather than God. Therefore, before she can worship as she should, she must have some means of bypassing man in order to give glory directly to God. Which brings us to the notoriously difficult verse 10: "Therefore the woman ought to have authority [not veil] on her head, because of the angels." With *authority* on her head (signified by the veil), woman

can stand alongside man as the glory of God. She can participate in worship without dishonoring man (the ground of her being) by glorifying him, rather than God, in her functions.<sup>16</sup> She requires this authority "because of the angels" (who perhaps symbolize God's presence).

This interpretation leads naturally to the next statement: "However, in the Lord, neither is woman independent of man, nor is man independent of woman. For as the woman originates from the man, so also the man has his birth through the woman; and all things originate from God." Here Paul warns both man and woman not to make too much of headship (basis of origin) and authority, for in fact both came from each other, and both came from God. God made them to be mutually dependent, and ultimately dependent on him.

Far from asserting their own authority, the husband and wife are each to recognize the authority of the other. Speaking of them in a different social setting, Paul says, "The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does; and likewise also the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does" (1 Cor. 7:4). This verse brings us to a new plateau in domestic relations: the rights of husband and wife are equal and reciprocal. "Paul is not saying here that each partner has a right to the body of the other, but that each foregoes the right freely to dispose of his own body. He is thus enjoining those who are married not to rule over one another but mutually to serve one another even in marital questions. The one gives rights to the other."<sup>17</sup>

14. Peter, however, commends Sarah who "obeyed Abraham, calling him lord" (1 Pet. 5:6).

15. For a longer discussion see Heinrich Schlier, "Kephale," *TDNT*, III, 679.

16. This in substance is the view of D.M. Hooker, cited by Barrett, *op. cit.*

17. Foerster, *loc. cit.*

If Paul's line of argument concerning the submission of wives to husbands is much more complicated than that relating to the "clergy" and "laity," his exegetical basis is even more mysterious. I think this can be accounted for by saying that, both in application and in point of departure,<sup>18</sup> the domestic arguments are tied to social thought contemporary with Paul. Whereas the ministry of the church was an internal affair, impervious to the pressures of society, Christian domestic relations could not ignore the social standards of the time. If all had been Christians, *there is neither male nor female in Christ Jesus* (Gal. 3:28) would have been the accepted norm. But unfortunately such was not the case.

### A New Orientation . . .

We should note that wifely submission is always discussed in a context regulating social situations: wives, husbands, children, fathers, slaves, and masters. In none of these is there any attempt to change the social situation, but rather to give those involved a new orientation: *as to the Lord*. The whole life, thought, and behavior of Christians is related to the lordship of Christ. But it is important for us to realize that "the content of individual sentences is conditioned by the situations of that time. They do not offer timelessly valid laws, nor do they endow a particular social order with ageless dignity.

As times change, so does the general estimation of what is fitting and proper."<sup>19</sup> Thus the admonition that wives should be in subjection because "it is fitting in the Lord" may no more be a blueprint for all future generations than the directives to slaves and masters, provided there is a corresponding change in the social milieu. To seek to bind such instructions upon every social possibility would in fact be to disobey them.

But the new orientation of husbands and wives (which is compatible with pagan and Christian society alike) is timeless. "The tensions in the relationship between husband and wife . . . are resolved *in Christ*. For the self-giving of the wife acquires a new dedication, and the impulse of the husband a new content and standard, in *agape*. The wife is no longer surrendered to the husband; she is entrusted to him. He does not have rights of lordship over her; he takes responsibility for her."<sup>20</sup>

The unity ("one flesh") of husband and wife rests upon the same attitudinal foundation as the unity ("one body") of the church. From the human viewpoint, this requires that all involved in the relationship "clothe themselves with humility toward one another." Christianity provides us with no relief from the duty of deference. On the contrary, it insists that all of us "be subject to one another in the fear of Christ." The rule for *all* is the rule for any *one*. □

18. There are numerous problematical questions regarding Paul's exegetical basis in 1 Cor. 11. If, for instance, "nature" did teach the Corinthians it was a shame for man to have long hair, why was long hair greatly admired among OT Jews? Does the idea that man disgraces his head by worshipping with covered head agree with what we understand to be Jewish custom (head covered in worship) in Paul's time? Why is the uncovered head of a woman tantamount to her being shaved? Since length of hair as a sexual distinction does not agree with scientific observation, how can a woman's long hair be "given to her for a covering"? Since Greek women were under no kind of compulsion to wear a veil in public (see Oepke, *TDNT*, III, 562), why should the veil be bound on a Christian woman in a Greek city? Such questions point to a sociological starting point, but it is an elusive one.

19. Eduard Lohse, *Colossians and Philemon*, 157.

20. Ethelbert Stauffer, "Gameo," *TDNT*, I, 656.



most it is merely an obsolete religious word. And what does it mean to be "lost," or "saved"? Or what is hope? Is it a vague desire or the result of a secure promise? There are other words central to the Christian message that often do not touch the reality of people's lives.

What can be done? Nothing, if we demand our own way and refuse to meet people where they are. But for those who want to speak to communicate the problem can be easily solved. There are words that reach deep into modern man's experience,

words that he can relate to and feel with. Alienation, emptiness, separation, harmony, security, and other such words often communicate far more than "sin," "lost," or "saved." Of course all of the richness of meaning in the great words of the scriptures cannot be relayed in one word. Nor can the Christian vocabulary be totally replaced; and our goal should not be to replace it, but only to set it aside in order to effectively reach outsiders, remembering that "love does not insist on its own way" (1 Cor. 13:5). □

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## On Negativism

ALLEN HOLDEN, Jr.

San Diego, California

When I was in high school, one of the most common activities for the church youth group was to sit around and have an "open discussion," and the principal topic always seemed to be, "What Is Wrong With the Church." As I look back on this, I see very little that was constructive that came of those discussions. We were never moved to feed the hungry, weep with those that were weeping, share the gospel or edify the church. Instead, we were left with a smug and self-satisfied feeling, having written off the elders as out of touch with reality, condemned our parents as being materialistic hypocrites and judged the members as a

bunch of people lacking in any serious commitment to Christ. The toll that this attitude has taken among the people who were part of that group is disturbing—now many of us are out of touch with the reality of God, materialistic hypocrites or completely devoid of a genuine commitment to Christ. It is because I see a similar preoccupation among some of the writers of *Integrity* that I am offering the following observations. Don't misunderstand me—I love *Integrity*, and have received more benefit from it than I could ever hope to return; it is precisely *because* I love *Integrity* and its endeavors to "encourage all believers in Christ to strive to

be one, to be pure, and to be honest and sincere in word and deed" that I feel compelled to say what I am going to say.

First, I must insist that I am not urging that we shut our eyes to the epidemic of spiritual illnesses that are prevalent both in our society and in the church. I see no evidence that God ever closed *his* eyes to the evil running rampant on earth; in fact, it was this awareness of evil which caused him such grief during the time of Noah, and which made it imperative that he sacrifice his only son.

Nor am I suggesting that we cannot vocalize our disapproval of the injustices we see. In fact, the role of a prophet of God is to do just that. Jesus himself lashed out at the scribes and Pharisees in a most blunt and direct manner, and Paul was forced to confront Peter to his face and tell it like it was.

There *are*, however, some things I *am* advocating. As a beginning, I believe it is imperative that we keep everything in its proper perspective. In what may be Paul's greatest theological treatise, the book of Romans, we find a very honest depiction of the depravity of man, and just how far he had regressed since the garden. But Paul refuses to stop the discussion after he has pointed out the problem; he instead proceeds to discuss some of the most thrilling realities that we as Christians experience, including salvation in spite of our pitiful attempts to please God, justification, grace, our death to sin, the fact that we are joint-heirs with Christ, sanctification, the reality of God's spirit in our lives and our status as God's sons and daughters. Or listen to the sermons preached by the early evangelists and recorded in the Book of Acts. The sins of the hearers were often pointed out, but the sermon never stopped there. Instead, the good news was always described, particu-

larly that God raised Christ from the dead, and that through him salvation and freedom are now available to everybody. Victor Hunter expresses what I am trying to say when he says:

. . . This is not to say that criticism of the status quo is evil. Far from it. In fact, negation must come before affirmation. History (including biblical history) has shown that "No" must be said before "Yes" can be spoken. But in the politics of God "Yes" is eventually and always uttered (*Mission* 6 (December, 1972), 178).

Our complaining is unrealistic because we have got things out of balance—as someone recently said, "The gospel is still the good-est news around," and when we become obsessed with the problems and faults we see, we run the genuine risk of forgetting the glorious fact that Christ came to *save* people, not to condemn them, and, brethren, that is something we can *never* afford to forget.

Our griping is also unrealistic. There is simply too much that is simply *fabulous* that God is doing through his church, and we have every reason to rejoice in view of his work all over the world. A sense of history would do us a lot of good here. If we look at the way things were a generation ago, we are forced to admit that God has brought us a long way in a relatively short time. We now hear of grace, faith, hope and the fact that we are saved now and know for sure where our home is going to be when we die. People are discovering the Holy Spirit, throwing off the shackles of sectarianism, worshipping God like they never dreamed possible this side of heaven and fellowshiping brothers and sisters they once warred with. As a brotherhood, we are becoming more open, better educated about what the Bible really says and more tolerant of diversity. Of course there are still problems,

but to dwell on these all the time is to miss the truly thrilling evidences of the power of Christ in human lives all around us.

### Biblical Accentuation . . .

One of the biggest complaints against the New Left of the sixties was their preoccupation with destroying the system without offering anything to replace it. Similarly, we need to be constructive in our criticism, and endeavor to offer loving suggestions that will correct the situation we don't feel is right. I will concede that sometimes we can't see a solution, only the problem, or that there are times when a trivial answer we offer may be better left unsaid. However, as a general rule, I see God's people in the Bible doing positive things, with God's help, to correct their problems. The church of Corinth refused fellowship to the man who was shacking up with his father's wife; Paul informed Peter exactly how he could rectify the situation he was in; and Jesus was immensely clear in the advice he offered to the rich young ruler (Luke 18:18-23) and the lawyer (Luke 10:25-37). It is in this regard that I must commend Hoy Ledbetter for his editorials in *Integrity*. He has been constructive and positive in what he has written.

I also have to question my motives in what I write or say about others. Am I just jealous of their power, influence, popularity or success? Like James and John, does it bother me that they aren't one of my little group and yet seem to be doing so much good? Maybe they have hurt me, and deep down I want to get back at them. I have noticed that the easiest way to build myself up is to cut someone else down. Needless to say, a little soul searching is in order as to why I am so quick to criticize.

I am also coming to the conclusion that many of my attempts at changing alleged inequities are counterproductive. In the Bible, I notice that God deals predominantly with the individual. He is a personal, loving God who came to this planet in the person of an individual, and while here interacted with a host of people, whose lives were radically changed. Christ died to save people, individuals, one by one. My complaints, on the other hand, are often leveled at the nebulous "they," which includes everyone except me. Instead of getting my hands dirty with the problems of specific individuals, I prefer the ease of the printed page and the absence of involvement that comes with accusing groups of people. No involvement, no pain, and, unfortunately, no results. I am also left asking myself, "Is it possible that the methods that I employ to correct problems are inappropriate, in view of the people involved?" Why do I employ sarcasm and bitter accusations? Is my sarcasm really intended to help others, or do I want to ridicule them? Is this really the way to reach people, or will it only serve to alienate them from me?

Finally, I am forced to conclude that a public forum may not be the place for some of my observations. I need to go to the person that is doing this horrible thing and attempt to square it in private before I get on my "Gossip Hotline" and inform the world that Joe Blow is a heretical enemy of the truth. My desire to get my name in print and to have this brother or sister destroyed disturbs me.

While we emphasize a return to the examples and teachings of the Bible, we would do ourselves and God a great service if we would reexamine the *spirit* of the early Christians. Not only should we speak *where* the Bible speaks, but we ought to speak *how* the Bible speaks as well. □

# Rightness and Righteousness

F. L. LEMLEY

*Bonne Terre, Missouri*

The church of Christ from its very inception has a built-in, incurable, constitutional defect: it is composed of imperfect human beings, many of whom believe that in order to be righteous one must be right! It is very easy to fall into this fallacy, for it is necessary to be right on some points in order to be righteous (e.g., one must be right about the deity of Christ and obedience to God). But there are many minor doctrines and interpretations not in this category. Our right standing (righteousness) with God is based on faith and not on our own perfection in either performance or intellectual comprehension. Many truly surrendered believers in Christ are mistaken on some point or other; in fact, one may well suppose that everyone is mistaken in some point. Many obedient souls are mistaken souls! Even an angel may misunderstand the will of God yet do his best to obey to the extent of his understanding.

The great problem in the first century was that of circumcision, which made it difficult to create one body out of both Jew and Gentile. It was the tendency of those who sought to bind circumcision on themselves to also bind it on others. Acts 15 makes it very clear that while Jews could bind themselves to circumcision, they were not to bind it upon Gentiles. (Also Acts 21:17-25 points this out.) Even so, many Christian Jews continued to trouble the brotherhood, for they assumed that they were right and that Gentiles had to be in

agreement with "the right" in order to be righteous. Those who envisioned themselves as being the most correct were in fact the most incorrect. Paul settled this question by his statement in Galatians 5:6: "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is of any avail, but faith working through love." In other words, it was immaterial who was right and who was wrong, for this is not a vital issue with God. The same holds true of other controversies; for example, eating of meats and keeping days (Rom. 14). In either case one was right and the other wrong, but it was of no consequence before God! However, if the brothers in view here held the opinion that one has to be right in order to be righteous, then they would most likely have to argue it out and agree or else condemn one another to hell. But God had a different solution, as is stated in verse 4: "Who are you to pass judgment on the servant of another? It is before his own master that he stands or falls. And he will be upheld, for the master is able to make him stand." And we might add, "In spite of his error."

The sum of all this is that God has children who are circumcised, and God has children who are uncircumcised; God has children who eat meat, and God has children who think it a sin to eat meat; God has children who keep special days, and God has children who have no special days. A right standing with God is not determined by correctness on the issues among the children.

The grace of God covers intellectual defects.

If we should make a modern application of this principle, we would say that God has children who support orphan homes, and God has children who do not support orphan

homes but care for orphans in other ways; God has children who support the Herald of Truth, and God has children who do not; God has children who worship with instruments of music, and God has children who think such is a sin; God has children who use modern versions of the scriptures, and God has children who use the original King James only; God has children who believe the Holy Spirit is the word, and God has children with broader views of the Holy Spirit; God has children who speak in tongues, and God has children who find it difficult to speak in plain English! In fact, God has children on both sides of all the divisive issues among us.

But to observe, all this does not solve our problem. The problem is that each of these imperfect human beings in the kingdom has a conscience which renders things that are perfectly legitimate before God as sinful. Note Romans 14:14: "... nothing is unclean in itself; but it is unclean for anyone who thinks it unclean." What one may do in all good conscience is sinful for another. The obvious solution is for each to abide by his own conscience while allowing his brother to exercise the same privilege. In this way differences do not become issues of life or death, and so brotherhood is maintained. This is not always easy, especially if each, or even if one, maintains that in order to be righteous one must be right. We must learn to live with diversity! If we must in each case of difference argue until we come to agreement, and all line up on the "right" side, adopting the same views, then we have an impossible situation; for such has never been and can never be as long as men are free and not robots. The salvation of a surrendered, dedicated believer does not depend on his being right on all or any of the issues that have divided us. □

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## MY GOD

*My God  
I love Thee more today  
than yesterday  
But not as much  
as tomorrow  
For you  
have seen me through another day  
That none else... could fully understand  
and  
so  
When the kiss of each tomorrow  
Has been shared  
the failures or the bliss  
When my capacity for love  
Has outgrown  
again  
and  
again  
The content of itself,  
Only then  
will I begin to know  
The love of Thee . . . my God  
—LILLIAN SMITH*

## Letters

### Sexual Inconsistency

I want to respond to Bro. May's article concerning women and prayer . . . with love and respect for him as a member of that wonderful body of Christ, and I want to be able to do so openly and honestly. If this could be said gently, I would do it, but no matter how it's said it will upset some.

Bro. May's article was another example of the most crucial point in this whole issue: the absolute and totally *arbitrary* manner of those that insist on total silence of women in the church. He remarked on 1 Tim. 2, a general reference to total submission to men *everywhere* (p. 182). May calls for total silence by women, for 1 Cor. 14 "even forbids the asking of a question" (p. 183). Both of these passages refer to the act of *learning*. So to be consistent (if Bro. May is correct), women must be silent in prayer meetings, Sunday schools, etc. The question of "leading" has nothing whatever to do with the injunction of *silence*. Do the women of Bro. May's congregation observe total silence? If he is correct, they must—in *every* meeting where there is a teaching process going on—be *silent*.

The fact is, there are *certain areas* in which men of a congregation have *arbitrarily* chosen where women can speak; not only speak, almost *teach*. No man has a right to dismiss in such an *arbitrary* (I use that word insistently) manner a directive of God (and Bro. May believes it to be a directive).

It is almost humorous (I said almost) how we are told very early things such as this: (1) women do not have to wear veils—that's custom; (2) women are to be silent—*except* where *we* say they may speak; (3) widows do not have to wash the saints' feet—that's custom (1 Tim. 5); (4) women cannot lead prayer—that's principle; (5) we do not pay our elders—that's custom (1 Tim. 5). I totally reject the suggestion that the assumed "generosity" of men be accepted and that we (women) should be grateful when No. 2 is in effect. There is no greater chain than that of *arbitrary* generosity.

I agree with Bro. May on a vital point in connection with scripture. We should never downgrade scripture to justify a change of direction, no matter how important we feel the change is. *We do not need* to insist that our "hope" is in Peter

having made a mistake or Paul's personal view of women interfering with the direction of the Holy Spirit. I reject all such views of scripture. I would rather be in total human bondage than to use such methods to gain a more agreeable view of my citizenship in the church.

The hope for women lies not in deprecating the authority of scripture, but in a more thorough research and *consistent* approach in regard to the issue. We have barely begun.

Columbus, Ohio

SARAH R. NELSON

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** Our January, 1973, issue, which dealt with women in the church, has provoked more response than any other issue to date. We have had so many requests for extra copies that we had to reprint it, and the reprint is going fast. We regret that some requests could not be filled without delay.

### A Correction

Unfortunately Frances W. Harvey overreacted to a simple plea for humility and fairness among brethren [and] is also guilty of taking a correct and honest statement and making a gross misuse of it. The brotherhood was not accused of ignorance on a whole . . . the article stated *an element* of ignorance could be found in the brotherhood. In this context reference was made to a part or a fraction of the whole.

The article under examination implied nothing about the censure of a minister's education nor a congregation's not being able to decide what was acceptable. Brethren were simply encouraged to put things in their "proper perspective" and "work together for His glory in the assurance of his promises." Brethren were encouraged to "shut the mouths of the unruly" through the guidance of elders. Such activity is sanctioned by God and is not wrong as implied (Tit. 1:10-11; 3:10; Rom. 16:17-18) . . .

Frances W. Harvey is presumptuous and judgmental (which things he denounces) in his generous use of descriptive terms concerning "Mr. Murphy." Mr. Murphy is aware of evil, etc., resulting from ignorance. He is not uneducated himself, but is presently working in his master's program. He is not an elder . . . but a young (1 Tim. 4:12) public school teacher who ministers to a small congregation of the Lord's church in his community.

Poplar Bluff, Missouri

WM. M. MURPHY