

## The Battle of the Sexes - Headship/Submission

Discovering the truth about some controversial teachings in the Church

Bulle, Florence, *The Many Faces of Deception*, Minneapolis, MN, Bethany House Publishers, 1989. Chapter 5 pp.67-80

### Headship/Submission

I could scarcely believe what I was hearing. . . ,

Having arrived on an early morning flight, I was in an eastern city having breakfast with the two women who had met me at the airport. They wanted to know if I agreed with the prominent speaker who told them the truly submissive wife would be a prostitute if her husband told her to do so. This man had suggested that if the wife had enough faith, God might pull off a last minute rescue operation. But regardless, she was to obey and not talk back.

Incredible as it seemed that Christians would pay attention to such rubbish, many put this principle into practice. Not that husbands pressed their wives to become prostitutes. They simply adopted the grossly distorted idea that the husband was to have autocratic control. Marriages of many couples who have tried to live by these teachings soon flounder, both the husband and wife being devastated by the effect.

### Mishandling the Truth

This evil was launched in the Garden of Eden. When Satan approached Eve, he was obsessed with one thing—gaining autocratic control. By deceiving the mother of the human race, he would bring all her descendants under his authority and enslave them in eternal bondage. What was his snaky tactic? Distortion—twisting what God said. It was a tactic that proved a masterstroke of deception, and Satan continues to use it with alarming success.

Paul wasn't speaking to a problem peculiar to the Ephesian church when he warned the elders, "Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them."<sup>1</sup>

The Devil's advocates are still with us—charming, popular, super salespersons. And their twisted teaching is often beamed at illicit control.

No subject has seen more chaotic debate than the authority-submission controversy. And no aspect of authority-submission has engendered more distorted teaching than that of women's role in society, in marriage, and in the Church.

In recent years, the move of the Holy Spirit has created a hunger in men and women not only to know what God's Word says, but how to relate it to every detail of their lives. In their eagerness to learn God's ways, many have gobbled up everything that is peddled from podium and printed page. The trouble is that not everyone mouthing Scripture teaches sound doctrine. False statements often slip by unnoticed under the credence of a popular by-line. Or because of the striking truths presented, the unsuspecting and undiscerning swallow the error along with the truth.

This ambush of Satan—teaching based on misrepresentation of Scripture—works because many Christians never check the accuracy of what they read or hear. They

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<sup>1</sup> Acts 20:30

assume that if a highly esteemed minister or revered authority figure claims that the Bible teaches thus and so, it must be true. Here's an example of how wrong this assumption can be.

Writing on the role of women, a well-known Bible teacher quoted 1Timothy 3:1 (KJV): "This is a true saying, if a man desires the office of a bishop. . . ." After the word "man" he inserted in parentheses "not woman." Here is proof, he said, that women have no place in ministry or leadership roles. But he must have known that the Greek word translated here in the KJV as "man" is a generic term, the indefinite pronoun *tis* meaning "any person."

To further prove his case, he quoted, "If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God . . ." (1Pet. 4:11, KJV). Peter's use of the word "man" as opposed to "woman," he declared, excluded all women from preaching or teaching. The Greek word here is *anthropos*, referring to any member of the human race. Had Peter wished to stress maleness, he would have used the Greek word *aner*.

The writer went on, "Nowhere in the Bible does it say women are to rule." But again, not so! Paul says wives *are to rule* their own households.<sup>2</sup>

What's more, there is a significant difference between this word "rule" and the one Paul uses when advising Timothy that elders are to rule their own households well.<sup>3</sup> When he speaks of elders ruling their households, Paul uses the term *proistemi*, which means "stand before," But when he counsels younger widows to marry and "rule their households" (RSV), he uses the word *oikodespoteo*, a very strong Greek word meaning "unlimited rule" or "absolute master." (The KJV translates *oikodespoteo* "guide," the NIV "manage.") "Despot," "despotic," and "despotism" are its English derivatives.

We would be in error if we took this statement to mean that a wife has the right to impose her will on her husband. That is not what the Apostle meant. Still, Paul says plainly that young widows should marry, bear children, and exercise absolute or uncontrolled rule over their households. To write that "nowhere in the Bible does it say women are to rule" is to write untruth.

What upset me most about the article was that I knew many would believe every word simply because the by-line was a popular name. But Christians can't afford to be so gullible. No matter who it is that claims, "The Bible says. . .," we need to carefully check out the truth.

### **Sarah—Our Example**

Many Bible teachers and preachers are more given to imagination than to careful exegesis. And who among them is going to mention those scriptures that would raise questions and support some other view? Tradition and strong prejudice also give rise to distortion and misapplication of truth. I can think of no better example than the story of Sarah and Abraham.

Take Sarah—the woman we've been persuaded was the epitome of submissiveness, the ideal model for all Christian women. Didn't she call Abraham, "Lord"? Wasn't she perfectly obedient? And her lying— was it not a spiritual virtue stemming from total submission to her husband? A truly spiritual woman will follow suit, we are told,

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<sup>2</sup> 1Tim.5:14 RSV

<sup>3</sup> 1Tim.3:4-5

because, quoting Peter, "this is the way holy women of the past who put their hope in God used to make themselves beautiful."<sup>4</sup>

There, the quoters stop. Or they breeze over the rest of what Peter says, namely, "You are her daughters if you do what is right and do not give way to fear."<sup>5</sup>

As I studied this passage, it struck me: What was Peter's point? What did he mean by "do what is right and do not give way to fear"?

Turning back to Genesis, I began to outline carefully the relationship of Abraham and Sarah to each other—and to the Covenant. In no time, I was making notations that totally contradicted all the sermons I'd heard about Abraham and Sarah.

For instance, the storytellers had Sarah painting the nursery and knitting blue booties in anticipation of a promised son twenty-five years before Isaac's birth. But the time element didn't fit the facts. And wasn't her purpose in giving Hagar to Abraham to fulfil God's promise? That's not what the Bible says. Was Sarah the totally submissive wife? Let's trace the events from the beginning.

Abraham was seventy-five years old when God called him out of Ur, promising that through his offspring all nations would be blessed. His line would be perpetuated, his name great and known to ail generations. But ten years ticked by, and Abraham and Sarah remained childless. Had God forgotten His promise? Baffled, Abraham confronted God with his disappointment: the way things stood, one of his household servants would be his heir.

"No," God said. "Eliezer is not the promised seed. But a son coming from your own body will be your heir. And you will no more be able to count your descendants than you can count the stars."<sup>6</sup>

We don't know whether or not Abraham talked any of this over with his wife. But the evidence indicates he did not.

In that culture, childlessness was a grief and a reproach. Like any Jewish wife, Sarah wanted a family—one way or another—so in keeping with the practice of that day, Sarah gave her personal maid to Abraham. Perhaps Abraham anticipated that sleeping with Hagar would produce the promised child. But was that Sarah's motive? Not according to her, She said, "The Lord has kept me from having children . . . perhaps I can build a family through her."<sup>7</sup> Unlike Hannah, who looked to God to take away her reproach of barrenness, Sarah had her own plan, and Abraham went along with it, not bothering to check with God. So the child Ishmael was born to Hagar when Abraham was eighty-six. Not the child of the Promise, but a child of their own fleshly desires.

Thirteen years later, Abraham again hears from the Lord about the matter of the Covenant; Abraham is ninety-nine and Ishmael thirteen when God institutes the rite of circumcision. By this time, Abraham seems to have settled into thinking Ishmael must be the promised child. And that's okay with him. He certainly wants the boy to live under God's blessing.

But now, for the first time, Abraham is specifically told that God will bless Sarah, that she is to be the mother of nations. "Change her name from Sarai to Sarah" (meaning

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<sup>4</sup> 1Pet.3:5

<sup>5</sup> 1Pet.3:6

<sup>6</sup> Gen.15:2-5 (author's paraphrase)

<sup>7</sup> Gen.16:2

"chieftain," "ruler," "princess"), God said, "for it is Sarah who will bear the promised child."<sup>8</sup>

Accordingly, it appears that Sarah knew nothing about her role as coheir of the covenant blessing until after Ishmael was born, and only one year before Isaac's birth. Even then, it was not her husband who told her. While eavesdropping on Abraham and his three heavenly visitors, she first heard the startling news. She could hardly suppress her laughter. To enjoy sex at her age? To have a son at this time next year? In view of what she knew about her own body—how wild!

But Sarah did conceive and give birth to the promised child. Now she understood: the unique blessing of God is on Isaac, So when she saw Isaac's position threatened by Ishmael, Sarah was fiercely protective. "Get rid of that slave woman and her son," she ordered her husband, "for that slave woman's son will never share in the inheritance with my son Isaac."<sup>9</sup>

Everything in Abraham protested Sarah's mandate. Ishmael was his son! He loved him dearly; how could he possibly send him away?

But did God tell Abraham to assert his authority and let Sarah know he is boss? Not at all. Instead, God said, "Listen to whatever Sarah tells you."<sup>10</sup>

The word "listen" is the Hebrew word *shama*, meaning "to hear intelligently," and it implies obedience. In other words, "Act on what you hear." Or, as the RSV renders this verse, "Whatever Sarah says to you, do as she tells you. . . ."

This story hardly illustrates the model of submission popularly preached today. What clouds the issue more is that God supported her.

I saw the issue was not Abraham's submission to Sarah, nor yet Sarah's submission to her husband. The issue was submission to the word of God—for it was God's word that Sarah declared. "Do what she says," Abraham was told, "because it is through Isaac your offspring will be reckoned."<sup>11</sup> Isaac, not Ishmael, was the heir through whom the Promise would be fulfilled. There was absolutely no alternative; the bondwoman and her son must go.

Did this mean Abraham was always to do Sarah's bidding? Of course not. In fact, when Sarah proposed Abraham have a child by Hagar, Abraham should not have listened to her. After all, he had a promise from God. But Sarah did not—not at that time.

It was different the moment she received power to conceive. Then she became a participant in the covenant blessing. Now, she, too, had a promise. She demanded appropriate action to assure Isaac would be the sole heir of his father. Ishmael was compelled to exchange his inheritance for freedom.

Much has been made of Sarah calling Abraham "lord," but "lord" was simply the common title of respect in that day. It is the same word Rebecca used when she gave Abraham's servant water, saying, "Drink, my lord."<sup>12</sup>

What is Peter's point? He wants it understood that Sarah was not putting her husband down. True, when she knew God's expressed will, she was not intimidated by Hagar, by Ishmael—who was at least sixteen—by her husband, nor by what the neighbours would

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<sup>8</sup> Gen.17:15-16(author's paraphrase)

<sup>9</sup> Gen.21;10

<sup>10</sup> Gen.21:12

<sup>11</sup> Ibid

<sup>12</sup> Gen.24;18

say. Fearlessly, she declared what was right. At the same time, she called her husband "lord." As a godly wife, Sarah showed Abraham due respect.

"You are her daughters if you do what is right and do not give way to fear," Peter declared. In other words, "No matter what, you must fearlessly obey God." But this doesn't give a woman an excuse to lord it over her husband with some spiritual revelation—even when she is right. If a sure word from God means she must stand in opposition to her husband, God expects her to do so with gentleness and respect.

The express issue here is not who's boss in the family. The issue is *submission to God*. And Sarah's authority belongs to any child of God committed to doing what God says.

In sorting out the myths from the biblical record, we see Sarah in a new perspective. No more can we portray her as the unquestioning, blindly submissive wife. To do so is a distortion of truth.

Another thing. To commend Sarah's lying as indicating her obedience to her husband and her holiness is likewise outrageous. God did not commend her; in fact, her lying got her into serious trouble. It also brought tragedy and pain to many.<sup>13</sup>

What does the Bible say? "The Lord detests lying lips, but he delights in men who are truthful."<sup>14</sup> And it lists among those who will not be in heaven, "everyone who loves and practices falsehood."<sup>15</sup>

As for Sarah going along with Abraham's lies—we need to bear in mind that God put up with a lot of things in the Old Testament that He did not tolerate in the New. Clearly, He expected something more of those who had been exposed to the teachings of Jesus and had the light of the Gospel.

This is apparent in the story of Ananias and Sapphira.<sup>16</sup> When Sapphira parroted her husband's lie, did she get a pat on the back from Peter—or God? Hardly! The lie cost her her life. How, then, can we do that which God calls sin, and take refuge under the cloak of submission? We can't. To think we can is irrational.

Yet pulpit-pounders and typewriter-crusaders continue to make irresponsible statements that disregard the meaning of the original texts. Bent on defending their own personal preferences and self-styled opinions, they deny women the freedom that is rightfully theirs in Christ. For the most part, Christian women are afraid to challenge those who thus twist the Scriptures; they fear to be denounced as feminist, accused of being rebellious, or told they are the ones deceived. They not only fail to speak up, but many end up supporting the submissive model to assure approval.

### **A Personal Result of Distorted Submission**

What happens when the headship-submission teaching is tortured? Let me share a letter from a friend, an R.N., a divorcee:

Concerning the question you asked me on submission. Yes, it definitely was a factor in our problems. A year and a half before our break-up, I had been studying under Dr. N---, and this was his strong point. In a short time, I became almost opinionless and literally dumped all the decisions on Bill. If our communication had been good, we could

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<sup>13</sup> Gen.12:17-19; Gen.20:2-7

<sup>14</sup> Prov.12:22

<sup>15</sup> Rev.22:15

<sup>16</sup> Acts 5

have discussed this. He could have expressed how he felt, and some adjustments could have been made.

In the belief that God would honour my submissiveness, I told my husband—and I meant it—that I would go anywhere or do anything that would help him in any way. I became almost a slave, and I couldn't understand why he was unhappy.

About the same time that this was happening, women's lib was becoming strong, and Bill, being in management, was embracing the contemporary and feeling I should become more and more a career woman since the children were nearly raised. He said that I was becoming a nothing.

Up to that point, I had planned to do nothing but be a housewife and the executive wife that required much travel and entertaining. But now, in a quick effort to please him, I began trying to get involved again in a choir and in nursing. But by this time, too many changes only added to the disturbance.

If I were ever to marry again, there would have to be a deep understanding of oneness not only in spiritual things, but also in our differences of opinion, so we could talk anything through and respect each other.

Now, I know some couples say that acting on the headship-submission principle has worked to make a bad marriage good or a good marriage better. But for others, like my friend in the previous story, the results have been disastrous.

It is easy to understand how a man, originally attracted to his wife because she was smart, competent, and decisive, feels betrayed when she "becomes a nothing." How drab a marriage when one partner never offers a stimulating idea or challenges the other's viewpoint! Even husbands who think they want to make all the decisions without challenge may find that this is not the sort of wife they want after all.

What happened to my friend is not an isolated case. Countless wives—and husbands too—who have sought to implement distorted concepts of headship-submission teaching in their marriages have ended up devastatingly disillusioned. The teaching practically guarantees that if a wife submits to her husband—no matter how unreasonable or cruel—God will honor her and bring her husband into a true role of headship, and the wife will have her "womanhood restored" and truly be fulfilled. But reality often repudiates the guarantee.

Because this teaching stresses that the success of a marriage hangs principally on a wife's submission, she subsequently bears the brunt of the burden when it fails. If she submits and nothing changes, or if her husband walks out, she still ends up loaded with guilt feelings. The upshot for shattered wives is bitterness, depression, and even suicide.

I know of one wife who went the extreme submission route only to have her situation become so intolerable that she saw no other way out than taking her own life. But someone dared insist to her that she had no other alternative than to start obeying God. She did, and things began to change. A short time later her husband said, "I'm so glad you finally decided to do what God said to you."

We have to ask, too, whether or not a wife's unquestioning submission to a neurotic husband causes him to act responsibly. Common sense and observation say no. Instead, such unquestioning submission feeds his neurosis. And what of the wife who says, "By the time I submit to one order from my husband, he has changed and demands something quite opposite from me. I can't win for losing!"?

Then there is the woman who grabs at headship-submission: she wants her husband to tell her what to do, how to do it, and when to do it. She shies away from making decisions because she comes un-glued when her choices turn out to be wrong. If her husband makes all the decisions, the blame is all his. She finds submission a welcome relief.

Submission can also be a spiritual cop-out. The need for daily personal encounter with God is shrugged off. Why bother to dig into the Word? Why bother to know God's voice if all of God's leading must come through one's husband?

Ironically, the idea of the husband as spokesman for God is held by many who denounce the Roman Catholic confessional on the basis of the scripture: "There is one mediator between God and men [anthropos, the human race], the man Christ Jesus."<sup>17</sup> Yet they turn around and say that the husband is high priest in his home, therefore all divine orders must come through him; it is his sole prerogative to relay God's messages to his wife and family.

Every Christian must realize the significance of what happened to the temple veil at the moment of Christ's death. This heavy linen curtain was supernaturally ripped from top to bottom, proclaiming that anyone could enter the Holy of Holies—the presence of God. No more did one have to be a high priest to hear God's voice, to have intimate communion with Him. Many who teach headship-submission would, in effect, sew up the curtain and again exclude women from the intimate presence of God.

### **The Godly Wife of Proverbs 31**

Proverbs 31:10-31 is a beautiful acrostic poem exalting womanhood. But it has not escaped mutilation to support the superficial Total Woman concept. I was appalled at the outrageous distortion appearing in one Christian periodical. A husband and wife had practically rewritten the passage, twisting the words to make obeisance and pampering one's husband the poem's message. The Proverbs' picture of the ideal wife and mother has much more to say about her excursion into the business world and ruling her household than it does about her homemaking—or pampering her husband.

What most of us overlook is that the first word of the poem concerns the husband. What is this spiritual leader's attitude toward his wife? Her husband "has full confidence in her." He respects her. He grants her the dignity of her womanhood. He trusts her implicitly to run the household, handle the finances, invest in and take charge of business operations. He not only allows her to achieve her full potential, but also trusts and supports her in doing so.

Obviously, this woman didn't run to the city gate to check with her husband about every decision she made. If she had, she couldn't have accomplished a fraction of what she did.

Let's take an honest look at the Proverbs lady: an intelligent and successful businesswoman, an industrious and efficient housewife, a volunteer social worker, an adored mother, a cherished companion; vivacious, healthy, physically and emotionally strong, beautifully dressed, commanding, a woman of wisdom.

Frankly, this woman's accomplishments leave me breathless. But the quality that makes the Proverbs lady of extreme worth is her spiritual stature. Above all else, she fears the

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<sup>17</sup> 1tim.2:5

Lord, and her awesome reverence for God affects every facet of her life. Because pleasing God is her first priority, she not only conscientiously rewards her husband's trust, but her life is genuinely fulfilling.

### **What About a "Covering"?**

We hear much today of the need for Christians to be "covered" by some individual or group. The idea is that one is covered or protected by the one to whom he submits. We are told that such a covering is a must for protection from demonic activity, from Satan's attacks, and from deception. But when I go to the Word, I conclude that the teaching on "covering" must have been put together from fanciful conjecture.

Pastor James Beall, in his book *Your Pastor, Your Shepherd*, writes about "covering": "I find no precedent for such a practice in the New Testament. Paul, for example, never covered Peter, nor did Peter cover John."<sup>18</sup> And if there had been any such practice, surely it would have shown up in Paul's letters to Timothy, his son in the gospel. But Paul never suggests that Timothy offer him slavish obedience. Instead, he admonishes him to "be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus."<sup>19</sup> The number-one priority of every soldier of Jesus Christ is to please his commanding officer, he said. So, it wasn't Paul's approval Timothy was to worry about. Rather, Paul urged him, "Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved."<sup>20</sup>

Paul knew his death was imminent. But does he say that when he is gone Timothy will need to attach himself to some other minister in a covenant-relationship that will provide covering? Why would he? He had already thundered those freeing words, "There is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus."<sup>21</sup> Paul had never set himself up as a go-between for Timothy in his approach to God. Nor would he ever put Timothy under that kind of bondage to any man.

Yes, Paul said that he had lived his life as an example for Timothy to follow. But he put the full responsibility on Timothy to guard the gospel and the gifts that had been entrusted to him: "Guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us."<sup>22</sup> Timothy's oneness with Christ would enable him to carry out this responsibility, provide spiritual direction, and protect him from the Evil One.

There is a peculiar twist to this teaching on covering that defies logic. It says that a wife is covered or protected by submitting to her husband; as long as she submits to him, she is safe, under the umbrella of his authority. But the husband? He has to find someone outside the covenant of marriage to submit to—someone to give him advice and okay nearly everything he does.

This concept is full of problems. First, it denies what Jesus said about two people in a marriage covenant being "no longer two, but one."<sup>23</sup> It breaks up the basic unit that God ordained marriage to be. Together as one, a man and his wife were meant to order their lives before God in obedience and love. Their union did not include a third person.

And what did both Peter and Paul say about mutual submission? That all members of the Body of Christ—husband and wife not excluded—were to be in mutual submission

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<sup>18</sup> James Lee Beall *Your Pastor, Your Shepherd*, Plainfield, N.J. Logos, 1977

<sup>19</sup> 2Tim.2:1

<sup>20</sup> 2Tim.2:15

<sup>21</sup> 1Tim.2:5

<sup>22</sup> 2Tim.1:14

<sup>23</sup> Matt.18:5

to each other—irrespective of sex. We tend to forget that a husband and wife are also brother and sister in the Lord.

What's more, Paul said the privilege of sonship has nothing to do with being male or female. There are no distinctions that exist between those who are one in Christ.<sup>24</sup> In a Christian marriage both have equal standing before God. If the wife has the same right of access and ability to hear from God, why would the husband need confirmation from an outside voice? The idea that he does is a perversion of truth and a snare to the marriage.

We also find this concept denies what the Bible teaches about a married couple's unique capacity to hear from God. We have the promise that if any two are agreed on earth, it shall be done.<sup>25</sup> Surely no two persons have greater potential for spiritual agreement than husband and wife; their prayers of mutual accord should be especially effective.

There is a catch, however. Peter was very specific: Husbands, if you don't treat your wife with respect, if you are not her loving protector, if you don't recognize that you and your wife together are fellow heirs of God's gracious gift of life, don't expect your prayers to be answered. But if your attitude is right and you treat her as you should, you can talk to God, and He will answer.<sup>26</sup>

Why, then, does the husband need to form a covenant relationship with some man in order to hear from God and get His directions? He doesn't.

There is no reason why a husband and wife together cannot seek the will of God about every detail of their life. God is committed to respond with guidance. My husband and I can attest that it works. Time after time when we have faced decisions, God has shown us separately and together His choice for us. This includes major moves, what house or what car to buy, as well as going here or there, doing this or that. Nothing that concerns us is too insignificant to receive guidance from the Lord about.

One passage of scripture invariably referred to by those who argue for covering is the statement of Paul's concerning propriety in worship:

The head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God. Every man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonours his head. And every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonours her head. ... A man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God; but the woman is the glory of man.<sup>27</sup>

This means, we are told, that the veil was a sign of subjection. Therefore, a woman is covered by being in subjection to her husband. This "principle" is then somehow stretched to mean that all men need to be covered by being in subjection to some other man. It seems that any method of interpretation can be used if it fits someone's preconceived ideas.

In her scholarly book, *The Bible Status of Women*, Dr. Lee Ann Starr points out that at the time the Apostle wrote, the unveiled head was a proclamation of harlotry; the veil, the badge of a virtuous woman. But if one claims the veil is a badge of subjection, this is what follows:

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<sup>24</sup> Eph.5:21; 1Pet.5:5; 1Cor.16:16; as it relates to Rom.16:3

<sup>25</sup> Matt.18;19

<sup>26</sup> 1pet.3:7

<sup>27</sup> 1Cor.11:3-5,7

1. (a) The veil is a badge of subjection.
- (b) A wife should be veiled to show she is in subjection to her head—her husband.
- (c) The husband should not be veiled; thereby showing that he is not in subjection to his head—Christ.

Again:

2. (a) The veil is a badge of subjection.
- (b) The woman who prays or prophesies, wearing this badge of subjection, honors her head—her husband—by acknowledging his authority over her.
- (c) The man who prays or prophesies, wearing this badge of subjection, dishonors his Head—Christ. He must not acknowledge the divine authority over him.

But the expositors assure us that the veil is also a badge of humility:

- (a) A woman must wear a veil to show that she is humble.
- (b) A man must not wear a veil; he is not humble.

Dr. Starr concludes, "The Apostle's logic is awry or expositors have misinterpreted the veil."<sup>28</sup>

As for the verse, "For this reason, and because of the angels, the woman ought to have a sign of authority on her head,"<sup>29</sup> expositors agree it is one of the most difficult passages to interpret in the entire New Testament. Dr. Starr protests that the words "a sign of" are not found in the original text, and that the Greek word *exousia*, translated here "authority," is translated elsewhere as "right." Furthermore, Thayer's Greek-English lexicon gives the first definition of *exousia* to be "the power of choice" or "the liberty of doing as one pleases." "For this cause ought the woman to have right over her head" means that the woman ought to have the power of choice or the liberty of doing as she pleases in the matter of veiling or unveiling. She is only constrained by doing that which will bring honor to her husband and bring no reproach on the Christian community.<sup>30</sup>

Could we say, then, that man-made coverings are an attempt to play God? God has said that He himself is our protector. Note what the psalmist says:

He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty. . . . *He will cover* you with his feathers, and under his wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness will be your shield and rampart. . . . If you make the Most High your dwelling—even the Lord, who is my refuge—then no harm will befall you. . . .<sup>31</sup>  
(Emphasis mine.)

The task of keeping His own safe, Jesus put into the hands of His heavenly Father.<sup>32</sup> And who knew better than Paul the reality of God's keeping power? With absolute certainty he declared, "The Lord is faithful and he will strengthen and protect you from the evil one."<sup>33</sup> He assured us that if we make our requests known to God with

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<sup>28</sup> Lee Anna Star, *The Bible Status of Women*, Old Tappan, N.J. Revell, 1926; *Zarapheth*, N.J., Pillar of Fire, 1955. pp296-299

<sup>29</sup> 1Cor.11:10

<sup>30</sup> Starr, *Bible Status of Women* pp 305, 310

<sup>31</sup> Ps.91:1,4,9-10

<sup>32</sup> John 17:15

<sup>33</sup> 2Thess.3:3

thanksgiving, "the peace of God . . . will guard [our] hearts and minds in Christ Jesus."<sup>34</sup> When pressures come, and hazards stalk men and women of spiritual daring, James Beall points out that it is the significant phrase "in Christ," found throughout the New Testament, that makes all the difference. He writes:

Coming into Christ is far more important than most church people realize; it is the difference between life and death. . . . Paul tells us that as part of our conversion-initiation experience of entering in at the door, we receive our covering. . . . *Those who insist on a man-made covering fail to understand the inheritance we have already received in Christ—a covering so complete that it is inconceivable that it could be supplemented.*<sup>35</sup> (Emphasis mine.)

In fashioning man-made coverings, we court the same spiritual disaster that Paul tried to head off in the Galatian church. Foolishly, these fairly new Christians had listened to "false brethren" pedal a "different gospel." And they were about to reinstate the bondage of custom and tradition, thus denying the all-sufficiency of Christ. Paul went right to the heart of the matter: "You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have been clothed with Christ! There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus."<sup>36</sup>

What reason is there to exalt the creature above the Creator by casting mere mortals in roles of "spiritual protector"? It is Christ who has triumphed over all spiritual adversaries! The believer's victory comes not from sitting under another man's umbrella, but from being "clothed with Christ," and from continually abiding "in Christ."

Does this mean we do not need leadership or pastoral care or that we do not need to submit to the counsel of our pastor? Far from it. But in guiding us, God's anointed leaders will concern themselves with our being servants of Christ, not slaves to them.

The key to right relationships in the home and the church is mutual respect and mutual delight in serving one another. True submission is not passive acceptance but positive action. As Jesus laid down His life for us, so are we called to lay down our life—"our rights"—for others. If we are clothed with Christ and continually abide in Christ, we won't be fighting an incessant battle for "my rights." In Christian love, we will yield our preferences, putting our mates' or our Christian brothers' and sisters' wants and needs before our own.

While submission also implies a teachable spirit, we still need always to watch out for any devious use of the Scriptures in what we hear. Because there are unscrupulous teachers, Paul admonishes believers to "test everything," and "hold onto the good."<sup>37</sup> If we don't, we may be hoodwinked into believing we are being obedient to the Word, while in reality we are committed to error. And we could end up in shackles under the guise of submission, instead of enjoying the priceless freedom that is ours in Christ.

### **Deal Pentecostal Church**

69 Mill Hill, Deal, Kent. CT14 9EW – [www.dealpentecostal.co.uk](http://www.dealpentecostal.co.uk)

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<sup>34</sup> Phil.4:7

<sup>35</sup> Beall *Your Pastor, Your Shepherd* pp 203-204

<sup>36</sup> Gal.3:26

<sup>37</sup> 1Thess.5:21