“You Are Sending the Wrong Message to People About Dealing with Flawed Parents”

Ms. Bohlin,

Your answer to e-mail “How Do You Honor Deeply Flawed Parents?” sends the wrong messages to readers. Despite dysfunctionality in the family one cannot be superficial to the very people that raised you. You seem to be saying “be nice” but don’t really mean it:

> *“To give them honor means showing (not necessarily feeling) respect, letting them know you are listening and considering what they say. (And it does not necessarily mean following through!)”*

In short, you are implying deception in hiding one’s true feelings. How can people be compassionate to the world if they are lying to themselves about their true feelings toward their parents? That is truly deceptive.

> *“And please remember that forgiveness is given, but trust is earned, so it’s entirely possible that you can release the woundings you sustained from them without ever, ever trusting them with your heart, because they don’t deserve your trust.”*

This statement is ungodly. This only allows for the heart to be confused and the heart will always be divided. Families will break up and more and more Americans will distance themselves from the family unit. Perhaps you need to carefully read the scriptures again. You are encouraging a false self and pretending to care for people even if one doesn’t mean it.

A human being must resolve the conflict and openly discuss what the issues are. Communication is essential in discussing problems.

Sorry, your helpful advice will only mislead people. You should suggest spiritual counseling for families. Unresolved issues lead to further breakup of the family unit. Parents are disconnected with their children and grandchildren. Please see that you correct your article with productive help.

Perhaps you haven't observed the horrendous woundings that deeply flawed parents can inflict on their children. Consider my friend Ann, whose father began raping her at age two and then invited his friends to have their way with her as well, all through her childhood. I suggest that being superficial with her father is the only way she can deal with a man who refuses to acknowledge and repent of his unspeakable sins against her.

I would suggest that being civil and cordial instead of erupting into a screaming tirade of anger and pain IS showing honor. Hiding one's true feelings can be a mark of maturity and wisdom. If you are feeling very grumpy and critical of someone that doesn't deserve it, hiding your feelings behind a choice to be civil is indeed loving and kind.

I don't think either of these cases are about lying to oneself about your feelings. It is choosing a higher road of self-control rather than giving into expressions of fleshly or tortured feelings.

I believe that God has given us great grace in His principle of Romans 12:18: "As far as it is possible, as much as it depends on you, live at peace with all men." Some people make it impossible to live at peace with them because of their hard, unrepentant hearts, so one needs to protect oneself with emotional distance. You cannot resolve issues in a family unless everyone is willing. The person who asked the original

question was talking about dealing with people unwilling to be humble and transparent enough to resolve the consequences of their flawed nature and behavior.

I hope this helps you understand my position better. I must stand by my statements.

Sue Bohlin

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"How Do You Honor Deeply Flawed Parents?"

I am very interested in reading about how to resolve "Honor thy father and mother" with the fact that these people may have had huge and damaging flaws. Where can I read about that?

You might Google the phrase "honoring your parents" for some insight. Below are some links I hope you find helpful.

But first, let me say that one aspect of honoring flawed parents is to understand that the best (or even only) way you might be able to honor them is from a distance, emotionally and physically. You can give yourself permission to do that.

To give them honor means showing (not necessarily *feeling*) respect, letting them know you are listening and considering what they say. (And it does not necessarily mean following through!) To give them honor means being civil and kind in your dealings with them. It does not mean trusting them. It does not mean placing yourself in harm's way. It means forgiving them, so that you are not carrying and paying for the emotional baggage of their treatment of you. And please

remember that forgiveness is given, but trust is earned, so it's entirely possible that you can release the woundings you sustained from them without ever, ever trusting them with your heart, because they don't deserve your trust.

Honoring flawed parents means you have healthy boundaries so that you know where you end and they begin. It means you learn how to protect yourself so that they can't steamroll over you; it also means you have realistic expectations about what they can and cannot give you or do for/to you. (You may need some help adjusting your expectations.) For instance, in our family there is a family member who has never, ever said the words "thank you." I mean, not even if you pass the salt, or do something they specifically asked! (I think this qualifies as "flawed," don't you?) It is unrealistic to expect that to change. It is an exercise in futility to expect anything different than a lifelong pattern of non-communication. Honoring this person means letting go of the futile hope to ever hear something as simple as "thank you," much less the more profound "I'm proud of you" or even "I love you"! Honoring this person means letting go of unrealistic expectations so we don't set ourselves up for continued disappointment and heartache. (An excellent book is *Boundaries* by Drs. John Townsend and Henry Cloud.)

Finally, let me share with you the insight of Dallas Willard in *The Divine Conspiracy*:

> *To honor our parents means to be thankful for for their existence and to respect their actual role as givers of life in the sequence of human existence. Of course in order to honor them in this way we need to be thankful for our own existence too. But we also will usually need to have pity on them. For, even if they are good people, it is almost always true that they have been quite wrong in many respects, and possibly still are.*
>
> *Commonly those who have experienced great antagonism with*

their parents are only able to be thankful for their existence and honor them, as they deeply need to, after the parents have grown old. Then it is possible to pity them, to have mercy on them. And that opens the door to honoring them. With a certain sadness, perhaps, but also with joy and peace at least. One of the greatest gifts of The Kingdom Among Us is the healing of the parent-child relation, "turning the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers" (Mal. 4:6).

Hope you find this helpful.

Sue Bohlin

Honor My Mother And Father? How Should I Treat My Abusive Parents?
http://www.christianitytoday.com/biblestudies/questions/parentingandfamily/honormymotherandfather.html

What Does It Mean to Honor Your Parents? (in this case, when a parent has dementia)
http://www.newhopenow.com/ask/honor_parents.html

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See Also:
"You Are Sending the Wrong Message to People About Dealing with Flawed Parents"

"What Do You Think About

Headcoverings for Christian Women?”

Sue,

I am intrigued by this article “Should a Christian Woman Wear a Headcovering?” by Daniel Botkin (enclosed by mail and also available online here) about headcoverings, and it makes sense to me, but I would really like your input as a woman.

I read the headcoverings article with a huge smile across my heart. Its an excellent article! . . . And I couldn’t agree more.

Before I go further, though, let me first state that Probe does not have an official position on this issue; my answer is about me and my response to this issue. For six years or so I struggled with the plain command of scripture [*1 Cor 11:10 Therefore the woman ought to have a symbol of authority on her head, because of the angels.*] and finally gave in. I just could not get around the phrase “because of the angels,” which has absolutely nothing to do with cultural- and time-bound practices. So, about a year ago, I started wearing hats to church. Recently, I purchased a couple of scarves which I also use as a headcovering in worship and for public prayer.

It’s been interesting the strong response I’ve received from men, who absolutely love to see a woman in a hat, even though they usually don’t know it’s not a fashion statement for me. They just know something strikes them as very, very right about it. What startled me was the effect on ME: I have so enjoyed feeling so feminine! I have also enjoyed experiencing the peace that is the fruit of obedience.

I started out wearing lace doilies or some other kind of headgear when I was in Catholic grade school. In the 60s and 70s, there was a wholesale dropping of the headcovering in

almost all Western churches (with the rise of feminist thought, and I think they are related). I never even thought about how quickly 1900 years of church history were overturned in a mere decade until I couldn't come up with a single good reason to disobey scripture.

So there you have it! Thanks for sharing the great article with me!

Sue Bohlin

Hi Sue!!

Your response was such a blessing and encouragement to my wife and me! Thank you so much for taking the time to read it and respond. Because of your response actually, my wife went out and bought a couple of scarves today! Well thank you for your faithfulness and may the Lord continue to guide you in His word and in His love.

See Also:

- "Do the Bible's Statements on Head Coverings Apply Today?"
- Sue Bohlin's Blog Post: "Why I'm the Lady in the Hat"

"Why Can't God and Satan Settle Their Differences?"

Why do not all the religions of the world pray to God asking him and the Devil to get together and settle their differences? It is widely held that God answers prayers.

This type of praying would surely head the list of really important things to pray for. I believe it is written at one time God and the Devil were very good friends existing in Heaven together. I also believe it is written while they were living together they had a big argument. The devil lost, and was tossed out. Would not the World be a better place if they improve their relationship?

I am thinking of all the people killed during the Crusades, the 30 years war, the Holocaust, the Civil War, the list is endless. I am also thinking about future babies, who will be born in the future, with their souls, not subject to future damnation. At least their chances would be better.

I believe God has written "blessed are the peacemakers." Would it be too much to ask for this? I have seen no answer to this question, your answer would be appreciated.

Interesting question!

I don't think it would do any good to pray that God and Satan get together to settle their differences for several reasons:

1. God is 100% good; Satan is 100% evil. Good and evil cannot peacefully co-exist, because good will eventually destroy evil.

2. We need to read the Bible as our only resource on what is true in the spirit realm because God gave us this information (as revelation). From what we can gather of what the Bible says about angels and demons, these powerful spirit beings do not have the capacity to repent as we humans do. They don't even understand what it is like to be forgiven and accepted back into friendship with God. Thus, to ask for Satan and the demons to change is like praying that black become white or negative become positive. It won't happen.

3. God already knows what the future holds, and He has told us a certain amount of that information. He has declared that at

the end of time, He will throw Satan and the demons into a lake of fire for all eternity. What God has declared and has recorded in scripture will not change because God already knows what He will do.

God cannot improve his relationship with Satan because Satan cannot and will not become other than what he is. And just as the nature of sunlight is to destroy mold, and the nature of boiling water is to destroy harmful bacteria, the nature of God’s holiness is to destroy rebellion and sin. They cannot be reconciled.

Hope this helps.

Sue Bohlin

“Why Won’t My Sister Accept My Live-In Boyfriend?”

Please help me answer this question?

I am a single parent (40 yrs old) of three children 16, 14, and 9. I have decided to live with my current boyfriend. I have taken all the pros and cons into consideration. So far it is going well. The only draw back so far has been my sister, her husband and 2 children. My sister and I are very close and spend a lot of time together. But since I have started dating again, 2 years with this one person (the only person I have dated by the way), I am not allowed to bring my boyfriend to her house. We are not allowed to do things with her children at all. I can understand that they would not want their children to spend the night or us to spend the night over there. I do not however understand why we can not spend time

together as a family as we have in the past. Going to Six Flags, etc…. We do not hug or kiss, we may on occasion hold hands. I understand this is a moral issue, living together.

Can you please explain why I can't spend time with my niece and nephew?

P.S. My family is Catholic. When I married the first time I married into a different church. My family is Catholic. I was married for 19 years. Been divorced for about 2 1/2 years and have been dating my current boyfriend for much of that time.

Dear _____,

I'm sort of wondering why you're asking US instead of your sister. . .??!

My guess is that your sister is extremely uncomfortable with your choice of an immoral lifestyle and she is concerned that doing things together as if you were married might communicate to her children that immorality is okay. Many people are not confident that their kids can handle (or that they can teach) both the belief that "we love our family member" and "that family member is doing wrong things that we deeply disagree with."

I noticed you used the term "moral issue," but my guess is that your sister is thinking of it as an IMmoral issue. Which, to be blunt, it is. Living together outside of marriage is sin. You said you took all the pros and cons into consideration, but apparently you didn't, since you could not possibly foresee how other people would react to your choice.

I hear the hurt in your "voice," and I am sure that it weighs very heavily on you. Unfortunately, that's one of the consequences of making choices that do not align with God's intentions and commands for us. Sin causes pain and always ends up affecting more people than just ourselves. Your sister may be concerned about the effect of your lifestyle choice on

your children as well, since you are teaching them that living with someone you're not married to and not committed to is a good thing. As a mother, your sister may be concerned about the impact your children's attitude and perspective may have on HER children as a result of what you're modeling to your own kids.

By the way, I don't think this issue has anything to do with denominations. It's a people issue and it's a moral issue. You could substitute any mix of religious traditions and have the same heartbreak over this situation.

If you were looking for comfort, I'm sure this isn't what you were hoping for, but it DOES align with what the Word of God says. He grieves over your choice just as He grieves over the pain you are experiencing because of it.

I hope this helps.

Sue Bohlin
Probe Ministries

"My Kids Are Into Goth, Punk and Emo Sub-Cultures"

My two teenage daughters are interested in the goth, punk and emo sub-cultures. I'm not sure how to deal with this. Could you give me some good Christian parenting advice?

I asked a couple of Christian counselors for advice about your question.

The first came back with this response:

> *The best overall reference I've seen for teens is the book Age of Opportunity by Paul David Tripp because it makes it clear the target for change is their HEART, not just behavior – otherwise we just create cooperative rebels (work the system to make life easier for "me") or religious Pharisees. There is an audio series by the same name, available from Resources for Changing Lives, 1-800-318-2186 – web site www.ccef.org.*

The second, who is a child psychologist, made these suggestions:

1. First of all, DON'T come down heavy with the hammer, telling them they are not allowed to pursue these interests. It will only backfire.

2. These lifestyles and values are meeting a need in your daughters. There is no shame in having needs; God gives us needs for others to meet, and for Himself to meet. Your job is to find out what need goth/punk/emo is meeting, and then subtly provide other, healthier ways for them to get those needs met.

3. Don't communicate that you're going to change your children and they're going to have to stop this behavior. It won't work; we don't have the power to change other people. We do, however, have the power to gain understanding about WHY they behave as they do, and then adjust our response to it.

4. Seek to understand your daughters' thinking and feeling about this. Many kids feel alienated from their parents, believing that their parents don't really care about how they think and feel (which is, unfortunately, all too true in many families). So make a plan to meet for 5-10 minutes each night, for a week, to LISTEN. Ask, "Please help me understand why goth/punk/emo is important to you. Tell me one thing that you like about it." Draw them out with unjudgmental questions; the goal is to understand, not to change them. Each night, try to

get another part of the big picture.

5. After a couple of weeks, when you have learned something about what these cultures are doing for your daughters, see if you can find other ways to get those needs met at times that interfere with activities that mean more involvement with their questionable friends. Many times, it's an esteem issue. Looking like the other people in that sub-culture makes them feel accepted and gives them a sense of belonging. . . legitimate, God-given needs that are better met in the family and with friends whose values are consistent with the family's and with God's.

6. Pray, pray, pray. Pray for wisdom to be loving without being controlling. Pray that you will see what YOU need to do to make sure your daughters' emotional needs are being met. The hard thing is that adolescence is a time when, developmentally, it is normal and right for their attention to turn to friends and want to fit in with their friends more than their families. This is important for growth into independent adults. But the choice of one's friends can make or break a young person. Which is why it's essential for parents to know what's going on, with whom, and hit our knees on our children's behalf.

This is a big issue and not an easy one. I pray God's blessing on you as you seek to be wise in the face of unhealthy cultural pressures.

Sue Bohlin
Probe Ministries

“What is the Biblical Perspective on Childlessness?”

What is the Biblical Perspective on Childlessness?

I would suggest that God’s design and intention for most married couples is the blessing of children. So first, it starts with the foundational premise that children are a blessing from God.

The Old Testament and New Testament both indicate that there was shame connected to not being able to bear children. This is not necessarily God-given shame, but the natural outflow of knowing that usually, children are produced at some point(s) in a marriage. Shame is about sensing something is wrong about ourselves. But now that we know more about conception, we can know that sometimes things just don’t go right for a variety of reasons on a purely biological level, such as a wife whose body is allergic to her husband’s sperm, or hormone levels not conducive to maintaining a pregnancy. In that case, it’s helpful to recall the biblical concepts of:

- Stewardship of the earth, which leads to medical science. There are procedures and medications that may assist in reproduction.
- The sovereignty of God. No one can conceive unless He calls that child into being.
- Trust in the goodness of God.

With the proliferation of sexually transmitted diseases that result in the infertility of one or both partners, the consequences of premarital or extramarital sexual sin may include childlessness. In this case, a biblical perspective sadly includes the principle of sowing and reaping, where infertility is the result of sinful choice.

When couples try to have children and cannot, then the biblical call to trust God means following His leading. It may mean pursuing medical treatment. Or building your family through adoption. Or choosing to live without children to free up energies for Kingdom work. (I am thinking of several couples I know who now recognize that their childlessness was the doorway to great spiritual fruitfulness of a different kind.)

A childless couple may not experience shame over their childlessness, but it would be important to give voice (and tears) to the grief, disappointment and deep sense of loss over it. David wrote in Psalm 51, "I know that You desire truth in my inmost parts," and we know that mental and spiritual health means being honest about what's going on in our hearts.

It is my privilege to share with you the deep wisdom of my friend Dr. Sandra Glahn, author of *When Empty Arms Become a Heavy Burden* and *The Infertility Companion*:

> **What the Bible says directly about infertility:**
>
> If you read the Bible cover-to-cover, you will find lots of stories about infertile couples from Abraham and Sarah to Samson's parents to Hannah and Elkanah in the Old Testament and Elisabeth and Zechariah in the New. In each of these stories the couple goes on to conceive. That's because the Bible is not a textbook on infertility. The stories are select histories included as part of a bigger story, the story of God's redemption of humankind. And infertility is often the way God uses to demonstrate His ability to do the impossible.
>
> In the Old Testament we also find promises that God will curse his people with infertility if, as a nation, they do not obey him. A problem arises when we read these sections and wrongly conclude that infertility is a curse from God.

The curses God outlined involved entire populations, including humans and livestock all infertile at once. He was not talking about individual infertility. Michal, David's wife who laughed at him for dancing before the Lord, is said to have never had children, but that does not necessarily mean she was "struck" with infertility. It may be that David just never "summoned" her again.

In one other instance in the Law we see that an adulterous woman was cursed with infertility. But overall, infertility is more an affliction of the righteous than the unrighteous. And the infertility as a curse is at a national not a personal level. In the New Testament when Elisabeth conceives, she rejoices that God has removed her shame in the eyes of the people.

How to think biblically about infertility:

Reproducing. The first commands given to humans were to be fruitful and multiply and to have dominion over the plant and animal kingdoms and the earth itself. The last command is to make disciples. So while reproducing physically is a wonderful part of being human, it is not the only way God has ordained and blessed for leaving a lasting legacy.

Longing. In Proverbs 30 we read that when we look around and observe the natural world as God made it, we see that it's normal for an infertile person to have deep, unfulfilled longing. Infertility can cause a lot of grief, and it is not "unspiritual" to feel a profound sense of loss.

Gifted living. The apostle Paul called celibacy a gift (1 Cor 7). And in one translation of the Psalms (NASB), children are called "a gift." (Though in the context, Psalm 127, the actual phrase is "sons are an inheritance/heritage"; at that time children were the means to economic success and many sons assured military protection). A wife is called a gift. So one way to think

biblically about infertility is to recognize that while the gift of children has been withheld, children are only one of many gifts through which God gives his blessing. If Aquilla and Priscilla ever had children, they are not mentioned.

Limits on dominion. If you read Genesis 1-2, you will notice that while God gave humans dominion, he put limits on what they were to manage/subdue. They were given stewardship if the earth and its animal and flying creatures. But notice that they were not given dominion over each other. Humans were made in the image of God, so all humanity, even at the one-cell stage, is precious to Him. One of the ways of thinking biblically about infertility is to recognize this and to tread carefully when considering advanced reproductive technologies (ARTs). There are ways to use ARTs that honor human life at the one-cell stage and there are ways that do not. We are also called to be good stewards of our bodies and our resources. That being said, infertility is only a symptom of a problem such as a malfunctioning thyroid or hormone imbalance. Many couples pursue treatment both to have a child and also to find out the source of what is wrong.

I hope you find this helpful.

Sue Bohlin

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“Is God Punishing Me Because

I Committed the Unforgiveable Sin?”

I enjoy your website a great deal, and have especially found comfort in the Probe Answer to E-mail “I Fear I Have Committed the Unforgiveable Sin.”

I, much like person who wrote in, have been assailed by doubts and fears that I’ve blasphemed the Holy Spirit. I’ve read so many things indicating that I haven’t, but I’ve had a hard time accepting them. I recall a specific time in my life that I (for no reason) wanted to push God’s limit. Knowing there was a blasphemy against the Spirit, I tested and cursed (in my head) God. After a while of this (and I didn’t want to do any of these things—they came out of nowhere—or just my sinful nature, perhaps), I started reading the scriptures dealing with this sin and wondering, “What if Satan’s really behind Jesus and His miracles? What if Satan has fooled us all into believing in God, but it’s all a joke?” Immediately after thinking these things, I just knew I had blasphemed the Spirit by calling God Satan.

While I’m also aware that other scriptures don’t carry the disclaimer, “unless you commit the unpardonable sin,” I fear that it still applies, since Jesus Himself made this sin the one exception. Just because it isn’t always there in a disclaimer doesn’t seem to make it null and void, in my opinion. In addition, I feel that my concern doesn’t really prove my innocence. A lot of times, people say that the fact that I’m concerned means God is working with me, but could it be that God has left me, and my own conscience is torturing me? Or maybe it’s Satan, telling me, “You can never be saved now! You’re through!” Perhaps it IS God working with me, but He isn’t offering forgiveness. Maybe, as part of my punishment, He’s calling me—dangling that carrot of salvation out in front of me, while also saying, “You’ve gone too

far—you can't be saved!" Why is there no evidence that He did it with the Pharisees, if this is the case? Maybe He did! Or, given their personalities, maybe it would be worse punishment for them to build more and more power, just to see it crumble when they reach Hell. With my sensitive conscience, perhaps the greater punishment would be to torment me here AND in Hell.

Is there any way you might be able to clear this up for me? My girlfriend, who is a Christian, says there's no way God would send someone to Hell for having weird thoughts, and I desperately want to agree with her. But we all, as sinners, deserve Hell to begin with…so I'm very torn. Every time I feel safe from worry, I start over-analyzing and talking my way out of assurance…

"Everything can be forgiven, but you've rejected the last appeal.." vs. "Everything can be forgiven, but you've gone too far!!"

Dear _____,

Bless your heart. Satan really has been playing mind games with you, hasn't he? What a dirty rotten liar and skunk.

Please remember that God loves you, MUCH more than you have the capacity to receive or even imagine. Please remember that He understands just how fallen your intellect and your conscience is (as is the case for ALL of us). Please remember that He fully knows that we can only "see through a glass darkly" (1 Cor. 13:12 KJV) on this side of eternity. Therefore, He completely understands that we're going to jump to faulty conclusions because we have faulty thinking, and He has more grace to extend to you than you can possibly experience.

I think growing older will help you with this. Once you are married and you are a father, you will understand the heart of God toward you much more than you can now. You will know that

God passionately loves you and will do just about anything to help you know Him and understand Him and ENJOY Him. As a father, you won't want to play mind games with your children or dangle carrots in front of them—your love will blow those kinds of thoughts away.

Instead of trying to explain away all the mental gymnastics you've been going through to wrack yourself with doubt over the fear of committing the unforgiveable sin, I'm going to make a very serious suggestion: that you pray every day, for three months at least, "Lord, teach me that You love me." Look for the ways He will answer that prayer. (And He will!)

And then write me back and let's see where you are in your spiritual life.

I really mean this, _____.

Sue Bohlin

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"Should Women Be Pastors?"

Hi Sue,

I hope it is ok to email you and ask your opinion (biblical) of this whole issue with—

1. Should woman be pastors?

2. In a church is there any ministry a woman can lead, whilst men are in that group?

3. In 2 Tim the verse regarding women not to teach and have authority etc. I have come across an interpretation which says

that it is talking about wives, because the word translated women can either mean wife or woman…. but the word translated man… is actually translated husband. Which should therefore give the whole sentence its context…(What is your opinion)?

4. The Bible shows that Deborah was a married woman who led the people of Israel and from the character portrayed, she seemed to be a woman of God as opposed to someone like Jezebel. Hence I would assume that she was submitted to her husband at home as the word of God says to all married woman, but her role as wife did not hinder her ministry as a leader over the country…..So isn't it possible for a married woman to maintain her submissive role in the home, but does not necessarily need to be carried over into the church sphere ….Also, isn't submission when mentioned in the bible only mentioned in the context of marriage…and hence all women are not submitted to all men…so why is it that she cannot teach or lead men?

Thanks in advance,

A (hopefully) teachable young woman of God…who just wants to get a right understanding on this whole issue

> *I hope it is ok to email you and ask your opinion (biblical)*

Sure!

> *1. Should woman be pastors?*

I make a distinction between exercising the GIFT of pastor (shepherd) and holding the OFFICE of pastor. Many, many women are given the spiritual gift of being a pastor-teacher (Eph. 4:11), including me, and we are given the responsibility and privilege of being a shepherd to other women. The OFFICE of pastor, however, is biblically limited to men. 1 Tim. 2:12 makes that very clear.

> *2. In a church is there any ministry a woman can lead, whilst men are in that group?*

That's the tough question. I think so, if it's a support ministry. For example, I think a woman can function very well as the director of children's ministries, where there are male Sunday School teachers who serve under her leadership—AS LONG AS she is under the leadership of the church pastor and elders and not in any position of final authority.

There is a book called *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism* that is excellent, and one chapter gives some suggested guidelines to what women can do in the church without crossing the line. Christian bookstores can get it, and you can also check the website for Council of Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: http://cbmw.org.

> *3. In 2 Tim the verse regarding women not to teach and have authority etc. I have come across an interpretation which says that it is talking about wives, because the word translated women can either mean wife or woman…. but the word translated man… is actually translated husband. Which should therefore give the whole sentence its context… (What is your opinion)?*

In the Greek, the word translated *man* means "male adult." It is not limited to "husband," and generally is not translated husband. So this translation you came across was done by someone with an agenda, seeking to read a loophole into this verse that's not there. Particularly when you read the REASON for limiting women to positions of authority over men, which comes immediately after that verse.

> *4. The Bible shows that Deborah was a married woman who led the people of Israel and from the character portrayed, she seemed to be a woman of God as opposed to someone like*

> *Jezebel. Hence I would assume that she was submitted to her husband at home as the word of God says to all married woman, but her role as wife did not hinder her ministry as a leader over the country.*

I think it's important to look beyond the FACT that Deborah was a leader at the values associated with Deborah being a leader:

1. Deborah considered the fact that she was Israel's leader (judge) as a shameful indictment of the men who refused to take leadership. In Judges 4:6, in her role as prophetess she gives Barak instruction from the Lord to take the responsibility of military leader to go and attack the wicked Sisera. The apparently wimpy Barak balks, telling her (vs. 8), "I'll only go if you go with me. If you aren't going, neither am I." Deborah responds with a reproach: "Well, okay, I'll go with you, but because of the way you are going about this, you lose the honor in this expedition. Yahweh is going to deliver Sisera into the hand of a woman." God was going to discipline Barak for his lack of leadership by giving the honor of killing Sisera to a woman. Yes, that says something positive about women's ability, but we shouldn't lose track of the fact that awarding the honor to a woman was a slap in the face to the man who was SUPPOSED to earn it.

2. Consider Deborah's and Barak's song in Judges 5, which starts out: "When the princes in Israel take the lead. . .praise the Lord!"(NIV) Something is wrong when men fail to take their God-given place of leadership.

3. I found this recently and it was a real eye-opener for me: In a passage where the context is the judgment of God's people, Isaiah 3:12 says, "Youths oppress my people, women rule over them." When women rule, it is in the context of judgment. Again, something is wrong.

> *So isn't it possible for a married woman to maintain her*

> *submissive role in the home, but does not necessarily need to be carried over into the church sphere?*

Two thoughts here:

1. We need to draw a distinction between women in church leadership, and women in leadership OUTSIDE the church. The Bible never forbids a woman to assume political or civic leadership. It is only church hierarchy that is addressed in the scriptures.

2. If a married woman is submissive to her husband in the home, how would she take off that submissive hat in the church and be the spiritual leader of her husband? A wife is NEVER to be the spiritual leader of her husband; it's the other way around. Ephesians 5:23 says that the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ is the head of the church. The wife's role is to lovingly, respectfully submit; the husband's role is to lovingly, sacrificially lead.

So does that mean an unmarried woman could be a spiritual leader in the church? No. 1 Tim 2:12 is a categorical statement against women exercising authority over men. Marital status doesn't matter.

> *Also isn't submission when mentioned in the Bible only mentioned in the context of marriage…and hence all women are not submitted to all men?*

No, submission is a much bigger concept than merely wives toward husbands:

> *• Luke 10:17 – Demons submitted to the 72 disciples in Jesus' name*
> *• Rom. 13:1 – Everyone is to submit him/herself to the governing authorities*
> *• 1 Cor. 14:34, 1 Tim 2:11 – Women are to have an attitude of submission in church*

• 1 Cor. 16:16 – Paul exhorted the Corinthian believers to submit to a certain group of mature believers in the church
• Eph. 5:21 – Submit to one another [a general rule, but not always reciprocal: I mean, do you want parents submitting to their children, or employers (masters) submitting to their employees (slaves)?]
• Eph. 5:22 – Wives, submit to your husbands
• Eph. 5:24 – The church submits to Christ in everything
• Heb. 5:7 – The Lord Jesus submitted to the Father
• Heb. 12:9 – We are to submit to the Father
• Heb. 13:17 – The church is to submit to our church leaders
• 1 Pet. 2:13 – Submit yourself to every authority instituted among men
• 1 Pet. 2:18 – Slaves, submit yourselves to your masters with all respect
• 1 Pet. 3:22 – Angels, authorities and powers (various kinds of angels, I believe) are in submission to Christ
• 1 Pet. 5:5 – Young men, in the same way be submissive to those who are older.

You're right, all women are not to submit to all men. As a woman, I am called to submit to my heavenly Father, to my Savior, to the Holy Spirit, to my husband, to church leaders, and to governing authorities. But not to my next-door neighbor, or my friend's husband, or *any* man just because he has a Y chromosome! <grin> On the other hand, we are all called to submit to each other (Eph. 5:21), meaning to serve and help each other in humility. This attitude of submission should carry over into all areas of life because it is the only attitude appropriate for a believer, who is to live his or her life in submission to God.

So why is it that she cannot teach or lead men?

It goes back to the creation order. In Genesis 2, when God created man and woman, he created man first as the initiator,

and created woman second to be his helpmate and to be the responder. Adam and Eve got into trouble in the Garden of Eden when Eve was deceived by the serpent, and talked Adam into disobeying God by eating the forbidden fruit. Adam knew Eve was being deceived; she didn't. He was with her when the serpent tempted her to distrust God's goodness and provision for them, and instead of speaking up to defend God's word to them and defend Eve against the deceptions of the enemy, he was silent and became her follower instead of her leader. This went against the created order. Men are to lead and women are to respond, generally speaking, although on an individual basis there are times for men to respond and women to lead (each other, and our families).

Paul explains this in further detail in his first letter to Timothy (2:11-14):

11 A woman should learn in quietness and full submission.
12 I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent.
13 For Adam was formed first, then Eve.
14 And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner.

Paul invokes the creation order (Adam was formed first, then Eve.) Then he reminds us that Eve was the one deceived, and became a sinner. The reason God doesn't want women in leadership over men isn't that we're second-class or less gifted than men; to the contrary, God says "woman is the glory of man" (1 Cor. 11:7)! What a great statement of the value of woman! It's because we do need the protection that God gives us through men, and we need to maintain the creation order. We can be deceived more readily than men, because of the way God was pleased to make us; more emotional, more relational, where men tend to be more analytical. That doesn't make one better than the other, and it doesn't mean that women are deceived all the time, but it does set the mold for the roles He wants us to take.

I do think it's interesting that God never forbids a man to LEARN FROM a woman; indeed, Apollos was discipled by both Priscilla and Aquila, a married couple who were very instrumental in his spiritual growth and training. (See Acts 18.) I think the prohibition against women teaching men needs to be seen in the context of the Ephesian church to whom Paul was writing, where apparently women teachers were bringing in false doctrine from the pagan culture into the church.

But when a pastor who knows and respects a woman's knowledge and insight asks her to share it with a group of people under his care, I think a case can be made that that pastor is stewarding the gifts of the Body of Christ without handing over authority and leadership to a woman. It's not that a woman's teaching is inherently suspect (after all, a man and a woman can teach the exact same thing using the exact same words), but that leadership and authority in the church is designed by God to be held by men. (I know, this is very politically incorrect, but that's our position.)

Let me get personal with you here and share how God has opened doors for me as a woman gifted to teach. Probe Ministries has a 3-minute daily radio program that airs on about 400 stations. I am one of the writers and speakers for that program. Every time a man listens to our program when I'm on, he might learn something he never knew before or gain an insight he didn't have before. There's nothing wrong with men learning from a woman. There's nothing wrong with men reading books written by women.

As a teacher of women, I have the privilege of standing before groups of women to teach the Bible and other subjects from a Christian world view, both in our church and in other churches and conferences. I have full freedom to teach here.

Probe also holds conferences for young people and adults to help them learn to think biblically. I am often the only woman speaker at these conferences. But I am not speaking as a

church authority, only as a resource person.

I would not be comfortable filling the pulpit of a worship service as a preacher or teacher, although I am very comfortable in front of the church participating in a drama with a lesson in it that people, both men and women, can learn from. [Full disclosure since I originally wrote this article: a dear pastor friend asked me to give a short "Messages to Moms" on Mother's Day. I directed my remarks to the women, inviting the men to listen, but my intended audience was women.] Again, there's a difference between standing up as a teacher in authority over men, and being in a position where men can learn something without me being in a position of spiritual authority over them.

One final thought in this category. One day when I was praying about this issue, I asked the Lord to show me His heart about the whole subject of women teaching, and He led me to see that what He most cares about is that a woman gifted to speak and teach, cultivate an attitude of submission and humility.

> *A (hopefully) teachable young woman of God.. who just wants to get a right understanding on this whole issue*

I am so delighted to hear you say you are teachable. I think maintaining a teachable attitude is so very vital to our spiritual growth and maturity, and it's something I consciously seek in my life as well.

As a young woman, you have a challenge before you to think biblically on this issue of men and women in the church, because the world has squeezed many people in the church into ITS mold instead of people going to the scriptures for understanding that allows us to be transformed by the renewing of our minds (Rom. 12:1).

Please feel free to ask for clarification on anything I've said. Let me add one point. The American actor James Dean was

purported to have defended his bisexual preferences by saying, “I refuse to go through life with one arm tied behind my back.” It was his way of saying he refused to be limited to only 50% of the population for his sexual expression.

I think God gives women teachers a broad range of ministry opportunities and ways to use our gifts with a full 50% (at least) of the church. Why isn’t that enough (as it apparently wasn’t for James Dean), when God knows better than we do? There are SO MANY women in the church who are desperate for godly, mature Christian women to teach them; why should some women resent the fact that men should teach men when there’s this huge need that already exists?

Paul, when instructing Titus how to pastor his flock on Crete, told him to teach the older women so that THEY could mentor the younger women. Paul knew that the most effective way for young women to be taught many things was by older women, not by male pastors. It’s God’s plan, and it works, and there’s always going to be more work to be done than there are people willing to do the work.

I think the place to put our energies is NOT in trying to force open doors for women to be pastors over entire churches, but to educate both men and women in the value and worth that God gives women so they don’t see “women’s ministry” as something lesser-than, something second-class—but as something exciting, vital, and important.

Most warmly in the Lord,

Sue Bohlin

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See Also *Probe Answers Our E-Mail:*

- I Have Some Questions About Women in the Church
- So Are All Women Pastors Deceived and Going to Hell?
- Your Position Against Women Pastors Is Outdated

"What Do You Think of 'The Purpose Driven Life' by Rick Warren?"

None of us here at Probe have any cautions or reservations about it.

Personally, I think it has become so popular because Rick Warren has taken "Basic Christian Living" principles and put them all in one place, in a highly accessible format. One of the best things about the book is its first sentence: "It's not about you." So his starting point is that the Christian life, the purpose-driven life, is about giving glory to God. It's not about personal fulfillment or self-actualization—it's all about God. That puts everything else into proper perspective.

The fact that this book appeals to both believers and unbelievers is exciting to me, because we are all hungry for truth and this book has it. It is steeped through and through with Scripture, and it's well written.

Sue Bohlin