

# This Is When Wives Should Confront Their Husbands

At a recent banquet, I was seated next to a Jewish couple whom I knew to be quite orthodox in their faith and fluent in Hebrew. In fact, before becoming a successful businessman, George had trained to be a rabbi. As we got to know each other, I decided to ask them about something I had read in the *Chumash*, a commentary on the *Torah* that is widely used in Jewish homes and synagogues.

## New Light on Genesis 2:18

My question concerned the phrase *ezer neged* in Genesis 2:18, which is translated “helpmeet” in the KJV and “helper comparable” in the NKJV. The *Chumash*, which carries commentary by rabbis both ancient and modern, says that *neged* literally means “against,” and that God literally said he would make for the man a helper “against” him. The *Chumash* commentators go on to say,

“Many have noted that the ideal marriage is not necessarily one of total agreement in all matters. Often it is the wife’s responsibility to oppose her husband and prevent him from acting rashly, or to help him achieve a common course by questioning, criticizing and discussing. Thus the verse means literally that there are times a wife can best be a helper by being against him” (The *Chumash*, Stone Edition, 13).

This couple was very familiar with the *Chumash*, and they confirmed this meaning of *neged*. I also knew that the first word in the phrase, *ezer*, translated “helper,” has no connotations of subordination. It carries the meaning of “to surround and protect” and is commonly used in the Old Testament of God being the “helper” of humanity.

I then recalled how I had learned in my own studies in Genesis

with Gentile sources that *neged* means “corresponding to” and that it expresses a picture of two people standing face to face. This was in line with another Jewish friend, with whom I had discussed this passage, saying that *neged* carries the picture of two people standing “nose to nose.”

It was becoming obvious that *ezer neged* did not carry the meaning that is commonly taught in evangelical circles today. It was becoming very clear that the “helper” God creates in Genesis 2:18 is not a mild, meek “yes, dear” sort of person who never challenges or expresses an opinion. I was beginning to see the truth of the *Chumash* that the helper God made was a strong and equal individual with the right and responsibility to confront her husband when he is wrong.

It is interesting to note that when Jesus was questioned about marriage and divorce, He pointed his audience to how it was in Creation as the original model and plan for male/female relationships. At least twice in this discussion, recorded in Matthew 19:3-10, Jesus pointed them to how it was *in the beginning as the model they are to follow*.

I also recalled a positive biblical example of a wife confronting her husband and an example where a wife should have confronted her husband and the dire consequences of her failing to do so.

### **Biblical Examples of Confrontation**

In the Old Testament case, Sarah confronted Abraham and demanded that he send Ishmael away because of his destructive behavior toward Isaac. Abraham was reluctant to do so, and the Scripture says that Sarah’s demand was “very displeasing” to him.

Nonetheless, God took Sarah’s side and said to Abraham, Whatever Sarah has said to you, listen to what she says, for in Isaac your descendants shall be called (Gen. 21:12). It was not a matter of who had authority over whom; it was a matter

of what was right in the situation. In this situation, Sarah happened to be right, and her confrontation of Abraham helped him stay in the center of God's will.

In the New Testament case, we see the very opposite. Sapphira did not confront her husband about his devious plan to lie to the church about the sale of their property, and how much they were giving. Instead, she submitted to his conniving scheme and both lost their lives (Acts 5:1-11).

The story of Ananias and Sapphira shows the fallacy of the popular teaching that God works exclusively through delegated authority, and that it is our duty to submit to the authority even when they are wrong. Not so! God held Ananias and Sapphira equally and individually accountable for their actions.

He is also holding each of us accountable for our actions, for as Paul says in 2 Corinthians 5:10, "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive his recompense in the body, according to what he has done, whether it was good or bad."

### **Charles Finney Recommends Confrontation**

During the midst of a powerful revival in upper state New York, a woman came to Charles Finney (1792-1873) asking his advice on how to respond to her unsaved husband who had ordered her not to attend the revival meetings. Finney's answer shows that the sort of extreme teaching on male headship that has been so prevalent among modern evangelicals is actually something new and novel. Finney said,

"I told her that her first obligation was to God; that she was undoubtedly under obligation to obey His commands, even if they conflicted with the commands of her husband ... in no case to omit what she regarded as her duty to God for the sake of complying with his wishes. I told her that as he was an infidel, his opinions on religious subjects were not to be

respected.”

Finney tells how this woman took his advice, ignored her husband’s command and came to the revival meeting. She returned home to find him in a rage and having destroyed much of the furniture in their home.

When he saw her, he pulled out a large knife and swore that he would kill her. He then began chasing her through the house, screaming his threats. Eventually, he cornered her on the third floor with no way of escape and approached her in a rage with the knife upraised.

At this point, she fell on her knees, lifted her hands to heaven and cried out to God for mercy for herself and her husband. Suddenly, the Spirit of God “arrested” and overwhelmed him, and he sank to the floor, where he sobbed and poured out his heart to God and his wife, begging for mercy and forgiveness.

From that moment, said Finney, “He was a wonderfully changed man and became one of the most earnest Christians I ever knew.” Finney, by the way, was a revivalist, an abolitionist and an advocate for women’s rights. The above story is taken from his unabridged *Autobiography*, which, outside the Bible, is one of my all-time best reads.

### **Paul Would Agree**

Yes, our marriages must consist primarily of mutual love, support and encouragement. But because we are all fallible and prone to shortcomings, there are times we need to be confronted by the person closest to us, which should be our spouse. Tradition has given this right to the husband, but not to the wife. The Bible, however, is clear on this matter. The wife has the right—and responsibility—to confront her husband, and the husband has the responsibility to listen to his wife.

If someone wants to appeal to Paul, I will say that Paul must

be interpreted in the light of the context in which he wrote and in the light of creation and the of the whole of Scripture. I will also point them to my book, *Paul, Women and Church* where Paul, interpreted in the context of everything he wrote about women, is clearly seen a friend of women and a champion of their equality in Christ. Yes, Paul too would agree with wives confronting their husbands when they are wrong. {eo}

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