

## **When Your Husband Is Not a Christian**

**Lavonne James McClish.**

Paul commended Phoebe (Rom. 16:1-2), who was a succorer of many, including himself. We read nothing about her husband. If she had a husband, he was apparently not a Christian, or perhaps he had died. Yet that did not stop Phoebe from serving the Lord and her brothers and sisters in Christ.

Timothy's father was a pagan. As far as we know, Eunice had no help from him at all in living as a Christian, much less in training Timothy. Yet she, with the help of her mother Lois, has been a good example to all Christian wives and mothers since the first century.

Abigail was a great and wise woman who was married to a "churl," a fool (1 Sam. 25:1-44). She seemingly lived in submission to her husband, but when it came to doing what was right and wise, she took matters into her own hands. She didn't wait around trying to persuade Nabal to repent. Contrast her behavior with that of Sapphira (Acts 5:1-10), who willingly followed her husband in sin, and for that she died with him. Abigail and Sapphira provide examples for us—one good, and one bad. We must never be guilty of disobeying God in order to please a husband (1 Cor. 7:15-16).

Even if you must carry them out all alone, you still have responsibilities toward God and toward your brothers and sisters in Christ. These responsibilities would include hospitality, giving, teaching, bringing up children—heavy burdens indeed to bear alone. Sometimes a wife just goes ahead and invites people over, although her husband refuses to be hospitable, or even to come home. Years ago, we were invited for supper by a young Christian woman. We arrived at the time she specified, but her husband was not home. We waited and made conversation, but when he still didn't come, she decided we would go on and eat without him. I admired her so much for going ahead with her plans, even if she must do it alone. I am so happy to be able to say that her husband is now a faithful Christian and a loving, attentive husband. There is not a doubt in my mind that her good example was a large factor.

There comes a time when a wife must accept the fact that her husband will not listen to her nor allow her even to talk with him about God, the Bible, the church, or even religion in general. In fact, if she goes past this point, she is likely to drive him further away. Peter addressed this situation (1 Pet. 3:1-6). A wife may, without speaking a word, win her husband by her good example and the love and the respect with which she treats him. Even if he is a

heathen, God has still made him the head of the house. Unless he requires something that God has forbidden, or forbids something God requires, she must submit to him graciously. She must love, support, respect, and be kind to her husband as best she can. Remember, *agape* is something you do, not necessarily something you feel.

Of the greatest importance is her insistence on attending worship and Bible classes, and on taking the children with her. She must teach them God's Word and the principles of good behavior. Some time ago I read about a young mother whose husband actively opposed even her attendance at worship. One Sunday morning the streets and sidewalks were covered with ice and snow, but she dressed her baby warmly and got into the car. It wouldn't start. Her husband had sabotaged it to keep her from going to Bible class and worship. He watched incredulously from the window as she got out of the car, took up her baby, and proceeded to walk to the church building, some distance away. He was so impressed by her dedication and so ashamed of himself that he dressed quickly, did whatever it took to render the car drivable, and hurried to overtake her. He took her to worship, and what's more, he went himself. Because of her courage and devotion to God, her husband became a Christian.

If the father sets a bad example before the children or even attempts to undermine her efforts (which has been known to happen), her task becomes even more difficult. She must somehow try to instill in her children a love for God and a desire to please Him. At the same time, however, she must take care not to cause them to be contemptuous of or disrespectful toward their father. She must accept the burden of teaching and training her children alone.

Someone told me of a young woman whose husband would not allow her to contribute any money to the work of church. Her solution was to buy extra groceries and bring them to the pantry when she came to mid-week ladies' class, as her contribution, with the approval of the elders. She also took food to the sick and bereaved. "Where there's a will there's a way."

A mother and father should never argue in front of the children; they should resolve their conflicts privately and then present a united front. Children will, even at best, attempt to pit one parent against the other, and they can almost smell any disunity between them, or any wavering. Do not allow this to happen. They should be punished if they, after being told "no" by one parent, go to the other and try to get approval against the will of the first parent. Again, this problem is made much more difficult if the father is not a Christian.

Admittedly, some fathers actually enjoy undermining the mother's authority, either to show her and the children that he is the boss and will pull the strings, or because he hates her values and her faith so much. A third possibility is that she makes him uncomfortable by her good life, so he tries to drag her down to his level. The results are often disastrous, but there isn't much a wife can do to change such a husband other than reasoning with him (respectfully and kindly) and praying for strength, wisdom, and guidance for herself and her children, and repentance and conversion for him.

### **Conclusion**

The Biblical examples and admonitions in the Bible concerning women whose husbands are not Christians are most likely directed toward those women who were married before becoming Christians. To those who have not yet married, be very careful that you marry someone who will help you serve God and will guide you and your children to Heaven. "We ought to obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29). However, never take it for granted that "a member of the church" (or a graduate of a "Christian College") will necessarily be a good and faithful Christian. Some of those who have been "baptized" outwardly have just been dunked in the water and were never truly converted.

**[Note]** Lavonne James McClish wrote this article and it appeared in *Showing Thyself a Pattern...(Titus 2:7)*, Published by The Gospel Journal, 2003.

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