

THE FRUIT OF HER HANDS

Respect and the Christian Woman

Nancy Wilson



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To Douglas,
the most fruitful person I know.

The Fruit of Her Hands

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Foreword

Nancy and I get along very well which, oddly enough, creates some problems. When two people are so compatible, it is very easy to coast on the strength of that natural affection. The problem with this is that it becomes easy to neglect the essential thing in a good marriage, which is reliance on the grace of God. Over the course of our delightful years together, Nancy has been careful to avoid this pitfall, searching the Scriptures for instruction on how to be a godly wife and mother, and she has been just as careful to ask God to empower her to do what He requires.

Probably the best thing I can bring to this book is the testimony that Nancy diligently practices what she exhorts other women to do. She has been writing on marriage and family for a number of years, and in reading her I have never had to wonder at hypocrisy. There has been none.

Simply getting along is not adequate. Nothing serves but love and obedience; a man and woman are called to demonstrate the covenant relationship between Christ and the church. As Christian women consider how they may stand as godly helpers to their husbands in this high calling, I can do nothing better than commend this book to them. The woman who wrote it has lived with a meathead for twenty-one years and has a great deal of practical wisdom.

Douglas Wilson

A Woman's Orientation to Marriage

For know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: for men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away! For of this sort are those who creep into households and make captives of gullible women loaded down with sins, led away by various lusts, always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth. (2 Tim. 3:1-6)

Gullible Women

American women today are indeed gullible. They have been captivated by the lies promulgated by the modern world and have succumbed in many ways to the humanistic mindset. Who are the deceivers? They are lovers of themselves, lovers of money, lovers of pleasure. The modern woman has been deceived, like Eve, and led away by her own lusts from her God-given domain and her God-ordained responsibilities. Loaded down with sin—discontent and envy—she is promised freedom and happiness if she will just forsake her domain—the home—and neglect her responsibilities—husband and children.

What are some of the lies she has been told? Fruitfulness is bad; children wreck the budget and the figure. Marriage is a partnership; submission is for imbeciles. Being a homemaker is for airheads who can't make it in the business world. Women are not designed with a unique purpose, but should and can compete with men on any level. The most important thing is to have a healthy self-image and to have your deepest needs met. If they are not being met by your husband, find someone else. The old femininity is outdated. The new femininity dictates that women should look capable, confident, and, at all costs, young and sexy.

How does this sort of thinking creep into our households? The media indoctrinate us daily. The news berates biblical views of wives and motherhood. Popular film and entertainment programs call women to war against men and husbands. They exalt the "modern woman" and neglect or ridicule the mother at home. A friend of mine was taking an English course at a government university and was told on one of the first days of class that no sexist language would be tolerated in student papers. What was the instructor's definition of sexist language? *Mother*. The class was told that they could not use the term *mother* in their writing, but must use the politically correct term *parent*. In other words, they could not write, "The mother baked the cookies," but must write, "The parent baked the cookies." The feminist agenda is rampant in the government schools from kindergarten through graduate school.

One can easily identify the weak-willed woman who has been lead astray by this damnable teaching. She has sacrificed the children and the marriage, her calling and responsibilities, for her own lusts. She has been deceived and is deceiving others. In her frenzied quest for success and approval from the world, she has lost the very thing she tried to gain: a blessed peace and satisfaction. After the career and the wardrobe and the membership in the health spa and the second car and the vacation, there is

still a miserable void. All the romance novels on the rack can't fill it. Where to look? Presto! We immediately have a tremendous market for more deception by way of the latest feel-good psycho-babble. Seminars and books and expensive counseling weekends are the next step. Here she can talk about all of her needs and frustrations. Here she can learn how to cope with lack of fulfillment. Here she can learn how to get back on speaking terms with her husband and children. Or maybe she will be encouraged to divorce and find someone who can meet her needs. The modern woman is the epitome of the gullible woman. She is the captive of all kinds of modern deception, always learning, but never coming to a knowledge of the truth. This is the woman of the nineties.

How can the Christian woman dedicated to serving God in her home resist this kind of propaganda? How can the woman who has compromised with the world get back on the right track? The answer is fairly simple, but not necessarily easy. First we must repudiate the world's agenda for women and seek to understand the Word's agenda for women. This is both a protection and a solution. We must determine to be obedient to the Word of God no matter what it says, with no compromises. This is what it means to be a woman of the Word. We must find out what the Bible teaches about marriage, about children, about men and women and their roles, and then we must be obedient with no apologies, no matter what the cost. Is this radical Christianity? No. This is basic Christianity.

A Home With a View

Have you ever stopped to think about how you view your husband, and how that view affects him and affects you?

Now exactly what do I mean by *view*? *View* means perspective. Perhaps the view from your window is of a dreary parking lot, or perhaps it is a lovely view of the hills or a garden. Sometimes people with a lovely view

take it for granted—they fail to appreciate it. Instead of admiring the view, they focus on all the weeds to pull and shrubs to prune. Likewise, some with dreary views lift their eyes to the beautiful sky above, and find that they can be thankful for their view after all.

So what is your perspective when you look at your husband? When you think of him, when you speak to him, when you pray for him, what is your view? Is it a biblical view? Or is it a humanistic view, tainted by the modern world's views on marriage and homemaking and husbandry? And what is the biblical view of husbands anyway?

In the Song of Solomon we see a delightful view of the beloved: "Like an apple tree among the trees of the woods, so is my beloved among the sons" (2:3). When you think of your husband, is he an apple tree in the forest? He should be. Or do you see one tree in the forest, dwarfed by many other imposing trees of greater stature? Perhaps you need to adjust your view.

First you must view your husband as your head. His authority as your head is established in God's Word. "Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body. Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything" (Eph. 5:22-24).

I would like to emphasize the following two words in the above passage: *own* and *everything*. You are to view your *own* husband as your head. Men are not the heads of women, but husbands are the heads of their own wives. A woman is *not* to submit to other men, but to her own head. A woman must not view other men as her head, but only her own husband. This is important. My husband is my head. I must go to my own head, submit to my own head in all things. I must not run to someone else's head for counsel and help before I first go to my own!

Once when my husband and I were speaking with a couple, the woman asked my husband a question that seemed

innocent enough. But I could tell by the man's expression that she had already asked him, and he had already answered her. She must have been unsatisfied with his answer or she would not have been asking for another opinion. What if my husband had given an answer contrary to the one given by her head? That would have put her in a position of wanting to submit to my head and not her own. I pointed out to her that she had dishonored her head by asking my husband what she had already asked her own. Instead, she should have asked her husband if it would be all right to get another opinion on the issue. Then she would not have been setting up a potential problem of pitting her husband against mine and apparently agreeing more with my husband.

A head is given to a woman for protection, safety, and shelter. We must not run from the safety of our own head to what looks like better shelter to us. This is a dangerous temptation and women succumb to it in many different ways. Sometimes they fall by reading Christian books or listening to Christian teachers. "But surely that cannot be wrong," you say. Yes, it is, if they begin to look to someone else *as their head*. Women are readily deceived. What a great protection it is to have a head to submit to, rather than being swayed by our own emotions, whims, and fears. A woman must cultivate a very high view of her head—both the *position* God has given him over her, as well as the *authority* God has given him. When women adopt this high view, submission is seen in an entirely different light. Submitting to someone whom God has placed over you with loving authority is a relief, not a burden.

The second word is *everything*. Hmmmmm. What does *everything* mean exactly? Maybe we can get out of this by examining the word in the Greek. . . .

When we begin to see that God's commands for us result in *our* good, that He has in His divine wisdom provided a perfect plan for marriage, then our fear of submission will diminish. We need to see submission to our own

head as a God-ordained means to our protection and happiness.

Of course, some will immediately think of extreme cases where submission would be impossible. I am not talking about submitting to your husband if he tells you to violate God's express commands. I am talking about everyday submission. Submission means the act of yielding or surrendering, deferring or giving way. It is a positive thing, not a negative thing. We are to be obedient to our own husbands as it says in Titus 2:5. This means in all things. Yes, regarding the household, the finances, the children's discipline, education, training, and so forth. What does your head think about these things? How does he want you to handle situations that arise? Does he want you to ask your parents, in-laws, friends, or church elders before you ask him?

We need to cultivate a high view of our husbands and a high view of their God-given jobs. Begin to view your husband as an apple tree in the forest. He is one of a kind, and God has prepared special work for him to do. You have the privilege of being God's appointed helper for him. Have a high view of this calling and a biblical view of your responsibilities associated with this calling. Your view will improve as you apply God's teaching. Your husband will appreciate your obedience and be set free to live up to all God has called him to be. You will find yourself living in a home with a lovely view.

True Ministry

Having a biblical view of headship is a protection in many areas, including some areas in which women may not think they need protection. Consider the role older Christian women have in ministry. Scripture encourages older women to teach younger women to be husband-lovers and children-lovers (Tit. 2:3-4). What does this look like in the

twentieth century, given modern media and transportation? Are there any limits to a ministry that a woman may have to other women? What are the dangers and blessings associated with teaching women?

First of all, notice that the nature of the teaching in the Titus passage is very home-centered. This is not narrow; it gives women a very broad spectrum of subject matter that can be covered. Teaching women to be “into husbands” and “into kids” must include many topics, ranging from personal holiness to methods of education. Just about any aspect of the faith taught in Scripture can be useful to the wife and mother. Any Bible-centered study could be used as a real tool, because a good Christian woman will be a good wife and mother.

But what other principles are laid out for Christian women that can come to bear on this subject of women in ministry? Today we have women in the Christian world who write books, edit women's magazines, travel on speaking tours, have radio or television shows, lead seminars, *etc.* If the teaching itself is biblical and Christ-centered, is it automatically to be assumed that the ministry is biblical and Christ-centered?

The first question to ask and answer is, “Who is this woman's husband?” Next we must ask many subsidiary questions. Is she fulfilling her ministry to him? Is he her priority? Is she helping him? Is her house in order? Is he leading her in this ministry? Is her identity as a Christian woman centered, under Christ, around her relationship to her husband? Certainly if a woman is a widow or unmarried, she can have a fruitful ministry. But she will still need protection and accountability of some kind, which should come through the church.

But if the answer to any of the earlier questions is “no,” then her ministry is likely independent of her husband, much like a separate career. Yet because it is “Christian,” it is somehow seen as a valid ministry. In contrast, because Scripture teaches that the husband is the head of

the wife, a Christian woman in ministry should be seen as under her husband's visible headship. In other words, her ministry should be visibly connected to him. This can be a real help to him, for her teaching can be a complement to his work. He can protect her from becoming too committed to ministry outside the home; he can see objectively whether she is keeping her priorities straight; he knows how she is doing spiritually and whether she is even qualified to teach. He can protect her from many temptations and lead her in her ministry to other women. This protection is a blessing. When people listen to or read her teaching, it is organically connected to the head God has placed over her. This is obviously difficult if her husband is always across the country, or if his name is merely listed in the book with the other "credits" in the fine print. This is why I rarely travel to speak at women's conferences, but rather teach where my husband is speaking. Not only does this keep us together, working as a team, but he is then available to continue to lead me and protect me in ministry settings. My teaching role is a support and complement to his, not the other way around. This way my ministry is visibly connected to my husband's and is not seen as a separate work.

Scripture teaches that a wife is specially created by God to be a helper to her husband: "An excellent wife is the crown of her husband" (Prov. 12:4). When a woman in ministry becomes successful independent of her husband, many temptations will accompany such success. She will be tempted to put her "ministry" ahead of her first calling as a wife and mother. She will be tempted to find more satisfaction and gratification in her "ministry" than in her calling to be a wife. Then comes the temptation to accept more and more speaking engagements, to like the financial independence, to work harder outside the home, to get used to being successful apart from her husband, and to become more independent of him.

In some cases, a husband's career is considered inferior, being not as lucrative, so the husband quits his job to manage his wife's "ministry." This is completely backwards. How can we expect God to bless a ministry that is in essence run by wives and supported by husbands? This is especially tragic when the wife's career is Christian in name and is teaching about being a "home-centered" wife.

Women have often been vulnerable to deception, and frequently they are self-deceived. The woman who sacrifices her own home, while teaching other women to be respectful and submissive wives, has been deceived and is deceiving others. This eventually becomes apparent when we read about the divorce. She has torn down her house with her own hands (Prov. 14:1). By the time she recognizes the trap she is in, it is often too late. To quit and go home would be a public scandal; to openly confess sin would be humiliating; to ask for help would be to admit weakness; to fold up the ministry might put other women (or men) associated with the ministry out of a job. She realizes the cost is too great, so she continues to live the lie.

The Church today needs godly teaching for younger women. It must come from godly older women. But godly older women need to be submissive to Scripture and submissive to their husbands first. Then, in a husband-honoring context, they are protected from the hazards and temptations of the "ministry."