

Joseph Bayly

out of my mind



[PHOTOGRAPHICALLY REPRODUCED FOR EVIDENCE from ETERNITY, June, 1977]

Basic Conflicts

An open letter to Bill Gothard

Mr. William Gothard
Institute in Basic Youth Conflicts
4S055 North Adams
Hinsdale, Illinois 60521

Dear Bill Gothard:

God has given you great opportunities and responsibilities in recent years, and I, along with most evangelical Christians, am thankful for your ministry. Many people have told me of their growth through your Institutes. I therefore approach you as a Christian brother, believing that we share deep concerns for the church of Jesus Christ and its testimony in the world.

Two years ago I was ministering to a group of missionaries in South America. During a session on the biblical teaching about the relations of husbands and wives, I asked a question: "If your husband were at home, and the phone rang, and he said, 'If it's for me, say I'm not here,' would you do it? Would you lie because your husband told you to?"

I was surprised when not one of the women answered "No." The closest anyone came to saying she would not obey her husband was one woman who said she'd delay long enough in replying that it might tip the person off to the fact her husband really was at home.

After the meeting, another woman said to me in private, "Yes, I'd lie if my husband told me to do so. God would judge him for the lie, not me. I would only be doing what God tells me to do: obeying my husband."

When I asked her and some of the silent ones (who later revealed that they felt the same way) the basis for their willingness to lie on their husbands' instruction, they said that their opinions had been formed at your Institute in Basic Youth Conflicts. Several told me you used Sarah's willingness to pass herself off as Abraham's sister as the biblical precedent.

Since then, others have told me that this is a misunderstanding of what you teach about the relations of a man and his wife to each other, to sinful acts and to God.

As a believer in John Dewey's principle, "Lord, deliver me from my disciples," I was willing to believe this, even though other women in the intervening years have told me that they received that same impression from your seminars.

Now I'm not so sure, because of two recent incidents about which I've heard. It is for this reason I write an open letter to you, with opportunity for you to disclaim the impression people have received.

Since this is an open, public matter involving tens of thousands of people who have sat under your teaching, rather than a private matter between the two of us, I feel that this public means of your denying or confirming the teaching is appropriate and biblical. (An example would be St. Paul's writing public letters to the Corinthian church and other churches, rather than going to individuals in private.)

Three weeks ago an attractive woman told me that her pastor is a firm supporter of you and your seminars, and that she had said to this pastor, "In the business world, an occasional husband who wants to succeed or get a big contract will offer his wife to his boss or a purchasing agent. If my husband told me that he wanted me to have such a relationship, should I do so?"

"My pastor told me that I should try to talk my husband out of this idea if he ever proposed it. But if he wouldn't back down, I should obey. He said I would not be judged by God for adultery; my husband would be judged for telling me to do this. I would merely be doing what God tells me to do: submitting to my husband, which pleases God."

A week later, in another city, I heard of a case that may be familiar to you. If it is, I think you may welcome this opportunity

to set the record straight.

A father who claims his idea came from your Institute in Basic Youth Conflicts has recently been found guilty by a court and sentenced to seven years in prison for killing his young son. This man was a respected member of an evangelical church—in fact, he was about to start teaching a course on child discipline.

The father, believing that it was his duty to break his three-year-old child's spirit, an obligation which he said you taught, had an argument with the child about birds perched on a wire which they could see through a window. The child—precocious and strong-willed—would not respond as his father desired. So the father struck his son, and for the next two-and-a-half hours, when the child continued to oppose his father, repeatedly struck him. At this point the child died.

[At the request of Mr. Gothard, I wish to add the following facts not available to me at the time I wrote the letter. This information is from accounts in the (Portland) *Oregonian* and *Journal* newspapers. The three-year-old boy was not the man's son, but a foster child. (From another source I have learned that his previous years were tragic: both parents died in separate incidents.) The child did not die of the beating, but died of drowning in the bathtub where the man said he put him to revive him after beating him with a wooden stick. The autopsy further showed that the child had suffered multiple bruises in the buttocks, thighs and calves. "Over the most minimal controversy, (the convicted man) took it upon himself to beat a baby almost to death," noted Multnomah County Circuit Judge Clifford Olsen.]

During this time [of the beating] the man's wife came into the room, but did not intervene. The reason: she believed that it was not her right to object to the beating, because she would be taking authority away from her husband (which she had learned in the Institute was wrong).

I was told that the man, who pleaded guilty, does not feel that he disobeyed God; rather, he did what God commands Christians to do. The result of his obedience must be left in the hands of the Sovereign God.

Here are the questions I should like to have you answer, for the sake of the people who have attended your seminars; and for those who have not, but have been exposed to your teaching second-hand; and for the sake of the evangelical Christian community's testimony, with which you are closely identified.

1. Does a Christian woman who is a wife have the responsibility to obey God rather than her husband, when the two are in

conflict? Specifically, does God hold her guilty of lying, of adultery, of complicity in child abuse/manslaughter when she does not cross her husband but obeys in these areas?

2. Do you follow the New Testament doctrine of the universal priesthood of believers, including women, reaffirmed by the Reformers, with their immediate access to God; or is a married woman's husband her priest, the connection between herself and God?

3. Is Old Testament Sarah a proper example for Christian women, in her obedience to Abraham when he told her to lie about their being husband and wife? If you have taught this (and a number of people claim that you have), do you give any weight to God's act in the New Testament in striking Sapphira dead for agreeing with her husband to lie (Acts 5:1ff.)?

4. Does a Christian parent have a responsibility to break his child's will? If so, to what lengths should he go to achieve

this end?

5. This question is not so important as the others, perhaps, but I'd like to know whether it is a concern for you that people such as I must depend on second-hand accounts of what you teach in your seminars if we do not have the time or money or inclination to attend? Do you not feel a responsibility to put any of your ideas or explanations into print for the general public? Must we always judge your ideas by what others report?

Thank you for answering this open letter. I assume that you can do so in the next four weeks. If I receive your reply by April 10, it will be carried at the end of my column in ETERNITY magazine where this open letter will be published. Otherwise the letter will be published without a reply.

Sincerely, in Christ,

Joe Bayly

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(Perhaps, in the absence of a reply from Mr. Gothard, I should detail our contacts after he received the above letter.

1. Mr. Gothard called me on the phone after three weeks, telling me he had been away and, later, sick. He said he had not yet read my letter but it had been summarized for him. We discussed areas of disagreement, and he suggested I "interview" him instead of publishing the letter. I said No.

2. A psychologist who "advises Mr. Gothard" (in his words), and who has been blessed by his ministry, phoned me to say that he hoped I'd not publish the letter. Would I accept an answer from someone other than Mr. Gothard? When I replied No, he said that he had advised Mr. Gothard not to reply, since if he replied to me, he'd have to "defend" himself against all sorts of people—something that he has not done. Rather, Mr. Gothard, he said, has refused to answer criticism to date.

3. Mr. Gothard called me several days before the April 10 date, and again discussed various aspects of this open letter with me. He said he was writing a reply which I'd receive by April 10.

4. On April 11, Mr. Gothard's secretary spoke on the phone with my secretary, giving several very brief comments from Mr. Gothard. I feel no Christian responsibility to publish these round-about comments, nor to pursue the matter further. It is my considered opinion, however, that no servant of the Lord is in a privileged position when it comes to answering the allegations of unbiblical teaching. And no leader, Christian or otherwise, who programs the minds of tens of thousands is above answering responsible criticism. (JB)

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