

“The Husband is the Head of the Wife”

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Read Ephesians 5:22-33

Ephesians 5 speaks directly to male headship within the home. I would like us to consider what this might mean from the text itself. That it speaks to headship is clear; the idea of authority implicit to headship is not clear.

Although the word “submit” does not occur in verse 22, it is implied based on verse 21. “For grammatical reasons, 5:21 belongs to the preceding verses, but the content of this sentence forms an essential element of the section of Ephesians which follows.” (Markus Barth, *Ephesians 4-6*, The Anchor Bible, 608). The scope of this submission is inclusive and broad (“in everything” [v. 24]). A boundary to the submission is noted, however, in Colossians 3:18, “Wives, be subject to your husbands, **as is fitting in the Lord.**” This submission rendered by the wife is equally rendered by the husband.

The end result of a submissive wife is the attitude of respect (v. 32). The word respect is **phobeo**. It literally means, “To fear.” It does include the meaning of reverence or awe. When a wife submits to a husband’s headship he “feels” respected or honored. Our intent right now however is not to focus on the wife’s submission, but on the husband’s headship.

I would like to begin by simply noting how the word “head” is used throughout the New Testament. The “head” imagery can speak of primary or prominent or first (Matt. 21:42; Mark 12:10; Luke 20:17; Acts 4:11; 1 Pet. 2:7). First Corinthians 11 uses “head” as functional lead (1 Cor. 11:3-10). It is difficult to speak of headship without including thoughts of leadership and direction. It is intrinsic to the idea. Paul uses this same image when speaking of Christ being “head over all things” as it relates to the Church (Eph. 1:22; 4:15; Col. 1:18). Christ is the head of all principality and power (Col. 2:10). It is this same imagery used in Ephesians 5:23 when speaking of the husband’s headship over his wife. When the head is dishonored or negated the entire body suffers (Col. 2:18, 19). This dysfunction is readily seen on the earthly level where husbands fail to exercise headship or wives fail to respect the headship. It is inside of this context we speak to headship within the marriage covenant and within the home.

The text speaks to his headship in a fascinating way. It would appear completely counter cultural and outside our perceived notions. The ontology and economy within the Trinity forms the foundation from which and on which the home is built. Whatever “role” God the Father exercises in His headship over the Son and the Holy Spirit is to be reflected by and through Christ over the Church and the husband within the home. It is the Trinity that provides the basis for ontological equality and functional hierarchy within the home. And it is the Church’s relationship to Christ that provides the picture of what a marriage relationship looks like **judicially/positionally** and can be reflected **experientially**.

In noting this we can inquire further, “Does the Father have “authority” over the Son and Spirit? It would appear we are asking the wrong question. The language is wrong. Christ

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does have authority/power over the Church. Yet it is not this aspect of headship that is celebrated. It is the love Jesus Christ has for His Church that is to mark the headship a husband has with his wife (vv. 25, 28, 32). Ephesians notes the husband's headship as loving and it is this love that is pictured in four ways.

- First, as head He is described as "the Savior of the body" (v. 23).
- Second, as head He is described as "the Sanctifier of the body" (v. 26).
- Third, as head He is described as "the Sustainer of the body" (v. 28).
- Fourth, as head He is described as "the Savor of the body" (v. 29).

All four of these ideas need further expansion, yet let us not trip over the text. Headship carried out in this manner is characterized as **sacrificial** (v. 25), **selfless** (vv. 28, 29) and **singular** (v. 31). It is only as we possess these three characteristics that we bring to light those innate qualities of Savior, Sanctifier, Sustainer and Savor. The headship of Christ and thus the husband is not portrayed as controlling or dominating (i.e. "foot on the throat"). It does not speak of restriction or bondage. There is no tone of abuse or bullying. It is the imagery of a loving "headship" that a wife is invited to submit to and respect. Yet neither love nor respect is in response to either one. Both are rendered unconditionally. A wife is to submit to her head, just as the Church submits to Christ. Her submission is one of yielding. Yet it is not a yielding of impingement, but of privilege.

When reading this text I (as a husband) am captured by its beauty. By default of marriage I am the positional head within my home. I am the functional head when I love my wife by protecting her from evil, purifying her thus enabling her innate beauty to shine forth, provide for her thus giving her a sense of security and care and prizing her. My wife should believe she is the most important person in my life. She should sense my desire to place her well-being above my own. Although this is counter-cultural, it is biblically right. Husbands, I call you to function as the head of your home and to love your wife in a manner that is sacrificial, selfless and singular. As a single man, learn to serve women in general. Protect them, defend their honor, seek to meet needs where possible and always hold in high esteem our female counterparts. O may this call be our quest. In so doing, the love Christ has for His church is seen. Let us never forget that all we render to our spouse is rendered to Christ. He is the ultimate and final object of our energy and affection. He is the one who lends substance to all our earthly shadows. Today may Jesus be prized in the loving of our wives.

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