

# “Husband and Wife – Unified for a Common Good”

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Read Ephesians 5:22-24, 33

It is unfortunate but undeniable how the images of headship and submission are construed as negatives and thus needing to be put off. The idea of functional hierarchy is **not** the result of sin. Mutual submission as noted in Ephesians 5:21 results in a husband lovingly prizing his own wife and a wife lovingly submitting to and respecting her own husband. Both acts are submissive and both acts loving. Genesis 1:27 assures the reader that both male and female are equally made in the image of God, both are equally involved in the “be fruitful and multiple” invitation and both are co-regents over all things created (Gen. 1:28).

In the expansion of the idea presented in Genesis 2 we read how each is essential to the other. This is powerfully brought forth in man’s uniqueness among the animal kingdom. Nothing and no one other than man’s counterpart in woman can enable man to be fruitful and multiply. Together they are all each need for the keeping of God’s commands.

Genesis 3 shows the weakness of Eve apart from and independence of Adam. As a consequence of her separation from Adam, she sins and Adam follows suit. God pronounced judgment on all parties involved: Satan, woman and man.

<sup>16</sup> “To the woman He said, ‘I will greatly multiply Your pain in childbirth, In pain you will bring forth children; Yet your desire will be for your husband, And he will rule over you.’ <sup>17</sup> Then to Adam He said, ‘Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree about which I commanded you, saying, ‘You shall not eat from it’; Cursed is the ground because of you; In toil you will eat of it All the days of your life. <sup>18</sup> Both thorns and thistles it shall grow for you; And you will eat the plants of the field; <sup>19</sup> By the sweat of your face You will eat bread, Till you return to the ground, Because from it you were taken; For you are dust, And to dust you shall return’” (Gen. 3:16-19).

Prior to sin childbirth was significantly different as it relates to pain. In addition, the relationship between the husband and wife is likewise altered. Sin cries out for the wife to seek control within the home and to make a husband’s headship burdensome and domineering. That functional hierarchy existed prior to sin is noteworthy. It is the dark-side of both that sin escalates. This is equally true of the husband working to secure sustenance. It is the difficulty assigned to work that is a consequence of sin.

All that was beautiful now becomes stained. It is still present but will now be marked by struggle. Ephesians 5:21-33 shows the redemption of the relationship as provided for by the cross and the resultant work of the Holy Spirit. The pattern of ontological equality and functional hierarchy begun in the garden, significantly altered by sin, is now rescued and renewed by God as Trinity.

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Within the book of Ephesians, there is significant time spent laying down the Christ centeredness of the Christian life. Everything we are as His people is graciously provided for by God as Trinity. Paul writes of this from Ephesians 1:1 all the way through Ephesians 3:4. At 3:5 he shows the implications of this in and through the Christian life. It will run from 3:5 through 5:21. Chapter 5 verse 21 is pivotal. It forms a bridge from what was said and permeates the following imagery. Ephesians 5:22-6:9 make application in three distinct relationships: marriage, parenting and slave/master (i.e. employee/employer). There are **two metaphors** that enable us to elevate our thinking as it relates to these relationships. Both show how each individual is for the good of the whole. **The first** is that of a body. The body imagery is used throughout Ephesians (1:23; 2:16; 3:6; 4:4, 12, 16; 5:23, 30). Elsewhere (1 Cor. 12) Paul shows how each part must celebrate its uniqueness within the whole for each is invaluable in the functioning of the whole. There can be no competition within the body if the body is to function properly. Neither the head nor its parts can work independent of each other. If either is working in "rebellion" to the other it creates tension within the body. All parts within the body are necessary and each functions differently for the overall health of the body. This is by design. There can be no envy or competition within the body if the body is to grow in health.

**The second** metaphor is that of an army. Immediately following this paragraph is one of putting on the whole armor of God (Eph. 6:10-18). All Christians engage in spiritual warfare. The marriage covenant, parenting and employment are no exceptions. Within an army you have hierarchy and rightly so. Despite the structure there is a common enemy, and together the officers and those under them work together in defeating the enemy. "Husband and wife need to function as a unified front, facing a common enemy (the world, the flesh and the devil), protecting a common investment (their marriage, children, etc.) and working together to form the strongest team possible."

Both metaphors place marriage in one of mutual dependency. Each needs the other. For homes to function well and to continue growing in health, both husband and wife need to lovingly submit to one another by functioning in their God-ordained roles. Together they form an alliance against a common enemy that would seek their individual destruction. Healthy marriages marked by mutual submission expressed by love and respect are best able to resist and "extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one." May God continue to enable us to see the beauty within the shadow of the marriage covenant with husbands and wives living unified in their pursuit of God.

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