

Biblical Headship Revisited
Men's Breakfast – January 22, 2005 – Sovereign Grace Church

INTRODUCTION

I. A CULTURE OPPOSED TO BIBLICAL HEADSHIP

- A. Attacks from a secular culture
- B. Attacks from segments of the church (evangelical feminists, egalitarians)
- C. Attacks from our consciences
- D. It is crucial that we be able to stand confidently in our God-given roles as head of our marriages, as head of our homes.

Gen 1:26-3:19: MALE HEADSHIP WAS ESTABLISHED AT CREATION
1 Cor 11:2-3: MALE HEADSHIP REFLECTS THE TRINITY
Eph 5:25-27: MALE HEADSHIP EXERCISES PURPOSEFUL LOVE

II. Gen 1:26-3:19: MALE HEADSHIP WAS ESTABLISHED AT CREATION

- A. Exegesis and Explanation

“So, was Eve Adam’s equal? Yes and no. She was his spiritual equal and, unlike the animals, ‘suitable for him.’ But she was not his equal in that she was his ‘helper.’ God did not create man and woman in an undifferentiated way, and their mere maleness and femaleness identify their respective roles. A man, just by virtue of his manhood, is called to lead for God. A woman, just by virtue of her womanhood, is called to help for God” (Raymond C. Ortlund, Jr., “Male-Female Equality and Male Headship: Genesis 1-3” from Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood, 102).

- B. Confidence and Humility

III. 1 Cor 11:2-3: MALE HEADSHIP REFLECTS THE TRINITY

A. Explanation and Exegesis

One article on the Christians for Biblical Equality web-site favorably quotes Millard Erickson, a contemporary theologian:

[The three persons of the Trinity] are bound to one another in love, agape love, which therefore unites them in the closest and most intimate of relationships. This unselfish, agape love makes each more concerned for the other than for himself. There is therefore a mutual submission of each to each of the others and a mutual glorifying of one another. There is complete equality of the three (from Kevin N. Giles' "The Doctrine of The Trinity and Subordination").

There are aspects of truth in this description, but there is also a subtle denial of the clear teaching of Scripture. Not in any single instance is the Father submitted to the Son, or the Father submitted to the Spirit. It is pure human invention to say that there is a "mutual submission of each to each of the others."

Bryan Chapell describes the headship of the husband in this way:

"What does the Bible mean when it says that the husband is the head of the wife? The head of a home possesses the most authority in the family...."

Biblical headship is the conscientious and loving use of the authority God grants a husband to ensure that a home (and all its members) honor God and experience his blessings. Biblical headship assumes responsibility for others. The head of a home must his authority to serve the good of his family. In this sense, biblical headship requires service.... (Each for the Other, 31, 34).

Douglas Wilson comments on this in his book Reforming Marriage:

"A brief grammar lesson may help explain the nature of biblical authority in the home. When it comes to reading the Scripture, Christians frequently confuse indicatives and imperatives. An indicative is a statement of fact; there is no ought in it—the chair is brown; the ship is tilting; the snow is lumpy. Such statements simply aim to tell us the way things are. An imperative, on the other hand, is a command; it tells us what we must do. Close the door! Turn on the computer! Pull over! Consequently, if one were to say, 'The book is on the table,' this is a simple statement of fact. It is an indicative. But if one said, 'Put the book on the table,' this is a command—an imperative...."

"The same 'grammatical' confusion happens when husbands seek to understand the Bible's teaching on headship and authority in marriage. The Bible says the 'husband is the head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church' (Eph

5:23). Paul most emphatically does not say that husbands ought to be the heads of their wives. He says that they are. In this verse, the apostle is not telling us how marriages ought to function (that comes in the verses following). Rather he is telling us what the marriage relationship between husband and wife is. Marriage is defined in part as the headship of a husband over a wife. In other words, without this headship, there is no marriage....

"Meditating on this is a very valuable thing for husbands to do. Because the husband is the head of the wife, he finds himself in a position of inescapable leadership. He cannot successfully refuse to lead. If he attempts to abdicate in some way, he may, through his rebellion, lead poorly. But no matter what he does, or where he goes, he does so as the head of his wife. This is how God designed marriage. He has created us as male and female in such a way as to ensure that men will always be dominant in marriage. If the husband is godly, then that dominance will not be harsh; it will be characterized by the same self-sacrificial love demonstrated by our Lord-Dominus-at the cross. If a husband tries to run away from his headship, that abdication will dominate the home. If he catches a plane to the other side of the country, and stays there, he will dominate in and by his absence. How many children have grown up in a home dominated by the empty chair at the table? If the marriage is one in which the wife 'wears the pants,' the wimpiness of the husband is the most obvious thing about the marriage, creating a miserable marriage and home. His abdication dominates (24-25).

B. Confidence and Humility

C. Application

1. Decision-making

- a. Are you willing to make hard decisions because of their benefit to the family?
- b. Do you tend to abdicate decisions to your wife? Do you tend to be overbearing in asserting your will (your preferences)?
- c. Do you make thoughtful decisions based on good information? Are your decisions impulsive and unsound in their logic? Are your decisions too slow in coming because you fear the consequences of them?
- d. Are you prayerful in how you make your decisions? Do you take advantage of the wisdom of the men in your life? Do you consult the bible before making a decision?

2. Spiritual Oversight

- a. Are you able to speak to your wife about her sin? Do you fear her response to your leadership?

3. Setting the Course

- a. Do you periodically reflect on where the marriage and your family are so that you can make necessary changes for their well-being? Do you fall into micro-managing everyone's life, so that they are resistant to your leadership? Of course, we can have good intentions and desires, but if we are not careful then we are simply micro-managers.

IV. Eph 5:25-27: MALE HEADSHIP EXERCISES PURPOSEFUL LOVE

A. Explanation and Exegesis

"How are husbands to love their wives? How much love is required of the man? Paul says like Christ loves the church. How much does Christ love his church? Notice that Paul adds that Christ 'gave Himself up for her.' The kind of love Christ has for the church is self-sacrificial love. Consider the substance of Christ's sacrifice for the church. He gave everything he had, including his life, for his bride. He withheld nothing. How much patience does he have with his church? How often must he endure loss of affection and rebellion? Is there any problem that a man could possibly have with his wife that Christ hasn't had with the church? Yet he continues to love her. What if the wife refuses to be submissive, must the husband still love his wife? Does Christ still love the church? Again, if one partner refuses to obey his responsibilities and violates his role, that does not relieve the other person from responsibility. God does not say, 'Wives, be submissive to your husbands when they are loving,' or 'Husbands, love your wives when they are submissive.' Two wrongs still don't add up to a right. Retaliation brings no honor to Christ" (Sproul, The Intimate Marriage, 53-54).

"A brown plaster plaque hangs in our home and represents to my wife and me the importance of this sacrificial love. The plaque was an inexpensive wedding present and we received it with little interest, not realizing that we would later come to treasure it....What has made us keep that inexpensive wedding gift throughout two decades of marriage is not the beauty of its colors or design (it's just a dull brown, round plaque). We have kept it because of the significance of its words: 'Home: where each lives for the other, and all live for God.'" These simple words remind us that our happiness comes from giving ourselves to each other while being obedient to God" (Chapell, Each for the Other, 11).

B. Confidence and Humility

C. Application Questions

1. Are we allowing our wives time to seek the Lord and grow in their walk with him?
2. Are we making time to allow our wives relationships that benefit them spiritually?
3. Are we doing what is necessary so that home group has a priority in our family, and in our marriage?
4. Do we know what our wife is doing right now in her devotions? Do we know why she is doing this?
5. Part of the loving sacrifice of our wives includes self-control with our lust and affections. Have I let my affections drift from my wife? Have I let them drift to another person or hobby or occupation? Am I sacrificing for her by preserving my sexual desires for her only?

V. MALE HEADSHIP AND THE OBSTACLES THAT WE FACE

A. From Within

1. Selfishness/Laziness
2. Pride/Inability to receive correction

B. From Without

1. Romance
2. Kids
3. Money
4. Job
5. Spiritual Growth
6. Hobbies
7. In-laws
8. Conflicts
9. Lust/Sexual Sin

VI. MALE HEADSHIP AND THE GOSPEL

A. Jesus the Perfect Husband

1. Eph 5:25f. Gave himself to present her without blemish
2. It is the blood of Christ that gives us the power to change and the hope for change.

3. As Paul Tripp says: "The gospel allows us to look back in rest and look forward in hope" (Age of Opportunity, 73).

B. God the giver of grace

1. Jam 4:6-10. Grace to the humble, correction to the proud
2. Jam 1:5. He who lacks grace, let him ask for more grace.

VII. MALE HEADSHIP AND A PATH TOWARD CHANGE

A. A matter of direction, not perfection

B. Avoid the precipices of pride

1. Fatalistic despair – denies the power of the gospel, denies your history
2. Proud Naivety – denies the reality of the gospel, that a cross was necessary to pay for your sins; at times this is delusional and not because of actual opinion of your wife

C. Further Resources

1. The Four Pillars of a Man by Stu Webber
2. Sex, Romance, and the Glory of God by CJ Mahaney
3. "When Sinners Say I Do," teaching by Dave Harvey (available at http://www.sovereigngrace.com/pdf/teaching/when_sinners_say_i_do.pdf)
4. Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood, eds., John Piper and Wayne Grudem
5. The Exemplary Husband by Stuart Scott
6. The Council for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood, www.CBMW.org

D. Discussion Questions

1. For Yourself
 - a. What does a godly home and marriage look like?
 - b. What are the things that I am doing that I either creating this or preventing this?
 - c. What changes do I need to make personally to see that this happens?
 - d. What changes do I need to make to help my marriage develop and flourish?
 - e. Do I tend to romance my wife or impose myself on her?

- f. Do I spend time talking with my wife daily, or do I let the details of life consume our discussions?
 - g. Is my wife growing spiritually? Does my example encourage her or tempt her?
 - h. Do I have sufficient knowledge of situations and issues to make good decisions in our home?
 - i. Am I fearing my wife's disapproval and so not speaking into her life or making a decision that needs to be made?
 - j. Have I misused my leadership over the years and so exasperated my wife?
 - k. Do my spiritual disciplines allow me to grow so that I can then lead our family in spiritual issues without being a hypocrite? I.e., could I teach my wife and kids that, "God is the most important person, cause, and aspect of my life and should be for all of us"?
 - l. Do I regularly ask for help from brothers I can trust?
 - m. Do others know about the state of my marriage or do I keep this private?
 - n. Do I share major incidents and conflicts with others so that I can better serve my wife? (we share to grow not to gossip).
2. For Your Spouse
- a. Is there anything that I could do better as a husband?
 - b. What could I do to better show that I love you?
 - c. Do you feel secure in our marriage?
 - d. Do you feel loved in our marriage?
 - e. Do you feel stifled in our marriage?
 - f. How could I help you to grow spiritually?
3. For Your Brothers in the Lord
- a. Are there areas where you have observed deficiencies in my marriage or leading my family?
 - b. Share the 2-3 specific changes that you want to make in your marriage with these men and report to them during the next several weeks or months.