

Unit 2



Headship and Submission

How God Designed Marriage

TRUTH

by memory (option a) – Ephesians 5:24-25 (ESV)

"Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands.

²⁵Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her."

in Bible –

Last week you learned that God designed men and women to have equal value before Him, but function differently in relationship to each other. Eve was designed to correspond to Adam in such a way that they would enjoy harmony with one another as they assumed the roles of leader and helper.

This week you'll explore the implications this design pattern has for the specific roles men and women were designed to assume in marriage. And you'll see how sin and redemption have affected marriage relationships. If you wish, you can use the **in Bible** passages for your personal worship this week.

Don't forget the usefulness of the **PRAISE** model for personal worship and the **5 Targets of Prayer**.

Pray First – **Read** the text – **Ask** Questions – **Interpret** in Context – **Summarize** applications – **Engage** with God

5 Targets of Prayer: God's Honor, God's Kingdom, God's Provision, God's Forgiveness, God's Power.

Genesis 2:15-24 – Last week you read this passage observing how God had created men and women to be unique. Review the passage now looking for the complementary roles that the first man and woman were designed to fill in their relationship.

What need did God intend to meet by creating the woman?

How did God introduce the man and woman to one another?

How did the man respond to the woman when he met her?

Based on this passage, and assuming that Adam and Eve never sinned but lived together as designed in perfect harmony, describe how you think they would relate to one another.

Genesis 3:16 – Tragically, Adam and Eve did sin; this verse documents how their relationship would be affected by sin. Some people have interpreted the word "*desire*" here to mean love or devotion. But, keep in mind that this verse is God's curse, not a romantic commentary. To help you interpret the word "*desire*" and the second half of this verse, compare it with Genesis 4:7 which uses the same word (and an almost identical phrase) to record God's warning to Cain.

How did sin complicate the original, perfect marriage?

T

E

A

M

S

Ephesians 5:17-33; Colossians 3:15-19 – These two Pauline passages deal with much of the same teaching about husbands’ and wives’ roles and responsibilities in marriage. Note that Paul sets the discussion of marital roles in the context of spiritual living in both passages.

Look at Ephesians 5:18-21 and Colossians 3:16-17. What parallels (similarities) can you find?

T

Now look at the complete passages. How does Paul connect marital roles with spiritual living?

E

What is the ultimate reason Paul gives for his teaching on marital roles? How does this reason affect your view of his teaching?

A

1 Corinthians 11:3 – There has been much debate about what Paul means when he uses the word head in Ephesians 5:23, "*For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church...*" This word carries a wide range of possible meanings including: *the head of the body, intellect, fountainhead, spring, source, master, leader and authority*. This verse from 1 Corinthians can help shed light on what Paul means when he says that a husband is the head of his wife.

M

What does Paul mean by "*head*" in this verse? How does this help you understand what Paul means when He says that a husband is the head of his wife? [Hint: Since Paul uses "*head*" the same way in three similar phrases, he must have the same meaning in mind in all three phrases. Try substituting "*head*" with one of the possible meanings listed above in all three phrases.]

S

If Christ is the fully divine, second person of the Trinity, then why does this verse say that God is His head? Isn't that a contradiction? [Hint: Compare this verse with Philippians 2:6-9.]

Now apply what you wrote above to men's and women's roles in marriage. How can a woman be equal to her husband if she submits to him as her authority?

1 Peter 2:13-3:7 – Peter's teaching about marriage in this passage is much the same as Paul's, connecting his teaching about marital roles with spiritual living. Peter is teaching his readers to live as those who are free, and yet offer themselves in voluntary submission to others for the Lord's sake. He begins with general comments about this topic in verses 2:13-17. Then he provides specific examples in relation to servants (2:18-25), wives (3:1-6) and husbands (3:7).

Summarize Peter's teaching on marital roles.

Would Peter allow a husband to exploit his wife's role in marriage? Explain.

T
E
A
M
S

to summarize -

How are you doing – still mulling over last week’s teaching? Granted, the teaching about God’s design of men and women from last week is unpopular, but please, don’t reject it just because you find it objectionable, or because some have distorted Scripture for their own advantage. Only reject it if you find that it isn’t taught by God in Scripture.

As you remember, last week’s teaching explained that God established a pattern for all marriage relationships when He designed the first man and woman to be completely equal in their inherent value before Him, but unique in the way they function in their relationship with one another. The word that describes this equality and uniqueness is *correspondence*. That is, God purposely designed the man and woman with complementary features that would define the roles they assumed in their relationship. Broadly speaking, God designed the man and the woman to correspond to one another as leader and follower. He established this pattern to bring mutual blessing to husbands and wives and as you shall see, to illustrate the proper relationship between the Divine and the human.

Now as mentioned last week, the ideal of male leadership and female help/support is taught in the New Testament using the role terminology of *headship* and *submission*. But before we grapple with what these terms mean, it would be wise to go back to Genesis again to examine how God’s design for marriage was corrupted by sin. Then we can turn to the New Testament to see how redemption impacts the marriage relationship.

Genesis 2 tells us exactly how God intended marriage relationships to function. The narrative reveals that the solitary life of the one man was something God considered "*not good*" (2:18). So, why did God create this "*not good*" situation by not creating the man and the woman at the same moment and in the same way? It seems that He had several reasons. First, He wanted to impress the man with his need for the woman. Without her, he could never fulfill his divine commission to rule over the earth. Secondly, He demonstrated that the woman was to be a most cherished gift from God to the man. This can be seen by the fact that God presented the woman to the man to be named by him and received as a gift (2:22-23), a gift which the man received enthusiastically. And thirdly, by creating the woman after the man, from the man’s own body (2:21), and presenting her to the man, God gave them both a graphic life-lesson of how they were to relate to one another. The order of their creation showed that Adam was to lead Eve in pursuit of God’s commission, and Eve was to help Adam in that pursuit. Prior to their sin, there was perfect harmony in this arrangement: Eve was exactly the helper Adam needed, and Adam was exactly the leader Eve was made to follow. Thus, the "*not good*" situation was addressed by the creation of the woman. With the addition of Eve, creation was now "*very good*" (1:30).

But, it didn't last. Just as sin had corrupted their world and their being, it also corrupted their harmony. God said to the woman, "*Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you.*" (Genesis 3:16). These words describe the distrust, inequity and power play that have plagued marriages since the Fall. The woman's "*desire*" described here is not feminine romantic affection, but a conniving desire to control or manipulate the man. And the man's "*rule*" would not be the servant leadership taught by Jesus and the Apostles, but an oppressive domination of the woman, often reducing her to the status of property scarcely ranking above livestock. This verse foretells, and history confirms, that God's intention of righteous male leadership would tend to devolve into sinful tyranny over women; while God's intention of righteous female partnership would devolve into a sinful craving to control men wherever an advantage can be gained.

This is a deplorable situation, and though it arises from God's just punishment for sin, He takes no pleasure in the dysfunction of marriage. In fact, He forbids both male exploitation of women (1 Peter 3:7) and female rejection of a husband's leadership within marriage (1 Peter 3:1). Nevertheless, sin-motivated marital dysfunction repeats itself throughout history in every culture. This does not mean that there are not happy exceptions where the curse seems to have less power. But no marriage is totally free from the impact of Genesis 3:16. And yet, there is one power that has the capability to restore much of the functional order and harmony God originally designed into marriage. It is the power of the gospel. In cultures where the gospel has little influence, women are often demeaned and oppressed. But wherever the gospel goes, women tend to be elevated to their proper place as men are taught to love, honor and cherish their wives as equal partners. Wherever the influence of the gospel is diminished, the exploitation and abuse of women rises.

Now, let's turn to the Apostles' teaching of male *headship* and female *submission* in marriage. (Keep in mind that Scripture only addresses male and female roles in the contexts of marriage and the Church, not to the realms of politics and business.) The relevant passages read:

"Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. ²³For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church...²⁵Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her..."(Ephesians 5:22-23, 25).

"Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. ¹⁹Husbands, love your wives, and do not be harsh with them."(Colossians 3:18-19).

"Likewise, wives, be subject to your own husbands...⁷Likewise, husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way..."(1 Peter 3:1,7).

Well then, what did Paul and Peter mean by headship and submission? The verses themselves help us to understand that a wife's submission to her husband includes the ideas of respect and obedience to an authority *as to the Lord*, or *as is fitting in the Lord*. It is important to note that this submission is

T
E
A
M
S

voluntary and offered gladly, not coerced. So, just as a woman gladly submits to her Lord Jesus, she should just as willingly submit to her husband. A husband's headship of his wife includes the ideas of authority and responsibility in the same way that Christ has authority over, and responsibility for, His church. Paul's use of the word *head* in 1 Corinthians 11:3 confirms this interpretation. Of the range of possible meanings for *head* including *intellect, fountainhead, spring, source and authority*, only *authority* makes sense of the verse. By substituting the word *head* with *authority*, you can clearly understand Paul's meaning: "*But I want you to understand that the authority of every man is Christ, the authority of a wife is her husband, and the authority of Christ is God.*" Remember that Christ voluntarily submitted Himself to the authority (headship) of God when He was incarnate, and yet He was and is equal to His Father. And don't forget that as a reward for His submission, He was highly exalted (see Philippians 2:6-9). In the same way, wives are taught to voluntarily submit to their husbands as one equal to another. Husbands are taught not to consider their wives as inferiors, but as equal partners worthy of high honor.

Notice that the passages quoted above reflect the creation pattern of leader and helper, and are a departure from the sinful pattern of rule and desire recorded in Genesis 3:16. Therefore, you shouldn't misread the Apostles' teaching (as many Christians have) as: "Husband, you're in charge; wife, do what he says." No, the Apostles knew what marriage was meant to be in creation, and what it could be in redemption. Just as the gospel promised the restoration of abundant life for individuals, it also offered a new hope for married couples through the indwelling power of God's Spirit. Interestingly, the Apostles set their teaching on marital roles in the context of instructions for Spirit-filled living. You may have noticed these parallels in Ephesians and Colossians that precede Paul's teaching on marital roles and responsibilities:

Ephesians 5:18-21	Colossians 3:16-17
Be filled with the Spirit...	Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly...
...addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs...	...teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom...
...singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart...	...singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs...
...giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father...	...with thankfulness in your hearts to God.

This would indicate that responding appropriately to the teaching on marital roles is a vital part of one's spiritual journey with Christ. This is because headship and submission in marriage functions as an illustration of Christ's relationship with His church. God intended marriage to be a living example of how Christ leads His Church with loving authority and how the Church receives blessing and honor by submitting to Him.

Now, let's make this discussion a bit more practical. What should happen in a marriage if the husband and wife disagree about a decision that has to be made? It could be a major decision about a job or home, or a more typical decision about disciplining a child or where to go on vacation. Maybe they've discussed the options, prayed, read Scripture, sought counsel and still can't come to an agreement or compromise. For many men the answer is, "I'm the man of the house and you'll do what I say!" But, how is this attitude one of biblical love and honor for one's wife? For many women the answer is, "If I don't get my way, I'll make his life miserable!" But, how does this reflect an attitude of biblical respect and submission? Where is the harmony of headship and submission in these typical examples? Isn't one's spouse an equal who is worthy of more thoughtful consideration than this?

Let's use a baseball analogy to illustrate a more biblical approach. A husband and wife are a team of two. The husband is the player/coach. His wife is his partner player. In order to win they must trust each other, play to their unique strengths, and be aware of their weaknesses. Each gets an opportunity to bat. But in specific situations when they disagree about who should be up to bat, the player/coach is responsible to make the decision. He must assess the situation and the strengths and weaknesses of his team, and then decide who steps up to the plate. Often a wise player/coach will put his partner up to bat, trusting her strengths, even when he thinks she may be making a bad call. If the decision turns out well, he gives her the credit; but if she strikes out, he takes the blame. Why? – Because it was *his* decision. It was his responsibility to make the best call whether he put his partner up to the plate or himself. And regardless of who strikes out or hits a grand slam, they suffer or rejoice together, because they're on the same team.

This analogy illustrates that biblical headship and submission, empowered by Spirit-filled living, is how husbands and wives can function as truly equal, corresponding partners – one who lovingly leads, and one who willingly follows. Embracing your God-given role in marriage is a significant step toward realizing the mutual benefit, harmony and fulfillment that was lost in Genesis 3:16.

online –

Remember to visit www.perimeter.org/discipleshipcurriculum for this week's downloadable audio, video, or print resources.

T
E
A
M
S

EQUIPPING

Singles and marrieds, briefly describe your attitude toward this teaching on marital roles.

If you are married, how do you treat your spouse? Is your attitude and treatment of your spouse more like the curse in Genesis 3:16, or is it more of an example of the Spirit-filled life described in Ephesians 5:18-21 and Colossians 3:16-17? Explain how and why.

Whether you are single or married, try to apply the teaching of headship and submission to a specific situation in your life – a situation in your own marriage, or in your parents' marriage. How could the right application of this teaching have improved the situation and/or the marriage relationship?

How do you think modeling the biblical roles of headship and submission in marriage affects children who observe it in their parents? How may children be affected if their parents don't model it?

T
E
A
M
S

