

# The Biblical View of Headship - Part 4a - Headship in Marriage: The Role of the Husband

## Memory verse

1 Corinthians 11:3 NKJV

*But I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ, the head of woman is man, and the head of Christ is God.*

“Head” in this context, means; the leader, the chief, the one in charge, or the top person. Headship has everything to do with authority or rank and its corresponding role. It doesn’t have anything to do with value or worth or essence or being. It’s like the different ranks in the army—the person with the lower rank takes orders from the person with the higher rank, however they all work together towards the same goal or purpose.

Why is headship important?

*Where there is recognition of, and submission to, these roles, there is order, community, love, relationship, and harmony. We see this in the way Jesus related to the Father.*

## Revision—Important principles regarding submission as “unto the Lord”

- Submission requires *humility*: Humility means thinking about the other person and not myself (not self-focused), and esteeming the other as being more important than myself (see Philippians 2:3).
- Submission also requires *meekness*: meekness is “power under control”—I glorify God by using the authority, gifts, talents, opportunities, and resources that God has given me to benefit others and not for my own gain or benefit.
- Submission is *as easy as one two three*. Since (1.) God loves me and (2.) God is in control of everything, then (3.) Instead of being bitter and angry, I can be thankful in every situation because I know that whatever happens to me is a part of God’s *good* plan for me. “*Giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, submitting to one another in the fear of God.*” (Ephesians 5:20-21)
- Submission to anyone (aside from God) is always “as unto the Lord” (Ephesians 5:22). This means that the wife’s motive for submitting to her husband is *to please God*, not her husband, and accordingly she will never go against the known will of God for her. Within these moral boundaries, the godly wife will willingly and fearlessly submit to her own husband because her hope and trust are in God, not her husband (see 1 Peter 3:1-6). This also applies to all other areas of submission, e.g. children to parents, slaves to masters, citizens to the government etc.
- The ability or power to willingly submit to others “as unto the Lord” comes from first submitting to and being in in a close and intimate love relationship with God; this means that I choose to make God the most important part of my life—God becomes my first love and the source of my strength. “*They first gave themselves to the Lord, and then to us by the will of God.*” (2 Corinthians 8:5b NKJV)
- *If* I first give myself to God, seeking and finding my satisfaction and fulfilment in my love relationship with God, *then* I will be able to submit to the other person and not demand things from them: instead of *expectation*, there will be *liberation*—the other person is free to be themselves in the marriage/friendship.

- *When we are submitted to God* (resting in God, filled with the Spirit), *we are also empowered by God*: The Holy Spirit gives us the power to put the desires of our new nature (light and life) into effect—we are no longer living by human effort which resulted us living according to the desires of our old sinful nature (darkness and death).

**“So I say, let the Holy Spirit guide your lives. Then you won’t be doing what your sinful nature craves.”** <sup>17</sup> *The sinful nature wants to do evil, which is just the opposite of what the Spirit wants. And the Spirit gives us desires that are the opposite of what the sinful nature desires. These two forces are constantly fighting each other, so you are not free to carry out your good intentions.* <sup>18</sup> *But when you are directed by the Spirit, you are not under obligation to the law of Moses [no longer operating by human effort, and therefore no longer under the control of my sinful nature].”* (Galatians 5:16-18 NLT)

I must understand that that victory is not automatic. I must first die to self before I can live for God—this is the hard part, but even though it’s my choice, I still do it by God’s power. *“Therefore, dear brothers and sisters, you have no obligation to do what your sinful nature urges you to do.* <sup>13</sup> *For if you live by its dictates, you will die. But if through the power of the Spirit you put to death the deeds of your sinful nature, you will live.”* (Romans 8:12-13 NLT paraphrase)

### ***A practical definition of submission***

To submit means that:

- You recognise someone has legitimate authority over you.
- You recognise that there is an order of authority, and that you are part of a unit, a team.
- You as an individual are not more important than the working of the unit or the team—always *sub* to the *mission* (This applies to both the husband and wife, who should both be working, according to their respective roles, to glorify God through their marriage).

### **Outline—The role of the husband, based on Ephesians 5:25-33**

Today we learn about what it means for the husband to love his wife. We will cover the main points as listed:

1. Marriage as an illustration of Christ’s special relationship to His bride, the Church (Ephesians 5:25-33)
2. The husband’s love is a sacrificial love (Ephesians 5:25)
3. The husband’s love is an “*agape*”, unconditional, self-denying love (Ephesians 5:25)
4. The high cost of *agape* love
5. The Husband as the servant leader—Godly headship (authority) vs worldly headship
6. Common errors concerning the husband’s headship role

We just looked at what it means for the wife to submit to the husband. Today we look at what it means for the husband to love his wife, and next time the other roles and attributes of a godly husband.

My wife is very glad that all she has to do is submit, because it means that she is not responsible for how the family functions—I am. The husband must take full responsibility for his choices and how they effect the family, good or bad, because he is their leader. Again, husbands are fully accountable to God Himself for how they lead their families, both practically and spiritually—the buck stops with us. Just as for the wife, being a husband is a high and difficult calling, and should never be taken lightly.

## **1. Marriage as an illustration of Christ's special relationship to His bride, the church**

As we read the section about husbands in Ephesians, notice how it mirrors the relationship that Christ has with the church, the bride of Christ.

Ephesians 5:25-33 NKJV

**Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church** and gave Himself for her, <sup>26</sup> that He might sanctify [set apart from the world] and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word [of God], <sup>27</sup> that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish. <sup>28</sup> **So [in the same way]** husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself. <sup>29</sup> For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, **just as the Lord does the church.** <sup>30</sup> For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones. <sup>31</sup> **“For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.”** <sup>32</sup> **This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church.** [*notice how Paul uses the marriage relationship to explain the relationship of the church to Christ*] <sup>33</sup> Nevertheless let each one of you in particular so love his own wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.

Ephesians 5:25-33 NLT paraphrase

**For husbands, this means love your wives, just as Christ loved the church.** He gave up his life for her <sup>26</sup> to make her holy and clean, washed by the cleansing of God's word. <sup>27</sup> He did this to present her to himself as a glorious church without a spot or wrinkle or any other blemish. Instead, she will be holy and without fault. <sup>28</sup> **In the same way,** husbands ought to love their wives as they love their own bodies. For a man who loves his wife actually shows love for himself. <sup>29</sup> No one hates his own body but feeds and cares for it, **just as Christ cares for the church.** <sup>30</sup> And we are members of his body. <sup>31</sup> As the Scriptures say, “A man leaves his father and mother and is joined to his wife, and the two are united into one.” <sup>32</sup> **This is a great mystery, but it is an illustration of the way Christ and the church are one.** <sup>33</sup> So again I say, each man must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.

Notice how Paul goes back and forth between talking about the relationship between Christ and His bride the church, and the husband and his bride (wife). Marriage is a picture or type of the church's relationship with God as the bride of Christ. This is important for two reasons.

Firstly, we see why marriage is so important to God. Marriage is God's way of communicating to an unbelieving world the kind of close, abiding, and intimate relationship that He longs to have with every person He created. God's plan is that the woman demonstrates the kind of submission that every believer must have toward Christ, and the husband demonstrates the kind of loving and sacrificial care that God has for those who choose to come back into relationship with Him.

When believers fail to trust and depend upon God, they will end up with a dysfunctional or broken marriage. This brings great shame and dishonour to God, and discourages unbelievers from seeking God—*“if this is what relationship with God is all about, if this is what I can expect to experience if I become a Christian, then I don’t want anything to do with God”*. Conversely, a godly, loving, close knit, and well ordered marriage will cause those on the outside to see the beautiful harmony and love present and desire a relationship with the God who is represented by this special relationship—The unbeliever will say to themselves, *“Wow, I want what they have”*.

As believers, we must take a stand for marriage. It is no surprise that Satan is doing all he can to destroy marriage—he is successfully destroying one of God’s main witnesses to His character and plan of salvation, and as a result we have a generation of youth who understand neither sacrificial love nor submission to authority, and have little or no knowledge of God. Satan has used pornography, alcohol, drugs, gender confusion, confusion or outright rejection of the roles in marriage, the redefining of marriage to be a commitment between any two or more people instead of one man and one woman for life, physical, sexual, and emotional abuse, and pure selfishness leading to a lack of commitment, to destroy marriage in our society. Unfortunately, much of the church has compromised with the world and is therefore, in effect, working with Satan to bring much shame and reproach upon God and His word.

The second reason why understanding that marriage is a picture or type of the church’s relationship with God as the bride of Christ, is so that husbands can learn what is required of them by studying how Christ cares for the church. What aspect or role of the husband’s headship is emphasised in these verses? Is it spiritual or physical?

## **2. The husband’s love is a sacrificial love (Ephesians 5:25)**

What does it mean for a husband to love his wife? We’ll take a journey through Ephesians 5:25-33 and find out what it means for a husband to love his wife.

### **Ephesians 5:25 NKJV**

**Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her**

How did Jesus love the church? Sacrificially—He willingly gave up His own life for His Bride, the Church.

***If he is to honour Christ, the Husband must love his wife sacrificially, meaning that he is willing to give everything up for her, following the example of Christ who willingly gave up everything for His bride, the Church.***

This defines how a godly husband loves his wife: he gives up what he wants, willingly sacrificing or going without what he enjoys and what is rightfully his for the benefit of his wife. Jesus modelled this when He literally gave up all His rights and even His own life for the sake of His bride, the church—there is no greater sacrifice than to give up your own life for someone else.

John 15:12-13 NLT paraphrase

This is my commandment: **Love each other in the same way I have loved you.**

<sup>13</sup> There is no greater love than to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.

1 John 3:16-18 NLT

**We know what real love is because Jesus gave up his life for us. So we also ought to give up our lives for our brothers and sisters.** <sup>17</sup> If someone has enough money to live well and sees a brother or sister in need but shows no compassion—how can God’s love be in that person?

<sup>18</sup> Dear children, let’s not merely say that we love each other; let us show the truth by our actions.

Ephesians 5:1-2 NKJV

Therefore be imitators of God as dear children. **2 And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us**, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma.

Before a Christian man marries a Christian woman, he must ask himself, “Am I willing to give up everything I have and go without for the sake of this lady—am I really willing to love her as Christ loves me?” If the answer is no, then he shouldn’t get married, because he will be a selfish husband and will bring shame and dishonour upon God and His church.

The man who marries a woman but doesn’t love her the way Christ loved the Church will end up a tyrannical dictator or no leader at all. Either way, instead of sacrificing himself for his wife, he will abuse the power of his authority or headship and end up sacrificing his wife for himself.

*“It is not naked power, it is not the power of a dictator or a little tyrant, it is not the idea of a man who arrogates to himself certain rights, and tramples upon his wife’s feelings and so on, and sits in the home as a dictator ... No husband is entitled to say that he is the head of the wife unless he loves his wife ... So the reign of the husband is to be a reign and a rule of love; it is a leadership of love.” (Lloyd-Jones)*

### **3. The husband’s love is an “agape”, unconditional, self-denying love (Ephesians 5:25)**

v 25 “husbands love [agape] your wives”

We’ve looked at the context of the verse, and it’s clear that the husband must love his wife sacrificially. However, the ancient Greek word used for *love* is “agape”, which also tells us a lot about how a husband is to love his wife. Let’s first look at the four different ancient Greek words that could have been used, that are all translated as “love”, so that we will understand the significance of why Paul used the Greek word “agape” here.

**1. Eros:** Eros was one word for love. It describe *erotic* love. It refers to love driven by natural or physical *desire* (*Outside of marriage this desire is called lust. Inside marriage it is the natural and healthy God given mutual physical attraction that the husband and wife have for each other*).

**2. Storge:** *Storge* is another Greek word for love. “It refers to family love, the kind of love there is between a parent and child or between family members in general. It is love driven by *blood*.” (David Guzik)

3. **Philia:** *Philia* is the third Greek word for love. “It speaks of a brotherly friendship and affection. It is the love of deep friendship and partnership. It might be described as the highest love of which man, without God’s help, is capable of. It is *fondness*, or love driven by *common interests and affection*.” (David Guzik)

4. **Agape:** *Agape* is the fourth Greek word for love. “*Eros*, *storge*, and *philia* each speak about love that is *felt*. These describe “instinctive” love, love that comes spontaneously from the heart. Paul *assumes* that *eros* (desire) and *phileo* (fondness) are present. Christians should not act as if these things do not matter in the marriage relationship. They do matter. But Paul’s real point is to address a higher kind of love, *agape* love. *Agape* describes a different kind of love. It is a love more of *decision* than of the *spontaneous heart*. It is as much a matter of the *mind* as the *heart*, because it chooses to love the undeserving.” (David Guzik)

“*Agape* has to do with the *mind*: it is not simply an emotion which rises unbidden in our hearts; it is a principle by which we deliberately live.” (Barclay)

“*Agape* really doesn’t have much to do with *feelings*—it has to do with *decisions*. ... It can be defined as a sacrificial, giving, absorbing, love. The word has *little to do with emotion*; it has much to do with *self-denial for the sake of another*.”

- It is a love that loves without changing.
- It is a self-giving love that gives without demanding or expecting repayment.
- It is love so great that it can be given to the unlovable or unappealing.
- It is love that loves even when it is rejected.
- *Agape* love gives and loves because it wants to; it does not demand or expect repayment from the love given. It gives because it loves, it does not love in order to receive.

We can read this passage and think that Paul is saying, “Husbands, be kind to your wives.” Or “husbands, be nice to your wives.” There is no doubt that for many marriages this would be a huge improvement. But that isn’t what Paul wrote about. What he really meant is, “Husbands, continually decide to practice self-denial for the sake of your wives.” (Adapted from David Guzik’s commentary—emphasis mine)

It should be clear from what we have learned so far that, just as it is humanly impossible for the wife to willingly submit to her husband “as unto the Lord” unless she is first submitted to and therefore led, filled, empowered, guided by, or walking in the Spirit, so it is humanly impossible for the husband to love his wife as Christ loved the Church. *This is so important for us to remember, because if we forget, we will find ourselves attempting to do what only God can do, and finish up completely frustrated and disillusioned.*

As we go forward, we will see the standard of love required of husbands for their wives only getting higher and higher, and we realise that this is so far beyond what our sinful human natures are capable of. However, don’t *despair* of any brokenness or dysfunction in your marriage, instead ask God to *repair* your marriage. Come humbly before God’s Throne of Grace where we will always find help in time of need. Cry out to your Daddy (Abba) Father and He will gladly equip and empower us to be able to obey Him.

Remember, God's commands are God's promises. If God commands wives to submit to their husbands as unto the Lord, and husbands to love their wives as Christ loved the church, then these commands are also God's glorious promises that He will empower and enable us to do exactly what He has asked us to do and so experience the blessedness of a godly and intimate marriage.

Ephesians 3:20-21 NKJV

Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, <sup>21</sup> to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

"It is possible that some husbands might say, 'How can I love such a wife as I have?' It might be a supposable case that some Christian was unequally yoked together with an unbeliever, and found himself for ever bound with a fetter to one possessed of a morose disposition, of a froward temper, of a bitter spirit. He might therefore say, 'Surely I am excused from loving in such a case as this. It cannot be expected that I should love that which is in itself so unlovely.' But mark, beloved, the wisdom of the apostle. He silences that excuse, which may possibly have occurred to his mind while writing the passage, by taking *the example of the Saviour, who loved, not because there was loveliness in his Church, but in order to make her lovely.*" (Spurgeon)

"I ask you to notice what is not always the case with regard to the husband and the wife, that *the Lord Jesus loves his church unselfishly*; that is to say, ... *He loves her not for what comes to him from her, or with her, but for what he is able to bestow upon her. His is the strongest love that ever was.*" (Spurgeon)

"Using the love of an ideal husband as a pattern, we could say that Jesus has a *constant* love for His people, an *enduring* love for His people, and a *hearty* love for His people." (David Guzik)

#### **4. The high cost of agape love**

Although *agape* love is based on my own decision or will (in contrast to being an emotional response like the other three types), it is still from the heart. It is never only a cold legalistic choice; "she's my wife so I'd better give up what I want so she can get what she wants... selfish, ungrateful wife!"—this is not love at all, and that kind of harsh legalistic attitude will not glorify God—in fact both God the wife would rather you didn't even bother making the sacrifice for her, because it wasn't motivated by genuine care and concern (*agape* love) for her.

What will happen as I choose with my mind to love my wife from my heart is twofold. Firstly, although I may not feel anything at first, the emotion will follow the action. It's the same as our relationship with God. When we die to self and give something up for God we don't instantly get the warm fuzzies—instead, what we feel initially is the lagging desire for that thing that we have left behind. However, our love for God will grow as we continue to submit to God, and we will eventually experience the emotions that naturally result from an intimate relationship with God. The danger is that we will stop loving our wives or go back to that thing that we gave up for Christ because we just don't *feel* anything at the time. So it's not that agape love has no feelings, it just that it's not based on feelings. Again, the emotions will eventually follow the actions or choices.

Secondly, choosing to love without expecting to receive anything in return leaves us vulnerable. We will be hurt. It costs to love. Paul experienced this as he continued to *agape* love the church at Corinth.

2 Corinthians 12:14-15 NLT paraphrase

Now I am coming to you for the third time, and I will not be a burden to you. I don't want what you have—I want you. ... <sup>15</sup> **I will gladly [continue to] spend myself and all I have for you, even though it seems that the more I love you, the less you love me.**

This rejection may not make sense, but it happens whenever the other person has a hard heart—which can be quite often. I think about how many times I've rejected Christ's love, even as a believer, refusing to submit to Him and abide in His love, and going my own way instead. *If we are to love as Christ loved, then we must be ready and willing to make ourselves vulnerable, to remain soft, and like Christ, continue to love the other person, even if they don't return our love.*

As an example, try to imagine how hard it is for God to continue to convict unbelievers of their sin and draw them to Himself while they continually reject Him—it's just as well that His love has no limits. The main thing to remember here is what we started with—*agape* love is not humanly possible—so don't try to do by human effort what can only be done by the power of the Spirit.

### **Application: Expect to be let down**

No wife or friend or child or brother or sister or parent is perfect. Again this is another reminder of just how important it is for us all to make Christ our first love, and not another person. If Christ is my Rock, then even if others I love let me down, I will remain standing, safe and secure in my love relationship with Christ. However, if I have neglected my relationship with God, and have begun to depend on someone else to give me the love I need, then when that person lets me down, I will be shaken and broken. *"On Christ the solid rock I stand, all other ground is sinking sand. All other ground is sinking sand."* (lyrics from the song: *My hope is built on nothing less*)

## **5. The husband as the servant leader—Godly headship (authority) vs worldly headship**

The difference between godly headship (authority) and worldly headship is the presence or absence of *agape* love. *Agape* love causes us to have a servant's heart, to want to do what is best for the other person, to have a genuine care and concern for the other person, in other words to be humble and meek. This is what Jesus did because of His *agape* love for us and submission to the Father:

Philippians 2:5-8

Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of **no reputation**, taking **the form of a bondservant**, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, **He humbled Himself** and **became obedient** to the point of death, even the death of the cross



*Agape* love is the difference between a husband expressing his authority in a strong yet gentle way, versus being authoritarian (an oppressive dictatorial rule). Jesus's kingdom is an upside down kingdom. Everything is backwards and opposite to the world's way of thinking.

Acts 17:6-7 NKJV

But when they did not find [Paul and Silas], they dragged Jason and some brethren to the rulers of the city, crying out, **“These who have turned the world upside down have come here too.** <sup>7</sup> Jason has harboured them, and these are all acting **contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying there is another king—Jesus.**”

Believers need to let the world know that they serve a different king, and our King has different rules and values.

Mark 10:42-45 NKJV

But Jesus called them to Himself and said to them, “You know that those who are considered rulers over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. <sup>43</sup> **Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant.** <sup>44</sup> **And whoever of you desires to be first shall be slave of all.** <sup>45</sup> For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.”

Remember how the wife needs to be humble and meek in order to submit to her husband. Well, the same applies to the husband. The godly husband must be humble and meek if he is going to be a servant leader to his wife. The *humble* husband will not be thinking of himself, but rather thinking of his wife, unselfishly esteeming her to be more important than himself. This will result in him using his headship (authority) to benefit his wife and not himself—he will be a godly servant leader for his wife, and not a prideful, worldly, selfish, tyrannical dictator.

The godly husband will also be *meek*—just as the godly wife is first submissive to God in her role as her husband's helper, so the godly husband will submit his headship (authority) role to God. This means that his headship (authority) will be under God's control, resulting in him being a strong yet gentle and kind leader as he lovingly exercises his authority over his wife. Under God's direction and guidance, he will gently lead or shepherd his wife in the path that is best for her.

## **6. Common errors concerning the husband's headship role**

There are two extremes or errors in many Christian marriages today. Firstly, and quite commonly, the husband drops the ball, takes no responsibility, and doesn't lead at all. Many churches teach that there is no difference between the roles of men and women in the church, allowing female pastors and elders. This rejection of God's order of authority also bleeds over to the family—it's inevitable. The result is that there are multitudes of churches that are full of dysfunctional families, with the wife trained to not submit to her husband, and the husband not taught to lead. Marriage only works one way, and that's God's way—man is the head of the woman, meaning that the husband is the head of his own wife.

The second extreme is that the husband becomes God in his own eyes, becoming proud and refusing to submit to God. As a result he abuses the headship (authority) that God gave him over his wife, and living according to the desires of his sinful nature, he uses his headship for his own personal benefit or gain. Again, this is commonly taught in some churches. Neither is better or worse than the other. Both will result in dysfunctional families with insecure wives and children.

It will become increasingly hard for those practicing biblical marriage. The non-leader husbands, and especially their non-submissive wives will criticise the godly husband saying, “Who do you think you are, thinking you have authority over your wife?” On the other hand, the legalistic and authoritarian husbands will criticise the godly husband saying something like, “Why are you so soft, you’re the man, you tell the wife and kids what to do.” But remember these words:

1 Peter 4:4-5 NLT paraphrase

Of course, your former friends are surprised when you no longer plunge into the flood of wild and destructive things they do. So they slander you. <sup>5</sup> But remember that they will have to face God, who stands ready to judge everyone, both the living and the dead.

Sadly, the greatest opposition to living a godly marriage will often come from the church, from fellow believers. It’s not going to be easy. The majority of the church is completely worldly, especially when it comes to God’s order of headship and the sanctity of marriage. Too many Christians today don’t know what the Bible says about God’s plan for marriage, and as a result are criticising God’s design for marriage out of ignorance or they simply don’t support marriage.

## **Summary and conclusion**

1. Marriage is an illustration of Christ’s special relationship to His bride, the Church (Ephesians 5:25-33)
2. The husband’s love is a sacrificial love—he will give himself for his wife
3. The husband’s love is an “*agape*”, unconditional, self-denying love (Ephesians 5:25)
4. There is a high cost to loving others with an *agape* love
5. The Husband is a servant leader
6. The role of the godly husband will be misunderstood by the majority of the church and the world.