

5th Sketches on headship & submission within the coexistence of mutuality and headship  
(2-28-10 continued)

Introduction

The joint principles of headship *and* mutuality constitute a dynamic relationship in marriage that is complimentary and not egalitarian in spirit. Seeking to uphold these principles with balance, we must maintain close touch with a cluster of relevant gospel truths, especially those that define spiritual renewal and practical righteousness. Therefore, in the big picture, we need to bring the following things together: support for headship, the spirit of wife submission, support for the mutuality of submission in marriage, and the spirit of husband submission. The most debatable point is the mutuality principle along with the spirit of submission that it implies for husbands. This mutuality principle is the core interest of this study. Thus, we will only give a sketch of the support of headship and the spirit of submission for wives.

1A. Support for headship and the corollary of submission

Headship in marriage means that the husband is a higher authority than the wife on a par with how both are higher authorities than their children. Accordingly, it implies helper-ship by submission.

The support is especially from the book of Ephesians (the controlling context of 5.21)

1) The word submit has the usual meaning of subordination to a higher authority. Submission to the husband is a fundamental duty of the wife clearly but indirectly from Eph 5.22 (based on 5.21), from 5.24b (based on 5.24a), and directly from Col 3.18 (wives, submit to your husbands) and 1 Pet 3.1 (wives, be subject to your...husbands, and 3.3: "holy women [showed it]...by submitting to their husbands").

2) The clear context of authority structures (Eph. 5.22-33) directs us in thought to the core principle of the 5<sup>th</sup> commandment, the giving of due honor to those who have roles that are "above" us (wives to husbands, parents to children, slaves/employees to masters/employers).

3) The command to wives to "submit *in everything* to their husbands" (Eph 5.24) emphasizes the husband's headship by its comprehensiveness (literally, "in all"). Although "all" is not absolute (it is not all without exception) because no superior can require sin from an inferior (we must obey God rather than man, Acts 5.29), the comprehensive "in all things" shows that in general (as the working principle, as the norm), the wife has the obligation to follow the husband's leading, which is the exercise of headship.

4) That headship entails submission is implicit in the parallel relation of the church to Christ

God put all things under the feet of Jesus and gave Him as head over all things to the church (Eph 1.22). A similar relationship of being over (for the husband) and under (for the wife) is indicated in how Paul roots the wife's submission in the church's submission to Christ: **as the church is subject to Christ, so also the wives ought to be to their husbands in all things** (Eph 5.24, NAU). 1 Cor 11.3 confirms this explicitly and powerfully: **But I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ, the head of a wife is her husband, and the head of Christ is God.**

2A. Spirit of Submission of wives

A dominating wife says, "He may be the head, okay, but I am the neck that turns him as I will." That is not quite the spirit of wife's godly submission; instead, if she claims to be the neck, it not for control but for support in the role of helper-ship in relation to headship; especially to help him be her spiritual leader. The key for both husband and wife is to look to Christ and follow His example. Husband, believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and follow His example of headship. Wife, trust in the risen Savior and follow His example of submission. This is the key to a loving marriage that makes praxis evangelical and thereby glorifies God.

Next: Evaluation of the rejection of mutual submission in 5.21 (Grudem/Piper) [Discussion date: 3-7-10]