

UNDERSTANDING THE BIBLICAL PRINCIPLE OF HEADSHIP

The Scriptures often refer to God as our helper. So if God sees being a helper in a positive way, why should we interpret it as demeaning? The progressive order of creation implies that the best was left till last. The woman being the last thing God created suggests that women are actually the pinnacle of His creation. From the very beginning the woman was created as man's helper. Traditionally the husband has accepted the responsibility of being the provider and protector of his family and leading by example, while the wife has been his back-up, confidant, support, nurturer and homemaker. However popular culture seems determined to distort this distinction made in Genesis 2:18. ***Then the Lord God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him".*** Until we understand that headship is not about domination or a chain of command, but built on love and respect, we will never comprehend God's intent in providing a structured order of responsibilities.

The argument in favour of the ordination of women revolves around what is perceived to be equality for and non-discrimination against women, which in itself is commendable. However it is based on human ideals. Whereas the argument for a male only pastorate; is viewed as obedience and faithfulness to the Word of God and a command of the Lord. Unless we recognize the ordered structure of responsibilities in both family and the church, as God-given with the authority of Scripture, we are at the mercy of human reason and remain blinded by it.

The two principles at the heart of this debate are these; firstly, the formal principle of the Reformation and therefore the Lutheran Church is '**sola Scriptura**'. In other words, our submission to the authority of God's Holy Word alone and none other, albeit a papacy, tradition, human reason or cultural changes of standards, practices or attitudes. Secondly, the biblical principle of '**Headship**', or to put it another way, God's appointed order of responsibilities clearly and repeatedly spelled out in the Scriptures.

God's design is to protect us from ourselves. The richness of God's love is expressed in our family lives, and reinforced through His directive of headship. That is for husbands to love their wives and for wives to respect their husbands. Simple; too easy; so why do we struggle? Harmony is not so difficult when Christ is the central focal point in our lives and we wholeheartedly submit to the authority of the Word of God. ***And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth. John 1:14.*** So it is in Christ we find the willingness to love unconditionally, encouraging, supporting and respecting each other. When Christ is front and centre in our lives we are equipped to experience the joy of family relationships that God wishes and intends for us.

The Scriptures have spoken clearly regarding the respect, dignity and reverence the office of ministry so rightly deserves. It is properly and clearly protected as God intended by His command in the interests and for the wellbeing of His Church in I Corinthians 14:33b -38, and I Timothy 2:11 -14. If indeed we choose to ignore these God-given directives, the Church may still function, however it will fail to experience the fullness and richness intended when His appointed authority is recognized. God's relationship to His Church is as a loving father's relationship is with his children. So too is the relationship between the pastoral office and the congregation, conferred upon the pastor at his ordination, a role and office deserving of the respect afforded to loving fathers. Some influential philosophers tend to reduce all human relationships to questions of **power and rights** rather than **service and responsibilities**. Their vision becomes distorted because they fail to distinguish **power** from **authority**. By itself the word 'power' does not indicate whether it is obtained legitimately or illegitimately and exercised fairly or tyrannically. The word 'authority', on the other hand, carries no such negative overtones unless authority is abused and a person becomes authoritarian. In itself authority always implies authorization, a commission recognized by others to perform a particular role. Thus when the Scriptures speak about headship, they refer to responsible authority and its proper use for the service of others. The point is that the apostolic exhortation for husbands to love their wives as Christ loved the Church sets a standard of behaviour for men and women which have always had a complimentary and salutary (*good or beneficial*) effect when it is put into

practice. So while it is true that men sometimes oppress their wives, such oppressive behaviour is contrary to biblical teaching and offensive to God.

For St Paul, male headship involves the use of authority to exercise spiritual leadership at home and at worship, rather than evade his responsibilities, as men are so often prone to do. The number of mothers you see at worship Sunday with their children not supported by their husbands, highlights the neglect of duty and care (*male headship or role model*) by many fathers. Responsible leadership is not coupled with the exercise of power, but it is exercised solely in service. Nowhere does the New Testament condone a man's lording it over his wife as if his headship implied a chain of command. Christian headship always involves willing self-giving that is modelled on the self-sacrifice of Christ. '**Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the Church and gave himself up for her. Ephesians 5:25.**' Headship, that is, God's appointed authority or delegated responsibilities relate to both the Church and the family. This comes out clearly in Ephesians 5:22-24; '**Wives, be subject to your husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the Church, his body, and is himself its Saviour. As the Church is subject to Christ, so let wives also be subject in everything to their husbands.**' The key to understanding this text is in the meaning of the term 'head'. When Paul spoke of headship he meant the authority of that person as a responsible leader. In 1 Peter 3:6-7, Peter speaks in one verse of Sarah's subordination to Abraham and in the next verse of Abraham's honouring her as a joint heir of the grace of life (see also Gal 3:28). From this higher subordination of all Christians to God and His Word, springs all other forms of subordination, such as, children to parents; employees to employers and subjects to government authority. The differentiation in the roles of men and women applies both to the role of the husband in marriage and the ministry of the Word in the Church. That is to promote peace and harmony with love and respect. Biblical headship is always exercised in self-sacrificial service.

'The head of every man is Christ, the head of a woman is her husband, and the head of Christ is God'. 1 Corinthians 11:3. 'Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord. Colossians 3:20. God has ordered the family according to the principle of headship. Each member of the family lives under the authority and protection of the head whom God has appointed.

CHRIST, the 'Head' of the husband:
Lord of the family.
HUSBAND, the 'Head' of the wife:
Chief authority over the children.
WIFE, the help meet to the husband
(Genesis 2:18): Second authority over the children.
CHILDREN, obedient to parents.

The husband lives under the authority of Christ and is responsible to Christ for the leadership and care of the family. The wife lives under the protection of the husband and is responsible to him for the way she orders the household and cares for the children. The children live under the protection of both parents. The authority over the children, however, remains essentially one. Thus God has structured the family along clear-cut lines of authority and responsibility. It is important to recognize this structure, for it is little understood today and still less practiced.

The debate over the ordination of women has served the interests of the LCA, in that as synod we have been confronted with the more important question of hermeneutics (*the interpretation of or how we read and apply the Scriptures*) and the divine authority of Scripture. It also reminds us very pointedly of just how relevant God's Word is in our daily lives and the life of the Church. Surely it is clear that the ordination of women is not the primary issue, but that the very foundations of our Confessions are being challenged by this debate. For confessional Lutherans the authority of God's Word, the formal principle of the Reformation, '**Sola Scriptura**', is not negotiable, and in conscience must be defended. As evidenced in the following texts, God's Word could not

be more explicit and one wonders when the majority of LCA members still argue in favour of the ordination of women, which part don't we understand? The sad reality was clear at the 2006 General Convention of the LCA that we have failed to communicate the complementary nature of the sexes.

REVISED STANDARD VERSION

2nd Timothy 3:16. All scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness.

2nd Timothy 4:3. For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own liking.

Matthew 15:9; in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the precepts of men.

Ephesians 4:14-16; so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the cunning of men, by their craftiness in deceitful wiles. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the body, joined and knit together by every joint with which it is supplied, when each part is working properly, makes bodily growth and upbuilds itself in love.

1st Corinthians 11:3. But I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ, the head of a woman is her husband, and the head of Christ is God.

Ephesians 5:21-33. Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ. Wives, be subject to your husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the Church, his body, and is himself its Saviour. As the Church is subject to Christ, so let wives also be subject in everything to their husbands. Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the Church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that the Church might be presented before him in splendour, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. Even so husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself for no man ever hates his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, as Christ does the Church, because we are members of his body. For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one. This is a great mystery, and I take it to mean Christ and the Church; however, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.

Colossians 3:18-19. Wives, be subject to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives, and do not be harsh with them. Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord. Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged.

I Timothy 2:11-14. Let a woman learn in silence with all submissiveness. I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over men; she is to keep silent. For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor.

I Corinthians 14:33b-37. As in all the churches of the saints, the women should keep silent in the church. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be subordinate, as even the Law says. If there is anything they desire to know, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church. What! Did the word of God originate with you, or are you the only ones it has reached? If anyone thinks that he is a prophet, or spiritual, he should acknowledge that what I am writing to you is a command of the Lord.

Titus 2:3-5. Bid the older women likewise to be reverent in behaviour, not to be slanderers or slaves to drink; they are to teach what is good, and so train the young women to love their husbands and children, to be sensible, chaste, domestic, kind, and submissive to their husbands, that the word of God may not be discredited.

1st Peter 3:5-7. So once the holy women who hoped in God used to adorn themselves and were submissive to their husbands, as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord. And you are now her children if you do right and let

nothing terrify you. Likewise you husbands, live considerately with your wives, bestowing honour on the woman as the weaker sex, since you are joint heirs of the grace of life, in order that your prayers may not be hindered.

Genesis 3:16. To the women He (God) said, "I will greatly multiply your pain in childbearing, yet your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you".

Isaiah 3:11-12. Woe to the wicked! It shall be ill with him, for what his hands have done shall be done to him. My people — children are their oppressors, and women rule over them. O my people, your leaders mislead you, and confuse the course of your paths.

Let's take a closer look at some of the key words in their context. We have already discussed the meaning of 'head' as a position of responsible leadership. Be subject to one another (Ephesians 5:21), is directed at both male and female. That is to live under the protection and security of this family union in the same way as being subjects of the Commonwealth of Australia we live under the protection of the laws of the land. To honour and respect again applies to both genders. Husbands are directed to honour (*respect*) their wives and wives are directed to respect (*honour*) their husbands. In Titus 2:3-5 the older women are instructed to teach what is good and train the young women to love their husbands. In 1 Peter 3:5-6 NIV we read. '***For this is the way the holy women of the past who put their hope in God used to make themselves beautiful. They were submissive to their own husbands, like Sarah, who obeyed Abraham and called him her master***'. — refers to wives respecting the God-given responsibility of leadership placed on husbands and fathers. Moreover how a woman's gentle quiet spirit enhances or complements her beauty. Then in 1 Peter 3:7 NIV we read. '***Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life***'.

Alternatively, in my view, the women's ordination lobby leans heavily on 'gospel reductionism', the 'historical critical method of interpretation' and 'higher criticism', then calls on proof texts such as Galatians 3:28 that refer to our being one in Christ which is not in dispute. I believe these texts, used to further their cause, have in fact no relevance to the issue of the 'biblical principle of headship'. Let me make it absolutely clear, headship is not about who is the boss or master of his house. It is all about love and respect. There is no such thing as opposite sexes. There is however male and female, one complements the other. They are complementary not opposites. In our popular culture today it seems we have lost sight of this awareness. The struggle is seen as a battle between the sexes.

A more recent development in the debate is to say that the women's ordination issue is a matter of theological opinion and not a fundamental doctrine of the church. This seems to be the only way forward for the women's ordination lobby. I regard that as devaluing the authority of Scripture.

Regardless of where we sit in terms of the women's ordination debate, the thing that needs to be emphasized above all else is that husbands and fathers should be aware of and accept their God given responsibilities at least within their families. The lack of male role models setting an example and the recognition of male responsibilities has become a major social issue today. Subsequently the high rates of domestic violence and abuse have become a grave concern for governments and social welfare agencies. Our social fabric is vulnerable when we ignore God's instructions specifically directed at both genders. The Church has a responsibility and opportunity to set a standard and be an example for the broader community.

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