

Introduction and Purpose

Society as a whole finds something very distasteful about calling a man, “the head of the home.” No doubt this stems partially from years of oppressive and demeaning treatment of women in this culture. While headship has been abused at the hands of sinful men, proper role distinctions in the home provide divinely designed order, direction and stability. Homes where family members (particularly husbands and wives) have trusted Christ as Savior and Lord must understand the proper roles that God has ordained for them.

There has been a marked increase in the Christian community in recent years to eliminate role distinctions.¹ Many conservative adherents of this view attempt to show that role distinctions were either a result of the fall, or are cultural norms which are not to be imported and adopted into Christian living. In contrast to these claims, we will show that the headship of the husband over the wife is rooted in creation, not a result of the fall of man into sin or the adoption of cultural norms by the church. The divine design of male headship is implied in Genesis 1, clarified in Genesis 2 and made much more difficult due to the introduction of sin in Genesis 3. Furthermore, when gender roles are discussed in the New Testament, the writer often grounds the reason for these distinctions in these early accounts of God’s creation. We will not attempt to define or describe biblical headship. Rather, our purpose will be to examine the above passages in order to establish that male headship in the home, properly expressed, is God’s universal and timeless design for Christian families.

¹ One could reference the following works as examples: Gilbert Bilezikian, *Beyond Sex Roles: A Guide for the Study of Female Roles in the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1995), and Aida Bensacon Spencer, *Beyond the Curse: Women Called to Ministry* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1985).

Old Testament Foundations

The headship of the husband over the wife is implied in Genesis chapter one, clarified in Genesis chapter 2, and its corruption is recorded in Genesis chapter 3.

The Implication of Headship - Genesis 1:26-28

Three details in the account of creation in Genesis chapter one relate to our discussion of the headship of the husband over the wife. It is important to note that headship does not imply superiority. The role distinctions are purely functional and are not a result of ontological differences between the male and the female. Male headship in the home is implied by three facts contained in Genesis 1:26-28.

Created with the Image

We must acknowledge that the primary lesson of Genesis 1:26-28 is not the delineation of male headship. Its purpose is to show that mankind—both male and female—have been created in the image and likeness of God (v. 27). “The divine image makes man God's vice-regent on earth.”² In order to make this functional aspect of bearing His image more clear, God gives man a specific commission to, “Be fruitful, and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky, and over every living thing that moves on the earth” (Gen. 1:28). The male and female are both commissioned with this responsibility as equal image bearers of God.

² Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, Word Biblical Commentary Series, gen ed. David A. Hubbard and Glenn W. Barker, ed. John D. W. Watts, vol. 1 (Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1987), 32.

Created with Equality

This creation of male and female in the image of God, along with their resulting vice-regency, necessarily implies equality. The headship of man over the woman is clearly not a matter of essence, spirituality or intelligence. Rather, it is a matter of function and role. While the main objective of 1:26-28 is to teach the creation of man in the image of God and his resulting dominion over the earth, this dual image (existing in both the male and the female) does imply equality in matters of essence.

Created with Implied Position

While man and woman are equal image-bearers and vice-regents over the earth, another question that arises from the text seems to imply male headship. Why does God designate human kind with the single name “man?” Our culturally trained mind, immersed in the tide of “political correctness,” immediately recognizes that many today would call this discrimination. God, however, has not sensed the need to present the truth in politically correct, gender neutral terms. It has been correctly observed, “Surely His referring to the race as ‘man’ tells us something about ourselves.”³ By referring to the human race as “man” God implies what will be clarified in chapter two.

God's naming of the race “man” whispers male headship . . . God did *not* name the human race “woman.” If “woman” had been the more appropriate and illuminating designation, no doubt God would have used it. He does not even devise a neutral term like “persons.” He called us “man,” which anticipates the male headship brought out clearly in chapter two.⁴

³ Raymond C. Ortlund, Jr, “Male-Female Equality and Male Headship,” in Recovering Biblical Manhood & Womanhood, ed. John Piper and Wayne Grudem (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books, 1991), 97.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 98.

It is to this clearer presentation of male headship in chapter two to which we now turn our attention.

The Clarification of Headship - Genesis 2:18-25

This section of Scripture expands what was recorded in 1:27-28 and 2:7. A comparison and analysis of these accounts reveal at least five points pertinent to the discussion of male headship.

The Man is Created First

Genesis 2:7 makes it clear that man was created first, formed from the dust of the ground. His priority in the order of creation is critical to our discussion. The Apostle Paul notes, as we will see later in I Timothy 2:13, that the submission of the women to male leadership in the church rests on this order of man being created before woman. Because order and role distinctions in the church is a reflection of order and role distinctions in the home, the creation of man before woman would also seem to have implications of submission of wives to husbands in the home.

The Woman is Created Differently

Genesis 2:21-22 states that the woman was created from a rib that God surgically removed by His divine power while Adam was in a deep sleep. This different method of creation is significant to our discussion, as made clear by Paul again. “For man does not originate from woman, but woman from man” (I Corinthians 11:8). Paul is specifically

discussing male headship in this context. The headship of man over woman is rooted in this very fact, that the woman was created from the man, here described in Genesis 2:21-22.

The Woman is Created to be a Helper

The context of God's creation of woman from the rib of Adam also provides insight into the issue of headship. God created man and placed him in the Garden of Eden (2:8) where he is told to exercise dominion. His first task as God's ruling representative on the earth is to name the animals. As God brings the animals to him one at a time, it becomes clear to Adam that none of them share in his unique nature of being an "image-bearer." This is all according to the plan of God who has already stated that He intends on creating a companion for Adam (2:18). The naming of the animals, in addition to illustrating the authority Adam has over them, also produces in Adam a longing for a companion and helper "corresponding to" or "suitable for" him. God provides this helper in Eve.

Although the preceding texts have made clear that the man and the woman are equals as image-bearers, the woman is still titled a helper for the man. This does imply a type of paradox, but one that should be easily understood if we understand the parallel of God being the head of Christ. Just as Christ came and lived with a view to accomplishing the will of God, the woman is to act in a manner consistent with, and supportive of, the common will of her head. As Wenham observes, "It seems to express the notion of complementarity rather than identity...The help looked for is not just assistance in his daily work or in the procreation of children...but the mutual support companionship provides."⁵

⁵ Wenham, 68.

The Man Named the Woman

As noted earlier, Adam's naming of the animals is illustrative of the fact that he exercises dominion over them. Authority is also implied in Adam's naming of the woman. Wenham states this clearly: "though they are equal in nature, that man names woman (cf. 3:20) indicates that she is expected to be subordinate to him, an important presupposition of the ensuing narrative (3:17)"⁶

The Man Leaves and Cleaves

The last point discusses the narrator's (and divinely inspired) comment on marriage. It is clearly stated that the man leaves his father and mother and cleaves to his wife. This is a strange statement to make in a patrilocal society where it would be true that the woman would leave her parents and the new couple would most likely live with, or very near, his parents. This statement makes very little sense if it is not taken in light of an implied male headship. It is the man who initiates the establishment of a new home by leaving the parents. As the head this is his responsibility.

The Corruption of Male Headship - Genesis 3:1-24

Genesis 2 provides a picture of male headship in the Garden of Eden. Chapter 3, in the context of the fall of man into sin, reveals that failure to exercise male headship was at the heart of the sin of Adam and continues to plague our sin cursed world.

⁶ Ibid., 70.

The Serpent Circumvented Male Headship

It is not Adam whom the serpent in the garden approaches. He went after the woman, whom we have seen was to be the follower or helper to Adam. The serpent circumvented Adam's rightful role as leader and Eve sinfully acted independently from her husband. "Adam sinned not only by disobeying God's command but also by succumbing to Eve's usurpation of his leadership, thus failing to exercise his God-given authority. Both the man and the woman twisted God's plan for their relationship, reversing their roles—and marriage has not been the same since."⁷

God Recognized Male Headship

Despite obvious indications in the narrative that Eve and the serpent were culpable for what happened on that dreadful day, when God approaches them in the garden the text says, "Then the Lord God called to *the man*" (v. 9, italics mine). Adam attempts to blame the action on his wife (v. 12), who in turn tries to blame it on the serpent (v. 13). It is how God uncovered the sin that is significant to this discussion. Although the omniscient God knew very well what had happened, he approaches Adam, the representative head of the human race (cf. Rom. 5), to elicit confession of the sin. He recognized that Adam was ultimately responsible, as the head of his home, for any failure to lead his family in obedience to God.

God Specifically States the Sin of Adam

⁷ John MacArthur, Jr., Different By Design (Wheaton, Illinois: Victor Books, 1994), 21.

As God pronounces the curse of toil and thorns upon Adam, he does so, “Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree” (v. 17). If there is any doubt that role-reversal is at the heart of this sin, God removes it. “Obeying his wife rather than God was man's fundamental mistake.”⁸ Philip Lancaster observes:

What we see actually unfold in the garden is that, while he retains his formal authority as representative head of the race (and it is indeed his act that doomed us all), Eve becomes the *de facto* leader and Adam the follower as they rebel against God...It would not then be too much of a stretch to say that the first sin was Adam's passivity and his failure to lead and protect his wife.”⁹

God's pronouncement is consistent with this conclusion. Adam failed in his responsibility to exercise his headship and provide leadership for his wife. This responsibility existed prior to the fall. It was part of the created order.

The Result of Sin is Marital Conflict

We see marital conflict first in the introduction of shame and sinful thinking. Recall that chapter 2 ends with this statement; “And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed” (2:25). After they eat the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, they immediately want to cover their nakedness. A shame previously unknown to them is now introduced into their perfectly harmonious existence together.

More importantly however, we see that the man and the woman are now going to struggle indefinitely with the very sins they have initially succumbed to (3:16b). The woman will now have a desire to rule and master her husband. It is no longer a subtle failure to seek his counsel, but will now be the full expression of a sinful heart, bent on sin and

⁸Wenham, 82.

⁹ Philip Lancaster, Family Man, Family Leader (San Antonio, Texas: The Vision Forum), p. 69-70.

disobedience to her God-given role. Likewise, the man is now going to struggle with the exercise of his authority. He will be competing with the woman for authority and may have a tendency to either give up, or sinfully dominate her in their relationship. The injunction of God to the man is that he must rule over her, exercising his God-given headship in a righteous manner.

New Testament Elaborations

While the Old Testament narratives strongly suggest male headship was a part of the created order, some have suggested that these norms were a result of the fall, or purely the adoption of cultural norms. In the New Testament, the apostle Paul recognizes that the functional role distinctions between male and female were part of the created order.

I Corinthians 11:2-16

In one particular passage Paul has the teaching of male headship as his main objective. His appeal for establishing male headship is not cultural but a timeless reference to the creation account.

The Context

The second part of 1 Corinthians contains answers to specific questions given to Paul through a letter (7:1). However, chapter 11, although it is clearly a change in subject matter, does not contain the usual introductory remark, “now concerning.” It appears that chapter eleven contains information that is introductory and foundational for Paul’s later responses to their questions concerning spiritual gifts and the exercise of them in the

meetings of the local church. These introductory remarks involve his teachings on submission and its practical expression through the wearing of head coverings.

The Content

Paul clearly delineates a hierarchy when he says that God is the head of Christ who is the head of man who is the head of woman. This also makes clear that headship is irrespective of essence, and relates only to function. The difference between God and Christ is not one of essence but of function. The case is analogous with the man and the woman. Paul's foundation for making a distinction between the man and the woman does not rest on propriety or nature as his arguments concerning the application of wearing head coverings do (11:13-14). Rather the distinction rests on the foundations of the priority of male creation, the source of the female (from man, 11:8, 12), and the fact that woman was created for the sake of the man (11:9) and for his glory (11:7). Although Paul carefully qualifies his statements by teaching mutual dependence (11:11) and source (11:12), the thrust of the passage is clearly to teach female submission to male authority and leadership, expressed in the practical and local application of wearing a head covering as a symbol of this submission.

The Challenge

Those who do not believe the Bible teaches this male headship often claim that role distinctions are a product of the fall. This argument is not valid. Paul here does not argue from post-fall data. He appeals to the creation account, not the fall. When Paul does refer to the fall in I Timothy 2, it is to make the point that the woman being quite deceived has rendered her entire sex unqualified to usurp the position of the man and teach in the mixed

church meeting. In that sense distinctions are a result of the fall. However, in both instances his first appeal is to creation.

The Conclusion

Paul appealed to creation as the reason for male headship. This does not deny equality in essence or equality as image bearers of God (see the above section from the Old Testament teachings). It does delineate role distinctions in the same way that there are functional distinctions within the Godhead.

I Timothy 2:11-15

The information in this section largely follows the data and form of Douglas Moo.¹⁰ Paul is teaching on proper roles within the church. However, these roles find their foundation in exercising proper roles within the home.

The Context

We should be cautious about trying to reconstruct the nature of the false teaching that Paul was trying to combat in the church at Ephesus, or what influence these false teachers had on the subject of women's roles within the church. What is clear from Paul's teaching in I Timothy is that these instructions were given to teach, "how one ought to behave himself in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar

¹⁰ Douglas Moo, "What Does It Mean Not to Teach or Have Authority Over Men?" in Rediscovering Biblical Manhood & Womanhood, eds. John Piper and Wayne Grudem (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books, 1991), 179-193.

and support of the truth” (3:15).

The Content

The fact is clearly stated. “I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man, but to remain quiet” (2:12). Paul as an apostle considered his teaching authoritative for the churches of God. Therefore, what Paul means by teaching is very important. The word is used to denote the careful transmission of the tradition concerning Jesus Christ and the authoritative proclamation of the Scripture with that understanding. It would seem, in light of the nature of teaching in general, and due to the specific context of how to behave in the corporate church setting, that the term teaching is here limited in scope to teaching in a public context.

Does this mean women cannot teach at all? No. The term “man” is grammatically the object of both teach and exercising authority. Thus we have, “I do not allow a woman to teach [a man] or exercise authority over a man.” Paul allows women to teach other women (Tit. 2:3-4) but not men. The context of church polity (3:15) also suggests that the prohibition of exercising authority has its primary meaning in the exercising of authority in the church, a function reserved for elders. Clearly the two activities are closely related (“an overseer, then, must be...able to teach” [3:2]).

It is again pertinent to the issue at hand that Paul does not provide a cultural argument as the basis for his instructions. The basis is the priority of the creation of Adam and the initial failure of the woman in the garden. “For it was Adam who was first created, and then Eve. And it was not Adam who was deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression” (I Timothy 2:13-14). These bases are not local or temporary

circumstances. They are general and permanent reasons that could still be appealed to today, and therefore still apply today.

The Challenge

Although the circumstances that prompted Paul's writing are local and temporary, the basis for Paul's instruction itself is not. Therefore, the principle contained in his teaching is universal and binding. Some opponents have gone so far as to suggest that Paul was only addressing women who had fallen prey to the false teachers.¹¹ They were forbidden to teach and lead due to their false views. They point to verse 14. Eve propagated false teaching and convinced Adam to eat. To prevent men from being led astray again in the same way Paul forbids women in Ephesus to propagate their false teaching as well.

Following Moo¹² this argument falls short for two reasons. First, Paul is not concerned with prohibiting women from teaching altogether. It is the prohibition of teaching *men* that he is concerned about. If it was a matter of preventing the propagation of false doctrine Paul have said they could not teach *at all*. Second, Eve did not stand as a "type" of Ephesian women who were teaching false doctrine, but as a "type" of Ephesian women who were being deceived by false doctrine. Although some would suggest Paul was making a statement that women are more susceptible to being deceived, we think it better to keep the focus on the principle that undergirded her deception; acting independently of the

¹¹ Among others this approach is advocated by; Letha Scanzoni and Nancy Hardesty, All We're Meant to be: A Biblical Approach to Women's Liberation (Waco, Texas: Word Publishers, 1974), 37; and Aida Besancon Spencer, "Eve at Ephesus [Should Women be Ordained as Pastors According to the First Letter to Timothy 2:11-15?]," Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society 17 (1974): 216-222.

¹² Moo, 189-190.

man. Teaching, rather than learning in all quietness, reflects a type of independence with which a woman is not to act.

The Conclusion

Paul did not mince words in I Timothy. He made it very clear that he did not allow women to teach men or exercise authority over them in the context of the local church. Proper roles in the church (male leadership) are an extension of proper roles in the home (male headship). Again, this instruction is not based on social structures or cultural norms, but is established as a principle of God's created order.

Conclusion

Male headship is presented by the apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 11 and I Timothy 2 as having its foundations in the Genesis creation account. The understanding gained from Genesis 1-3 is that headship over a woman will now be exercised with greater difficulty, but is, nonetheless, man's responsibility. God recognized that the companionship of human relationships within their divinely prescribed functional bounds is a vital part of our enjoyment and success in living a life that is pleasing to Him (2:18). The powers of darkness recognize that the disruption of this God-designed order is a valuable tool to weaken families, churches and society. Genesis 1-3, as well as these two key New Testament passages, clearly teach that the headship of man rests in the foundation of the created order and not in cultural norms.

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