

## 10 THINGS YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT MALE HEADSHIP

*August 29, 2016 | by: Sam Storms*

In the on-going dialogue (debate!) between complementarians and egalitarians, there is considerable confusion about the meaning of male headship. So today we look at 10 things we should know about headship.

(1) “Headship” (Gk: kephale) has three meanings in Scripture: first, a physical head (1 Cor. 11:7); second, source or origin (Col. 1:18); and third, a person with authority (Eph. 1:22).

(2) Among the many misconceptions about male headship in Scripture I mention these. First, husbands are never commanded to rule their wives, but to love them. The Bible never says, “Husbands, take steps to insure that your wives submit to you.” Nor does it say, “Husbands, exercise headship and authority over your wives.” Rather, the principle of male headship is either asserted or assumed and men are commanded to love their wives as Christ loves the church.

Headship is never portrayed in Scripture as a means for self-satisfaction or self-exaltation. Headship is always other-oriented. I can’t think of a more horrendous sin than exploiting the God-given responsibility to lovingly lead by perverting it into justification for using one’s wife and family to satisfy one’s lusts and thirst for power.

Headship is not the power of a superior over an inferior. Human nature is sinfully inclined to distort the submission of the wife into the superiority of the husband. That some, in the name of male headship, have done precisely this cannot be denied, but it must certainly be denounced. We must also remember that the abuse of headship is not sufficient justification for abandoning it. Rather, we must strive, in God’s grace, to redeem it and purify it in a way that honors both Christ and one’s spouse.

Headship is never to be identified with the issuing of commands nor does it mean that the husband must make every decision in the home. Unfortunately, some men have mistakenly assumed that it undermines their authority for their wives to take the initiative in certain domestic matters. This is more an expression of masculine insecurity and fear than it is godly leadership.

(3) Headship is more a responsibility than a right. A “right” is something we tend to demand or insist upon as something we are owed. This can all too often make for an authoritarian and self-serving atmosphere in the home. When headship is viewed as a sacred trust in which the husband is “called” by God to lead and honor and sacrifice for his wife, the tone and mood of the home is radically improved.

(4) Headship is the authority to serve. John Stott explains that “If headship means 'power' in any sense, then it is power to care, not to crush; power to serve, not to dominate; power to facilitate self-fulfillment, not to frustrate or destroy it. And in all this the standard of the husband's love is to be the cross of Christ, on which he surrendered himself even to death in his selfless love for his bride” (232).

(5) Headship is the opportunity to lead. If Jesus is our example of biblical leadership, it will help to take note of how he led his disciples. Jesus led by teaching his disciples (cf. 1 Cor. 14:35), by setting an example for them (John 13:15), by spending time with them (Acts 4:13). Jesus also led by delegating authority to his disciples (Luke 10:1-20).

(5) Headship is Scripturally circumscribed. Husbands have never been given the authority to lead their families in ways that are contrary to the Bible. Headship does not give men the right to be wrong. Simply because God has invested in the husband the authority to lead does not give him the freedom to lead in ways that are contrary to God's Word. On a related note, if a wife is ever asked or told by her husband to do something that violates Scripture, she is not only free to disobey him, she is obligated to do so.

(6) Headship does entail the responsibility to make a final decision when agreement cannot be reached. This final decision, however, may on occasion be to let his wife decide. Contrary to what many think, this latter option does not undermine the husband's authority.

(7) Headship entails gentleness and sensitivity. See Col. 3:18-19 where Paul exhorts husbands not to be "embittered" against their wives. The idea is that of "friction caused by impatience and thoughtless nagging" (Moule).

(8) Headship means honoring one's wife. See 1 Peter 3:7.

(9) Headship means loving and caring for one's wife as much as we love and care for ourselves. See Eph. 5:28-29.

(10) Headship means loving and caring for one's wife as much as Christ loves and cares for us. See Eph. 5:25-27. Christ's love for us has several characteristics. It is unconditional (Rom. 5:8), eternal (Rom. 8:39), unselfish (Phil. 2:6-7), purposeful (Eph. 5:26-27), sacrificial (Eph. 5:25), and demonstrative (Rom. 5:6-8). These characteristics are best summed up by John Stott:

“Christ 'loved' the church and 'gave himself' for her, in order to 'cleanse' her, 'sanctify' her, and ultimately 'present' her to himself in full splendour and without any defect. In other words, his love and self-sacrifice were not an idle display, but purposive. And his purpose was not to impose an alien identity upon the church, but to free her from the spots and wrinkles which mar her beauty and to display her in her true glory. The Christian husband is to have a similar concern. His headship will never be used to suppress his wife. He longs to see her liberated from everything which spoils her true feminine identity and growing towards that 'glory', that perfection of fulfilled personhood which will be the final destiny of all those whom Christ redeems. To this end Christ gave himself. To this end, too, the husband gives himself in love” (Stott).

<http://www.samstorms.com/enjoying-god-blog/post/10-things-you-should-know-about-male-headship>