

Response to Objections to Male Headship in Marriage

I want to take the time to respond to some of the many arguments people make for modern believers to ignore male headship in the home. It seems strange that we should desire to deny something so simple in the Bible, as well as so important. Perhaps we should consider it par for the course, in an era when respectable people can deny nearly anything, from the existence of our Creator to the existence of good and evil, and the prevalence of relativism is such that one will debate nearly anything. In such an era that mocks truth, the simple truth of the roles that men and women have gets predictable attacked as well, including by professed Christians. However, we'll see that their objections to male headship, some of which are thoughtful and some of which are ridiculous, have very good answers from the Word of God.

I also want to add, before I begin, that in standing up for the vertical pillar of authority in marriage, I in no way mean to demean the other, horizontal pillar, which speaks of mutual love, and equal human dignity. I am not even trying to express in my commentary here or on this webpage every facet of doctrine regarding marriage. Rather, what I am doing is working to repair doctrine, in the areas where it has been most terribly attacked and damaged. It's just common sense to me. This is true throughout my work at Holiness of the Bride. Just like any repairman, I seek to repair where the damage has been most done. In the area of husband and wife, that damage has been through the outright denial or severe watering-down of the husband's authority. I hope that is clear. Let me please begin:

Objection 1--Male headship in marriage is merely cultural. Therefore, it's not a permanent instruction:

This is very easily demonstrated to be false. However, I should still stop and make the same point I make elsewhere in my writings: The claim that the teaching is merely cultural is a mere claim itself, and comes with no textual backing. It also comes loaded with presumptions. It comes with the presumption that culture, broadly speaking, is value neutral. Often it is not. Often we can know confidently, through scripture or natural law, that a cultural element is positive or negative. Not only does this objection assume that it is mere culture, but also commonly presumes that culture in the past is something unenlightened while culture in the present is enlightened. This itself is not only a presumption, but is easily demonstrated to be false, since there are plainly cultural elements from the present which are atrociously bad, and

elements from the past which are by comparison a beam of sunlight. So the claim that male headship is mere culture is just a claim, and stands only on presumptions.

Moreover, and more importantly, scripture itself shows male headship in the home along with other gender roles to be much more than culture. Ephesians 5, for example, does not merely say – wives submit – but says *“wives submit to your own husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body. Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything.”* The Word of God here compares the woman’s submission to the submission of the Church to Christ. This is way in the stratosphere above mere culture. Of course as the passage goes on, speaking of the husbands loving their wives as their own flesh, it likewise compares the relationship to Christ and the Church, this time with the husband modeling Christ. Unless one really believes that the Church can have headship over Christ, then it is clear that the man and woman’s relationship in marriage has a vertical pillar; the man is above. The woman is below. Another clear passage from 1 Peter 3, backs up its instructions of female submission by pointing to the matriarch Sarah, who obeyed the patriarch Abraham, *“calling him Lord”* (vs. 6), showing no disdain for the ancient past and tying submission in once again to Holy Scripture. In the shorter similar passage of Colossians 3:18, the wife is to submit to her husband *“as it is fitting to the Lord.”* Here again the wife’s submission is not merely appropriate to the culture, but is right by God.

Similarly, scripture shows other forms of gender roles to be connected with grand scriptural truths, not mere ancient culture. For example, the teaching of male headship in the congregation, in 1 Timothy 2, is finished with a reminder that *“Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression.”* (vs. 13-14) This ties in headship and submission to the Fall of man, the natural order and the redemption of the woman. Likewise, male headship in 1 Corinthians 14 has the teaching finished up with the words, *“let him acknowledge that the things which I write to you are the commandments of the Lord.”* (vs. 37) Moreover, countless examples through many centuries of biblical history also support what the New Testament plainly teaches, by showing not only the aspects of the Creation and Fall mentioned earlier, but countless examples of the man’s headship role in the home, in ancient Israel, in the Temple, in the Apostleship and in New Testament preaching. The Bible, from beginning to end, is a powerfully patriarchal revelation.

Before I finish this section, I want to point out that even if we had no scripture to go by, or not very clear ones, we would still see the teachings of male authority at home as true. This is because like a multitude of God’s instructions, it is in excellent harmony with what we know from natural law. We can observe nature and see the traits that make men take up leadership, take risks, show aggression, prove themselves, naturally know shame if they have a woman taking their job or telling them what to do,

especially at important tasks. Not only that, but we can look at nature and see that the woman adores a strong man, is less aggressive, is more nurturing, is almost mystically good with children and doesn't have the enormous drive to prove herself that the man has. In fact she flourishes under a man's caring protection. She can find rich enjoyment in submitting to him, although it admittedly can be difficult at times. It is not much said in this era, but because of feminist philosophies like the one I write to counter, you could fill countless stadiums with women just crying out for a man who can take charge; almost begging for a strong man in their lives. And natural law being natural law, you CANNOT fill countless stadiums with such men. Can you even imagine it? I just can't wait to find a good strong girl who will take charge. God, please send me a lady to be a leader in my life! Sorry, you're not going to hear it. You see the good and true teachings of Ephesians 5, Colossians 3 and others, are in beautiful harmony with nature, because the same God who gave those teachings is the same Lord who made all of us. Make sense? Many scientific studies have only supported sex differences. Modern data basically confirms the preponderance of what your parents, grandparents or the ancients could have told you about men and women. We are different. That's not mere culture like the objectors like to say. That's nature.

Objection 2 — What about abuse of power? A husband who has real authority might abuse it.

This sounds like a reasonable concern, and nearly everyone recognizes that power can be terribly abused, but that fact does nothing to erase real authority. This is because the potential for power to be abused is true of any authority in the world, yet we know that we need to have authorities. The word of God, along with common sense demands it. For example, government power can be abused. Yet we still have governments. Business owners can abuse their power. Yet people still own businesses. Even NGOs have been known to abuse the power they have. Therefore, this objection is irrelevant to whether we should follow God's patriarchal order for marriage. Obviously, as with any authority structure, we can be open to being a conscientious objector if the authority demands we do evil. We can also be open to running away if the authority is very dangerous to us. However, under any ordinary circumstances, we still must obey the authority. In like manner, under any ordinary circumstances, the wife must still obey her husband. It's not that hard to figure out.

Objection 3—What about “strong women” and women leaders?

Like other common objections to male headship, the objection that some women are stronger than others is basically irrelevant to the question. The word of God instructs that men are the heads of the home so if we want to obey God that is the order that we seek. It may be true that in natural variety, some women take more initiative than others, and even that some women take more initiative than lazy men. Yet this natural difference in personalities and behaviors is not our ultimate foundation. Rather, it is guided by our ultimate foundation, which is God's

word. What that means practically is that a woman can follow that natural sense of initiative for the purposes that God puts forth, and cannot take it out of the bounds that God puts forth. This limits it to being used within the context of godly submission and in homemaking. Moreover, from what I can tell, when people say that a woman is strong what they often really mean is that she is loud-mouthed, arrogant, intentionally mannish and sometimes prideful. In contrast, it takes a strong woman, a very strong woman, to obey God and to live out her awesome calling in submission to her husband. That is true strength. We should honor and praise women for showing it.

Not only that, but in cases when a woman has more boldness than a rather passive husband, it's not a bad opportunity for her to do something well within her domain, which is to encourage that passive Christ-figure to be more active. It is a chance to encourage his ideas, not to disrupt them, encourage his achieving his goals, not trying to do them herself, encourage his fortitude, not trying to replace it. You know after thousands of years of so-called human evolution, those things are still shameful. The man by nature desires to lead. When a woman has more boldness than usual, that boldness can fully flourish before God, but only rightly within the order that God has already laid out. That order has the man above her.

Objection 4—Well, a husband can benefit from listening to his wife!

This is a true statement. A man with a godly wife can benefit from listening to her counsel. However, it is no real objection at all to the biblical order of male headship. After all, nearly all leaders have counselors or subordinates that they listen to, sometimes regularly. In fact, it would be foolish for the head of any institution not to listen to wise counsel. So of course men ought to consider what their wives have to say, when their wives are in line with God. This is fully in harmony with male headship and female submission.

One note though, is that this willingness to hear counsel from a wife is a great reason men need to seek out godly women to marry and make sure their wife is faithful to our Lord. Those women will be raising and often education their children, helping with many projects in the home, dealing with finances in some instances and offering counsel on important matters. The man, who is the Christ leader, the Christ picture, needs to care about choosing the right woman, as well as leading her forward in holiness. In doing this, when those instances of receiving counsel come along, they are much more likely to be filled with good counsel, rather than bad. A woman submitted to her husband is more likely to give the good kind.

Objection 5—Let’s forget about male headship. We should just agree to disagree on small doctrines like this.

When a person says that we can just forget about a teaching because it so small and unimportant, they have at least admitted one important thing – that the Bible actually teaches that teaching. If it didn’t, they would have no need to say let’s forget about it. So when you hear people claiming that we can ignore male headship because there are more important doctrines, they are already admitting the biblical truth of that headship.

However, the claim that we should ignore headship or any other doctrine, simply because it is allegedly not important, is a deadly claim indeed. Why should we forget about what God teaches us? What’s the reason? Excluding of course ritual Torah from the Mosaic Covenant, please name one category of instructions we should just abandon and why? What about prohibitions on violent behavior? Maybe we can ignore them as well, since refraining from punching someone out isn’t at the center of our faith. What about prohibitions on drunkenness? Maybe we can ignore them since no one gave their soul to Yeshua because of their own sobriety. Besides, obedience is all over the New Testament. 1 John 5:2 says, *“By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep his commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous.”* Likewise, Revelation 22:14 says, *“Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city.”* These are just two of countless similar scriptures. Brothers, we respect male headship because it is the word of the living God, and moreover is in harmony with nature and benefits us. If you do not respect it, please find it in your heart to repent.

It’s important to mention here, as I do elsewhere, that we are currently in an age when professed Christians along with the bulk of the culture accept all forms of gender-bending, gender-denying, homosexuality and rampant immorality. These things aren’t just accepted; they are often publicly celebrated. Many Christians complain about this nightmarish state we are in, but it’s hard to imagine we got here without Christians themselves ignoring gender, taking the woman out of the home and away from her children, making the woman into a mock man, the man into a boy, breaking up marriages and more. Christian behavior, especially in ignoring gender and marriage teaching from the Bible, has helped to trash our communities and trash our culture. Remember that then next time YOU feel a desire to argue that what God says is not so important. Or that what the Bible says on men and women isn’t important. Of course it is important. How could it not be?

Objection 6—We are to submit “to one another” as Ephesians 5:21 says. Therefore, there is no male headship.

The argument that Ephesians 5:21 tells both husband and wife to submit to one another in the same way is truly one of the most ludicrous and ignorant arguments people make when trying to squirm out of patriarchy. It’s hard to fathom how anyone with any basic knowledge of the Bible would consider making it. Yet people do. They do it mostly because they want to escape from the teaching of male headship, and I’m sure at least some of them know they are misusing the text when they do so. Escaping responsibility can indeed be a powerful motivator to misuse the Bible.

To begin with, Ephesians 5 speaks clearly of the wife submitting to her husband. Not only that, but it provides details of that submission and ties it in with that of the Church to Christ. Other scriptures also speak plainly of the wife’s submission. How then could what verse 21 says be in conflict with these other scriptures? Scripture cannot break scripture. Besides, verse 21 comes immediately before the passages that most anger the feminists. What does it mean when it says “submitting to one another in the fear of God?”

Of course the Bible isn’t contradicting itself at all. One reasonable answer here is that verse 21 speaks as it does because it is a general statement, speaking of the various kinds of submission to authorities that the rest of the section will deal with. We have submission to husbands beginning in verse 22 up to the end of the chapter; we have submission to parents at the very beginning of the following chapter 6; we have submission to masters starting in verse 6:5. Therefore, we can read the words “*submitting to one another in the fear of God*” in verse 21 as a statement of submitting in all these basic categories and there is no conflict with other texts at all. I hope that makes sense to you. It’s really pretty simply.

Another alternate explanation, if you desire one, is that verse 21 is speaking of a different kind of submitting: for example, submitting oneself to the good of other people and being humble toward them. This would be a minority usage of the word submit (just do a search of the word in the Bible) but it would still make good sense and would not be in conflict with the following verses about headship in various arenas. What it would mean is that everyone is submitted to the good of everyone else, something that of course we should be, regardless of our position on the vertical pillar. Yet caring for the good of others does not mean having no authority.

Rather it comes often WITH authority, and is especially important in positions of leadership. The king, of course should care about his subjects. We should all be submitted to the other's good.

Lastly, I just want to add this. While feminists may claim verse 21 annihilates the meaning of the following verses, and that it proclaims everyone submits to the will of every other soul, just try this little test: Show up at their congregations. Take them aside. Tell them they need to quit being pastors and quit being teachers because they're making a complete disaster of things. Remind them that they need to submit to your commands, since Ephesians 5:21 says so. Go and see if they choose to submit to you. We'll see how the results of our test turn out.

Closing

In conclusion, I don't think it's difficult to see that biblical marriage has a vertical pillar, and that vertical pillar reflects the man's headship and the woman's subjection to him. In fact, I trust that anyone can grasp that. This vertical pillar is revealed from start to finish of scripture, and reveals something redemptive in the beautiful man-wife relationship. I realize that many of you little Messiahs out there still have a problem dealing with these truths, and have even been trained to bristle and recoil at clear talk of the man's authority. But I assure you that response is merely culture talking. The Bible itself speaks clearly of man's authority. We should learn to respect it and speak clearly as well.

Moreover, I realize many of you might be tangled up in a lifestyle that involves ignoring these instructions along with others about men and women, and perhaps have come to rely on that alternate lifestyle. All I can say is, the truth of God is greater than any worldly preference, and the Spirit of God is greater than any force holding you there. If you find that your attitudes are the modern ones and not the God-breathed ones, it is your obligation to turn around and respect the biblical order. It's as simple as that. And it's the same thing we would expect of anyone. God Himself will give you the power to do that, just as He gives the sinner the power to be released from his sin, the unbeliever the power to come to the cross, the heretic the power to come and learn the truth; God Almighty will empower you to adapt to what might be a very new, but not so contemporary lifestyle. So if you are living in the world's values, and trying to find the world's values in the Bible where they are not, please repent and come back to the path. Even if that means as a man you have to take charge. Or as a woman you must joyfully submit.

Thank you very much for listening.

Shalom U'vrachah. Peace and blessing to you.