

## **The Role of a Christian Man**

*This article by Alan Bailey, of OAC Ministries originally appeared in the Christian newspaper 'New Life' in 1990. I have reproduced it here as it brings clarity where there is a lot of confusion on this subject and despite the passage of over 25 years is just as relevant (and perhaps more so).*

Though the scene of marriage and the family is strewn with debris and shot through with unhappiness for a great number of people, there are many others who rejoice daily in the privileges and joys of living together with a loving life's partner. Those joys are too great to put into words. We who experience them can only be humbly grateful to God.

### **Is Leadership Necessary?**

The past three decades have seen tremendous changes of attitude towards marriage on the part of both Christians and non-Christians. Now we seem to have reached the point when concepts like 'headship' and 'leadership' are openly repudiated and even scoffed at.

Years ago this was rife in liberal circles. Now it is rife among evangelicals. Anyone who reads magazines and listens to current comment will see that this is so. As a person who mixes in ministry across the denominations, I know that it is the case.

Yes, Leadership is Required

Marriage is a team of two, deeply involved together in the game of life. It shouldn't be necessary to point out that leadership is required here, as it is in all partnerships and co-operative efforts. A home needs policies, initiatives and direction. In short, management. (Paul speaks of it in 1 Timothy 3:4). If these things are not exercised, two people and their family are drifting, rudderless and without a goal. That two people can achieve their ideals without one being leader or head is plausible in theory, but it is completely fictitious in practice. Someone leads, however badly. Inevitably.

Now I am conscious that this brings up the spectre of male domination and all the abuses that have gone along with it. But I suggest that the picture we have in mind is so often a caricature of what God intended. Throughout the years of debate on this question, I have rarely seen anything but a straw man set up and then systematically torn apart. The failure of men to model the God-ordained order spoken of in Scripture does not mean that we should forsake God's Word and carve out a new policy of our own. But this is happening all over the place.

Yes, It Is Biblical

The plan of God as revealed in Scripture has built into it the beauty of complementarity. It is in the natural order of things, though not without deep mysteries attached to it.

The Persons of the Godhead have different roles or functions, appearing to complement each other. The creatures have them too. Men and women have different functions and different needs to fulfil. Hence God has put order into husband/wife relationships just as He has in the case of parent/child, master/servant, ruler/subject and so on. That man is the head of the woman is clearly taught. Those who are uncertain of this should carefully read 1 Corinthians 11:3, Ephesians 5:22-24, Colossians 3:18, Titus 2:5, 1 Peter 3:1,5. That this headship is set out in Ephesians 5 as a type of Christ and the church immediately shows that it is set in place by God Himself.

I am aware of the claim that 'head' means 'source' rather than 'leader' or 'one having authority.'

Whatever importance there is in this aspect of the truth it can hardly remove the emphasis on submission that is made in the same Scripture passages. How do we escape the implications of submission and obedience? Will we remove the notion of authority from Christ's headship of the church?

The only way to avoid this teaching is to deny the authority of Scripture. No amount of interpretive juggling can change what is said, even though I have read many attempts to make the verses say the exact opposite to their plain meaning! To dismiss the teaching as cultural is to ignore its context and its claim to originate from creation and revelation, not from mere custom.

### **What is Meant by 'Headship' and 'Leadership'?**

To soften what seems to be unreasonable and unfair to our secularly influenced minds, all too often we try to remove the words 'authority,' 'submission,' 'roles' and the like and replace them with 'relationship,' 'equality' and 'sharing.'

This reveals a basic misunderstanding of the subject. We reveal our misunderstanding by setting these words off against each other as if they were mutually exclusive ideas. (Again, did we learn this from the humanists?) They are nothing of the kind.

In Christian marriage the concept of authority and roles don't rule out love, growing relationships and equality. True love admires, it does not compete. Love doesn't seek its own but the well-being of the other. Part of the leader's task is to promote growth in love, personal development, deep sharing, mutual listening, praise and appreciation of one another. This is God's way of providing for these things.

The Ephesians chapter 5 passage shows the kind of love with which a man is to love his wife. '*As Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her*' and so on. Yet that love, to be of the quality that it is, must take up the responsibility that is given to it. This means carrying the load, accepting the buck, being prepared to die.

Throughout the 70s, the heyday of the feminist debate, I noted one writer after another stumbling over the words superiority/inferiority and equality/inequality. They could not see how a person who had leadership and authority was not automatically superior to the one or ones he led. Christians need not have any such dilemma. The words are inapplicable and irrelevant. Of course it is possible to have leadership among equals. A person who submits is not by definition inferior.

### **The Case of the Gentiles**

The disciples on more than one occasion showed their true colours by arguing about who was the greatest (Mark 9:33-37 and 10:35-45). The Lord taught them lessons that we need to learn today. He spoke of the way the Gentiles think and act. Their idea of greatness was to lord it over others. To be great meant to be superior. To be superior meant to set yourself over lesser mortals. The Gentiles still believe it today. On the whole, Christians do too. It is ingrained in the minds of most of us.

But Jesus said: '*This is not to be so among you.*' He set out a different order. '*Whoever desires to be great among you must be your servant. Whoever wishes to be first in rank must be slave of all.*' We tend to pass this off as hyperbole. It is not. The Lord girded Himself with a towel and washed the feet of those carnal men. He didn't come to be served but to serve. Later he carried His cross to Calvary to give His life a ransom for many. He exemplified submission. In this He expressed the nature of God Why then are we so afraid of it? If any person wants to avoid submission or subordination then he/she had better not become a Christian. It is part of the whole contract - almost

all of it, in fact.

Years ago P.T. Forsyth wrote: *'Subordination is divine. The Principle has its roots in the cohesion of the eternal Trinity itself. To recognise no lord or master is satanic. Without the spirit of subordination there is no true piety, no manly nobility and no womanly charm.'*

So the church submits to Christ. Believers submit to one another (male and female, Ephesians 5:21). And the wife submits to her husband.

### **Christian Chauvinism?**

Some folk airily dismiss the teaching of headship with the accusation that it is only chauvinism with some doubtful verses to back it up. Again this reveals a woeful misunderstanding of the whole debate.

Chauvinism is masculine domination. Spiritual headship is a man who is subject to Christ accepting God-given responsibility. Chauvinism is bluster and force, imposing one's will upon another. Headship is prayerful and concerned, tender and forgiving.

Chauvinism refuses to accept responsibility then accuses, blames and confronts. Headship is taking responsibility, accepting the consequences. Chauvinism is selfishly inspired, seeking its own. Headship is considerate, sacrificial, conscious of inadequacy, dependent upon Christ.

### **Does It Matter That Much?**

Relegating this question to the 'too hard' basket or hiding oneself from it is dangerous. Yes, it matters greatly.

Marriages and families are crashing all around us, often because there is simply no leadership. They drift onto the rocks. Many marriages experiment with split responsibility (as opposed to planned, delegated responsibility). It suits the de facto arrangement where one may leave the other at any time, but that is not the principle of Christian marriage.

Huge numbers have problems through feminine leadership. Where a man is dominated by his wife, strife will ensue sooner or later. When God's order is reversed, things are bound to go wrong. (I say this having observed and noted the fact for some 30 years.)

With sadness I bring up another consequence of the lack of masculine leadership in the home (and to some extent in the church). It is the arrival of the wimp. He is the weak, soft, pliable man who has lost a good deal of his masculinity. Initiative is missing. Passivity rules. At the risk of sounding personal and judgemental, let me say that this type is prolific in Christian circles. I see him in the ministry and on the mission field to an alarming degree. Being afraid of his wife's wishes, and sometimes her wilfulness, he will follow her in such things as her unwillingness to attend church, her desire to change to a different one, her ideas on the use of money and their place of residence. His children defeat him again and again in confrontation. Discipline is weak because the firm exercise of authority is taboo. He is only partly a man in the modern terminology. Don't expect him to love his wife as Christ loved the church – he lacks the courage for anything like that. And don't expect his children to grow up to fear God.

Yes, I am afraid of the future because of the trends in the church today. We claim that we are going forward into greater enlightenment. In this area we are going backwards - back to Eden where sinful Adam sat with Eve munching on forbidden fruit.

I implore my brothers in Christ to 'acquit yourselves like men; be strong!' Play the man! Be like your Master! Pray for strength, grace, wisdom, because you, like me, need them.

To my sisters in Christ I say: 'Let him wear the crown. It's only paper. It's just for time, not eternity. Don't try to snatch it away because you will find that under the paper is a crown of thorns. (With thanks to C.S. Lewis for the latter thought.)

The last word is given to Matthew Henry who lived back in times when it is thought that no-one really understood gender relationships (1662-1714).

*'When God made woman He did not take her out of man's head for her to lord it over him, nor out of his feet to be trampled on by him; but out of his side to be equal with him, from under his arm to be protected by him, and from near his heart to be loved by him.'*