

“ONE ASPECT OF THE PART YOU PLAY IN ANSWERED PRAYER”

Ephesians 1.15-23

Dr. John S. Waldrup

We who know Christ are wonderfully placed in a relationship that not only guarantees our access to the throne of grace to pray to God, Hebrews 4.16, but we are also the beneficiaries of prayers offered up on our behalf, Ephesians 1.15-23, which is where we will begin this message. As you make your way to Paul's letter to the Ephesian congregation, be mindful that a great many answers to prayer are dependent upon our obedience to and conformity to the will of God for our lives. God does not reward misconduct, though many parents seem to think rewarding their child's misconduct is somehow acceptable. Neither does He reinforce behavior that is not in compliance with His revealed will.

Thus, you and I who know Christ have a part to play in answered prayers offered up by us and on behalf of us. With that in mind, I invite you to stand and read along with me silently as I read Ephesians 1.15-23:

- 15 Wherefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus, and love unto all the saints,
- 16 Cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers;
- 17 That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him:
- 18 The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints,
- 19 And what *is* the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power,
- 20 Which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set *him* at his own right hand in the heavenly *places*,
- 21 Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come:
- 22 And hath put all *things* under his feet, and gave him *to be* the head over all *things* to the church,
- 23 Which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all.

Using this account of Paul's prayer life as it related to the Ephesian congregation, I want to point out four clues to understanding, with a summary of the passage, on the way to an essential treatment about the principle of headship, as it relates to God, as it relates to a believer's relationship with Christ, as it relates to your Church membership, and as it relates to the home life of married couples, especially those with children. As Paul rehearsed his prayer pattern for the Ephesian Church members, he made three allusions familiar to those who have studied First Thessalonians. Paul's letter to new believers in Thessalonica outlines the apostolic new converts' course of the New Testament.

In verse 15 of our text, he wrote, "I heard of your faith," an allusion to the "work of faith" mentioned in First Thessalonians 1.3, that is characteristic of every believer's commitment to evangelism, and one of the factors that solidifies confidence that an individual is the elect of God. Also in verse 15, he wrote, "and love unto all the saints," a second allusion, this time to the "labour of love," a second criterion also found in First Thessalonians 1.3, by which the Apostle Paul gained additional assurance of his readers' election by God. Third, in

verse 18, he referred to “the hope of his calling,” the final of his First Thessalonians allusions, the “patience of hope,” that rounded out the three characteristics in the lives of the Thessalonian Church members on which the Apostle’s assurance of salvation was solidly based by what he observed in their lives. And this is no surprise, since Paul sprinkled allusions to these three characteristics throughout his writings.

The final clue to understanding is necessary only because of the propensity of Protestants and their contrived ideas about the Church. Ending verse 22 and beginning verse 23, Paul referred to the Lord Jesus Christ as “the head over all *things* to the church,²³ Which is his body.” Let us be very clear in our understanding that Paul is reiterating the Lord Jesus Christ’s relationship to ἐκκλησία, the assembly, which is His body, meaning the Ephesian congregation of believers, and not anything like Protestantism’s imagined but nowhere proven universal invisible entity.¹

What is the essence of Paul’s prayers on behalf of the Ephesians, as described in verses 15-22? What you might notice first is the complete absence of Paul’s requests, at least here, for things such as relief from persecution, material blessings, or healings from sickness and disease. What he prayed for, instead, was their spiritual illumination, “The eyes of your understanding being enlightened,” he wrote in verse 18.

I will leave it to you to explore the details of the Spirit’s illumination of believers. However, let me remind you that your obedience to God’s revealed will for your life is crucial to your eventual grasp of the truths, the principles, and an appreciation of the glories you have in Christ. Meaning? The Spirit will grant you greater comprehension of Bible truths in proportion to your heart’s obedience to Him. He is not teaching us when we are grieving or quenching Him by our failure to obey.

That said, and to set before you one aspect of your obedience to God’s plan for your life, we will consider the topic of headship in God’s Word and in your life, beginning with the Triune Godhead and ending with how we address some practicalities of headship.

In The Word of God, WE BEGIN WITH GOD

We know from the Shema in Deuteronomy 6.4, “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God *is* one LORD,” and from Mark 12.29 and 32, Romans 3.30, First Corinthians 8.6, Galatians 3.20, Ephesians 4.6, First Timothy 2.5, and James 2.19, “that there is one God.” We who believe in the Bible are monotheists.

But we are not only monotheists, because the Word of God does not only declare, so many times and in so many ways, that there is only one God. We are also Trinitarians, because Scripture shows, so many times and in so many ways, that though there is one God, He exists in the form of three Divine Persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

I will not take the time to expand on this, since my pamphlet “The Ancient Heresy Of Modalism Returns” addresses the matter thoroughly, and can be obtained in the back of the auditorium or on the Classical Baptist Press website.²

The crucial point to make at this time has to do with headship, its importance, and its implications: First, headship in the Triune Godhead is explicitly asserted by the Apostle Paul in First Corinthians 11.3, where we read, “the head of Christ *is* God.” Because the Lord Jesus Christ is in every way equal to God the Father, this is correctly understood as a functional hierarchy, with the Second Person being functionally subordinate to the First Person without in any way suggesting inferiority. The outworking of this functional relationship is seen in

¹ Very helpful to understanding this truth is Charles Hunt’s, *The Body Of Christ: Metaphor Not Myth* that is available to read at www.ClassicalBaptist.Press

² www.ClassicalBaptist.Press

John 8.29, where the Savior asserted, “for I do always those things that please him.” Functional subordination is *never* seen in the Bible as diminishing or in any way denigrating.

Next, SALVATION

The concept of headship, as it relates to sin, salvation, and eternal life, is tied to a notion theologians long ago labeled federal headship. Federal headship is shorthand for Adam, the first man, representing all of his heirs, leading our entire race into sin and spiritual deadness when he disobeyed God. At the same time, the Lord Jesus Christ, referred to as the last Adam by the Apostle Paul, led those who believed in Him to life.³ Romans 5.19 concisely summarizes the outworking of federal headship with respect to salvation:

“For as by one man’s disobedience many [which is to say all] were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many [which is to say all believers] be made righteous.”

So long as Adam is your head (and he was your head when you entered the human race), you are doomed and damned. Those whose head is Christ are redeemed and will be delivered to glory. I do not have the time at present to establish the benefits to you of obeying and complying with the revealed will of your Head, but I would be glad to discuss the matter with you. Just know that one of the many accomplishments Christ blesses His own with is displacing Adam and becoming the Second Adam when the sinner turns to Christ in repentance and faith.

Third, THE CONGREGATION

A sinner’s understanding of headship is not required to grasp the Gospel and become a Christian. However, believers need to learn along the way as they grow in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ, so important, in fact, that the gathered worship of God’s people is so ordered that it establishes a pattern in worship that reflects headship.

When people first begin to attend Church, especially if they had not grown up in Church and seen the proper patterns of married conduct that reflect headship in the worship services, God’s plan is for them to learn by the examples they observe in the congregation as well as by the doctrines they are taught. Some truths are thereby both caught and taught in a Church service. The functional hierarchy in both the Triune Godhead and marriage is stated in First Corinthians 11.3:

“But I would have you know, that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman *is* the man; and the head of Christ *is* God.”

One illustration of how this headship relationship is to be acted out is given in First Corinthians 14, where the Apostle Paul dealt with the Corinthian congregation’s misunderstanding related to the speaking gifts of prophecy and tongues, where he noted in verses 34 and 35,

- ³⁴ Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but *they are commanded* to be under obedience, as also saith the law.
- ³⁵ And if they will learn any thing, let them ask their husbands at home: for it is a shame for women to speak in the church.

³ Stanley J. Grenz, David Guretzki & Cherith Fee Nordling, *Pocket Dictionary of Theological Terms*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999), pages 50-51.

This is not talking, but assertive and authoritative speaking in the assembly. Any violation of a husband's headship in marriage and his wife's functional subordination to him is shameful, and certainly not to be joked about or treated lightly.

A second illustration of how this headship relationship is to be acted out is given in First Timothy chapter 2, where Paul dealt with public worship as it relates to men, verses 1-8,

- ¹ I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, *and* giving of thanks, be made for all men;
- ² For kings, and *for* all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty.
- ³ For this *is* good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour;
- ⁴ Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth.
- ⁵ For *there is* one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus;
- ⁶ Who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time.
- ⁷ Whereunto I am ordained a preacher, and an apostle, (I speak the truth in Christ, *and* lie not;) a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and verity.
- ⁸ I will therefore that men pray every where, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting,

and also, how it relates to women, in verses 9-15:

- ⁹ In like manner also, that women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety; not with broided hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array;
- ¹⁰ But (which becometh women professing godliness) with good works.
- ¹¹ Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection.
- ¹² But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence.
- ¹³ For Adam was first formed, then Eve.
- ¹⁴ And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression.
- ¹⁵ Notwithstanding she shall be saved in childbearing, if they continue in faith and charity and holiness with sobriety.

A third illustration of this headship relationship is found in two of the Apostle Paul's so-called pastoral epistles, letters written to guide the conduct of spiritual leaders, First Timothy 3.1-5, and 12,

- ¹ This *is* a true saying, If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work.
- ² A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach;
- ³ Not given to wine, no striker, not greedy of filthy lucre; but patient, not a brawler, not covetous;
- ⁴ One that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity;
- ⁵ (For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?),
- ¹² Let the deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well.

Notice, before moving on, that verse 4 reads, "his own house," "his children," and verse 5 reads "his own house." Make of that what you will, being aware that no corresponding wording is associated with mothers. Not to deny that children are their mother's, but the issue before us in context is headship.

And Titus 1.6: "If any be blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children not accused of riot or unruly."

It is the husband who has one wife and faithful children.

May I interject at this point, the obvious that goes without saying? People are oftentimes overcome with apprehension when confronted with this matter of headship in the congregation for the first time, evoking nightmarish concerns about cruelty, domination, and degradation by a runaway husband dictator. Such is the feminist narrative. This ignores many realities found in the Bible, of which I will mention only two. First, the Christian faith has exalted the standing of women in the home, likening her to the believer in relation to the Savior, with respect to her relationship with her believing husband.

Only Christian women, over the course of human history, have enjoyed such a position of privilege and respect in the believing community, not found in any other belief system.⁴ We Christians believe that every woman bears God's image, possesses free will, and that no husband has any right to impose his will on his wife. Marriage is a voluntary association. As well, I will leave it to you to read Ephesians 5.21-30, where the husband's headship position corresponds to his duty, obligation, and responsibility to deliver his wife, verse 23, love his wife, verse 25, sacrifice himself for his wife, also verse 25, and showing in conclusion him loving his wife again asserted, verse 28. And all this is to be accomplished by the Christian husband in a benign and inoffensive way as he demonstrates in a decidedly masculine way kindness, compassion, gentleness, and explicit expressions of sacrificial love.

Thus, the notion that a Christian wife is somehow worse off for following the leadership of her Christian husband is not supported by either the Word of God or Christian history, recognizing that it is unsaved men and woefully immature Christian men who berate, badmouth, and mistreat their wives, not godly men who do not fail to provide not only love, but also encouragement, understanding, compassion, protection, and provision for their spouses as they lead them in their marriage. It is the challenge of the congregation to impart these principles, patterns, and truths to the uninformed when they begin to attend the public worship services of the assembly. What they see in our practice, along with the doctrines they learn as they are discipled and taught, will reformulate life in their homes.

Finally, THE MARRIAGE THAT HONORS GOD'S CONCEPT OF HEADSHIP

In the Word of God, we are shown that the child of God is, first and foremost, a servant, literally a slave. So, what can be said about two servants of God who are married to each other? As servants in the household of faith, our privilege is to serve the Master, our Lord Jesus Christ. And within the context of our service, are the relationships God has been pleased to place us in, both our relationship with a spouse in the case of those of us who are married, and our relationship with the Church where we are members in good standing. The overarching principle that governs both our attitudes and our actions is both implied and declared. In Matthew 18.15-22, we are given explicit guidance by the Lord with respect to sinning and being sinned against by a Church member, from the steps leading to reconciliation to our willingness to forgive:

“Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven.”

Implied for us in the Great Commission, Matthew 28.18-20, is the authority delegated to our Church by the Savior to make disciples, to make us into disciples, with the implication being that it guides us being the reality that we are disciples of Jesus Christ, committed to both following Him and engaging with others to follow Him.

How that looks in the Christian home is based upon the headship principles we have already noted, with God the Father being the functional hierarchy head over Christ, Christ being the head over the husband, and the

⁴ Contra Islam, with its Quran granting permission to beat wives into submission, and Hinduism's now illegal practice of Sati, whereby widows were frequently drugged and bound before placing them on their husband's funeral pyre to be burned alive.

husband being the functional hierarchy head over his wife. Please note, again, that the wife's subordination to her husband is as much the subordination of her husband's equal as is the Savior's functional subordination to God the Father, as His equal in every way.

Functional subordination, rightly understood, is *never* degrading or denigrating. With humility, and as servants indwelt by the Holy Spirit of God to produce joy in our outlook, anticipation, and experience, we are grateful to occupy the role God has sovereignly placed us in to bring Him glory and to exalt the Savior. The husband, from the beginning and before the entrance of sin, First Timothy 2.11-13, was designated by God to occupy the position of leader, head of household, with overarching duties, obligations, and responsibilities to exercise with benevolence, determination, and a willingness to sacrifice for his wife, his children, and his home.

The wife, from the beginning and before the entrance of sin, First Timothy 2.11-13, was designated by God to occupy the functionally subordinate position of helper, whose husband praises her and whose children call her blessed.⁵ Just as it is shameful for a wife not to properly observe in public her place in the headship hierarchy of her home, so it is shameful for a husband not to properly observe in public his place in the headship hierarchy of his home. He is honored to lead, she is delighted to follow. It is shameful for her not to follow her husband spiritually, but to go her own way. Though coercion is out of the question, it is shameful for him not to provide spiritual leadership for his wife and to neglect both his own and her place in God's plan for marriage.

Let me turn to decision-making insights in the home that reflect God's headship principles. No husband is his wife's boss, just as no wife is to be her husband's boss. Because they are equals in the sight of God, Galatians 3.28, the husband's functional oversight of his wife and the wife's functional subordination to her husband is a relationship of equals.

Spiritual believers embrace their respective roles, the husband reflecting Christ in the home, Ephesians 5.23, the wife reflecting the believer's submission as unto the Lord, Ephesians 5.22, with both husband and wife submitting to one another in the fear of God, Ephesians 5.21. The marriage relationship, therefore, is an authority structure.

As with any authority structure and including any authority structure in which functional subordination is found, the person occupying the subordinate position does not issue demands, does not exercise vetoes, and does not usurp or undermine leadership. In the secular world, violation of what the military labels the chain of command is mutiny. No lance corporal usurps or undermines his gunnery sergeant. And just as in any congregation whose head is Christ, who would be appalled at the notion of a music director, an usher, a Sunday School teacher, or a deacon refusing to comply with the leadership of the pastor, so in a Christian marriage, it is appalling when a wife fails to follow the leadership of her husband.

What if the husband is wrong? What if the pastor is wrong? What if anyone in authority is wrong? That is where the Biblical appeal is employed by the instructed and the godly and is the subject that deserves its own series of messages. No husband is granted authority to coerce his wife, just as no Gospel minister is given authority to compel any Church member. And while the world seems okay with wives divorcing husbands with whom they disagree, and Church members leaving their Church to end up not attending Church anywhere faithfully, God is honored when His people employ the means He has placed at our disposal, the Biblical appeal.

An inherent aspect of leadership is the likelihood of bad decisions. Satan would encourage wives to marry manageable men to control, men who are ultimately not manly but spiritually weak and ineffective, afraid to cross their wives and eventually their daughters. A spiritual man, however, develops and grows over time to become wiser in his decision-making skills. And, married to a godly woman, committed to helping him as unto the Lord, she will develop her appeal skills and thereby help him grow as a Christian man and spiritual leader. Of course, there are many requests for forgiveness along the way, with a good measure of humility. But God's plan

⁵ Proverbs 31.28

always works better than our devices. God's plan is never for Christian wives to lead their husbands, or for Christian husbands not to lead their wives.

This is obviously a vast and multifaceted topic. I could go on and on about our culture's destruction of manhood and the distortions of femininity, which is yet another reason why we are warned to "Love not the world, neither the things *that are* in the world," First John 2.15.

Let me wrap this message up by asserting a principle most of you are familiar with, especially you who are moms and dads. It is the principle that is opposite to what most unsaved people and too many immature Christians imagine to be the right approach to making decisions.

Most people imagine that obedience to God's Word properly *follows* their consideration and understanding of the truths that are declared. In short, a wife submits to her husband once she understands the specifics and details of how that will work out and how skillful a decision-maker her husband shows himself to be.

A husband is willing to exercise his position as the spiritual leader in his home once he has all the details figured out, so that he faces no risk of making bad decisions or the consequences of undeveloped skills as a spiritual leader. Both approaches are entirely incorrect and contrary to most of our life experiences to this point.

I illustrate with a little boy or a little girl. Has it been your experience with your children that their use of eating utensils is delayed until they learn the principles and benefits of such utensils? Or have you found that the only way a child will ever master the use of a spoon or fork is by trying and failing, trying and failing, and trying and failing until coordination and control are developed over time? They will later understand. Do I need to start potty training?

The same is true in the spiritual realm, beloved. A husband exercises leadership and fails. Then he exercises leadership again and likely fails. And this process continues for decades as he acquires skill and wisdom. How much more successful will he be with his wife's joyful subordination to his role as leader?

In like manner, a godly Christian woman will follow her husband and likely fall short. Then, she will do it again and again and again, addressing her frustrations and his faltering steps along the way. However, what if she submits to her man as unto the Lord, and conscientiously develops wisdom and hones her skills of formulating appeals to him along the way, not urging him to change his mind, but requesting that he consider a new decision based on new information? Requests, mind you, not ultimatums.

Along the way, not only do the husband and wife develop spiritually and become a wonderfully coordinated family unit as God intended, but they are actually participating in the fulfillment of their own prayer requests and prayers offered up on their behalf. By incorporating the clearly established Biblical principles of headship, husband leading, and wife following as unto the Lord into their marriage, they accomplish several goals. First, they model God's plan for marriage and set an example for their family, friends, and Church members. Second, they testify by their actions that yielding to the leadership plan and purpose of God for their lives as husband and wife is better than the tug-of-war power plays that are a part of so many marriages (until the husband gives up in cowardly fashion and waves the white flag to his wife and kids). Third, they enable the pastor to more easily construct a gathering of God's people for worship in which visitors are both taught and caught the pattern of headship for their homes, because it is seen in the assembly, with men doing what Paul urged Timothy to lead men to do, First Timothy 2.8,

"I will therefore that men pray every where, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting,"

while the women

"learn in silence with all subjection,"

First Timothy 2.11.

Finally, and this is the primary thrust of the message, whereby you and I can, by our obedience, participate in the prayers offered up to God for our spiritual illumination to be answered. God will more fully illuminate your understanding of what you have in Christ, with His subordination to the Father in the Triune Godhead, and His headship over His Church, which is His body, coupled with your leadership of your wife, sir, and your fellowship of your husband, ma'am.

You will thereby see more, understand more, and glory in your salvation more by your compliance with God's authority structure for your marriage than by failing to lead your wife properly and failing to be the help God designed you to be for your husband.

Set aside forever this nonsense of, "When I understand the concept, I will obey," that requires no faith. Instead, understand that God's approach is recognized by the faith that declares, "I will obey, that I will come to understand." Christian husband, lead! Christian wife, follow your man's leadership!