

Headship's Heart

The Call for Christlike Leadership

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The Failure in Headship: WHEN MEN DOMINATE AND/OR ABDICATE

As Christian men, it is important to talk about the call for Christlike leadership in our marriages and our families. It isn't easy to lead well as the head of the household, and all too often it seems that we fall into one of two extremes: to dominate or to abdicate.

On one hand, there's the tendency to **dominate**—to walk into a situation at home and lay down the law without considering the thoughts and feelings of your wife or family. To dominate is to impose your will, to demand obedience, to demand respect. It's the kind of leadership that insists on being heard, often through force or frustration, rather than through understanding.

On the other hand, there's the tendency to **abdicate**. This is where you avoid making decisions, leaving everything to your wife or neglecting your role in the spiritual and physical wellbeing of your household. You might focus on your work, hobbies, personal interests - or even your activities in church - while ignoring the needs of your family.

How is this with you? Where do you stand? In your marriage and family do you tend to dominate, abdicate, or perhaps a mix of both? Maybe you're mostly absent from decision-making until something upsets you, and then you come down loud and hard.

The problem is, neither domination nor abdication reflects the leadership God calls us to be. *Domination* breeds resentment and broken relationships, while *abdication* creates chaos and unmet needs. Switching between the two only leaves everyone—including yourself—confused, frustrated, and hurt.

So, what should we do? Men, if you're a husband, leadership is not an option—it's a calling. But this leadership isn't about power or control. It's about humble service and sacrificial love, following the example of Jesus Christ.

The Biblical Foundation for Headship: TO LEAD IS TO LOVE

Ephesians 5:22-33 is often better known for its instructions to wives than to husbands. Verse 22 says, "*Wives, submit to your husbands, as to the Lord.*" In His wisdom, God has designed marriage so that a wife is called to submit to and respect her husband. She is to do this in honour to God who has established these roles. But men, notice this: while the Bible calls wives to submit, it never instructs husbands to enforce that submission. Your wife is accountable to God, not you, for how she responds to your leadership.

What Ephesians 5 says to you is this, "*Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her*" (Ephesians 5:25). Here, the Apostle Paul paints a breathtaking picture of what it means to lead as a husband. The heart of headship isn't about control or commands - it's about love. Not just any love, but the sacrificial, selfless, and servant-hearted love of Jesus Christ. Christ's love for the church wasn't about dominance or demanding obedience; it was about giving, serving, and laying down His life. Men, this is the model we are called to follow.

But Paul goes further, explaining that a husband's love should reflect Christ's care for the church: nurturing, protecting, and cherishing his wife as his own body (Ephesians 5:28-29). This kind of leadership isn't about asserting authority; it's about assuming responsibility. It's about creating an environment where your wife can flourish, feel valued, and become the person God has called her to be.

Headship in Practice: What it is and isn't

So what does biblical headship look like in practice? Here's a breakdown of what it is - and isn't.

WHAT BIBLICAL HEADSHIP IS

Biblical headship is about **sacrificial love**. Ephesians 5:22-33 gives the command three times for husbands to love their wives, modelling their love after Christ's selfless love for the Church.

Biblical leadership is about **serving**. It's about humility, putting her needs above your own. We need to do this as Christ did for the church, giving himself up for her. (Ephesians 5:25)

Biblical headship is about **understanding** and **honour**. Live with your wife in an understanding way, valuing her thoughts and perspectives. (1 Peter 3:7)

Biblical headship is about **encouragement** and **support**. Build her up, helping her grow in her God-given gifts and calling. (1 Thessalonians 5:11).

Biblical headship is about being **grace-filled**, taking the initiative to resolve conflicts and restore unity in your marriage.

Biblical headship is about having a **Christlike character**. Demonstrate love, patience, kindness, goodness and self-control in all that you say and do. (Galatians 5:22-23).

WHAT BIBLICAL HEADSHIP ISN'T

Biblical headship is not about domination or control. Never use your role to assert authority harshly or selfishly. (Colossians 3:19).

Biblical headship is not about selfishness. Don't prioritize your desires over your wife and family. (Philippians 2:4)

Biblical headship is never dismissive. Don't ignore, belittle, or disregard your wife's opinions or feelings. (1 Peter 3:7)

Biblical headship is not about misusing Scripture. Don't twist biblical teachings to justify selfish, controlling or unloving behaviour. (2 Timothy 2:15)

Biblical headship is not about fear, intimidation or manipulation. Remember the words of 1 John 4:18 that perfect love drives out fear.

Biblical headship is not about forgetting mutual submission. Remember that we are to submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. (Ephesians 5:21)

The Heart of Headship: TO PROTECT AND PROVIDE

At its core, biblical headship is about two things: to **protect** and to **provide**. In his book "This Momentary Marriage" John Piper observes that, "*Virtually everything a husband is called upon to do in his leadership is summed up in one of these four ways: physical provision, spiritual provision, physical protection, and spiritual protection.*"

Physical provision means ensuring your family has food on the table and a roof over their heads. Men, as a general rule the physical needs of your wife and family are your responsibility. This requires diligence, even when work is tough, the hours are long, and the rewards seem few. It's about sacrificing your comfort, desires, and sometimes dreams to provide for your family. Don't feel inadequate if you can't afford the biggest house or fanciest car, and don't let pride stop you from accepting help when needed. But don't be lazy or spend your pay cheque on yourself at your family's expense.

Physical protection is also your role as the man of the house. This means making your home a safe and secure place, standing up for your wife and children in difficult situations, and being a source of strength and stability. As 1 Peter 3:7 reminds us, wives are "*weaker vessels*"—not in value but in physical vulnerability—and husbands are to honour

them by creating a safe, nurturing environment. That means that protection isn't just about physical safety; it's about fostering a space where your family feels secure and cared for, much like Christ does for His church.

Spiritual provision involves leading your family in prayer, Bible reading, and worship, feeding their souls with God's Word, and modelling a life of holiness. As men, we're called to be spiritual leaders—not because we're more perfect, but because it's our duty to point our families to Christ. Gather your family together around the kitchen table for devotions, read Scripture together, and lead them in prayer and thanksgiving. Encourage your family to be active participants in church, leading by example. Take to heart the words of Joshua 24:15: "*As for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.*"

Spiritual protection involves actively guarding your family against harmful influences—whether unhealthy media, toxic relationships, or false teachings. As the spiritual leader of your home, you are called to create an environment where faith can thrive. When making decisions with spiritual consequences—like choosing a church or where to live—don't think of yourself first. Consider your wife, children, and even your potential grandchildren.

***The Gospel and Headship:* LOVING AND LEADING LIKE CHRIST**

But how can we do these things? Only through Jesus Christ. Our ability to lead like Him flows from understanding His love and sacrifice. The gospel is the foundation of everything we've talked about today. When we grasp the depth of Christ's love—how He gave Himself up for us, sanctifies us, and presents us in splendour—we are empowered to love and lead as He does. True headship is not about power or control but reflecting the heart of *Christ*, the ultimate servant-leader.

And here's the good news: the gospel doesn't just call us to lead; it equips us. When we fail, He forgives. When we're weak, He gives strength. When we feel insufficient, He empowers us. So lead with confidence, knowing the same love that saved you will guide and uphold you as you love and lead like Christ.

***A New Way of Headship:* NEITHER DOMINATE NOR ABDICATE BUT CULTIVATE**

Men, as we close, remember this: biblical headship is not about *dominating* - imposing your will and demanding obedience. Nor is it about *abdication* - avoiding responsibility and leaving the hard work to others. Instead, it's about **cultivating** - nurturing your marriage and family with sacrificial love, humility, and grace. Cultivate an environment where your wife feels cherished, your children feel secure, and your home reflects the love of Christ. This is the heart of headship: to lead like Christ, who gave Himself up for us. So go home today resolved to neither dominate nor abdicate, but to cultivate—to love as Christ loves, to serve as Christ serves, and to lead as Christ leads us.