

Chapter 5

One Flesh

A Rose by Any Other Name

Everyone loves the sleepy little town of Mayberry. In this hamlet of by-gone days, Sheriff Andy Taylor rarely ran into the dangerous underbelly of society. No, his days were usually filled with jaywalkers, moon-shiners and the hilarious deeds of his renowned Deputy, Barney Fife. But occasionally, real criminals did come to town. Of course our good-natured but competent sheriff always caught the bad guys and locked ‘em up. Now as jails went, none topped Mayberry County Jail. Decorated with flowers and Aunt Bea’s homemade doilies, Sheriff Taylor made sure his prisoners were not only well cared for, but had all the comforts of home. Those scoundrels were served hot, delicious home-cooked meals, and sometimes Andy would even sing to them, strumming along on his guitar. But no matter how well they ate or how much they were entertained, those outlaws were *still in jail!*

Now, if forced to choose between the brutality of an Alcatraz and the hominess of Mayberry, any criminal in his right mind would pick Mayberry. But every prison, no matter how charming, is still a prison. And each prisoner, regardless of treatment, has still been denied their freedom. This is exactly what the Church has taught husbands to do to their wives today: lock them away behind beautifully decorated and well-kept bars. Oh, it’s quite lovely in there, having been adorned with such words as “servant leader” and “high priest of the home.” But Christian wives have still been locked out of the decision-making process and forced to serve out a life sentence their Righteous Judge never did hand down.

The battle has grown intense. And husbands need more than Stepford wives today. They need women of God, confident of their position in Christ Jesus, who are free to crawl down into the trenches and do battle with the enemy alongside them. How many times have we heard, regarding marriage, “Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness?”¹⁶² Yet have we ever really examined this scripture? What does it mean to be “yoked together” anyway? Paul was referring to an instrument that binds two great animals together, under the control of one master. Yoking two animals of unequal strength is counterproductive and harmful to both creatures. But to harness two great beasts together is to accomplish much—both submitting to the same Master, both pulling in the same direction, both working with all their might. How ironic that with one breath we have preached the wisdom of these words and with the next we distorted this same scripture, declaring that one creature is to be master over the other!

Were it not so dangerous—yielding such far-reaching and disastrous results—it’d be funny. In the name of “proper order” Christian wives have been urged to quit pulling their weight, release themselves from God’s yoke, and climb into the back of the wagon with the children! But this is no laughing matter. This disengagement of wives and overburdening of husbands has come about for several reasons, and we will examine each one closely.

A Flawed Definition of “Headship”

In the fifth chapter of Ephesians, the Apostle Paul uses allegory and comparison to give us the perfect picture of Christian marriage. The problem is, in many churches, this rather lengthy discourse appears to have gone through some sort of theological “chop shop”—where thoughts and directives have been tragically broken down and cruelly separated—so that the original beauty of Paul’s words is barely even discernable. “The husband is the head of the wife” has been pulled out, alienated from the rest of the dialogue, leaving many Christians perfectly comfortable defining “headship” for themselves. They’ve read those eight little words as if they were a complete sentence, a whole thought, when nothing could be further from the truth. It’s only when we allow Paul to finish his sentence that we discover *God’s definition* of headship.

“For the husband is the head of the wife, *as Christ also is the head of the Church*, He Himself being the Savior of the body.”

[emphasis added] Ephesians 5:23

The husband is the head of the wife *in the same manner* that Christ is the head of the Church! In other words, Christ’s relationship with His Church is our blueprint for Christian marriage. What does God expect from a Christian husband? Examine *Christ* and we’ll find out. What are the duties of a Christian wife? Examine the *Church* and we’ll learn. Too often we ignore the sum of Paul’s teaching here in Ephesians, pulling a few words out of context instead, and then flipping through the pages of Webster’s Collegiate in a desperate search for “headship.” And yet all the while, God’s Word has defined it for us.

But others have understood the Christ/Church relationship to be our model for Christian marriage. For these dear souls, the failure to grasp equality between husband and wife is really a secondary issue, no more than a symptom. Their *real problem* is failing to understand what Christ did for the Church! Contrary to popular opinion, biblical headship has nothing to do with subjugating a loved one into a position of indignity and humiliation. In fact, the only ones Christ dominated—subjugated, took control of—were the devil and his cronies! He *empowered* His Bride. Therefore, biblical headship can only be expressed by lifting up a person of lower status to equality and honor, truly becoming their savior. Just look what Christ—head of the Church, Savior of the Body—did for us.

Jesus

Raised from the dead and seated at the right hand of the Father in heaven.
(Ephesians 1:20)

Holy, harmless, undefiled (Heb.7:26)

Far above all rule and authority, power

Church

When we were dead in our trespasses and sins, God raised us up with Jesus, and seated us with Him in heavenly places!
(Ephesians 2:5, 6)

Made glorious, holy and blameless.
(Eph.5:27)

Given the keys to the Kingdom. Whatever

and dominion. All things put in subjection under His feet. (Eph. 1:21, 22)

we bind on earth is bound in heaven, whatever we loose on earth is loosed in heaven! And if two agree on earth touching anything, it shall be done for them! (Matthew 18:18, 19)

Knew that His Father was always attentive to His prayers, and whatever He asked for was accomplished. (John 11:41, 42)

Whatever we ask for, in the name of Jesus, the Father has promised to give. (John 16:23)

Position, righteousness, power and prayer—what Jesus has *earned*, the Church has been *given*! And because of this we have been commanded to do the works of Christ. Jesus went about healing all manner of sickness and disease. The Church is ordered to do the same. Jesus preached. The Church preaches. Jesus cast out devils. The Church is to cast out devils. Jesus made disciples. The Church's great commission is to go and make disciples all mankind. The Apostle John summed it up perfectly: As Jesus is, so "are we in this world!"¹⁶³ Jesus has always had myriads and myriads of angels to serve Him. What He longed for was a Bride—a companion, flesh of His flesh and bone of His bone—one who could walk beside Him in righteousness, holiness and equality. So He that "knew no sin" became sin "that we might become the righteousness of God in Him."¹⁶⁴ Lifting us up, placing us in a position of authority and sway cost Jesus everything. But because of His sacrificial love, we are now qualified to sit with Him in heavenly places and we, as well, are ministered to by angels.¹⁶⁵

Why, too often the Church's biggest problem is not the devil at all...but our failure to comprehend just who we are and what we are capable of in Christ! Is it any wonder most Christian women today are blind to their potential as well? The kingdom principal of "first the natural, then the spiritual"¹⁶⁶ has never been more painfully evident. Natural wives throughout the Kingdom—unaware of their possibilities, ignorant of their power and oblivious to their high status—are merely reflecting the identity crisis, which has crippled the Church for eons. But there is good news on the horizon. Many preachers have begun provoking the Bride of Christ—demanding we realize who we are and live up to our high calling. And at the same time, natural wives throughout the Kingdom are being challenged to live up to *their* potential as well, accepting their God given rights and responsibilities.

No, biblical headship has nothing to do with forcing a loved one into a place of dishonor and degradation. That's called "victory in warfare" and is reserved for our enemy! Headship—as patterned by Christ—involves lifting a person of inferior rank up to a place of equality and honor. As a result of the fall, husbands have obtained greater deference and respect in this wicked world. It is up to them, therefore, to resolutely honor their wives, following the example of Christ and grant them equality. And wives? They are to learn their roles and responsibilities from what God expects of the Church. What if we said to Jesus, "You're the big, strong Man. You do it! We're too delicate and fragile to preach, teach, and convert the lost." Why, that would be ridiculous, right? In fact, it's in *this same letter* that Paul makes it abundantly clear just what Jesus expects from His Bride, and that's "*to grow up in all aspects into Him* (emphasis added)."¹⁶⁷

Yes, the Church, our model for Christian wives, is commanded to grow up in *all aspects* into Christ...yet natural wives are treated like children, unable to bear the burdens of life and discern God's mind in important matters?! Surely, we can agree there's something wrong with this picture. Christian wives must come into a place of maturity, fulfilling their duties as gifted and able soldiers of God— no longer abandoning their posts and heaping every burden onto the shoulders of their husbands.

Now, the only other place in scripture that uses this particular phrase—a man being “the head” of a woman—is found in I Corinthians 11. In this setting, the Apostle Paul is responding to various questions the saints at Corinth had posed to him in a letter.¹⁶⁸ And the topic Paul addresses is *not* “Should women preach?” but rather “How should women dress *when they preach?*”¹⁶⁹ In responding to their queries, Paul makes several significant statements in rapid-fire succession. First, he addresses the importance of being culturally sensitive. (In that day and age, a woman was thought to have dishonored her husband—appearing to flaunt her beauty and sexuality—if she didn't cover her hair.) And then he touches on the story of creation to make two more important points: 1) the interdependence between men and women and 2) the right of women to make their own choices about headwear.

The interdependence of the sexes is summed up beautifully in verses 8 and 9: “Indeed, man was not made from woman, but woman from man. [Remember, Eve came out of Adam.] Neither was man created for the sake of woman, but woman for the sake of man. [But remember, Eve was fashioned in the image of God because Adam needed an “ezer neged”, a strong helper that corresponded to him.]”¹⁷⁰ These verses do not allow arrogance or condescension between men and women, but force us to recognize our dependence upon one another.

And then Paul makes his next point, which is that women have the right to judge for themselves: “For this cause ought the woman to have power [“exousia” in the original Greek, meaning “power of choice, liberty of doing as one pleases”¹⁷¹] on her head because of the angels.” This is a powerful verse, obviously referring to Paul's earlier statement in the same letter: “Know ye not that we shall judge angels? How much more things that pertain to this life?”¹⁷² Now some modern translations have added the words “sign of” to verse 10, so that it reads like this: “For this reason, and because of the angels, the woman ought to have a sign of authority on her head.”¹⁷³ But these words are not in the original manuscript, the King James Version being much more accurate here.

Now of course there is still much confusion over Paul's reference to the angels. Failing to remember that what we call I Corinthians was actually a *letter*—with no verses and chapters separating Paul's words—we've come up with some pretty wacky notions about the whole angel reference. The most popular goes like this: Angels look upon the long hair of women as submission and are reminded to submit to God. But this is just grasping at straws. We have to look at Paul's reference *within the context* of his entire letter if we're to properly understand it. Say, for example, your aunt penned you a rather long letter, stating on page one: “My dishwasher is on the fritz again. I've got to call a repairman.” And then, after chatting about your cousins and her new cat, on page five said, “I'm not buying any expensive gifts for Christmas this year but, because of the dishwasher, will be making homemade candy and cookies for the entire family.” After reading this letter, would you say, “Because of the dishwasher...because of the dishwasher...what in the world did Aunt Sue mean by this? Does she have a new

dishwasher that actually *makes* homemade candy and cookies?!” Why, of course not. Even if her letter was so long that by the time you got to page five you had already forgotten what she said about the dishwasher, you’d just go back and look it up. Well, this is exactly what we must do about Paul’s statement regarding the angels. We see that Paul had been chiding this particular church for not judging in-house matters themselves, but for running to the courts whenever a dispute arose. He said, referring to events that will take place after the return of Christ, “Do you not know that we shall judge the angels? How much more matters of this life?”¹⁷⁴ So when he gets to the subject of headwear, just a few pages later, he says that women should be able to decide for themselves “because of the angels.” And in verse 13 he states plainly: “Judge for yourselves.”

Addressing cultural sensitivity, touching on the story of creation and then bringing in an earlier reference to the angels, our misunderstanding of these verses in chapter eleven has been the source of confusion for years. But we’re beginning to get it. One sentence, however, still misconstrued by many, is this statement of Paul’s:

“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.”¹⁷⁵

Now most traditionalists use this verse to bolster their view that men are superior to women by exerting that “head” here means “boss/ ruler/ chief.” But in the excellent book *Why Not Women?* David Joel Hamilton makes a most convincing argument that this “head” does not mean “authority/leader” at all, but rather “source/origin,” like the headwaters of a river. He goes into great detail discussing the original Greek word (*kephale*) and the Greek translation of Old Testament Hebrew Scriptures (the *Septuagint*), and all of this is very interesting from a scholarly point of view. But his most compelling argument by far is that scripture simply does not support this old school interpretation of “head.” Unfortunately, the “authority/leader” of every man *is not* Christ.¹⁷⁶ All we have to do is turn on the television, sign on the internet or flip through the radio to witness for ourselves what Hebrews 2:8 states plainly: “all things” are *not yet* “subjected to Him.” It is a tragic fact that many millions of souls are still yielding themselves as servants of sin, rather than servants of righteousness¹⁷⁷, and are not allowing Christ to be their leader at all. The Bible does, however, reinforce the idea of Christ being the “source/origin” of every man. In fact, Paul documented this truth in this same letter stating: There is “one Lord, Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we exist through Him.”¹⁷⁸ And who could forget John 1:3, which explicitly states that Christ is the source of all life? “All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made.”¹⁷⁹

After proving that Christ is not yet the “authority/leader” of every man, but *is* indeed the “source/origin” of all life, Hamilton drove his point home by reminding us of the unity, harmony and mutual submission of the Godhead: The Father praises the Son and works through the Spirit; the Son yields to the Father and promotes the Spirit, and the Spirit points to the Son and does what the Father says. So while we see that Jesus voluntarily yielded to the will of His Father during the years of His earthly ministry, to state that God is His “authority/leader” is to rob Him of His exalted position and all-consuming power.

In fact, Jesus made no bones about His equality with God. “The Father loves the Son,” He said, “and has given all things into His hand.”¹⁸⁰ “For not even the Father judges anyone, but He has given all judgment to the Son, in order that all may honor the Son, even as they honor the Father.”¹⁸¹ Christ’s claim of equality was not “robbery,”¹⁸² but simply His position from time eternal: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”¹⁸³ And while some of us may lack understanding about Christ’s position within the Holy Trinity, the Jewish leaders of that day heard Jesus’ claims of equality loud and clear. In fact, this is one of the main reasons they were so determined to kill him: “For this cause therefore the Jews were seeking all the more to kill Him, because He not only was breaking the Sabbath, but also was calling God His own Father, *making Himself equal with God* (emphasis added).”¹⁸⁴ No, there is no hierarchy within the Godhead—no President, Vice President and Secretary/Treasurer—as our carnal minds would conceive. The early Church understood this, teaching that:

“‘head’ must be understood as ‘source’ rather than ‘boss’ lest one arrive at a faulty understanding of the Trinity.”
Athanasius, Fourth-Century Church Father¹⁸⁵

In their passion to defend a hierarchical view of marriage, many have inadvertently misrepresented the nature of the Godhead, insisting that “head” in I Corinthians 11:3 means “authority/leader.” But, as we’ve seen, the *balance* of the Word does not support this view. And neither does an exhaustive study of the original Greek and its usage in scripture. It requires a great deal of humility to admit we’ve been wrong—but to concede that “head” means “source/ origin” in regards to Christ and “all men,” and “source/origin” when it comes to Father and Son, and yet *passionately insist* that it somehow means “authority/leader” in regards to men and women is downright ridiculous. This would require an impossible-to-defend leap of faith and break every rule of education, grammar and common sense!

Ask the Architect

In the early days of the automobile, a tall, gaunt stranger in a Ford stopped to help a new motorist stranded along the road. Appreciating this act of kindness, but doubting the man’s ability, the frustrated new owner eventually did step aside, allowing the stranger access to his brand new car. To the owner’s delight, the man proved himself quite the expert, fixing the broken automobile on the spot. With all the new technology, “How in the world could that man have handled my problem with such ease?” the motorist wondered shortly after. “Why, don’t you know who that was?” his friend responded. “That was Henry Ford himself—architect and builder of your fancy new machine!”

Without a doubt, no one could fix a Ford like the gentleman who designed it. In just the same way, no one can repair the institution of marriage like the God who created it. A September 2004 report by The Barna Group, America’s premiere Christian polling institute, reveals that the divorce rate for born-again Christians (which has now climbed to 35%) is *identical* to that of the world!¹⁸⁶ This devastating news should serve as a wake-up call for the Body of Christ, underscoring our state of confusion, frustration, and

inability to repair what has apparently broken down. Dear Saints, we must now step aside, allowing the Architect and Builder of marriage to restore His priceless creation.

The popular question “What Would Jesus Do?” is always appropriate when seeking the mind of God on a matter. How did Jesus respond when confronted with the issue of divorce? He immediately pointed *back* to creation, *back* to the perfect marriage, *back* before the fall of mankind.

“Have you not read, that He who created them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, ‘For this cause a man shall leave his father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and the two shall become one flesh’? Consequently, they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together [literally ‘yoked together’ in the original Greek¹⁸⁷], let no man separate.”
Matthew 19:4b, 5, 6

As Christ Himself made clear, that first undefiled marriage is our example, our goal, our ultimate ambition. And the Word of God clearly states this first husband and wife dwelt in such harmony, such oneness, they even shared the same name! “He created them male and female, and He blessed them and *named them Adam* in the day when they were created (emphasis added).” Keep in mind that this first human was made in the likeness of God, after His own image. And it’s only natural that our God (who is three, yet one) would create an Adam that was two, yet one. God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Ghost created man in His image: Adam the man and Adam the woman. And like their Creator, this man and woman were each distinct in personality and expression, yet unified in purpose and function.

“Then God said, “Let us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let *them* rule... And God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.”
Genesis 1: 26a, 27 (emphasis added)

The process of Adam’s creation is unique and quite revealing. “God formed man out of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being.”¹⁸⁸ And then God set about proving to this man that nothing else on the earth could “correspond” to him. A bear corresponded to a bear. A lion corresponded to a lion...only an Adam could possibly correspond to an Adam. So God put him to sleep, reached into his side and pulled out a rib. And out of this rib, He fashioned a woman. The inevitable result of this action? Only *together* did they now form the image of God. Husband would never again be complete without wife, and wife was woefully undone without husband.

Not that singles are somehow unfinished or less than marrieds— far from it! Each individual person—man, woman and child—is made whole in Christ Jesus. But marriage is unique in two ways. First, it represents the likeness of God Himself—a Triune Being who has three separate and distinct personalities, yet is one in purpose and principle. Secondly, this story of Adam’s creation is a picture, a prophecy, of Christ and His Church. You see, before husband and wife became separate beings, they were united in one body. The woman was *inside* the man, waiting to be pulled out and fashioned. So it

was with the Church, Ephesians reveals. “He chose us *in Him* before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him in love (emphasis added).”¹⁸⁹ And after the crucifixion, God reached inside of Christ and pulled out the Church! No wonder homosexuality is such an abomination to the Lord, and homosexual marriage repugnant. Not only is it a sin against the natural function of our bodies¹⁹⁰ but it is, ultimately, a perversion of God’s image *and* a misrepresentation of Christ and His Bride!

Made in the image of their Triune God, and foreshadowing Christ and His Church, husband and wife were now put over the garden, both receiving dominion and rule. And having learned from the best— as Father, Son and Holy Ghost modeled unity, harmony and mutual submission—this first husband and wife were indeed “one.” Our childish competition for God’s affection—with one spouse claiming a closer, more intimate relationship with God than the other—did not yet exist. In fact, scripture indicates that only *after* the fall did the man claim sole ownership of the name which both he and the woman had shared in the garden: “*Now* the man called his wife’s name Eve (emphasis added)”¹⁹¹ the Bible records. And with this seemingly innocent command, it had begun. The husband was beginning to rule over his wife—even renaming her as one might a pet, a child, or a slave. But this was a bitter result of the fall, not the way God created marriage to function.

It’s an ingenuous and unique institution, this covenant of marriage, this holy and sacred “yoking together” of husband and wife. And when operating according to God’s precepts, will meet the needs of both spouses in a way that no other relationship can. In a fully functional Christian marriage, both spouses will:

- Have the Christ-like virtue of humility firmly engrained into their character.
- Be exalted, honored and lifted up—a legitimate need within each human being, which is reflective of our heavenly Father’s DNA within us
- And have a best friend for life, mirroring the ministry of the wonderful Holy Spirit.

Let us quickly examine each of these important points. First, no other relationship compares to marriage when it comes to perfecting humility in both husband and wife. Why, where else do we have the opportunity to “die daily”¹⁹² except in our own homes? And the glorious benefit for households in which both spouses have resisted self-indulgence and put down self-will? Why, these dear saints have invoked the favor of God, because He resists the proud and gives grace to the humble!¹⁹³ “But I thought I was supposed to ‘be a man’, standing up for my rights,” confused husbands declare. “Give us chapter and verse,” we respond. The Gospel is clear: Prefer one another, honor one another,¹⁹⁴ and submit one to another.¹⁹⁵ In fact, Paul prefaces his whole discourse about husbands being the “head” of their wives with these exact words: “And be subject to one another in the fear of Christ.”¹⁹⁶

Did we really believe that the basic tenets of Christianity— humility, meekness and exalting someone else’s needs above our own—were to be applied everywhere *except* for our marriages?! Come on, now! If your wife wants you to worship Buddha, stop tithing or in some other way compromise the Gospel of Jesus Christ...then by all means, take a stand, brother. But this isn’t the cause of contention in most Christian marriages. Quite often it is simply a struggle of wants and desires—and like our childhood game of “king

of the hill,” the biggest bully usually wins, be it husband or wife. This may well be how the Church describes a Christian marriage today—but this sort self-promotion and self-will demonstrates anything *but* Christianity in marriage!

Secondly, each spouse’s need to be lifted up, honored and respected is very real. It’s not sin or pride, but a reflection of God’s nature within us. Where we often mess up, though, is in *how* we get this need met. Jesus never said it was wrong to sit in the “high seat”— He simply said, “*Don’t put yourself there!*”¹⁹⁷ Proverbs 27:2 puts it this way, “Let another man praise thee, and not thine own mouth; a stranger, and not thine own lips.”¹⁹⁸ Each spouse’s need for honor and exaltation is not wicked—it’s when it crosses over into *self-honor* and *self-exaltation* that sin enters in.

And last but not least, Christian marriage is to be a camaraderie, a vital life-giving friendship—not a hierarchy in which one spouse rules over the other. We had *that relationship* with our parents! Ecclesiastes describes the “I got your back” of Christian marriage perfectly: “Two are better than one because they have a good return for their labor. For if either of them falls, the one will lift up his companion. But woe to the one who falls when there is not another to lift him up... And if one can overpower him who is alone, two can resist him.”¹⁹⁹ In fact, it is this same chapter in Ecclesiastes which is most often quoted by pastors at Christian weddings: “A threefold cord is not quickly broken.”²⁰⁰ And they are correct. Christian marriage, this unique threefold relationship—husband, wife and their God—is nearly indestructible when functioning according to God’s precepts. The valleys are filled and the mountains are brought low, preparing the way of the Lord.²⁰¹ Husbands, these high “mountains” in a corrupt world, must realize the fall of mankind has placed them in a position that God never created them to assume. And wives, these lowly “valleys,” have to step up their game, realizing who they are in Christ Jesus and bearing the responsibility of equal partnership in Christian marriage.

Certainly men and women are different, bringing diverse qualities and viewpoints to marriage. But this is by design. We can easily see the value of these gender differences when it comes to our children. The warmth and nurturing of a mother is no less valuable than the firm hand and strong arms of a father. Why, every study reinforces what God has known all along: It takes both Mom and Dad to produce well-rounded, productive and happy children. Dear Christian, gender differences exist so that husbands and wives can complement, balance and complete one another...not foolishly dominate or compete with each other!

Here We Go Again

God has *always* made a distinction between the master/servant relationship and that of a husband and wife, Old Testament and New:

“And it will come about in that day,” declares the Lord,
“That you will call Me Ishi [my Husband] and will no
longer call Me Baali [my Master].” Hosea 2:16

“But I thought a godly wife called her husband ‘lord’!” many Christians declare. This belief, based on I Peter 3, so permeates Christian teaching today that wisdom commands we take a moment and study it closely. Now the rule for “rightly dividing” I

Peter, or any other book of the Bible for that matter, is to begin by asking several key questions: 1) Who is the author? 2) When was it written? 3) Who was it written to? 4) And what were the circumstances at the time that it was penned? Discovering the answers to these questions is an important first step for any student of the Word, and is critical for a comprehensive understanding of I Peter.

Now this particular letter was written by Peter himself around 63 AD and was addressed to the saints in Rome on the eve of Nero's horrific persecution of those Christians. History tells us that Rome caught fire in the summer of 64, destroying nearly three-quarters of that city and killing many of its citizens. And Nero, the Roman emperor, was so despised that rumors soon surfaced blaming him for the fire. To squash these—and hopefully lift his approval ratings—Nero said the Christians did it. And the ferocity with which this wicked man began to attack the Christians in Rome is nearly incomprehensible. These saints were not just murdered; their torture became official state-sponsored sport. They were sewn into the skin of wild animals and given to the dogs to tear apart. They were crucified, beheaded and used as exhibits in Nero's circus. And as evening drew near, became human candles—set aflame while still alive—to light the emperor's parties.

Having been warned by the Holy Spirit of these approaching persecutions, Peter took quill to parchment addressing these dear saints...very much aware that many of his readers would never make it through the decade. Their only hope was in the life to come. "Fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ"²⁰² Peter urged. In fact, this whole letter is an instruction manual for suffering saints, and could well be entitled: *How to Get Through Hell With Your Faith Intact*. And to this end, Peter succeeded. Christians, much maligned before Nero's persecution, actually won the sympathy of many Romans during it. As a result, many souls came to Christ through these nightmarish years. Nero eventually killed himself in the summer of 68, but not before Peter was crucified upside down and the Apostle Paul was beheaded.

Now that we understand the setting of this particular letter, let's take a look at the letter itself. In it, Peter specifically addresses three groups of suffering souls: 1) Christians, 2) abused servants, and 3) wives married to disobedient husbands. And to each of these Peter holds up the example of Christ, reminding them that when "reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously."²⁰³ In fact, it is immediately after speaking about the cruelty of the crucifixion that Peter turns his attention to wives: "*In the same way, you wives, be submissive to your own husbands so that even if any of them are disobedient to the word, they may be won without a word by the behavior of their wives, as they observe your chaste and respectful behavior (emphasis added).*"²⁰⁴ These wives were instructed to submit to disobedient husbands *in the same way* that Christ submitted to those who crucified Him! Servants were given the same command about cruel and perverse masters; and Christians were told to submit to rulers, even though these rulers would soon begin the systematic extermination of these same Christians.

Now please don't misunderstand; there is a time for Christians to stand up for their rights. Paul demonstrated this in his encounter with a Roman centurion. Having been stretched out and prepared for torture, Paul turned to the jailer and said, "Is it lawful for you to scourge a man who is a Roman and uncondemned?" frightening the Roman commander who suddenly understood that he had violated the law.²⁰⁵ And another time,

Paul and Silas had been beaten and forced to spend the night in prison. And when the chief magistrate came the next day to release them, Paul boldly declared, “They have beaten us in public without trial, men who are Romans, and have thrown us into prison; and now they are sending us away secretly? No indeed! But let them come themselves and bring us out.”²⁰⁶ But, dear Saints, these precious Christians in Rome had no rights. The king himself declared war on all Christians; servants and slaves were routinely abused and even murdered at their master’s whim, and wives were considered the “property” of their husbands with absolutely no rights at all. No, the only option open to these saints was to submit to unrighteousness and hope in God.

Tragically, the important and potentially life-saving instructions found in this letter—a letter specifically addressed to people with no legal recourse or rights, has been misunderstood and misappropriated for decades. Abusive slave masters often quoted I Peter 2 to keep their Christian slaves in line, and too many preachers today quote I Peter 3 to keep Christian women in line. But this was never Peter’s intention. He was not *advocating* any of these bitter circumstances, but was simply issuing instructions to the unfortunate saints who found themselves in the midst of them. To women much like those in most Arab nations today, Peter spoke of Sarah. He reminded them that even when Abraham disobeyed God (remember, he sold his wife *twice* out of fear for his own life!), God ultimately saw her plight and rescued her.

Dear Christian, we must not pull two or three verses completely out of context, foolishly holding up disobedient husbands and wives without rights as the gold-standard for Christian marriage. In fact, turning to Christian husbands in the very next verse, Peter makes it abundantly clear that wives (though physically weaker) are *not* second-class citizens in God’s Kingdom. “Husbands, you had better honor them as *fellow heirs* of God’s grace or He won’t even answer your prayers!” he pointedly warns.²⁰⁷

Church, we in America have been blessed with a society that acknowledges equal rights for women. And wise women will always follow the example of Paul—availing themselves of their rights as citizens—refusing to submit to abuse by husbands, or anyone else for that matter. For the sake of their children, for the sake of their safety, and for the sake of the Gospel, women of discernment will never allow scripture taken out of out of context to imprison them in violent and cruel marriages.

In fact, scripture plainly demonstrates that submission—for the sake of submission alone—is never a prudent course for wives to follow. Not once are they commanded to “obey” their husbands. While servants are ordered to obey masters and children told to obey parents, this word is conspicuously absent when it comes to the husband/wife relationship. As peers, rather than underlings, wives are admonished to use discernment, submitting to their husbands as it is “fitting in the Lord.”²⁰⁸ In other words, if it gives glory to God and lines up with scripture, do it. But if it doesn’t, don’t.

In fact, this has always been God’s litmus test regarding submission, be it Old Testament or New. Why, just look at Abigail, a woman “of good understanding”²⁰⁹ that found herself married to an evil fool named Nabal. When David had extended a hand of friendship to this man, asking for his assistance, Nabal stupidly rebuffed Israel’s future king, his lack of discernment painfully obvious as he snorted, “Who is David? And who is the son of Jesse?” Furious, David ordered his men to grab their swords. And every male in that household would have been destroyed had it not been for the wisdom—and what some today might call “rebellion”—of Abigail. Knowing that her husband’s wishes

were not at all “fitting in the Lord,” she saddled a donkey and went out to David herself, bringing bread, wine, cake and raisins. “Please do not pay attention to this worthless man,” she pleaded. “Nabal is his name and folly is with him.” She begged David to forgive the insult, assuring him that God Himself would take revenge on Nabal. David allowed her to go in peace, and the very next morning Nabal had a heart attack and died! And how did God deal with Abigail, this woman of wisdom and understanding who had deliberately gone against her foolish husband’s wishes? Why, she became *Mrs.* David and later moved into a palace!

Saints, our popular religious mantra—“as long as I submit to my husband I’m covered”—has absolutely no scriptural basis. What if Abigail had forsaken her responsibilities, trying to hide behind this kind of ridiculous rhetoric? What if she, like so many wives today, had said, “Well, even if my husband misses God, I’m still covered because I’m in submission”? This woman would have been sorely mistaken...and the blood of her household would have been on her hands as well. Where in the world did we come up with this dangerous idea anyway? The “I was just following orders” defense didn’t work for the Nazis after WWII and it won’t get foolish wives off the hook either. To place the wishes of a husband above the wishes of God is idolatry. Every Christian’s first allegiance must be to God.²¹⁰ We will not stand before our spouses on the Day of Judgment nor give account to them for the deeds done in the body. It is to God we will answer. It is God we must obey.

Of course the perfect will of God for husband and wife, demonstrated in the Garden before the fall, is mutual submission and mutual exaltation. And it was to this that Christ pointed when asked about divorce. Without a doubt, the family is under fierce attack today. Homosexual marriage is now recognized by some of our local governments and too many of our children are in rebellion and on drugs. Now, more than ever, it is critical that we extract our marriages from under the curse and build them upon a solid, biblical foundation. Our infatuation with 1950’s nostalgia—desiring to turn back the clock to *Leave It to Beaver* and *Father Knows Best*—can’t fix anything. They’re our favorite shows, too. But we don’t live on a studio lot, Christians! The safety and protection we yearn for in regards to our families will only come from instituting the principles of God. The Lord never intended for one person to rule and dictate the direction of any family. *Both* husband and wife were given dominion over the garden and *both* were commanded to rule. Remember, in the “abundance of counselors there is victory”²¹¹ and only a “fool” delights in “revealing his own mind.”²¹²

To insure good success and accomplish all that God has called them to, each Christian family must be able to discern the specific will of God for their lives. Where do we live? What jobs do we pursue? What church should we attend? How do we handle this crisis? All critical questions that must be answered by their God. And as things stand today, with husbands issuing the final word, there’s a pretty good chance many Christian families will miss God completely too many times. Why? Because, according to the Word, the will of God is to be confirmed by the testimony of at least *two witnesses*!²¹³ In small, everyday, unimportant matters—what’s for supper, what color should the new car be, where should we go on vacation—dying to self and preferring one another is the only option for both spouses.

But when it comes to important family matters, both of these witnesses (husband and wife) should be free to present their case. In an environment of mutual respect and honor,

each spouse should lay out exactly what they feel the will of God is, using scripture to back it up. This common sense approach usually ends any argument. But should husband and wife reach an impasse, disagreeing in vital, potentially life-changing situations, we suggest the “three-day rule.”²¹⁴ For three days put aside your opinion, put aside your feelings, and put aside your food—seeking God earnestly as you both fast and pray. We’ve discovered that when both husband and wife lay down their bias, and become unified in seeking the face of God, even sticky situations are quickly resolved. And quite often, rather than one spouse being *completely right* and the other *completely wrong*, the will of God often turns out to be a compromise of both. If, however, after all of this husband and wife still find themselves at a stalemate, they must seek counseling. Just make sure the counselor is a wise, spirit-filled person able to discern the mind of God and willing to weigh both viewpoints equally.

Yes, Satan would love nothing better than to keep our marriages under the curse, the Christ within wives completely disregarded. And just as religious tradition has blinded the eyes of many Christians to the baptism of the Holy Spirit and the equality of the races, tradition has certainly done its part to keep women irrelevant, immaterial and without a voice for years—but there are at least two more traps that we must guard against. One has entangled many a good husband and the other, their wives.

First, husbands must be alert for the spirit of arrogance and control. This wicked spirit is evident whenever someone constructs a wall between God and others, and then stands there, declaring they are the only doorway back to the Father. Judaisers followed Paul from town to town attempting to do this to the Gentiles, saying that new believers must go *through the Law* to reach Jesus. Some pastors today are guilty of doing it their congregation, declaring the saints must go *through them* to reach the boundless supplies of heaven. And Christian husbands have been taught to do it to their wives on a regular basis, believing their wives actually go *through them* to get to God. Sadly, many sincere—but sincerely wrong—saints have been deceived by this wicked spirit. Church, we must remember the words of Paul, that it’s good to be sought after in a commendable fashion but to always be on guard against people who “shut you out” just so you have to go *through them* to get to God.²¹⁵

But the biggest roadblock to building a sound marriage has got to be the overwhelming carnal desire of Christian wives to crown an earthly king. This is the same trap that Israel fell into, time and time again. Their passion to be like other nations—having an earthly king rule over them and fight their battles for them—was, ultimately, a rejection of their God. And just like Israel, many foolish wives today have enthroned their husbands, placing them in an exalted position that was created for God alone. Israel was warned that bitter consequences that would soon follow should they continue down this foolhardy path: “He’ll take your sons, your daughters and your servants, collecting for himself the best of your fields, your vineyards, your olive trees and a tenth of all your flock. And, ultimately, you yourselves will become his servants!”²¹⁶ And just like Israel, many Christian wives, determined to have a man to rule over them and fight their battles for them, have discovered that bitter consequences accompany this course: “My husband won’t listen to anything I have to say! He treats me like I’m no more than a servant or a maid!”

But, dear wife, why should he pay attention to you? After you’ve spent years making sure he is high and lifted up, why should your husband now humble himself to consider

the wishes of a subordinate, an inferior, someone that's not a "king" like he? *Of course* he's more comfortable sharing his heart and exposing hidden weaknesses with other men! It only makes sense...the king would never confide in the baker, the butler or the chambermaid. His confidence, quite naturally, would be in a peer, an equal, another king. How sad that Christian wives, in their zeal to crown an earthly king, have undermined their own happiness and sabotaged the sacred intimacy of the husband/wife relationship.

God eventually did set up a system for Israel regarding kingship, but it was never His perfect will for that nation. He may have *allowed* a fallible, imperfect man to sit upon the throne, but it was created to hold a just, righteous and perfect God. Can God be glorified in a marriage in which the husband has been crowned king? Probably so...if he's a *good* king. But why run that risk? Because even while there were a few good kings throughout the history of Israel—there were many, many wicked kings and even cases of good kings gone bad. But none of this was God's original plan. For example, it was never His desire for Israel to go into captivity, yet this was always the result of bad kings on the throne. Why should any family run that risk—spiritual, emotional and financial bondage—just because an imperfect, fallible, all-too-human king sits upon God's throne?

And what would make a husband want to be king of the castle, anyway? Not wisdom, that's for sure. Several years before God gave Israel a king in his wrath, a wise man tried to reason with a group of Israelites who were feverishly seeking a natural man to rule over them.

“Once the trees went forth to anoint a king over them,
and they said to the olive tree, ‘Reign over us!’
But the olive tree said to them, ‘Shall I leave my fatness with which
God and men are honored, and go to wave over the trees?’
Then the trees said to the fig tree, ‘You come, reign over us!’
But the fig tree said, ‘Shall I leave my sweetness and
my good fruit, to go and wave over the trees?’
Then the trees said to the vine, ‘You come reign over us!’
But the vine said to them, ‘Shall I leave my new wine,
which cheers God and men and go to wave over the trees?’”²¹⁷

Olive tree, fig tree and vine all wisely rejected the foolish request, not willing to leave their good characteristics just to go “wave over the other trees.” In this parable, which so perfectly captures the nature of fallen mankind, those trees did eventually find someone willing to be crowned king: A prickly bramble bush! Marriage—as God originally designed it—just might require more humility from husbands than they're accustomed to and more responsibility from wives than they're comfortable with. But whoever said God was aiming for our comfort zone? It is the challenge of faith that God requires, not the ease of natural and worldly inclinations.

A Question of Royalty

The first few years of married life can be quite the roller-coaster ride. We're up, up, up with passion and excitement—and then down, down, down with radical change, adjustment and compromise. This holy struggle for “two” to become “one” is a challenge

in the best of circumstances—but we in the West have made the difficult nearly impossible. You see, while women in many other parts of the world grow up in social and economic bondage, only to discover freedom and equality as Christians, our young women often have quite a different experience. Having come of age in a nation which treats them with deference and respect, America's women have been encouraged from their youth to succeed in school and make their voice heard in important matters of political, social, and economic concern. "You can do all things through Christ!" their preachers encouraged, rallying the troops. "What is impossible with man is possible with God! Remember, you have been given the mind of Christ!" Imagine the shock of growing up with all this liberty, encouragement and support ...only to lose it with "I do."

Not long after marching down the aisle, Christian brides all across America wake up, scratch their heads and wonder, "Just what *did* they put in my wedding punch? How could I have been so intelligent and capable *before* marriage...and over-emotional and incompetent *after*?"

Frustrated, bewildered and confused, they are assaulted daily with illogical and inconsistent reasoning: "Dear Sister, the Master and Creator of the Universe values your input and urges you to reason with Him in prayer...however, your husband is too high and lofty to grant you a say in important matters."

"What?!" these Christian women sputter in confusion. "*God* can humble Himself to consider my petitions, but my husband can't?!"

"Yes, that's right," says the Church, without batting an eye. "Now, remember, you have the mind of Christ. Of course, that *still* doesn't mean you can make good decisions. *That* is for your husband alone!" As this absurdity thunders from the pulpit, the radio and the bookstore, our young woman eventually hum a new song—"once I was free, but now I am bound, once I was bright but no longer am I sound"—or they just get out. To have known great freedom, only to lose it, is almost certainly more painful than never to have experienced it at all.

Let us quickly examine one of the most destructive beliefs in Christianity today regarding the sacred institution of marriage. This is a teaching which, at first glance, appears to be quite scriptural. It's got a bunch of biblical words in it and advocates zealously claim they can trace it all the way back to the Old Testament. A closer inspection, however, swiftly reveals the many holes in this popular theory. What is this flawed belief? That God has designated the husband alone to be prophet, priest and king of the home.

The Word of God clearly states, regarding *each and every Christian*:

"But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession. " I Peter 2:9

And indeed, our standing as prophet, priest and king *is* traced back to the Old Testament. Because of mankind's fall, the broken communication between God and His image, and our continuous rebellion, God instituted all three of these anointed offices and used them to communicate a type, a shadow of the Christ to come. The priest sacrificed the blood of bulls and sheep to atone for the sins of God's people. The prophet heard the voice of God and boldly proclaimed His words to the nation. And the king reigned and ruled over the population, establishing order and assuring justice for all citizens of the

realm. And when Jesus came, He fulfilled every one of these offices—sacrificing His own innocent blood as our Great High Priest, preaching the good news of the Gospel throughout the land as God’s Prophet, and now reigning as King of Kings and Lord of Lords in the Kingdom of our God.

Fulfilling each of these holy offices, Christ has reconciled the world to Himself and has now given the Church the “ministry of reconciliation.”²¹⁸ Because of this, in Christ, we are *all* priests, offering daily the sacrifice of praise. In Christ, we *all* come as prophets, boldly proclaiming the good news of the Gospel. And in Christ, we *all* have dominion over the powers of darkness in this present life and will reign with Jesus in the life to come. Now, which one of these blood-bought positions would you take from women and reserve for the men alone? To do so would fly in the face of Christ’s redemptive work and oppose the exalted position that God has given to each and every Christian today.

And how could one gender possibly be more qualified to fill any of these positions anyway? The Bible makes it abundantly clear: there are *no physical requirements* for our status in Christ Jesus. In fact, Jesus Himself didn’t meet the “physical requirements”! Having clearly descended from the tribe of Judah and not Levi, His standing as High Priest was based wholly on the “indestructible life” that dwelt within Him.²¹⁹ And yet we would go *beyond Christ*, now imposing physical criteria to meet a spiritual position? No, dear Saints, our standing is also based solely on the “indestructible life” that dwells within us!

“Okay, I understand my position as ‘prophet, priest and king’,” Christian wives now confess. “But everyone keeps saying my husband is ‘high priest’ of the home!” Yes, this is the latest take on the whole “men are better than women” argument and the development of this new doctrine is quite interesting. Just a few years ago certain Christian leaders declared the husband to be “prophet, priest and king of the home.” And for a while, everyone bought it. Then, much like the child that cried, “The emperor has no clothes on!” someone finally said, “Wait a minute, I thought the birthright of *every* Christian was to be ‘prophet, priest, and king’! Why is it that *husbands* are so special?”

“Oh, I know the answer to *that one!*” someone finally countered. “We’re *all* prophets, priests and kings, of course...the husband is simply ‘*high* priest of the home’!” And just like before, the Church has swallowed it—hook, line and sinker. But scripture does not support this theory any more than it did the first. Under the Old Covenant, “high priest” was an auspicious office, bearing great privileges and weighty responsibilities...for these men alone were allowed into the Holy of Holies to sacrifice and intercede for the sins of a nation. Now, real, live, flesh-and-blood men most definitely served as “high priests” under the Old Covenant, but Jesus is the only one scripture calls “high priest” in Christianity. Having spilled His own precious blood to atone for the sins of all mankind, our great High Priest “abides forever hold[ing] His priesthood permanently.”²²⁰ Not husbands, not wives, not pastors, not apostles...just Jesus. Sharing an unbridled, intimate love with His Father and “always live[ing] to make intercession,”²²¹ Jesus both enjoys the privileges and has faithfully fulfilled the duties of our great High Priest.

Yet the Bible plainly calls Jesus our “forerunner,” leading every Christian behind the veil, where we too are given the responsibility of intercession and the intimacy of a loving relationship with our Father. Dear friends, we have once again made assumptions

that are not supported by scripture, manufacturing an elevated spiritual position for husbands that simply does not exist. To declare the husband “high priest” of the home is to suggest that he alone is allowed into the “Holy of Holies” and that he alone bears the responsibility of intercession for the family. Yet nothing could be further from the truth! Paul plainly declared that a believing wife “sanctifies” an unbelieving husband just like a believing husband “sanctifies” an unbelieving wife. In other words, whichever spouse happens to be born-again is the spiritual authority in the household, making the children “holy,” set apart for God.²²²

As Jesus Himself pointed out, the will of God is for husband and wife to dwell as “one flesh”—living a life of mutual submission, honor and exaltation. In so doing we not only give God glory, but wreak holy havoc upon the plans of our enemy, who seems to favor the “divide and conquer” strategy. Once he has successfully turned husband against wife and wife against husband, he is free to move on to the next family. “My work is done here!” he smirks. “They’ll do a beautiful job of destroying one another now!” Christianity’s dirty little secret of spousal abuse by husbands and Prozac popping by wives is only two of the extreme results born of this inequity which thunders from the pulpit. After years of hearing that she is *less* than her husband, somehow *not really complete* in Christ Jesus, the valuable gifts and callings that God has placed within this wife will lay dormant for a lifetime. And like a favored child that can’t help but feel arrogant toward his siblings, this deluded husband walks in unintended conceit, provoking the resistance of God in his life. Dear Christian, we must not allow this to take place one minute longer! Let us cast off the religious bias that comes so naturally and be noble-minded Bereans,²²³ refusing to accept anything less than God’s perfect will for Christian marriage.

Endnotes
Chapter 5

- ¹⁶² II Corinthians 6:14 NKJV.
- ¹⁶³ I John 4:17
- ¹⁶⁴ II Corinthians 5:21
- ¹⁶⁵ Hebrews 1:14.
- ¹⁶⁶ I Corinthians 15:46 paraphrased.
- ¹⁶⁷ Ephesians 4:15 emphasis added.
- ¹⁶⁸ I Corinthians 7:1.
- ¹⁶⁹ I Corinthians 11:4, 5.
- ¹⁷⁰ 170 I Corinthians 11; 8, 9 New Revised Standard Version.
- ¹⁷¹ Strong's Exhaustive Concordance, number 1849.
- ¹⁷² I Corinthians 6: 3 KJV.
- ¹⁷³ New International Version.
- ¹⁷⁴ I Corinthians 6:3.
- ¹⁷⁵ I Corinthians 11:3 KJV.
- ¹⁷⁶ Romans 6:16.
- ¹⁷⁷ Romans 6:16.
- ¹⁷⁸ I Corinthians 8:6.
- ¹⁷⁹ John 1:3 KJV.
- ¹⁸⁰ John 3:35.
- ¹⁸¹ John 5:22,23a.
- ¹⁸² Philippians 2:6.
- ¹⁸³ John 1:1.
- ¹⁸⁴ John 5:18.
- ¹⁸⁵ Cunningham, Loren and Hamilton, David Joel. *Why Not Women?* Seattle, Washington. YWAM Publishing. 2000. p. 170—Hamilton's source: Catherine Clark Kroeger, "An Illustration of the Greek Notion of 'Head' as 'Source.'" *Priscilla Papers*. 1.3 (August 1987).
- ¹⁸⁶ The Barna Group. "Born Again Christians Just As Likely to Divorce As Are Non-Christians." September 8, 2004.
<http://www.barna.org/FlexPage.aspx?Page=BarnaUpdate&BarnaUpdateID=170>
- ¹⁸⁷ Strong's #4801; transliteration: suzeugnumi.
- ¹⁸⁸ Genesis 2:7 KJV.
- ¹⁸⁹ Ephesians 1:4 emphasis added
- ¹⁹⁰ Romans 1:26, 27.
- ¹⁹¹ Genesis 3:20a emphasis added.
- ¹⁹² I Corinthians 15:31.
- ¹⁹³ I Peter 5:5.
- ¹⁹⁴ Romans 12:10.
- ¹⁹⁵ I Peter 5:5.
- ¹⁹⁶ Ephesians 5:21.
- ¹⁹⁷ Luke 1:52.

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- 198 KJV.
199 Ecclesiastes 4:9, 10, 12a.
200 Ecclesiastes 4:12b KJV.
201 Luke 3:4, 5.
202 I Peter 1:13b.
203 I Peter 2:23.
204 I Peter 3:1, 2.
205 Acts 22:25-30.
206 Acts 16: 37.
207 I Peter 3:7, paraphrased.
208 Colossian 3:18.
209 I Samuel 25:3 KJV.”
210 Acts 5:29.
211 Proverbs 11:14.
212 Proverbs 18:2.
213 2 Corinthians 13:1.
214 Esther 4:16.
215 Galatians 4:17, 18.
216 I Samuel 8, paraphrased.
217 Judges 9:8-13.
218 2 Corinthians 5:18.
219 Hebrews 7:16.
220 Hebrews 7:24.
221 Hebrews 7:25.
222 I Corinthians 7:14.
223 Acts 17:10, 11.