

THE UNIQUENESS OF A BIBLICAL MARRIAGE



God's plan for marriage has never
changed!

Colleen McLean

The Uniqueness of a Biblical Marriage

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Chapter One — Biblical Marriage is Unique

In their quest for same-sex marriage, the LGBTIQ lobby adopted the slogan ‘Marriage Equality.’ Amidst the many reasons why I believe same-sex marriage is unbiblical and not what God had in mind when He instituted matrimony, I have to admit to you now that the slogan ‘Marriage Equality’ alarmed me. I am aware in the past, inequality between husband and wife existed, and to some degree still exists in Christianity today, at least in theory. During the same-sex marriage debate in the lead up to the plebiscite/referendum on the 17th December 2017, Christians in Australia were encouraged to equip themselves to be able to defend and explain the biblical definition of marriage skilfully. Therefore, in the following few pages of this booklet, I have attempted to put forward what I believe is the biblical definition of marriage. I know that our Father God is a good, good Father and the kind of marriage God intended for his children can only be perfect and therefore exhibit true equality between husband and wife in all aspects.

Biblical marriage is unique in that it is God-ordained, He blesses it, and it is a union of a man and a woman, where they become one physically and spir-

itually. Biblical marriage is so unique that it cannot be about who is in control, who is over, or under, or who serves whom. It is about being one! God's plan for marriage has never changed, Ephesians 5:31, 32 TPT says, "Marriage is a beautiful design of the Almighty—a great and sacred mystery – meant to be a vivid example of Christ and His church."

In light of this scripture, we have to ask the question then—is marriage a vivid example of Christ and His Church? I shudder to think of some Christian marriages that I know, including my own at one point modelling Jesus and His church. The mystery is 'great', indeed! It seems to me that if we can get this right, then the church will be the beautiful design of the Almighty. If there is oneness and equality in marriage, then the Church will exhibit equality and unity and emerge victorious.

The equality question touches all of us, and in every aspect of our lives, so it is crucial that we, the church have to get this right. It affects every part of our lives because God created people to relate to each other as male and female. I have found that the bible teaches shared responsibility between men and women in both marriage and ministry. I can find

no evidence that God intended ministry and leadership to be a solely male-dominated arena. I cannot find any scriptures where God gives the leader's role to husbands, and wives follow. Instead, I see unity, equality, diversity and mutual submission. I sometimes wonder if I am reading the same bible, and I have concluded that preferences, biases and culture may have all played a part. I understand there are scriptures, which give dominance to the man (see 1 Tim 2:12; 1 Cor 11:3, 7; Eph 5:22-23). However, when I understood the cultural context and considered other conflicting passages, it also became clear to me that Paul was writing to address specific situations.

Jesus prayed to His Father in John 17:27-23 "Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth. As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world. And for their sakes, I sanctify Myself, that they also may be sanctified by the truth. I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; That they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We

are one. I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me.”

Jesus’ way is truth and unity. The unity and love between Jesus and His Father are to exist between Jesus and His Bride, the church. Jesus prayed for a people set apart to God and usable, which involves everyone. Created in His image, men and women called together to rule over creation and to stand in the victory won for us by the cross of Jesus Christ. It is a unique privilege, and in the confines of the marriage covenant, it is powerful.

God created Eve from Adam’s side as Adam himself was unable to fulfil God’s command to reproduce and to fill and rule the earth (Geneses 1:28). To achieve this, Adam desperately needed the kind of help the animals could not supply. Eve was a human comparable to him, his equal, and magnificently designed by the Creator God Himself. Both made in God’s image and reflecting His majestic glory!

Considering this, then can we honestly say that there is equality in church structures. Recent Church his-

tory reveals the predominance of male leadership and the elevation of the individual above the needs of the people. Instead of promoting a relationship with a personal God, rules managed the behaviour of the people, and members served the vision of the church.

The next question then is the Church of Jesus Christ operating in God's original plan. Graham Cook and Gary Goodell write in their book "Permission to Do Church Differently"—"We need a framework that breathes, that allows leaders to lead but gives individuals the opportunity to hear God and follow His plan for themselves. It creates opportunity for unique and powerful partnerships to emerge." ¹

God's plan in everything He does is always about relationship, where the individual is highly valued and permitted to grow and flourish as a daughter or son of God Himself. People will leave a church to pursue a relationship with God that enables them to mature. In the same way in marriage, a spouse will leave if she/he feels devalued, oppressed, or treated as second best. In a marriage relationship where dreams become stifled, devalued, overlooked or ridiculed, a spouse may search elsewhere because there

is no opportunity for a unique and powerful partnership to emerge.

Firstly, I must insist, and you will agree with me here that we all desperately need a Saviour, and that every human is equal at the foot of the cross. No one is excluded, or barred from entry; all of us equally redeemed. We have a destiny individually and together, and we all sit in heavenly places in Christ Jesus. All are one in Christ Jesus (see Galatians 3:28). Each is qualified to be a partaker of the inheritance (see Col 1:12) and each has exceedingly great and precious promises, that they may partake of the divine nature (see 2 Peter 1:4). No exceptions and despite all differences, male or female, husband, or wife, race or nationality, in Christ we are one body, each one with a calling and the faith to see it through. This oneness in Christ is a vivid example of Christ and His church and the model of a biblical marriage. Individually and together, we all sit in heavenly places in Christ Jesus. All are one in Christ Jesus (see Galatians 3:28). The operative word being “in Christ.”

God's desire for marriage is that husband and wife rule together, but not over each other and most importantly that, the two are one. God's plan for Chris-

tian marriage today is the same as the relationship Adam and Eve had with each other and most importantly, with God, before the fall! In this environment, then unique and powerful marriages will emerge, where both are equal and equally valued. Grace and faith, hope and love abound to husband and wife, and true love does not dominate but always puts the other first (see 1 Corinthians 13:4-8 TPT).

Chapter Two — Understanding Genesis

So how did we come to the understanding that husbands rule over their wives? In the book of beginnings—Genesis, we find the following words of God spoken to Adam and Eve after they disobeyed God and committed the very first sin. Genesis 3:16 NKJV says, “To the woman he said, ‘I will greatly increase your sorrow and your conception. In pain you shall bear sons, and your desire shall be toward your husband, and he shall rule over you.’” Before we discuss this, we must realise that God did not curse Eve nor Adam, rather God cursed the serpent and the ground (see Gen 3: 14, 17). A sad consequence of sin is that Eve would have increased sorrow and pain in childbirth and her desire will be toward her husband that he will rule over her. The consequence for Adam—Gen 3:17-19 says, “Then to Adam he said, ‘Cursed is the ground for your sake; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life. Both thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you, and you shall eat the herb of the field. In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for dust you are, And to dust you shall return.’”

We do well to understand that God never intended for it to be this way—this was a consequence of sin, a judgment on humanity, not a blessing. The order of creation has husband and wife standing side by side. The mutual partnership Adam and Eve enjoyed replaced by patriarchy (“male rulership”), became a distortion of God’s intentions for His people. Only the promise that the descendant of Eve would someday crush the Serpent’s head would reverse it.

To this end, God provided a Saviour to pay the complete penalty/consequence of their sin. Jesus submitted to the agony of the cross and became sin for us that He might redeem us from the result of patriarchy. We have gloriously escaped the destructive penalty and inherited the blessings of Abraham and the salvation of a merciful Father God. The Old Covenant was done away with (see Hebrews 8:13) when Jesus cried, “It is finished!” God in Jesus Christ at Calvary reversed that which was lost. Every sin forever forgiven and taken away. Col 2:13 NIV says, “When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins,” That is amazing grace—God forgave all sin at Calvary, including the sin of Adam and Eve. We are to have the

Garden of Eden working in our marriages just as it did in Adam and Eve's life before they sinned. I can imagine the headlines in heaven when Jesus died on the cross—

Jesus saves humankind once and for all!
Male dominance replaced by mutual partnership.
From patriarchy to partnership.
From law to grace.
From the Old to the New.
Hallelujah!

Back to earth—sin and its consequences was now a problem for Adam, Eve and subsequent generations. Remember, God told Cain to rule over sin (see Gen 4:6-7). Let's take a close look at what God said because it has the same structure as Genesis 3:16.

Genesis 4:6-7 NKJV

“Then the LORD said to Cain, “Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must rule over it.”

Sin is crouching at the door like a lion ready to de-

your Cain, but he must hold it in place, God told Cain to rule over sin. Does sin master Cain? Yes, he murdered his brother. So what is this saying about the relationship between Adam and Eve? Eve's desire will be for her husband, and the husband will rule over her. However, they both should rule over it, because sin is crouching at the door. They knew all about mutual partnership—here was an opportunity to rule over patriarchy and work at maintaining the harmony they had before the fall. For New Testament believers, we stand against sin, and we have abundant faith, grace, the power of the Holy Spirit, and forever forgiveness readily available.

We inherited original sin, but as born again believers in Christ we are free to stand against sin, it does not rule over us. Rom 6:14 says, "For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace." The improper power and dominion of the husband and the illegal submissive secondary wife issue in marriage is the consequence of sin, and all sin and its effects are powerless, because of the cross of Jesus over 2000 years ago at Calvary. We resist sin, and it flees from us. James 4:7 says, "Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you." We do not let it rule us. God's

desire for marriage is that husband and wife rule together; the two have become one. Grace and faith, hope and love abounds to husband and wife, and true love does not dominate, is not conceited, true love is kind, patient and not envious (see 1 Corinthians 13:4). Take hope and be encouraged; God is doing something awesome in His church today. He is a God of hope! The mutual partnership that Adam and Eve lost in Eden is no longer an issue. The struggle between the sexes is over; crushed forever under the head of the serpent (Gen 3:15).

God's provision in the death and resurrection of His only begotten Son restored everything to the original plan (see Gen 3:15-21, Isa 53, Matt 1:21. 26:28, Eph 1:7). Redemption, reconciliation with the Father and restoration to the original dominion Adam and Eve had is ours (see Gal 3:13, Eph 2:11-18, Heb 2:9-18, 1 Peter 1:18-23). At Calvary, Satan was defeated, and made powerless to overcome those who believe in Jesus, and who would put on the armour of God (see Eph 6:10-18), and resist him (see Eph 4:27, James 4:7, 1 Peter 5:7-9). There is no distinction between Jew and Gentile, slave and free, male and female (see Gal 3:28). There is now no limit on the believer, according to God's promises. All re-

ceive righteousness according to faith, all receive power over sin, and all receive the victory according to faith. Can you see me jumping for joy?

Chapter Three — Submission

Does God place wives under husbands? No, because the two are one. One refers to a single person or thing.² In marriage, the two become one, so how can one be under or over the other. In a unique biblical marriage, there is no rank because the two are one. “Two cannot walk together unless they are agreed” (see Amos 3:3). Jesus Christ makes all the difference in relationships because all are one in Christ Jesus (see Galatians 3:28).

The great Apostle Paul encouraged the Ephesian husbands to “have the obligation of loving and caring for their wives the same way they love and care for their own bodies, for to love your wife is to love your own self” (Ephesians 5:28 TPT). This concept to love and care for wives as they would themselves was a radical departure from the culture of the day, which treated wives as possessions able to be divorced at the whim of the husband. Paul went on to say that, the two are one flesh and that “a man is to leave His father and his mother and lovingly hold to his wife since the two have become joined as one flesh” (Ephesians 5:29-31).

A more in-depth look at Ephesians 5:22 “Wives sub-

mit to your husbands as to the Lord.” Before we get into an argument here, let’s look at the whole passage.

Eph 5:17-33 NKJV

“Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is. And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord, giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, submitting to one another in the fear of God. Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body. Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish. So

husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church. For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones. “FOR THIS REASON A MAN SHALL LEAVE HIS FATHER AND MOTHER AND BE JOINED TO HIS WIFE, AND THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH.” This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church. Nevertheless let each one of you in particular so love his own wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.”

Wow! There it is from verse 17 onwards; however, in the Greek text (verse 21 and 22), the word submit does not appear twice. It is a part of that sentence that begins in the preceding verse; “Submit yourselves one to another out of reverence to Christ!” There is submission on the part of both husband and wife; one to the other. Here it is in the Greek form—

Eph 5:21

ὑποτασσόμενοι (submitting yourselves)
ἀλλήλοις (to one another) ἐν (in) φόβῳ (reverence)
Χριστοῦ. (of Christ)

Eph 5:22

Αἱ γυναῖκες (wives) τοῖς (to the) ἰδίοις (own)
ἀνδράσιν (husbands) ὑποτάσσεσθε ὡς (as to) τῷ
Κυρίῳ, (Lord).

Eph 5:21-22 (Nestle GNT 1904)

ὑποτασσόμενοι ἀλλήλοις) ἐν φόβῳ Χριστοῦ.
γυναῖκες τοῖς ἰδίοις ἀνδράσιν ὡς τῷ Κυρίῳ.³

In the original Greek text, there are no paragraph divisions. Despite this fact, many bible versions have a division between Ephesians 5:21 and verse 22, highlighting the submission of the wife. Paul's command at the end of verse 18 "Be filled with the Spirit!" carries into verses 21-22. Submitting to each other is an expression of the filling of the Holy Spirit and cannot, therefore, mean that one is in charge of the other. Voluntary submission, one to another, demonstrates Jesus and His church. Jesus yielded his authority to serve and sacrifice for His church (see Phil 2:5-8; Matt 20:28). Husband and wife are to submit to each other "in reverence to Christ" (see Eph 5:21), "as the church submits to Christ" (see Eph 5:24), and as slaves submit "as unto the Lord" (6:7). It is voluntary!

The biblical blueprint and unique foundation for marriage is dependent upon submission “one to another out of reverence for Christ.” It is the only structure strong enough to withstand the tests that come to marriages. Anything less than submit to one another out of reverence for Christ will not be a successful marriage. Anything less than this is patriarchy. Husbands are to love their wives, as Christ loved the church: whole-heartedly, sacrificially, and out of reverence for Christ. Surely then if a husband were to love his wife to this extent, submission on his part would also be voluntary and willing.

Let's have a look at the Greek word for submit—“hupotasso” and what it means. There are two meanings of “hupotasso” as in “submitting yourselves to one another out of reverence to Christ”. Verse 21 “to subordinate; reflexively to obey: - be under obedience (obedient), put under, subdue unto, (be, make) subject (to, unto), be (put) in subjection (to, under), submit self unto.” A voluntary attitude of giving in, cooperating, assuming responsibility and carrying a burden. The second meaning—“a voluntary attitude of giving in, cooperating, assuming responsibility and carrying a burden” fits well with verse 21 and

carries the same meaning into the following verse. Therefore, if I place the second meaning inside the verses, it would look like this—

“Having an attitude of giving in, cooperating, assuming responsibility and carrying each-others burdens in the fear of God. Wives also having the same attitude toward their own husbands, as to the Lord.”

“We also must note that the Greek word for submission, *hupotasso*, is written in the Greek middle voice, which means it is something that an individual imposes upon himself or herself. It means to choose to yield to another, rather than demanding one’s way. Submission remains the freewill right of the one choosing to yield. It cannot be demanded from another individual or imposed upon one person by another. When this occurs, it stops being *hupotasso* and becomes domination, which was an attitude Christ forbade His disciples to operate in regarding one another (see Matt 23:10). Submission is not something that can be required or exacted from another person.”⁴ Accurate mutual submission is a trusting attitude voluntarily entered by both husband and wife, where both have their needs met.

Submission out of legalism or fear will never lead to intimacy and runs the risk of a husband taking God's place, which is idolatrous. God comes first, second and third. You may be aware of the slogan for people in ministry, God first, wife and family second, and the church third. Well, I say it should be God first, God second and God third, and then everything will fall into its proper place. God requires mutual love, honour and submission in marriage full stop (see 1 Cor 7:3-4; 1Co 7:14-16; 1 Cor 11:11-12).

One-sided submission is not God's ultimate for marriage. Marriages function best, and when we stand against the enemy together united as one, protecting our marriage and avoiding actions that harm it. We pay attention to one another's needs and feelings and treat each other's opinions as valuable. We give honour to the other, therefore promoting liberty in God that supports a powerful, lasting partnership.

Surely mutual prayer is not possible unless there is mutuality, love and kindness. When a husband treats his wife as his equal, his prayers are accepted. 1 Peter 3:7 says, "Husbands, likewise, dwell with them with understanding, giving honour to the wife, as to the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the

grace of life, that your prayers may not be hindered.” Surely if the wife is the “weaker vessel”, then the husband is also weak. Surely if the wife or husband wants to be great, then they must serve each other.

The common belief which I encountered in the ‘90s was that biblical submission entails passivity on the part of the wife and that in spiritual and family matters she should be guided by her husband. Such a belief is misguided. Submission, in this case, is blind or unthinking and can render us incapable of knowing what God requires of us. Peter and John both knew what God needed when they asserted, “We must obey God and not men” (see Acts 5:29). However, most couples today work things out together and hear from God individually. They agree with the headship of the husband and the submission of the wife, but in real life, they do not practice it, mostly because it does not work.

Do wives have to submit to their husbands? No! Submission is always voluntary and given in response to love and out of reverence for Christ. I am sure you have heard the teaching that a wife does not have to submit to her husband if he requires her to do something that goes against God and His ordinanc-

es. However, submission is always voluntary. It cannot be compulsory because then it is performed out of duty, not love!

Do husbands have to submit to their wives? No! Submission is always voluntary and given in response to love and out of reverence for Christ. It has no meaning if it is compulsory!

Chapter Four — Marriage under the New Covenant

The Bible gives clear foundations for a lasting marriage. The wife submits a deep sense of respect for her husband. Also, the husband submits unselfish love for his wife (see Eph 5:33). Interestingly Paul commands husbands to love their wives, but he does not give this command to the wives. In fact, nor does any other scripture tell a wife, she has to love her husband. However, what about that passage Paul wrote to Titus, where he says to the older women, “to train the younger women to love their husbands and children.” The word love used in Titus 2:4 means to find pleasure in something. It means ‘to like!’ The translation could say train the younger women to like their husbands and children. They need to learn to find pleasure in or learn how to ‘like’ their husbands. You have to understand the culture of the day where arranged marriages were the custom, and there was no getting to know or like each other beforehand. There was no choice and no time to like or find pleasure in each other. Mutuality in marriage means that wives must also sacrificially love their husbands, just as husbands must have respect for their wives. Why? Because God first loved and respected them. Every believer is to love, comfort, forgive, welcome, care for and be kind to the other.

Wives respect your husband. What does that mean? Paul wrote to married couples in the first century who lived in a male-oriented culture, reminding them of their oneness and likening marriage to Christ and His body, the church.

Eph 5:29-33 NKJV

“For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church. For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones. “FOR THIS REASON A MAN SHALL LEAVE HIS FATHER AND MOTHER AND BE JOINED TO HIS WIFE, AND THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH.” This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church. Nevertheless, let each one of you in particular so love his own wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.”

According to Paul, a husband needs genuine respect. It may be that Paul’s command to “respect her husband” was the result of a male-dominated culture. However, a wife who profoundly admires, respects,

and values her husband's qualities, achievements, talents and abilities has his best interests at heart. It is a relationship, which allows him to be free from control and free to be who God called him to be. It is a big call but one that will make all the difference to a marriage.

The dictionary definition of respect—"A feeling of deep admiration for someone or something elicited by their abilities, qualities, or achievements." One should not consider herself or himself to be more worthy or more deserving, of anything from God, than the other. Each individual has intrinsic value and worth (see Gal 6:3; 1 Cor 8:2). To regard a person, race, group or individual as less important than another is a sin since Jesus died for all people and each one in particular. At the foot of the cross, we are all just people. Of course, husbands need love and respect, and wives need love and respect.

Husbands love your wives just as Christ loved the church. What does this mean? According to Paul, a wife needs genuine, unselfish love. When Jesus died, He was not dying to meet His own needs; He died to meet our desperate need. What about a wife's needs. Her happiness, her fulfilment, her future, her desires

and her calling. It is a big call but one that will make all the difference to a marriage.

Honour is the practice of calling out the best in one another. The bible instructs wives to be submissive and respectful, and husbands to be submissive and love their wives. They are one, so one spouse is not less or more important than the other, nor does one spouse have more rights than the other. Rights, honour and respect are never ours to grasp anyway! Honour is the practice of two influential people putting one another before themselves, empowering one another, and working together to meet one another's needs. Honour is the practice of calling out the best in one another. God modelled honour when He transformed us from slaves to friends, from orphans to sons and stooped low and raised us to His level. He used His power to make us powerful, insisting that we be equal partners in His plan to bring heaven to earth. The sacrificial love of Jesus contained not one dot of selfishness.

Chapter Five — Helper

Helper is has been understood over the years in a patriarchal sense, but this is not what God meant when He said, “It is not good for man to be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him” (Gen 2:18 NASB). God gave Adam a companion equal to himself, so they could fulfil God’s command to fill the earth, multiply and have dominion, subdue and rule the earth. God did not give Adam a servant when he could easily do chores for himself. God sent the Holy Spirit as our “Helper”, and the Holy Spirit of God is not someone we can boss around! The Holy Spirit is an intercessor, a comforter, an advocate, a teacher, and counsellor, and we do well to listen and pay attention to Him.

Chapter Six —Headship

Why does the great Apostle Paul call the husband “the head” (See Eph 5:23 and 1 Cor 11:3), especially after he called for mutual submission and had declared in Galatians 3:28-29 that women were full and equal partners with men, and joint-heirs of all God’s promises? Knowing that male headship or patriarchy is a sad distortion of God’s best for humankind. How does the husband fulfil mutual submission and be the head at the same time? Headship, therefore, cannot mean leadership, patriarchy or boss. Some wives exhibit a natural leadership ability, so who is the leader in this partnership. I suggest neither spouse is to lead nor make the final decision. It is to be reached mutually and because ultimately, Jesus is the head of every household. Conflicts will always arise, and there is a way out—by humbly submitting to each other and the Lord. It after-all a partnership of equals, each with a distinctive contribution to make.

The teaching that the husband is the final decision maker in the home, as well as the woman’s submission to the ministry, desires and convictions of her husband, in my opinion, fuels the “kingdom cult of self” thinking. The husband has the potential to be

headstrong and selfish, and the wife has the potential to be self-sacrificing, never asking the husband to do anything except be king is not how God created marriage to be. It is my experience that husbands are not too happy about having all the power because God created both of them to “be strong in the Lord and in His mighty power” (see Eph 6:10). Read any marriage help book, and you will find that this is not the way to a successful marriage. “Wives have to stop, disrespecting their husbands by catering to their husband’s childish ways, and the husbands have to value and sacrificially love their wives. Unfortunately, hubby will never value or love his wife while she is not allowing him to mature by catering to his selfishness.”⁵

Headship cannot mean boss! Jesus commanded His followers not to be like the rulers of the world who would exercise dominion over others. The concept of a “greater one” who “lords it over” or “exercises authority” over another is not a principle of the kingdom of God. Jesus spoke clearly and forthrightly—

“But Jesus called them to Himself and said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over

them, and those who are great exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave.” (Matt 20:25-27 (NKJV))

“It shall not be so among you,” Jesus said, in other words; “Don’t be like that, don’t do what they do; this is not the way for you to act. It should not even be in your thinking, lording it over people is not the way, don’t act like them if you want to be a leader then be a servant.”

The Apostle Paul did not have authority over anyone’s faith in God, and he did not attempt to gain it because our faith is meaningless and powerless when it comes under the influence of the demands of legalism, control or domination. He wrote to the believers in Corinth “But I don’t want to imply that as leaders we coerce you or somehow want to rule over your faith. Instead, we are your partners who are called to increase your joy. And we know that you already stand firm because of your strong faith” (2 Corinthians 1:24 TPT).

At this point, we need to look at what 1 Corinthians 11:3 says, “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.” The word “head” in the NKJV could have two meanings. 1. Master/lord of a husband in relation to his wife, and 2. Source. If we look at it in the Hebrew origin, we find that it means Adam, the first man, the parent/head of the entire human family. Which one did Paul intend to convey? If we look a few verses down in 1 Corinthians 11:8, we get a clue. “For the man is not of the woman, but the woman of the man.” Also, 1 Timothy 2:13—“For Adam was formed first, then Eve.” In Genesis Chapter 2 God took a rib from Adam and made Eve making Adam the head/source of the human family.

The Passion Translation translates head as source, 1 Corinthians 11:3 TPT says, “But I want you to understand that Christ is the source of every human alive, and Adam was the source of Eve, and God is the source of the Messiah.”

God, the source of Christ instead of the master of Christ, makes perfect sense. Jesus Christ is in no way subordinate to God. All members of the Trin-

ity are equally God and hold equal authority. The Trinity is a perfect unity. Headship then is not a hierarchy. There is absolute equality in the Trinity, but God raised Jesus from the dead and seated Him at His right hand, far above His Name (see Ephesians 1:20-21). Please refer to “The Trinity is the Ultimate Model in End Notes.”⁶

In the light of all that I have written in the previous pages then, the word “head” surely cannot mean that a husband is superior as “boss” inevitably it means that the first woman came from the first man. “Head” therefore says source. This concept of the husband being the head of his wife confused me much. I would think, “if I am raised together with Christ and seated in the heavenly places in Him (see Eph 2:6), how can I be under my husband. If I am the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ (see Rom 3:22), and Jesus is my Head as Head of the Church (see Eph 5:23; Col 1:18) then how is my husband my head also? That has to make me a two-headed monster. Surely, the head cannot mean boss, better than or superior, when we are one, and he needs a Saviour as much as I do! Surely, headship is not about my husband taking God’s place as head in my life.” I am sure that husbands would not

knowingly take God's place, as that would be idolatry. A wife can give control of her life to her husband, which makes him her god, and a husband can feel that he has the right to control her by getting her to bow to his will—this is a dysfunctional marriage! Too many marriages are lost in futile attempts to fix the other person by controlling them. Control is not an option in a biblical marriage. The Holy Spirit is calling us to a higher place in marriage. Col 3:9-11 says “that we have put off the old man with his deeds and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him, where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave nor free, but Christ is all and in all.” You and I are born again, and our new nature is according to the image of God. We are new creations, new creatures and we are all equally one in Christ (see Gal 3:28). As far as standing, before God is concerned, we are all on the same level. The playing field is level.

There is another way of looking at the headship issue. Biblical headship is only acceptable when the husband recognises that his wife is his equal, loves her sacrificially, and empowers his wife by allowing her to share his authority. Just as Jesus did for

his church, He gave Himself to death and then gave his authority to us, by making us co-heirs of His Kingdom. Equally together in the Lord, husband and wife are to rule over the powers of darkness, not each other. God promoted Jesus to the highest place in all creation, and then He seated us all with Christ together in heavenly places (see Eph 2:6). As head and Saviour of the church, Jesus goes all out to demonstrate His love by making His bride a glorious, radiant and beautiful force on planet earth.

Jesus promoted His church to sit with Him in heavenly places; He gave her authority, died for her, and loves her unconditionally. All He does for her brings her to maturity so she can partner with Him to bring Heaven to earth. We have an excellent model in Jesus, and when we do life His way, we have a marriage that is sacrificial and has mutual submission. Jesus made it clear that the greatest among us is to be the servant of all (see Luke 22:26).

All that Jesus has done for His bride is to make her mature, glorious, radiant, beautiful and holy without fault or flaw (see Eph 5:25-27). Therefore, the head/body analogy of marriage is an image of unity, rather than one of authority. The theme of Ephe-

sians is that God will one day submit everything and everyone under the leadership of Jesus. He is the Head of the Church; He gives His church extraordinary power to walk filled with the Holy Spirit. The Church is His Bride, the one He died for, the one He loves unconditionally, and the one destined to rule with Him. Is this a picture of a Christian marriage? Yes, it should be, ruling together as part of the body of Christ (see Galatians 3:28). In the letter to the Ephesians Paul clearly shows the cornerstone of our faith—the Lord Jesus Himself as Head of His powerful church. He is the Head of every wife and every husband. I love the following notation from The Passion Translation, written by Brian Simmons, “You see when faith comes the Law is no longer in force, we are new creations, we are liberated sons and daughters of the Father. We are no longer slaves to the law, which separates us. Let this go deep into you, we are all one in Jesus Christ.” Can you hear me clapping!

And Galatians 3:26-28 TPT

“You have all become true children of God by the faith of Jesus Christ. It was faith that immersed you into Jesus Christ the Anointed One, and now you are covered and clothed with His Anointing.

And we no longer see each other in our former state – Jew or non-Jew, rich or poor, male or female – because we're all one through our union with Jesus Christ with no distinction between us.”

Chapter Seven — Proper Relationship in Marriage

Jesus is the ultimate example of a biblical marriage. He demonstrated what submission looks like; with the words “No one takes My life from Me, I lay it down” (see John 10:18). His acts of strength, understanding, selflessness and determination, did not result from a passivity or a power struggle with His Father. Jesus was not defeated, nor was He a doormat; He was determined to fulfil His Father’s will by laying down His life. Jesus empowered others to follow Him, without fear, and not to follow the traditions of men, which crushed their love of Him and promoted law over grace.

When couples decide that nothing is going to stop their marriage, they place their marriage union on a higher level than any problem that comes along. Such determination requires vulnerability and honesty, and showing the truth from the heart, not just pointing out failings. It requires asking yourself the question can my husband/wife indeed be himself or herself around me. Do I blame him/her for me not being courageous?

Chapter Eight — Does God hate divorce?

Malachi 2:16 NIV

“The man who hates and divorces his wife,” says the LORD, the God of Israel, “does violence to the one he should protect,” says the LORD Almighty. So be on your guard, and do not be unfaithful.”

Moses probably divorced his first wife Zipporah (see Exo 18:2-3), and Abraham divorced Hagar (see Gen 21:14ff). God said He divorced Israel because of her infidelity (see Jer 3:8). Under Ezra's leadership, the Jews divorced their pagan wives (see Ezra 10:2-3), and in the New Testament, Joseph was planning to divorce Mary because of her supposed infidelity (see Matt 1:19). Divorce is heartbreaking and involves whole families. In the prophet Malachi's day, the men of Israel were dealing treacherously or violently with their wives by divorcing them. We could say that God hates the violence of divorce.

Chapter Nine — What is the Covering Rule?

The covering rule, as far as I can understand, simply means that a woman requires her husband or another male to cover her life. I learnt that if ever I moved out of my husband's covering the devil would get me. Does this make sense, and where does it leave single women? Does it have any biblical basis? Does my husband's covering validate my ministry? How ridiculous! The gospel is for everyone, it is good news, not bad, and it does not put lovers of God, image-bearers and redeemed people needing supervision to minister.

No verse in the Bible says, "If a woman preaches or goes on missions trips, or takes leadership roles, she has to have a male covering." There is no passage in Scripture that warns women, "Let a man cover every woman so she will not lead people into deception, and so she will be safe from the attacks of the devil." Yet why do we use non-existent concepts? I suspect it has to do with control. The Samaritan woman at the well was the first person to whom Jesus revealed who He was, and she was the first evangelist in the New Testament. Jesus showed His resurrection on Easter morning to Mary Magdalene and unmarried

woman, and Jesus affirmed her as a witness of the gospel and Jesus sent her to tell the others about His triumph over the grave. God also did not ask Mary's father or Joseph if it was ok for her to be the mother of the promised Messiah. He sent an angel to speak to Mary by herself. Jesus sent His brave women disciples to tell the good news of His resurrection, and all they had was the command from Jesus to go. If what we teach does not line up with the life, ministry and teachings of Jesus, then it is a lie. My confession is; He shall cover me with His feathers, and under His wings, I take refuge; His truth shall be my shield and buckler.”(Psalm 91:4). In Christ, a husband and wife are safe.

Chapter Ten — Concerns

My concern is reaching non-Christians if the message we bring to young men and women considering marriage is one of the wives in subjection. To the Moslem, it will appear that the same gender oppression that exists in Islam is also in Christianity. Marriage in Islam—allows polygamy (Surah 4:3), and allows a man to divorce his wife by oral announcement (Surah 2:229). When a husband has pronounced divorce three times on his wife, she then may not lawfully remarry her husband until she has married and divorced by another man (including having intimate relations with him) (Surah 2:230). Islam teaches that a wife is subject to punishment by her husband (Surah 4:34).

History reveals that women the world over have been prevented from full and equal rights. Hence the Women's Liberation Movement. Ultimately, the family suffers, and if the world happens to look closely at the Church and finds inequality in marriages or leadership roles, then God ends up with a bad name and the Church is not taken seriously. However, in the real Body of Christ, there is no oppression, no gender biases, no racism, and no inequality. Jesus

came to set the oppressed at liberty. The world needs to hear this so badly today. If we can get this right, those barriers to unanswered prayer, will tumble, breakthroughs will come, families will function as God intended, lives restored, and marriage will be a vivid example of Jesus Christ and His Church!

I am concerned for every boy growing up in a culture that silently says they have to prove themselves by being the boss/head of the home, by being competitive, selfish and in some cases violent. This violence is against other men and unfortunately towards women, which we call domestic violence. The destruction of property and mindless bloodshed where men kill others is all too prevalent in some places in the world. Yes, women are involved in the carnage, but they represent a tiny fraction of this insanity. Even if men and boys escape the violence, they may struggle to express their feelings or even acknowledge them, fearing that doing so will make them less of a man. The “real men don’t cry” scenario—well, Jesus wept publicly profoundly and loudly, in unashamed grief over the death of his friend Lazarus and wept openly over Jerusalem. Jesus permitted men to be fully human to admit that they struggle and hurt. He encouraged men to embrace

the wholeness of being a man. Jesus was not afraid of cultural taboos either.

In the traditional church manhood, it seems must be earned by a man's ability to provide finances and spiritual leadership over his wife. Now the whole family is caught up in the draining process of the husband having to prove himself. The single man seen as incomplete struggles to find a place. It is hard to talk about the oppression of wives without considering husbands because the two are one. Men also by way of men using power over other men face many of the issues women face.

The fulfilment of God's sons requires and depends on the fulfilment of God's daughters. It works both ways. The bible does not teach one way for men to get to heaven and another for women to get to heaven as far as I can tell we are reading the same bible and there is only one way. God is calling men and women equally. We are interdependent; one promotes the other, and they flourish together. If we can get this right, we can bring heaven to earth.

Chapter Eleven — My Conclusion

Husband and wife are to exercise authority over sickness, disease, lack and temptation and fiercely protect each other against anything that would weaken their relationship. They must never forget that their faith must be in God and His Word, not each other. Yes, we are to submit voluntarily to our spouses and Pastors or Leaders but not to elevate them to a place where they can take God's place assuming rank and power like the rulers of the world. A person cannot act freely if he or she is forced to comply. Such people become robots programmed for responding, not freethinking and not performing by a personal choice. Concerning our Pastors or Leaders, in the same way, we should pay attention and allow them to persuade us, but we are not to elevate them to a place where they can take God's place in our lives after all God has given us a spirit of self-control.

I believe God does not place people in hierarchies. There is no hierarchy in the first two chapters of Genesis in the Garden of Eden; Adam did not have authority over Eve; he was not her spiritual leader or the one she had to obey. Then along comes the ene-

my, with a single lie, he destroyed a unique biblical marriage. Adam and Eve cut off from their Creator went into hiding, the battle of the sexes begins as well as the campaign of men over men, and patriarchy becomes a warped way of life. What a mess! They stood together against God and started blaming each other; Adam even blamed God. A mess that only the Lord Jesus could fix with his coming to earth, His suffering, death and resurrection.

A biblical marriage—is it what we think it is. God's plan for marriage has not changed; it is the same as it was before the fall of Adam and Eve—the two shall become one. The uniqueness of Marriage is that it is God-ordained and blessed, and it is a union of a man and a woman to the exclusion of all others, where they become one physically and spiritually. This concept requires a mindset that understands the equality and the power in being one. Marriage is so unique that it cannot be about who is in control, who is over, or under, or who serves whom. It is about being one. The desire to give ourselves to each other selflessly in marriage is the plan and purpose of God.

The Proverbs 31 woman was successful, she man-

aged her home, and she was a leader in the community. She was a highly-skilled, intelligent and successful businessperson in her own right, with an entrepreneurial gift of leadership. She had grace, generosity, creativity and dignity. She was free to be herself, and her husband was behind her all the way. All this happened for her in a unique marriage environment, and he “trusted her without reserve and never has a reason to regret it” (see Prov 31:11 MSG). Her husband was also a leader in the city and much respected. This picture is of a woman married to a man who believes in her. Her strengths, talents and calling did not intimidate him. He praises her, and he even gains respect because of her strengths. She made him look good, and he did the same for her. Therefore, the Proverbs 31 man was equally a powerful, successful man alongside his similarly powerful, successful Proverbs 31 woman.⁷

A great, lasting marriage is possible because Jesus Christ defeated every enemy that could come against it, and in Him, we overcome. There is equality in marriage between husband and wife and the truth matters. Our goal is to promote our spouse above ourselves and operate in authority alongside each other, in the same way as Jesus empowered us

and gave us His authority as His Bride.

Have a long and happy marriage!

Much Love

Colleen

Resources and Recommended Reading
“Powerful and Free” by Danny Silk
Confronting the Glass Ceiling for Women in the Church
© 2012 by Danny Silk
www.lovingonpurpose.com

“Fashioned to Reign” by Kris Vallotton
© 2013 by Kris Vallotton
Published by Chosen Books
11400 Hampshire Avenue South
Bloomington, Minnesota 55438
www.chosenbooks.com

“The Malestrom” by Carolyn Custis James
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Zondervan, 3900 Sparks Dr. SE,
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“Keep Your Love On” by Danny Silk
Connection, Communication and Boundaries
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Books by the same Author

“What Has God Ever Done For Me” by Colleen McLean

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Colleen McLean is an author, a marriage celebrant and a financial and pastoral supporter of an orphanage of twenty eight children, in the remote hills of North East India. Colleen and her husband have seven grandchildren and four step grand children, they reside on the Central Coast of New South Wales, Australia. Colleen is passionate about the Word of God and see people reach their potential in God.

About this booklet

Why did I write this? Because I have felt that we the church have missed the mark to some degree as far as carrying the commission Jesus left us. In effect by interpreting the scriptures through our culture and bias we have have put ourselves in a box and wondered why God did not bless it. The bible properly interpreted promotes equality in every aspect, especially in marriage. Everyone is gifted by God and everyone has a responsibility to exercise their gifts. Thankfully the tide is turning and the restrictions placed on women are disappearing. I pray you receive this in the spirit it was written.

Colleen

End Notes

1 Permission Granted to do Church Differently” © 2006—Graham Cooke and Gary Goodell. Destiny Image Publishers, Inc. PO Box 310, Shippensburg, PA 17257-0310

2 Merriam Webster Dictionary definition of “one” is—“having the value of 1.—used to refer to a single person or thing”.

3 <http://biblehub.com/text/ephesians/5-21.htm>

4 “Ten Lies the Church Tells Women” © 2000, 2006 by J. Lee Grady. Published by Charisma House, Charisma Media/Charisma House Book Group 600 Rinehart Road, Lake Mary, Florida 32746

5 The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work by John M Gottman, PhD, and Nan Silver. Chapter 6, Principle 4 page 99

6 The Trinity is the ultimate model
In every place, we are to submit voluntarily to each other in an attitude of co-operation, assuming responsibility and carrying each others burdens. Because in the bible we see each member of the Trinity bestowing honour on the others. The Father always commends the Son (see Matt 3:17, 17:5, Mark 1:1; 9:7; Luke 3:22, 9:35; Philippians 2:9), and works through the Spirit (see Luke 11:13, 24:49, John 3:34, 14:16, 15:26; Acts 1:4-5). The Son always yields to the Father (see Matt 26:39, 26:42, Mark 14:36; Luke 22:42; John 4:34, 5:19, 5:30, 6:38, 8:28), and promotes the Spirit (see John 6:63, 7:37-39, 16:7, 20:22; Acts 1:8), and the Spirit always points to the Son (see John 14:26, 15:26, 16:14-15), and does what the Father says (see John 14:26, 15:26, 16:13, Acts 1:4-5). The Trinity is the ultimate model preferring one another

in love and honour, always submitting to one another in perfect unity.

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7 “What Has God Ever Done For Me” by Colleen McLean © 2020 Colleen McLean, Gold Touch Press