

HEADSHIP

*“The head of every man is Christ; the head of the woman
is her husband.” 1 Corinthians 11:3*

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INTRODUCTION

The concept of headship of the husband causes a lot of concern to many women, and possibly also to many men in this age of equality. Some Christian women, young ones especially, are inclined to treat this as male chauvinism on the part of Paul. Because they believe it to be wrong in principle, they tend to think of it as Paul speaking, and not as reflecting God's will.

Much of the controversy arises from differing ideas about the meaning of the term headship.

Firstly, let me say that I do not believe that headship must mean superiority: nor need it mean domination; nor a more important role.

But rather it can mean leadership.

Well, what does leadership mean? This is a subject which has been studied very deeply by many people—and is still being studied. I'm sure the last word has not been said on this most important subject.

Three broad styles or methods of headship or leadership have been identified.

They have been called Autocratic, Democratic and Laissez-faire. Alternative terms are Directive, Participative and Permissive. Many experiments have been conducted using these three styles and the findings are very interesting.

AUTOCRATIC LEADERSHIP

The Autocratic or Directive leader tends to lead by domination. Those who are led are expected to follow the leader because he says so (incidentally, I will use the word “he” throughout, but in most cases I mean “he or she”, because we have female leaders in most walks of life).

With those who are prepared to be led by an autocrat, the results can in some cases be very good for all concerned.

There are many successful businesses conducted by autocratic leaders, and there are many successful marriages with autocratic husbands. The requirements for success seem to be:

1. A willingness and desire to be directed on the part of those being led (in some societies this is the main form of leadership).
2. Love and concern for those being led on the part of the leader, so that in his decision-making he considers the best interests of those he is leading. Perhaps the worst feature of the autocratic leader is that he produces dependence on the part of those led, and they typically do not develop their own abilities and self-expression to extent that they could. When the autocrat is absent or perhaps dies, those who were dependent upon him, often tend to find it difficult to cope.

PERMISSIVE LEADERSHIP

At the other end of the spectrum is the laissez-faire or permissive leader.

This form of leadership has been tried in a wide variety of situations, but has always had to be abandoned. Interestingly, permissiveness is the cause of most of our social problems today.

One of the earliest examples, which became widely known, was Summerhill School of A.S. Neill in England. When it was widely publicised many people, including myself, thought what a wonderful development—and it was a bold experiment, but it failed. Allowing young people to do just as they like without any direction, limitation, or discipline proved definitely not the way to go.

Many parents opt for permissiveness these days, either as a cop-out, or because they don't know how to handle determined or self-willed young people in today's world, and I don't blame them; it's not easy. But we all know how disastrous this can be.

Dr Spock, the famous authority on child rearing, embraced permissiveness for a while and later had to recant.

This discussion might seem a long way from the subject of headship of the husband but it is closely related.

There are marriages in which the husband and wife agree to be permissive; where a great deal of freedom is available to go one's own way, independent of the other. The results of these arrangements are not encouraging.

DEMOCRATIC LEADERSHIP

The third style of leadership is democratic or participative, and this style is very much in keeping with modern life. As women develop a more equal role in all matters of life, the autocratic/directive form of leadership is less and less attractive to them.

Let us look at the democratic/participative style of leadership.

There follows a list of characteristics of the democratic leader which I have used widely in management training in recent years. This form of

leadership has been used with great success in a number of enterprises—unfortunately all too few, but steadily increasing in number.

The democratic leader recognises a number of key characteristics of his headship.

1. He sees himself as member of the group he leads, not as an aloof outsider to the group—a part of the group and not apart from the group. This is a reminder to absentee or workaholic husbands, as well as to aloof or superior ones.
2. He does not regard himself, or his role, as more important than other individual members of the group, only different. Sometimes the Managing Director is paid less than the top salesman—also a wife may earn more than her husband. All positions are regarded as equally important—like cogs in a wheel; if a cog is missing the wheel does not function correctly.
3. He does not consider himself, or his role, as above or superior to the group he leads --so it is with the democratic husband.
4. He sees his role as helping the group, facilitating its work, supplementing its knowledge with its own. If one walked into a team meeting being led by such a leader it would be difficult to distinguish his contribution from any other—all points of view are considered of equal importance. So it is in the Biblical family. Not only that, but he sees himself as serving the group rather than the group serving him.

To illustrate this:-

A management specialist was speaking to a group of executives on the subject of leadership. On the wall behind him was an organisation chart showing the family tree of a Company. However, this chart showed the managing director at the bottom, then above him the managers, then the supervisors, and above them again the operating personnel.

A member of the Group could not contain his curiosity and asked the speaker: “Isn’t that organisation chart upside down?”

“No,” replied the speaker, “this chart illustrates the fact that the managing director is the greatest servant in the organisation—he helps everyone else to do their jobs, the managers help the supervisors and the supervisors help the operators, and they are the ones who do the important work of the enterprise.”

5. He does not see himself as the decision-maker of the group, but as the person who sees that all necessary decisions are made. He sees consultation as important, hence the term ‘participation’. Also the democratic husband sees the family council as important, where all members of the family can contribute their thoughts on matters where they have the capacity to contribute.

6 . He does not see his role as that of critic or judge of the group’s performance any more than he would expect members of the group to judge or criticise his performance. So the democratic husband seeks to edify or to built up the self- esteem of his spouse and never to denigrate her.

7. He interprets the principle—“a leader’s responsibility for his team’s actions and performance is absolute”, to mean:-

- he accepts responsibility for everything his team does, and he does not try to excuse himself for errors made by members of the team.
- he recognises that any errors of omission by members of the group are really the result of his own leadership shortcomings, communication, motivation, etc.
- so, he asks the question: Why criticise others for my own mistakes? So the husband takes responsibility for what goes on in the home; not the blame if things go wrong, but responsibility for correcting the

situation, for seeing that whatever is necessary is done to keep the family together and operating well.

This idea of taking responsibility is perhaps the most important aspect of leadership and one of the most useful ways of looking at headship in Biblical terms.

I doubt that there are many wives who do not want their husbands to take responsibility for a happy marriage and harmony in the home.

8. He diverts attention from the mistakes of the past into consideration of the needs of present and future. He sees that the past cannot be changed—the future can. The democratic husband does not focus on mistakes but on ways to mend the situation.
9. He avoids self-criticism as actively as he does criticism of others, as it only serves to demoralise.
10. He defends the integrity of his team and the individual members against criticism from others, within or outside the group—thus creating team solidarity, but not condoning wrong. So the democratic husband is proud of his wife and shows it in all situations.
11. It is natural for him to show appreciation for acts of support from the group by his attitude, his words, and his actions. The democratic husband appreciates what his wife does.
12. He is not averse to openly seeking guidance from his highly skilled or experienced specialists in fields in which they have competence—he is prepared to admit that in many ways they are better equipped than he is to assess specific situations and make technical judgements. So the democratic husband defers to his wife in many matters where her special skills and knowledge are superior to his.

13. He realises the futility of trying to control the actions, performance, or results of others—he strives to help them control their own performance. The democratic husband does not try to control his wife.

These are some of the lessons we can learn as husbands from modern management research in carrying out our leadership role.

I have focussed on the modern concepts of participative leadership to illustrate that leadership or headship need not imply in any way either dominance or superiority. Democratic leadership is far, far, removed from such characteristics, and is marked by such as equality, servanthood, and subordination of one's own needs to the common good.

So the generally held view that headship means dominance is completely false and is based upon an autocratic mode of leadership—a mode which is now well and truly 'outmoded'.

TAKING RESPONSIBILITY

A most important point is the concept of taking responsibility—what does it mean?

It doesn't mean being blamed when things go wrong, but taking initiative in making things go right, and in righting wrong developments.

Let me explain:-

If there is a difference of opinion between husband and wife, it is the husband's leadership responsibility to see that the difference is ironed out satisfactorily. If his wife is unhappy about a situation it is his responsibility to see that this is corrected. If his wife is finding it difficult to cope with some aspects of life, it is his responsibility to help her or see that she gets the help she needs—and so on.

LOVE IS THE KEY

Jay Adams, the great Christian Counsellor, counselled a husband seeking a divorce along these lines: “The husband is primarily responsible, as head of the home, to see that there is love in the home. Headship is the responsibility to take loving leadership in the home, and this leadership must follow the model provided by Christ in his loving headship over his Church.”

Ephesians 5:25 – “Husbands love your wives as Christ loved the Church and gave himself up for her.”

He goes on, “it was not the Church that first reached out to Christ in love—but we read in *1 John 4:19* – ‘We love because he first loved us’. And he loved us who were undeserving of his love, so the husband loves his wife whether she is deserving or not.”

The Bible goes on to place a very strong responsibility upon the husband as he is to love his wife as himself.

Ephesians 5:28 – “Even so husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loved his wife, loves himself.”

This describes an unstinting, completely dedicated love, that knows no boundaries.

SERVANTHOOD IN HEADSHIP

The other great example of Jesus was his servanthood. He said, “*The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve and to give his life a ransom for many.*”

The modern leader in business sees himself as the servant of all. The modern Christian husband in following Jesus will see himself as the servant of his wife and family. Servanthood could be the subject for a book on its own, but let us look briefly at what it means.

1. Subjecting one's own good to the good of others.
2. Sacrificing, when necessary, things which mean a great deal to us, especially our ego, in order to show our love and concern for the other. Jesus sacrificed all for us.
3. Being prepared to physically carry out a serving role—Jesus washed his disciples' feet.
4. Being an example to others in order to show them the way.
5. To sum up, giving the needs of others priority over one's own needs, and achieving our own satisfaction through satisfying others' needs—giving one's time, abilities, and oneself to help others.

Jesus said, "*He who would be greatest among you must be the servant of all.*"

Paul wrote in Philippians 2:3 – "*Do nothing from selfishness or conceit, but in humility count others better than yourselves.*"

Albeit unknowingly, many of the modern democratic organisational leaders are learning the humble, self-effacing, self-sacrificing servant-style, leadership which Christ exemplified—showing us once again that Jesus Christ is more modern than tomorrow—as he must be, because as Lord of Creation he invented tomorrow, and by his will it comes into being.

CONCLUSION

The concept of headship/servanthood is hard to get our minds around—we are so used to the autocratic domineering concept of headship as exhibited by so many men in all walks of life, (and by some women).

But Christ's model of leadership based upon servanthood was clearly possible 2000 years ago, and is possible today—it is actually being applied, as I can personally attest, in many situations with outstanding results.