

1. Jesus is the model (vv. 21-25, 28-29, 31)
2. Jesus is the motivation (vv. 23, 25-27, 30)

²¹ **Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.**

²² **Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord.** ²³ **For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior.** ²⁴ **Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.**

²⁵ **Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her** ²⁶ **to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word,** ²⁷ **and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.** ²⁸ **In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself.** ²⁹ **After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church—** ³⁰ **for we are members of his body.** ³¹ **“For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.”**

Take Care in Your Calling!



*Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us
in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.*

Ephesians 1:3

Jesus knew some of his followers were grumbling over the words he had spoken about being the Living Bread from Heaven. They were offended by the analogy of eating his flesh and drinking his blood. **“This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?”** (John 6:60). Some couldn’t get over it, and refused to keep pursuing the truth. **“From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him”** (John 6:66). Jesus, the greatest teacher ever to walk the earth, allowed these students to not get it, and to walk away from the truth! You’d think Jesus wouldn’t let this happen. But the truth itself often offends and drives people away. One of the most “offensive” truths of Scripture is God’s teaching on the unique callings of men and women in God’s world. In the church and in the home, men are called to positions of leadership/*headship*. In the church and in the home, women are called to a *helper*-calling. The callings of

head and helper is an unchanging biblical principle for all cultures and all times. But this is offensive to many. Here at Trinity, we just finished what turned out to be an 8-month study on this topic. We studied the words head and helper, submission, authority, and more. We wrestled with how best to apply this unchanging principle for this congregation, in this place, at this time in history. We asked tough questions. The Holy Spirit through his Word, made our time profitable. Like many in Jesus' day, there are some today who stumble over *head and helper* and refuse to keep pursuing the truth. And a Sunday-morning sermon on the topic has the potential to raise more questions than answers. We'll spend some time this morning looking at Paul's divinely-inspired words to the Ephesians about our God-given *head and helper* callings. If you still have questions, we have the patience and willingness to keep talking about it. These can be hard teachings, especially in 21st Century America. So let's approach these words the same way we approach all of Scripture: looking both for the eternal value and the earthly value they can bring to our lives. And in doing so, may each of us be compelled by Christ's love to *take care in our callings*.

The Apostle Paul has written to the Ephesians of all the blessings of being a part of the body of Christ—God's Church. He's written about the unity and solidarity of working together toward common goals and serving a common Head—Christ! All the while, Paul has reminded them of who exactly Christ is—not just their Head, but their Savior, who sacrificed himself for them. As we heard a couple weeks ago, he encouraged them to imitate Christ in their sanctified lives. Then he tells them to be constantly filling themselves with the Holy Spirit through the Word. What will that filling up with the Holy Spirit look like? Paul describes it with a series of actions: praising God and encouraging one another and overflowing thanksgiving to God. Then he adds one more description of being filled with the Holy Spirit: “**Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ**” (5:21).

The Apostle Paul is about to single out wives and tell them to submit to their husbands as their God-given heads. How can he tell everyone to submit to everyone else here and then single out the wives in the next sentence? And then even later he'll tell children to submit to their parents and servants to their masters. Some people use this verse to negate all other verses about husbands being the head of wives. But there must be a way to understand this verse without using it to nullify God's clear words about head and helper. There are a couple different ways that make this possible.

The first is to see these words as an encouragement to humble mutual service among all Christians. We know Christ came not to *be* served, but to serve with his life and death, and he calls us to serve one another too. This understanding would fall in line with many of Paul's other words, such as these to the Philippians, “**Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others**” (Philippians 2:3). Perhaps Paul is softening his use of the word submit in the verse. But taking these words this way would be the only time in the New Testament that the word “submit” is used this way.

The other option is to see this verse not so much as “everybody submit to everybody,” but more as a transition to the next section about some specific people submitting to those other specific people who are called to be their head: namely, wives to husbands, children to parents,

servants to masters. So to paraphrase, “*Submit...one to the other, wives to husbands, etc.*” Scripture itself speaks this way in other places too, such as when the book of Revelation speaks of men “slaying one another.” This couldn't mean one person killing the other precisely at the same time the other kills him. “Men slaying one another” would have to mean some men killing other men. Another is the example of “bearing one another's burdens,” which also would not in every case be an exact reciprocal relationship, but most often “one to another.” So submitting to one another is Paul's way of introducing a new section on some people submitting to other people. This seems to make the most sense, especially when compared to the other 37 uses of the word “submit” in the New Testament. But really, either way leaves us with this: all Christians are called to serving one another in humility and certain Christians are *uniquely called* to submit to those in the headship calling. Paul continues: **“Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything”** (5:22-24). For many people in the world, these are “fighting words.” But let's notice a few things. Notice first of all that it's as if Paul takes wives aside to tell them this. He's not telling husbands, “*make your wives submit to you.*” And he'll do the same with the husbands, “take them aside” and talk to them about their calling. So, you might say the wife is “in charge” of her calling and the husband “in charge” of his. When it comes to husbands and wives being head and helper, there's no room for: “*I'd do my part if you did yours!*” No, husband and wife are each responsible for carrying out their own respective calling. Notice also what Paul *doesn't* say here and what Scripture as a whole doesn't say. Nowhere does Scripture say, “*Wives, be subservient to your husbands.*” Nowhere does Scripture say, “*Wives, obey your husbands.*” Submission is not the same thing as subservience or obedience. God intends a wife's submission to her head to be one that is entirely voluntary and gladly given to him.

But the word “submit” is one that sounds bad to our modern American ears because the world assumes that submitting yourself to someone else's authority means debasing yourself—lowering yourself to a position of inferiority. The word *submit* literally means “to rank yourself under” another. In God's world, *ranking yourself under* another person doesn't have to mean you are of lesser worth or value, or lesser intelligence or abilities. For example, when a 14-year old crossing guard puts his hand up to stop a big-rig from entering the intersection, by stopping, the truck driver is not showing himself to be weaker, less intelligent, less gifted, less important, or in any way inferior to the crossing guard. He is, however, submitting. The driver recognizes that the government established this order of authority for the good of drivers and pedestrians. And so he should submit to the will of this 14-year old. Another example of submission not involving inferiority is that of Christ himself. Jesus modeled submission for us when he submitted to the will of God the Father. And we know Jesus and the Father are both equally God, neither one inferior to the other (1 Corinthians 15:28).

When wives recognize the authority God has given their husbands, they are not just submitting to their earthly head, but also to their divine Head, Christ. Think about that: it's really not about power and control and force. It's an attitude thing. Do Christians submit to Christ because they *must*? No, but because we want to. “*Christ's love compels us*” (2 Corinthians 5:14). Christian submission to Christ is given for the same reason a wife's submission is: love for

Christ and love for her husband. But this also means that the woman who refuses to submit to her earthly Head is refusing to submit to Christ, the Head who gave her the calling of helper.

But the question should be asked: what if a husband is a far cry from the Christ-like head he's called to be? What if he mistreats his bride and lords his authority over her? Though the Holy Spirit inspired Paul to command submission in every aspect of married life, this doesn't mean the wife should be a doormat or a victim to her husband. Look at all the stories in the Bible about godly women who had to step up and take the lead when their earthly heads abdicated or abused their calling: Deborah, Jael, Abigail, just to name a few. Sometimes to protect herself or her family, sometimes even to protect her husband as in the case of Abigail, a wife must go against her husband's will if it contradicts the will of Christ her Head. Maybe we could ask this question too: Is the Church, by submitting to Christ her head being victimized? By no means. Nor is a wife's helper-calling to be that of a victim!

Some have made this interesting point about Creation: the woman was taken not from man's head to rule over him, not from his feet to be tread upon by him, but from his side to be equally loved and cherished (Matthew Henry). If a husband takes his own calling seriously, how much easier would it be for his wife to gladly *rank herself under* his loving headship. Maybe that is one reason why as Paul pulls husbands aside, he devotes many more words to the headship calling than helper.

“Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church” (25-29). Husbands are to love their wives with the same sacrificial love Christ showed the church. This is *agape*-love. This is a love that needs no prompting, a love that puts her needs above his, a love that is willing to do for her what Jesus Christ has done for the Church—to take care of her in every way! In the same way we all take care of our bodies (or at least we should), so a husband takes care of his bride, because marriage has made them *one flesh*. The husband is to look at his wife as the way Christ looks at the Church—his body, as his most priceless treasure. Ladies, tell me that's not romantic! What's more romantic than a knight in shining armor being his bride's greatest ally, her strong protector, her preserver and defender? Husbands, this is your calling—to be a little Christ to your most priceless and treasured bride!

When men see their wives in this way, treat their wives in this way, how can wives not gladly submit to their husbands God-given leadership? One pastor illustrates these marriage callings in this way: the wife is like a precious and beautiful ancient vase from the Ming Dynasty in China. The husband is her caretaker and protector. Christ-like headship for the husband means he extra-carefully goes about his life holding her in his arms so as not to ever drop her. (I know, wives, thinking about your husband doing this might sound like a scary thing!) But Christ-like submission for the wife, means she lets him (Rev. Charles Degner).

Now, just to be clear, the biblical principle of *head and helper* doesn't mean the husband has to be the breadwinner. It doesn't mean the wife does all the work around the house. It's not

about jobs. It's about attitude. Play to your strengths, with the husband focused on his calling and the wife focused on hers.

Deciding how to work out your callings of head and helper in your own home is something to wrestle with, something to pray about, something to enter into with Paul's reminder to do so imitating Christ in kindness, compassion, and forgiveness. We have all had our moments of failure at our callings in married life. But the past doesn't matter anymore. It doesn't matter to Jesus our Savior, but he took care of it. He has made you a part of his Church—his Bride. And he calls you radiant. **“Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless”** (26-27). His blood has covered the past, present and future failings. His instrument of grace called Baptism delivered these blessings to you—*“the washing with water through the word,”* and has made you holy in God's sight.

What perfect agape love this is for us who deserve far worse! Jesus is our model of headship; Jesus is our model for being helper. Jesus is our motivation to gladly carry out both! How can we not all submit to Christ our saving and loving head, who sacrificed all for us? How can we not all take up these high and holy callings. *“Christ's love compels us.”*

So, *head and helper* works best as a two-way street, as husband and wife focus their attention and energy each on their own calling. That being said, husbands: it starts with you! Imitate Christ in your marriage! Give your bride a *little Christ* to follow. Make it easy for her to fall into her helper calling! Make it easy for her to *want to*. This means asking yourselves as husbands not, *“How can I better rule over my wife?”*, but rather, *“How can I better love my wife?”* This means taking the initiative as the spiritual leader of the family. It means taking the initiative when it comes to family devotions. It means taking the initiative in your family's worship life and in your family's stewardship life.

Incidentally, if you singles are feeling left out, this lesson has encouragement for you too. When choosing whom to date, when choosing whom to marry, choose someone who is going to make it easier to carry out your calling. Furthermore, all Christians, including singles are also called to defend and encourage God's principles to those who are called to positions of *head and helper*.

To be sure, the world won't understand *head and helper*. They'll look down on you for it. They'll call you a sexist. They'll call you a victim. They'll be offended and grumble against it and maybe even be turned off to the rest of God's Word. They won't understand, because they don't know Christ as Head and Christ as Helper. But you do. If a husband is focused solely on carrying out his calling of loving head, if a bride is focused solely on carrying out her calling as helper, what could this marriage not make it through? If both are willing to humbly and mutually serve one another as Christ has served the Church, to be Christ to one another in kindness, compassion and forgiveness, what could possibly drive a wedge between them? Take care in your callings. Jesus is the model. Jesus is the motivation. Amen.

To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood,⁶ and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father—to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen.

Revelation 1:5b-6