

## ***The Man of God***

In the name of him who loved us and gave himself for us, dear friends in Christ: Last week in our worship together, we began a two-part miniseries on the topic of what it means to be specifically *men* and *women* of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. And what we discovered as we started to explore this topic in the sacred Scriptures is that while our infinitely wise and loving God made men and women to be equal before him, he did not make them to be the same. Instead, he designed them differently precisely so that they would complement and complete each other so that together they would form a union that would be in a marvelous way something much greater than the mere sum of the parts. We also saw that not only did the Lord make men and women to be fundamentally different from each other, he also defined the role that each should take in relation to the other. And these assignments he made were far from random or arbitrary. No, what we found is that way God made the man and the woman and the roles he assigned them was intended to reflect his own image in them. It works like this: as the Father takes the lead and gives of his own divine essence to beget the Son, so the man gives of his own flesh, blood, and bone to form the woman. And as the Son then submits his will to that of his Father saying, as he does, “Not my will but yours be done”, so also the woman is to submit her will to that of the man. In this way, by their ongoing relationship with each other, they continue to reflect the image of the God who made them; and in this way they declare his glory in the way they live their lives.

Now what’s so interesting is that we see exactly this same divine order and design carried forth in today’s Epistle lesson; but now it’s presented to us on a different level. Whereas before the relationship of the man and the woman mirrored that of the Father and the Son in the Godhead, this time their interaction is set forth as a portrait of the Lord Jesus Christ and the assembly of his holy people, that is, the church consisting of all those who believe and trust in him. As Christ takes the initiative and gives himself, his body and blood on the cross for the life of his bride, the church, so the man is to give himself on behalf of the woman. In return, the woman is to submit her will to that of the man, just like the church submits to the will of Christ her Lord. So again, in the way they live together, men and women are to reflect the image of the God who not only made them but who also redeemed them from sin. It’s really quite ingenious—you’d think someone who was really very smart must have thought it all up. Oh, wait ...

All right then, with all this in view, last Sunday we focused our attention on the role the Lord has assigned to women, namely the role of being in submission to men. We spent some time talking about what that means and what it doesn’t mean; and if you weren’t here, I urge you to get a copy of that message because we’re not going to go back there today. Instead, we’re going to spend our time considering what it means to be faithful *man* of God. We’ll concentrate on what it means to fulfill the role of *headship* that God has assigned to men. And again, I want to stress that by doing so we’re not dealing with only half the people here. We all need to know not only our own roles, but those of our counterparts as well. This isn’t so that we can point fingers at each other and say, “Hey, you’re not doing your part” or “Look, I’ll start doing my part when you do yours”; but rather so that we can all know what the Lord’s will is and encourage, support, and help each other to fulfill the roles that God has given to each of us.

And as I said before, the role God has given to the man is that of headship. But what exactly is meant by that? Well, as I did last week, perhaps it’s best to begin by explaining what it doesn’t mean. In giving headship to the man, the Lord does not intend that he become an autonomous dictator whose every command, whim, and desire is law. The headship given to the man is not *independent*; he’s not free to make up his own rules and oppress willy-nilly the women and children that God has placed under him. Instead he is to see that his headship is given to him by God as a sacred trust, and that he is accountable to God for how he discharges that responsibility. He needs to understand that he is in a chain of command. His leadership comes from God whom he represents. And he’s been placed where he is to accomplish a mission for God. He also needs to understand that those placed under his authority do not belong to him. They are the Lord’s. Jesus said to Peter, “Take care of *my* sheep”, and “Feed *my* lambs”. And to every man the Lord gives the exact same instructions. “I’ve placed you in charge to take care of them *for me*.”

This tells us a great deal about what this headship will look like in action. Instead of being characterized by selfish ambition and the desire to seek its own pleasure and ease, it will reflect the headship of Christ who gives it. And here the shepherd image is particularly helpful. Walking in the footsteps of his Lord, the faithful man will lead, guide, and care for his charges for their benefit, not his. He will see that their needs are attended, he will protect them when there is threat or danger, he will go after the ones who stray, and yes, he'll have to enforce some standards of discipline – but again, he's not free to decide what these are. He has God's Word to guide him. It's in the Lord's way that he seeks to guide those entrusted to his care – and if he's leading them, it necessarily means that he too is walking on that path.

His is a leadership of service—of *self-sacrificing* service. His model is the Good Shepherd who laid down his life for the sheep. And that brings up another point: often, even though he's in charge, his leadership will mean doing exactly what he doesn't want to do and going where he doesn't want to go. Remember, the will of Jesus would not have taken him to the cross. He didn't want to go there; but it was the Father's will that he give himself for the sins of the world in that horrific way, and he gave himself to his Father's will. Jesus tells Peter the same thing, "Take charge; but understand the day will come when it will take you away against your will." He was referring, of course, to the extreme limit, when the role of leadership leads to death. And it may happen that the man of God is called to that extreme; but on a day to day basis, he's not called to die as a sacrifice for those God has given to his care, but rather to *live* sacrificially for them.

And fulfilling that role, he can count on having to face some opposition. Anyone who's ever been in a position of leadership knows that there are times when you can't make everyone happy; and that when you choose the hard right over the easy wrong, you will do so against storms of protest. On the other hand, the man of God knows that he doesn't have to run for office. The Lord's placing him in charge means that he doesn't have to worry about his approval ratings. He chooses what's right and good for his wife and family even when they don't like it – even when they say so, too, loudly and bitterly. Gentlemen, that's why God gave you the broad shoulders: so that you can bear the abuse—just like Christ your Lord did.

And that leads me to another aspect of this whole thing. Last time, when we looked at the role of the godly woman, we saw that her submitting herself to the headship of the man was ultimately an act of faith – that she had to trust that the Lord had placed over her a man who would do what's best for her even when to her it didn't seem that way. That's really what surrendering her will to him means. And please understand I'm excluding here the sort of leadership that is abusive and clearly against God's will. No woman is called to submit to that. But where he is leading faithfully, she is called to follow – and her following is an act of faith. In the same way, exercising the leadership that he has been given is an act of faith. They say it's lonely at the top for a good reason. Fear, doubt, uncertainty, self-consciousness all afflict the point man. He asks, "How do I know I'm doing this right? What if the decisions I'm making are not the best ones?" There's the tendency to want to look around at others who are in the same position and see how they're doing it, and then kind of blend in with the flow. We see Peter doing this in the Gospel lesson. "Hey, Jesus, what about him?" The answer Peter gets from Jesus is important. "Don't you worry about him. That's my job. *You follow me.*" And so we see that taking the lead according to God's will is an act of faith. A man who does so is trusting that God will lead him to make the right choices – the ones that are best for his family. He trusts too that when he makes mistakes, as he surely will, that the Lord will bring the correction needed to get him back on the right track.

In describing the headship God has assigned to men, perhaps another analogy will help us. Last week when describing the role of a woman, I said that her part was to make the house a home. She's the one who fills the family place with warmth and love and life. Thinking of it that way, if her part is making the house a home, then it's his part to build the house in the first place. And I don't mean that literally, of course; unless he just happens to be a carpenter. No, what I mean is that the role of the man of God is to establish the structure in which the family operates. He defines the walls for their protection, he sets the limits, and he keeps watch at the door, so to speak. He decides what's allowed in and what must stay outside. He seeks to shelter his family from the evils of the world; and where it is in his power, he seeks to make the world a safer place for them too. That speaks to his involvement in community affairs. He understands that his house is safest when everyone's is. But again, he doesn't build his house with his own blueprint. His goal is to build it on the Rock according to God's design.

And that speaks to his position of *spiritual* leadership in the family. He is given oversight of his house to not simply to lead them *for* the Lord; but far more importantly to lead them *to* the Lord. And this is certainly where we see the greatest failings of Christian men in the church today. Many are more than happy to be the head of the house, but they'd like to pass the buck when it comes to matters of the spirit. Moving into the fall season as we are, many married women in our country will soon become what are known "Monday night *football* widows". Far more numerous, I fear, are the married women in our country who are in all seasons "Sunday morning *church* widows".

How very different is the example we have in today's Old Testament reading. Joshua, the great warrior of God, calls together the leaders of the people, the elders, the heads of the clans, the officials, and so on—that is to say, he calls the *men* of Israel. And he says to them, "Fellows, you do what you want; but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." You've got to admire his "buck stops here" attitude about it. Somehow, I can't see Joshua saying, "Honey, take the kids to Sunday school, will you? I'm going to stay home and mow the lawn." No. A man of God is a leader especially of the things that matter the most: the eternal souls of those given to his care.

I hasten to add that his leadership is nonnegotiable and nontransferable. It's a calling of God. It's a task given to him by God. A man might comfort himself with the notion that he's more modern and enlightened about things, that he has an egalitarian view that allows his family members to make their own choices for better or worse – he might tell himself such things; but it does not change the fact that he is held accountable. God has called him to lead.

So let him lead. This is absolutely vital for the woman if she is to perform her role. If she is called to surrender her will to his, it necessarily requires that he have a will and make it known. Women really can't do their parts unless men do theirs. And I for one am convinced that most women are more willing to follow than men are to lead. This analogy may get me in trouble if it's misunderstood, but some years ago I was part of a military liaison mission to the South American country of Paraguay. And while there, one afternoon we went horseback riding with their Cavalry. Yes, they still have the horses and wagons in their army like we did a hundred years ago. Anyway, I'd never ridden a horse. Everything I knew about riding I got from watching westerns on TV. And they make it look pretty easy. I figured a trained horse just sort of knew how to behave and that is naturally wanted to do what the rider did. Boy was I wrong. I found out, the hard way, after finding myself lying in the dust several times, that the horse had a will of its own. To make it go where I wanted it to *and* stay on at the same time, I had to let it know in unmistakable terms who was in charge and what the marching orders were. And please don't misunderstand me here, I'm not saying that women are like horses (actually, I know more men like horses—or at least parts of horses. Anyway); no, I'm saying that men often make the mistake of thinking that leadership just sort of happens on its own. All you have to do is sort of go along for the ride. That won't work. Gentlemen, God has given you the reins, so to speak. Use them; because if you don't, something else will fill the leadership vacuum. And if she's looking to you for direction as she ought, and you're not leading, then the two of you will be like a sailboat with no one's hand on the tiller. It'll go whatever way the wind's blowing – and considering all the hazards out there in this world, that's a dangerous thing. So, men, since you've been called to take charge, take charge. And do so in faith, trusting that the Lord who has called you to lead will be your leader.

In closing, this needs to be said: all that we've spoken about for the last two weeks –stuff that used to be pretty well taken for granted – has become countercultural in our day and age. Today we are told that a woman who is submissive to a man is weak and foolish. We're also told that patriarchy is a terrible evil of the past, and that we can be thankful that those days are behind us. Yeah? Well that's only possible if God and his truth are subject to change—which they aren't. No, even the most cursory reading of Scripture makes it clear that our God reveals himself to us as a *Patriarch*, a word that literally means a Father-leader or Father-ruler. He is our God and *Father*. Christ our Lord is also a *Patriarch*. He is the Great Bridegroom of the church, and each of us is at once a part of his bride and we are also his children. And we are in this church because our faith is founded on the promises God made to the *patriarchs*: to Abraham, to Isaac, to Jacob and to those who are their spiritual descendants. Even in the church, God has ordered a form of patriarchy; that is, he requires that those who serve as the pastors and shepherds of his people be men. Now, have there been abuses in the past? Men who used their headship in sinful and inappropriate ways? Of course. That's what sinful people always do – and we are all sinful people. But the way to correct things is not to abandon God's

good design; but rather to repent of our sins and failings, receive Christ's word of forgiveness and the power of his Holy Spirit to amend our lives, and make it our goal to live according to the pattern he has given us for our good. That way we can be sure that our houses are built upon the Rock. If we allow our culture to define what's right and wrong, we can be certain that we will be building our houses upon the sand – and that, as we know, leads to disastrous consequences.

Fortunately, we have not been called to change the culture. We've been called out of it. We've been called to follow him who led us out of it through his sacrificial, servant leadership and who has redeemed us from sin and given us new life and hope in time and eternity. May we then make it our goal to please him, to live in his forgiveness and his love that empowers us to reflect God's image in our lives. And may we, as *men* and *women* of God, in our homes, here in the church, and wherever we are respond to his call with one voice, "We too will serve the Lord, because he is our God." In Jesus' name, Amen.

***Soli Deo Gloria!***