

# IN RESPONSE BIBLICAL SUBMISSION, PART I

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There is a movement in the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America to advance the cause of women by moving the church away from the traditional understanding of the roles of men and women within the church. In this, it seems to me, there is a desire to downplay the biblical understanding of headship. And at the same time there is a desire to erroneously replace headship with another legitimate concept that there is neither male nor female in Christ.

Obviously Scripture does not contradict itself. And so, if we think that the concept of headship and the concept of equality in Christ are incompatible, then we really don't understand the Scriptures correctly. I will argue that this is the case.

Next, I want to look at the objection voiced against the apostle Paul that he was the victim of his culture when he made his exhortations to submission. My plan is to answer this criticism of Paul in two ways. Negatively, if I can show that Paul's statements requiring submission from wives and love from husbands are made to counteract the results of the fall and human sin, then we answer the objection Paul is culturally bound. But positively, if we show submission generally, and the submission of wives specifically, is a fruit of the presence of the Holy Spirit, then the objection that Paul was culturally bound is also answered. In other words, I will display the theological reasons for Paul's position.

We start at the beginning with Genesis 1:27, "And God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created Him; male and female He create them." It seems that from the start, the image of God within humankind involves the Trinity. How so? If we understand the Trinity properly, we know that God is One. "Hear, O Israel. The Lord is our God, the Lord is one." (Deuteronomy 6:4). Yet there are three persons

within the Godhead. The Father is God (Ephesians 1:3). The Son is God (2 Peter 1:1). And the Holy Spirit is God (Acts 5: 34). As the Westminster Shorter Catechism says, "There are three persons in the Godhead; the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost; and these three are one God, the same in substance, equal in power and glory" (Answer 6). The point is, the fact that God is one and that there are three persons within the Godhead are equally ultimate, equally important.

This concept is carried over into creation. Notice once again, "And God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He create them." The image of God in humankind involves the fact that God created "him" and the "him" is equal to "them." According to Genesis 1:27, the him is them.

You see, man and woman are of the same substance. Man and woman, as far as who they are, as to their being, are absolutely equal. As God the Father, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit are absolutely equal, so man and woman are absolutely equal. As each person of the Trinity is due the same honor, so a father and a mother are due the same honor. God demands this, "Honor your father and your mother" (Exodus 20:12).

And in the marriage relationship, the fact that a husband and wife are two individuals is just as important as the unity they should have in their marriage. The marriage is not more important than the individuals nor are the individuals more important than the marriage. Here is unity and diversity which reflects the Trinity.

What we have said about the Trinity is important. And it is also important that what we have said about the Trinity is but one aspect of the Trinity. When we speak of the Trinity in this way, the theologians say we are speaking of the Ontological Trinity.

That is, we are talking about the nature of God's being.

But there is another way to view the Trinity. Theologians speak of the Economic Trinity. This is the view of God from the perspective of the work agreed upon by each person of the Trinity. In God's economy, each person of the Trinity has a different fundamental task. For example, speaking of God the Father, Ephesians 1:11 says, "We have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will." The Father planned salvation. The Lord Jesus Christ then says to the Father, "I delight to do Thy will, O my God" (Psalm 40:8, Hebrews 10:49). Jesus Christ carried out the plan of the Father. Finally, Jesus Christ says of the Holy Spirit, "He shall take of mine and disclose it to you" (John 16:14). The Holy Spirit applies the work of Christ to human beings in accord with the plan and purpose of the Father.

Now when we turn to a passage of Scripture like 1 Corinthians 11:3 and see that "God is the head of Christ," what are we to make of these words? From the standpoint of absolute being, God the Father and God the Son are equal. But from the standpoint of their work, we see the Son voluntarily place Himself at the disposal of the Father. We see Christ submit Himself to the plan of the Father. In the administration of the plan of God, the Father is the head. And Christ is in the place of submission.

The same is true within a Christian household. As we have said, there is no distinction between husband and wife as far as essential being is concerned. They are equal. And they are to receive equal honor from the children. But in the administration of the household, the administrative capacity and responsibility of the husband is to act as the head of the family unit. Hence the exhorta-

tion in Ephesians 5:22, "Wives, be subject to your own husbands." It is the administration of the household with which Paul is concerned. He does not have a preconceived notion about the inferiority of women.

The interesting and profound fact is that biblical submission is based upon the supposition that husband and wife are equal. Were it not for the fact that Jesus Christ is equal with the Father, He could not place Himself under the headship of the Father. Similarly, were it not for the fact that a husband and wife are equal in essential being, a wife could not place herself in submission to her husband. The point being that the exhortation is given to wives to take this action. The exhortation is emphatically not given to husbands. And it is never their place to constrain submission.

The so called evangelical feminists have missed this very important biblical point. As one writer says, "There is no doubt that Christ is the ultimate authority over everything in the universe. But is this what we are to understand from the teaching that Christ is head of the body? I cannot see it in these passages. It is not there." Headship is stripped of its authority. And the biblical principle that there is neither male nor female in Christ is put in its place. But these two principles do not contradict each other. Headship is real. It is real within the Godhead. And God intended it to be real within families. If we understand the Economic Trinity, we understand headship properly.

Not only so, equality within the Godhead is also real. If we properly understand the Ontological Trinity, we also understand this. And we know that the two concepts stand together. Unfortunately, the feminists don't want to see this.

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