

# “The roles of men and women”

Ephesians 5:21-33 ; 1 Timothy 2:8-3:7. Rev. Bruce Stanley  
Sermon audio and text available at [www.waitara.anglican.asn.au](http://www.waitara.anglican.asn.au)

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The roles of men and women have been the topic of much debate recently in the media. It began over the use of the word “submit” in our church marriage vows. People didn’t like the idea of a wife **submitting** to her husband. Why? Because the world understands “submit” as a terrible thing. It means you’re below another person. Less than them. Less important. Of less value. It’s interpreted that one person makes all the decisions and rules over the other person. Not a nice picture for marriage.

But for those of us who know Jesus, and read the Bible, we need to understand that word “submit” very differently. We have a different world view **because** we are Christians. Words like “submit” and “headship” mean something different to us, because we want to understand these words from God’s perspective.

So let’s start with Ephesians chapter 5.

1. 5:21 – “Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.”

First of all, submission is about order in relationships that bring honour to Jesus. What the Bible tells us is that all people are made in the image of God. Males and females are created differently, but as equals in God’s image. No one is better or more important than another. It honours Jesus when we have order in our relationships, **because** that order helps us to relate to one another and to grow in our relationships.

2. 5:22 – “Wives submit to your husbands”

First, Paul talks about wives submitting to husbands. Not women submitting to men. But wives to husbands. This is in the context of a **marriage**. Wives are called to submit to their husbands as to the Lord. That is, to recognise the **headship** of their husband in the marriage relationship. The submission of a wife is a **response** to godly headship. So before we can understand “submission”, we really need to understand the **headship** role of the husband...

3. 5:23 – “For the husband is the head of the wife.”

What does it mean to be the head? First of all, remember our context. Genesis 2 tells us that a husband and wife are ONE flesh. HENCE, as one flesh, there can only be ONE HEAD. If a husband and wife truly come together as one flesh, then that one flesh needs one head, for the sake of order in their relationship.

BUT, that headship does not change their value. It is for the sake of **order**. They are equal. They are partners. They are each other’s helpers, made in the image of God and equally valued by God. It is not a matter of skill or testosterone that gives the husband some unique ability to be the head. It is the place God has given a man and a women in their one flesh relationship **for the sake of order**.

But what does it mean in practice?

There are many opinions on this. For some, being the head of a marriage means that the husband says things like: “I make the decisions”; “I get the final say”; “I control the finances”.

But this is not the picture that the Bible gives us. Listen to these verses again:

- V22: *wives submit to your husbands **as to the Lord***
- V23: *for the husband is the head of the wife **as Christ is the head of the church***
- V24: ***as the church submits to Christ**, so also wives should submit to their husband.*”

The way we define headship for a husband is by looking at how **Jesus** acts as the head of the church. Headship is, above all, **Christlike**. So how did Jesus act as the head of his church?

- V25: *Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her...*”

The headship of Jesus is, simply, two things:

1. It is **loving**. Headship is about love. Not power. Not control. Not having the final say. But love.
2. It is **sacrificial**. It is a headship that sacrifices your self and puts your wife first. It’s not about getting your way or putting your foot down. It’s about sacrifice.

When a husband takes on headship in a Christlike way, it is an easy response for a wife to submit and accept his role of loving and sacrificial headship.

Let me ask you this: Why do you submit to Jesus? Is it because we **have** to? Or is because we **choose** to? Jesus’ headship is one we **willingly submit to** because it is sacrificial and loving. And it is a headship with a purpose:

*Verse 26: “to make her holy... to present her to himself as a radiant church...”*

The aim of Jesus is salvation. The aim of Jesus is to feed us and care for us spiritually, as members of his body. Just as a husband and wife become one flesh, **WE** become one flesh with Jesus, as his body, the church, with him as our head.

For many people, the word “submit” implies being **less** than someone else. But for God, submitting means coming under the headship of someone who is sacrificially loving you and putting your needs first. And it is for the sake of order in relationships.

So let’s turn now to 1 Timothy 2, and open up a whole other can of worms! The role of men and women in the church:

- V8 – men, don’t be angry.
- V9 – women, dress modestly.
- V11 – women – be quiet. And do not teach a man or have authority over him. Be silent. Because the woman was deceived first.

These are strange verses, aren’t they? To understand these verses, we really need to start with some basic Bible principles.

1. First, the Bible does not talk about gender superiority or inferiority. All people are made equal in the image of God.
2. Second, all of the Bible is truth, but it is written in a cultural context. There is always culture to consider in the language and translation and ideas. And it must be consistent in interpretation with the rest of God's Word.

So as we look at this, as the Word of God, we need to ask - what is relevant today, and what is cultural? Here is what I believe 1 Timothy 2 teaches us today:

1. V8 – Men are to pray with their hands in the air and not with anger. What it teaches us today is the importance of our heart attitude in the way we pray. Culturally, we may pray standing up or sitting down, with our hands up or down, but what is important in any culture is that we consider the **attitude of our hearts** when we pray.
2. V9 – Women are not to have braided hair or pearls. They are to dress modestly. Again, culturally, modesty in the way we dress may be expressed in different ways. But what are we being taught today? We're being taught about our **attitude** to the way we dress for worship. And we're being reminded that our good deeds are more important than the clothes we wear.
3. V11 – Women are to learn in quietness and full submission... not to teach or have authority over a man... Likewise, there is a cultural side to this and a truth that we are being taught today. Working out which is which can be difficult! These verses are about the roles of men and women in a church setting. God created man and woman to come together, and for the man to be the head of that one flesh relationship of marriage. God created a **distinction** between male and female, and an order to our relationship, and that order is not reversible. It's about order, not about superiority or inferiority. **Submission and authority** are the distinct **roles** which God has given men and women in marriage. And that should also be reflected in the headship of a **church** family. Culturally, however, what that looks like in this church in 1 Timothy, is for women to **not teach** and to **be quiet**. We could say that this is Paul's **cultural application** to the issue of authority and submission, since in THAT context, teaching and speaking were seen as signs of authority over others.

### So, what does this look like in our church in Waitara?

We have male headship in this church. That is, I have been appointed as the Rector – to be the sacrificially loving head of this church family. And as a male, I am called to model the headship we desire to see in our families.

In our wider church, we have a male Bishop and Archbishop, again, men who are called to model the sort of loving and sacrificial male headship in the church that we desire to see in our families.

Culturally, the way this church is lead is to allow men and women to exercise ministries of teaching under my authority. I am also happy to be taught by women, including my wife, because in OUR cultural context, I don't believe that usurps or undermines my role of headship in any way.

### So how does this look in our families?

The way a church or a family exercise headship and submission needs to be Biblical, as well as being culturally sensitive and relevant and appropriate. Churches operate differently, because they operate in different cultures. And families also operate differently. One family's idea of headship and submission may LOOK different to another family's model. However, one thing that the Bible is clear about – however you operate in your family, this part is not cultural – it is true in any context: Headship for the Christian is about sacrificial love. It's a headship that makes submission a joyful response.

Let's pray.

QUESTION TIME