

Session 3: Man and Wife, Submission and Authority

Recordings to Watch: [Workshop #4 – Jan 12, 2025](#) | [Workshop #5 – Feb 9, 2025](#)

The Big Idea

Being a husband or wife is more than being a “spouse” – it means being a man or a woman within marriage, and God designed those roles at creation, not merely after the fall. Genesis 1 affirms full equality: male and female together bear God’s image and share the dominion mandate. Genesis 2 then zooms in on order and design: Adam is formed first and given work in the garden before Eve is created as his “helper” – one who supplies what is lacking – taken from his side (closeness, not independence) and named by him.

The Fall and the Struggle

In Genesis 3, the tempter approaches Eve first, and Adam fails to protect her through passive silence. The curse that follows (Genesis 3:16) doesn’t create the husband’s authority – it makes the wife’s submission to it, and the husband’s temptation to rule harshly, a struggle for the first time. Men and women also differ in what wounds and encourages them most deeply: men tend to be wired around task, significance, and respect; women around security, safety, and being cherished (echoing Ephesians 5:33’s “love” and “respect”). These are real, God-given differences to understand with compassion – not weapons to demand what you feel entitled to.

Submission and Authority: For the Other’s Good

Ephesians 5:22–33, Colossians 3:18–19, and 1 Peter 3:1–7 give the direct commands. Authority in marriage is modeled on godly kingship (2 Samuel 5:12; 23:3–4) and, ultimately, on Christ’s self-sacrificing headship over the church – it exists for the good of the one under it, not the benefit of the one who holds it. In practice, headship means “the buck stops with the husband”: he carries final responsibility and takes the blame when decisions go wrong, rather than always deferring just to keep the peace (“happy wife, happy life” is a form of cowardice, not love). Genuine submission means a wife sometimes yields to a decision she wouldn’t have chosen; genuine headship means a husband sometimes must decide against his wife’s preference – prayerfully, carefully, and never as an excuse to dominate or ignore her voice. Any use of strength or authority to control, frighten, or harm a spouse is named plainly as abuse, with no excuse.

The Deepest Reason

Beneath the psychology and biology, the ultimate reason for these roles is Ephesians 5:31–32: marriage was designed from Genesis 2:24 onward as a living picture of Christ and the church. Marriage is a lived parable – not just something to look at, but something to look *through* so that we see the real thing.

Key Scripture Passages

- **Genesis 1:26–28** – Male and female together bear God’s image and share the dominion mandate – equal dignity, with an implied order.
- **Genesis 2:18–23** – Eve created as Adam’s “helper,” formed from his side, named by him – closeness and headship.
- **Genesis 3:6, 16–17** – The Fall: Eve deceived first, Adam passive; the curse introduces struggle against an authority that already existed.
- **Ephesians 5:22–33** – The central passage on submission and headship, grounded in Christ’s love for the church.
- **Colossians 3:18–19 & 1 Peter 3:1–7** – Parallel instructions to wives and husbands.
- **2 Samuel 5:12; 23:3–4** – Godly kingship as a model for authority exercised for others’ good.

Discussion Questions

Understanding the Material

1. In your own words, what is the difference between “roles that can be picked up and set down” and “design that’s built into who you are”? Do you find that framework convincing?
2. How does this teaching define authority – and how is that different from how authority is usually understood or exercised in the world?
3. What questions, hesitations, or pushback did this material raise for either of you? Those are worth naming out loud, not suppressing.

His Expectations and Hers

Let each person answer honestly – this is meant to surface real expectations, not the “right” answers.

4. Husband-to-be: what does it mean to you to carry “final responsibility” for a decision? Can you think of a recent example where you took the blame for something even though it wasn’t entirely your fault?
5. Wife-to-be: what would it look like for you to trust your husband’s leadership even on a decision you disagree with? What makes that easy or hard for you to imagine?
6. Where did each of you learn what a husband or a wife “is supposed to do” – your parents’ marriage, other couples, media, church? How closely does that match what was taught in this session?

Assessing Expectations of Marriage

7. Men are often wired toward significance and respect; women toward security and being cherished. Where do you each feel most vulnerable to seeking that from the wrong places – work, appearance, others’ approval – instead of from your marriage and from God?
8. What would people-pleasing (“happy spouse, happy house”) look like in your relationship, and how is that different from genuine, loving leadership or support?
9. Talk honestly about your father’s and mother’s marriage (or another marriage that shaped you). What did you learn there – good or bad – about authority and submission that you’re bringing into this relationship?

Preparing for the Road Ahead

10. How will you handle a disagreement where, after real listening and prayer, you still see it differently? What does it look like for each of you to act faithfully in that moment?
11. What safeguards will you build into your marriage – trusted friends, your church community, honest conversation – to make sure headship is never used to control, isolate, or harm rather than to protect and serve?
12. This session ended by saying marriage is “a parable... something to look through.” What is your marriage meant to show other people about Christ and the church? How might that change how you handle conflict over roles?