



MARRIAGE: CONTENTIOUS OR CONTENDING TOGETHER?

The men are in charge, right? In the church and in our families, the men are supposed to lead, aren't they? With women leading in the church today, some are crying foul! Others argue this is a biblical tradition that has nothing to do with the "liberalizing" of Christianity. Who's right? Who should be in charge? Aren't men supposed to exercise headship? According to Ephesians 5:23 and 1 Corinthians 11:3, men are the head of the wife, like Christ is the head of the church. But does headship mean "in charge?"

Through careful and contextual examination of scripture, there is a change happening within evangelicalism today, and many conservative evangelicals are re-examining their views on gender roles and the meaning of headship. (1) When God created Adam, He determined that it was not good for Adam to be alone. He created a "helper suitable" for him. (2) The phrase, "helper suitable," is a combination of the words *ezer* and *kenegdo*. *Ezer* means helper, aid, and/or strength. An *ezer* is someone who does for another what he or she cannot do for oneself. *Ezer* is used most times in the Bible to describe God (Psalm 10:14, 70:5, and Deuteronomy 33:29). It is an edifying—not subordinate—term describing someone of indispensable value. The word *kinegdo* offers further dimension to God's intention. *Kinegdo* means one who stands in front of or opposite. It is to face and grapple with another in a time of decision. It can also mean to stand in opposition when the partner is acting thoughtlessly.

God gifted married partners to be advocates and challengers of one another to ensure they adhere to His will for them. Author Brad Gray believes struggle is essential to a healthy marriage. Ask any couple who has a strong relationship what has contributed most to their strength, and I guarantee you they will tell you stories about the struggles they've worked through: stories about addiction, depression, a job loss, cancer, or finances. It's in these moments a couple finds out what they're made of, and it's in these moments they come to understand that they can either struggle against one another or they can struggle with another. It's how we deal with those struggles that makes all the difference. (3)

Jim:

As a husband I've always understood my role to be the head of the family. In fact, I remember the pressure I felt when an important decision was on my shoulders. After, when my decisions were challenged, I was confused because I assumed Dori's role to be one of support. Over the past 33 years of struggling with scripture (and sometimes Dori), I've changed my mind. Headship is about my connectedness to her, not



my authority over her. As a partner in this marriage, I see her gifts and expertise as essential to our healthy marriage.

Dori:

As a young wife and mother, I too struggled with the idea of headship. I had opinions and desires, but I thought I should be silent. With the encouragement—and sometimes prodding—of my husband and other godly men, I took steps of faith and moved from a support role to a leadership role, from a marriage and family counselor to an actual pastor working alongside men and women in the church. I am grateful my husband is both an *ezer* and *kenegdo* to me.

Headship, as Paul discusses it in 1 Corinthians 11, is dealing with the issue of interdependence. The word *kaphale* in most Biblical cases simply means “head.” Paul, clearly talking about Christ and the church, says that for the church to separate from Christ would be the equivalent of decapitation. The church cannot live without her head! The same is true for married partners. Divorce, like a church trying to live without Christ, removes the head from the body; neither part can survive!

Some argue that Paul blames Eve for the fall (1 Timothy 2:14). Yet he also says in Romans 5:12-19, “Sin entered the world through one man.” He means to compare the fall of mankind (both Adam and Eve) to the rescue of mankind by Jesus. Jesus, the second Adam, cancels the curse caused by Adam and Eve’s decision to sin against God. If the curse is canceled, (4) then why would Christians continue to live under its rule? God created men and women to be partners who support, challenge, and advocate for one another to accomplish His will. It was sin that brought the curse of conflict and struggle for dominance between spouses. Jesus broke this curse and, through His enabling Spirit, empowers us to live like God originally intended. (5) Marriage, in a restored spiritual state, is to be one of equal and supportive partnership. We bring our gifts, talents, minds, and hearts to the relationship, advocating and challenging one another to live as God intended. It’s not a matter of deciding who is in charge because God’s in charge, and He’s given us one another on this journey of discovering the joy of living in His will.

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