



ABBA Ministries

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Illuminating Life through Scripture

Marriage Roles

Many couples today rebel at the notion of marital roles. Talk about marital roles has been unfairly characterized as "the husband does as *he* pleases and the wife does as *he* pleases too." This characterization, while perhaps "traditional", does not reflect Christian roles for husbands and wives. Rather, a proper understanding of the Biblical concepts of headship and helper also requires a proper understanding of the Biblical definitions for these roles. While space limits a complete exploration of these concepts here, the following summary is offered as a basis for further study and discussion.

The Biblical definition of headship involves love, sacrifice, preservation of holiness, and financial support (Eph. 5:21-33). In other words, as head, the husband bears ultimate responsibility for building and maintaining a healthy atmosphere in the home. The husband's primary consideration, if he is to be head in the Biblical sense, is what best advances the life and spirituality of his family. Rather than demanding the service of his family, giving ultimatums, self-serving directives and commands, the godly husband follows Christ's example of headship by serving those whom he heads and sacrificing himself and his desires for the sake of his wife and family. This concept has been summarized by the words, "servant-leadership." Common failures/abuses of this headship role include irresponsibility (withholding time and money from family to indulge his own desires) emotional detachment (unwillingness to intimately communicate emotions as well as logic), assumption of dictator status (demanding service and control rather than demonstrating sacrifice), workaholicism (making work more important than family, perhaps even using family as an excuse for work), and lack of spiritual direction (failure to provide a spiritual perspective on life).

The wife's role, on the other hand, is to respond to the loving and sacrificial leadership of her husband and help him to faithfully fulfill his role in managing his family, work, church, and community responsibilities. The Biblical concept of "helper" (Gen. 2:18) used to describe a husband's need of his wife does not mean or even imply, subservient. In fact, God uses the same word (*ezer*) to describe Himself as our helper (Psalm 33:20 and fourteen others). The role of a wife is not to just do anything her husband tells her to do. In fact, a true helper may sometimes find herself in conflict with her husband and must then consider how far she can in good conscience go in pressing her point. The key concern must be in helping her husband accomplish God's work, not merely in establishing her husband's will. Thus, it is clear that wives are not free from responsibilities in discerning God's will or in seeking righteousness on her own. However, when there is consistent evidence that her husband is demonstrating loving, sacrificial leadership in establishing God's work, submission to her husband's desires for the good of the family should not become an issue. When a husband refuses to exercise servant-leadership and instead acts in a self-serving manner, his wife may wish to involve the designated leadership of her church in instructing her husband in the concepts and practice of servant-leadership.

Using Biblical terms without their Biblical meanings is ignorance at best. At worst, such dishonesty can only be used in degrading half the human race. Those who would encourage wives to follow ungodly directions just because the directions come from their husbands perpetuate misunderstandings of God's design and ultimately encourage rebellion against God. Properly understood, marital roles honor both husbands and wives without making either of them slave to the other.