

THE ROOTED WAY • EPISODE 13

HEADSHIP ON ITS KNEES

Authority, Sacrifice & Servant Leadership

MADE TO BE MEN • BIBLICAL MANHOOD SERIES • PART 4

“A Christian man’s headship should look less like a throne and more like a cross.”

EPISODE STUDY & SHOW NOTES

Designed for listening, personal study, small-group discussion, and use inside Rooted Word.

ROOTED IN SCRIPTURE. GROWING IN TRUTH. LIVING FAITHFULLY.

Episode Overview

KEY QUESTION	If Scripture calls the husband the head of his wife, what does biblical headship actually require of him?
BIG IDEA	Biblical headship is real leadership, but it is not a throne from which a man demands service. Its model is Jesus Christ, whose authority is expressed through sacrificial love, humble service, and self-giving responsibility.
PRIMARY PASSAGES	Ephesians 5:21-33; John 13:1-17; Mark 10:42-45; Philippians 2:3-8
SUPPORTING PASSAGES	1 Timothy 5:8; Ephesians 6:4; Genesis 3:1-6; Titus 1:16; Acts 18:24-26; 1 Corinthians 16:13-14

Why This Matters

The word headship carries baggage because some men have used biblical language to justify control, selfishness, or domination. Scripture does not erase the husband's responsibility to lead, but it radically defines the shape of that leadership. Paul points husbands to Christ: the One with all authority who gave Himself for His bride.

KEY DISTINCTION

Headship is not a permission structure. It is a responsibility structure. The question is not, "How much authority do I get?" but, "What responsibility has God called me to carry?"

1. Address the Elephant Immediately

When people hear "headship," many hear "dictator" - and some Christian men have given them reasons to. A complementarian reading does not teach that women are less valuable, less gifted, less spiritual, or less capable. It teaches equal dignity alongside meaningful role distinctions.

KEY LINE

If "headship" means "I'm the man, therefore everybody does what I want," that is not biblical headship. It is an abuse of it.

2. Complementarianism and Egalitarianism

COMMON GROUND

Both orthodox complementarians and egalitarians affirm that men and women bear God's image, possess equal worth before God, receive spiritual gifts, are disciples of Jesus, inherit salvation, and must reject abuse and domination.

THE QUESTION

The disagreement is not, "Are women valuable?" The question is whether Scripture assigns some governing or leadership responsibilities according to sex - especially in marriage and in the elder/pastor office.

KEY DISTINCTION

Equal dignity does not require identical roles.

3. Ephesians 5 in Context

READ

Ephesians 5:21-33

UNDERSTAND

Verse 21 calls Christians to a posture of mutual submission and service. Paul then addresses particular household relationships - wives and husbands, children and fathers, slaves and masters - without erasing their distinctions.

The husband is called the head of the wife as Christ is head of the church. But notice where Paul places the husband's attention: husbands are not told to police their wives' submission. They are commanded to love as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her.

KEY LINE

If your favorite part of headship is having the final say, you have probably started at the wrong end of Ephesians 5.

4. Headship Is Responsibility, Not Privilege

Headship does not mean a husband automatically gets his way. It answers a different question: who bears particular responsibility to initiate sacrificial leadership in the home? The husband's first concern should be faithfulness to Christ, not enforcement of his own preferences.

ASK

Does the way I lead make it easier or harder for my wife and family to see the character of Christ?

5. The “Final Decision” Question

Complementarian households answer the “final say” question differently. Healthy headship should make unilateral decisions rare. Before a husband ever reaches that point, he should pray, listen, seek wisdom and counsel, understand his wife’s concerns, investigate carefully, and wait when possible.

He should be especially cautious when a decision primarily affects his wife. Headship is not a standing permission slip to override her. If a decision genuinely must be made, final responsibility should produce humility, not excitement.

KEY LINE

If a man is eager to pull the “I’m the head” card, that may be evidence he is not ready to use it.

6. Jesus Washes Feet

READ

John 13:1-17

LOOK AT CHRIST

Jesus possesses unquestionable authority, yet He gets down, takes the towel, performs the servant’s task, and washes His disciples’ feet. Authority and service are not opposites in Jesus. His authority is expressed through service.

KEY LINE

Jesus never had an authority problem. Yet the Man with all authority picked up a towel and washed feet.

7. “Not So Among You”

READ

Mark 10:42-45

Gentile rulers “lord it over” others. Jesus says leadership among His disciples must be different. Greatness is expressed through service, and Christ Himself is the model: the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve and give His life as a ransom for many.

ASK

Would the people closest to me describe my leadership as self-giving or self-protecting?

8. Headship Means Sacrificing First

A husband should be first to sacrifice comfort, time, preferences, sleep, money, and ego. Headship does not mean “that’s your job” when the baby cries, hiding financial problems, waiting for your wife to schedule counseling, or blaming her when the children are not being disciplined.

KEY LINE

When something is wrong in the home, the first question is not, “Whose fault is this?” but, “What responsibility do I have here, and how do I lead faithfully?”

9. Providing

READ

1 Timothy 5:8

Provision matters, but provision cannot be reduced to a paycheck. A husband and father provides financial care, stability, protection, instruction, affection, presence, discipline, prayer, and wisdom.

KEY LINE

A man can provide a beautiful house while failing to provide a home.

Paul’s words in 1 Timothy 5 assume that caring for one’s household is a basic moral responsibility. Material provision is important, but biblical provision reaches the whole life of the family.

10. Protection

Protection is not merely physical. A man should protect his family from destructive influences, financial recklessness, pornography, spiritual neglect, toxic relationships, unnecessary chaos, and - importantly - his own anger and sinful behavior.

Genesis 3 presents Adam as present while the serpent deceives Eve. His failure is not only what he does afterward; it includes the passivity of standing by while evil enters the home.

KEY DISTINCTION

Sometimes the greatest threat a family needs protection from is the man’s own unrepentant sin.

11. Spiritual Leadership Is Practical

Spiritual leadership does not require a nightly forty-five-minute sermon, a seminary degree, or being the most theologically educated person in the home. It should look like ordinary, consistent faithfulness:

- pray at dinner and with your wife
- ask children what they learned at church
- read Scripture together
- initiate church attendance
- talk through difficult questions
- repent openly when you sin
- set a clear moral and spiritual direction

KEY LINE

You do not have to be a pastor. But you should not be spiritually absent from your own home.

12. What if Your Wife Knows More Bible?

Wonderful - learn from her. Priscilla and Aquila together helped instruct Apollos. A husband's headship is not God's award for being the smartest, most educated, most mature, or most gifted person in the room.

KEY LINE

Headship is responsibility before God, not proof of intellectual or spiritual superiority.

13. Submission Never Requires Sin or Abuse

No Christian understanding of submission should require a wife to obey sinful commands, tolerate violence, conceal criminal behavior, remain physically unsafe, or participate in sexual sin. A husband's authority is under Christ and is therefore never absolute.

KEY DISTINCTION

The husband is not Christ. He answers to Christ.

Abuse, manipulation, coercion, gaslighting, and domination are not expressions of biblical headship. A husband who has sinned against his wife must repent, seek forgiveness, accept appropriate safeguards, and do the long work of rebuilding trust.

14. Single Men Can Practice Servant Leadership

Biblical masculinity is not reduced to husbandhood. An unmarried man can practice servant leadership through church, work, family relationships, mentoring, service, integrity, protecting vulnerable people, and discipling younger men. Jesus was unmarried. Paul was unmarried.

15. Fatherhood

READ

Ephesians 6:4

Fathers are specifically commanded not to provoke their children to anger, but to bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

KEY CONTRAST

A dictator father says, “Because I said so.” A passive father says, “Ask your mother.” A biblical father is present, loving, firm, patient, and accountable.

REFLECT

What do you want your children to remember about what it felt like to have you as their father?

16. The Cross Defines Headship

READ

Philippians 2:3-8

Jesus did not cease to possess authority when He humbled Himself. His humility revealed what godly authority looks like. Christ had authority, deserved service, and received obedience - yet gave Himself.

CLOSING TAKEAWAY

A Christian man’s headship should look less like a throne and more like a cross. Headship is not the privilege of being served first. It is the responsibility of sacrificing first.

Men, stop asking first whether your wife is submitting enough and start asking whether you are loving like Christ enough. Stop demanding authority you are unwilling to carry responsibility for. Pray first. Repent first. Serve first. Sacrifice first. Protect. Provide. Be present. Tell the truth. Keep your word. Love your wife. Disciple your children. Serve your church.

FINAL CHALLENGE

When you fail - and you will - be the first to say, “I was wrong. Please forgive me.” That is not weakness. That is biblical manhood.

Apply

- 1 Ask your wife or a trusted Christian what your leadership feels like from the other side. Listen without defending yourself.
- 2 Identify one area of your home where you have been passive. Take one concrete act of faithful initiative this week.
- 3 Choose one comfort, preference, or convenience you can sacrifice for the good of your family without announcing it or demanding recognition.
- 4 If you need to repent to your wife or children, do it specifically. Name the sin, ask forgiveness, and ask what rebuilding trust requires.
- 5 Build one simple spiritual rhythm in your home - prayer together, Scripture at a meal, a weekly family discussion, or intentional church participation.

Reflection

CLOSING TAKEAWAY

Biblical headship is real leadership under the authority of Christ. It is responsibility carried with humility, strength expressed through service, and authority shaped by the cross.

Pray

Lord Jesus, teach me to lead the way You lead. Kill the desire to control, dominate, hide, blame, or protect my pride. Give me courage to carry responsibility, humility to listen, strength to sacrifice, wisdom to protect and provide, and grace to repent quickly when I fail. Make my home a place where my family experiences my strength as service and sees Your character through the way I love. Amen.

Further Scripture

- Ephesians 5:21-33 - Headship and sacrificial love in marriage.
- John 13:1-17 - Jesus washes His disciples' feet.
- Mark 10:42-45 - Leadership that does not "lord it over" others.
- Philippians 2:3-8 - Christ's humility and self-emptying service.
- 1 Timothy 5:8 - The responsibility to provide for one's household.
- Ephesians 6:4 - Fathers and the discipline and instruction of the Lord.
- Acts 18:24-26 - Priscilla and Aquila instruct Apollos together.
- 1 Corinthians 16:13-14 - Courage and strength governed by love.

Listen & Continue

Listen to The Rooted Way - Episode 13: Headship on Its Knees, then use these notes for personal reflection, discipleship, or small-group discussion. Episode resources and Scripture references are available at rootedtruthministries.org/podcasts.

Guest Podcast

Our guest is also part of American Combat Files. Listen on Spotify: open.spotify.com/show/0342rTkZMagN05PoUdmy1r

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