

# Notes for the Ones Called-Out to Meet

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## Ordering Under in Family Relationships

by Dan Trygg

“Therefore, if there is any encouragement in Christ, if there is any consolation of love, if there is any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and compassion, <sup>2</sup> make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose. <sup>3</sup> Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; <sup>4</sup> do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. <sup>5</sup> Have this mindset in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, <sup>6</sup> who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be held on to, <sup>7</sup> but emptied Himself, taking the form of a slave, and being made in the likeness of humans. <sup>8</sup> Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself (‘made Himself low’, or ‘lowered Himself’) by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.”

Philippians 2:1-8

“Be subordinate to every human institution because of the Lord, ... <sup>3:1</sup> *In the same way*, you wives, ordering-yourselves-under to your own husbands so that even if any of them are disobedient to the word, they may be won without a word by the behavior of their wives, <sup>2</sup> as they observe your chaste and respectful behavior. <sup>3</sup> Your adornment must not be merely external--braiding the hair, and wearing gold jewelry, or putting on dresses; <sup>4</sup> but let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the imperishable quality of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is precious in the sight of God... <sup>7</sup> You husbands *in the same way*, living-together-with your wives according to understanding, as with a more delicate feminine vessel; dispensing honor (reverence, respect, deference) as also co-heirs of the grace of life, so that your prayers will not be hindered.”

1 Peter 3:1-4,7-8

“And He said to them, ‘Why is it that you were looking for Me? Did you not know that I had to be in the things of My Father?’ <sup>50</sup> But they did not understand the statement which He had made to them. <sup>51</sup> And He went down with them and came to Nazareth, and He continued ordering-Himself-under to them...”

Luke 2:49-51

So much damage has been done to people, to marriages, to relationships between parents and children and to our Christian witness because of poor understanding and teaching in the area of family relationships. The enemy has succeeded in blinding teachers and church leaders to the correct interpretation and understanding of the scriptures, and they have unwittingly baptized and sanctified the world’s understanding of family relationships, and brought those beliefs and practices into the church, ...and even added the “authority of God’s word” to support and justify those cultural norms. Whereas we should be the vanguards of affirmation, blessing, liberation and honor *because of* what God’s word teaches, so much of the church is in the unenviable position of supporting and enforcing beliefs that even our culture instinctively sees as backward and oppressive. Our responsibility is not to please the world, ...it is to faithfully follow the word of God, ...but, unfortunately, as the Pharisees did in Jesus’ day, we are nullifying the word of God by the traditions we have handed down, ...teaching as doctrines the commandments of men (Matt. 15:6,9).

What am I talking about? I am referring to the hierarchical roles in family relationships that so many are saying are “biblical roles”, when they are no such thing. They are cultural roles that we have read *into* the biblical texts, but are actually *set against* the plan of God for marriage and family relationships. Sadly, these preconceived notions have even influenced the traditional ways in which many of the biblical texts have been translated, because the translators have been indoctrinated in these same cultural understandings. Let’s see if we can clear some of this up.

We have to go back to Genesis 1:26-31. **God decided to make humankind in His image and likeness, and let them rule over all the inhabited earth.** So, He made humankind in His image and likeness, **male and female He created them. He blessed them and gave them the commission to fill the earth and rule over it. Both of them were equal partners in this endeavor.** In Genesis 2, we have a close-up view of the creation of the woman. It was “not good” for the man to be alone. God determined to make a helper “suitable” or “corresponding to” him. **The word, “helper”, is not a “less than” or “subservient” role.** Of the 21 times the Hebrew word occurs, 16 times it is used of God (Ex. 18:4; Deut 33:7,26,29; Psa. 20:2; 33:20; 70:5; 89:19; 115:9,10,11; 121:1,2; 124:8; 146:5; Hos. 13:9), 3 times it is used of Israel’s allies in war (Isa. 30:5; Ezk. 12:14; Dan. 11:34), and 2 times it is in reference to the woman God made to “help” the man (Gen. 2:18,20). **A helper, then, is someone who brings strength, ability or resources to add to or complete the capabilities of their ally, so that together they could complete a task that would be impossible to do alone.** In the context of Genesis 1 and 2, the task was to accomplish the joint-commission of God to fill the earth and rule over it. They were *both* given this commission. They *each* had unique abilities and strengths to use cooperatively to accomplish the task. Neither was greater than the other, or in charge of the other. They had to work *together* to accomplish God’s will.

**When sin entered into the world, the curse which resulted was a selfish rivalry to control** (Gen. 3:16; cf. 4:7). Instead of an equal, co-operative partnership, where both supported the other and effectively worked together, there would now be a desire to control the other. Women would try to control through manipulation, and men would ultimately dominate by superior physical force. **Hierarchy was born out of this rule-by-demand-and-intimidation. Hierarchy was not a solution to the sin problem, ...it was a diminishing of the equal partnership that God intended.**

Instead of both partners openly and freely advancing their perspectives and areas of strength toward a common goal, manipulation or domination tried to work around, diminish or silence the other partner in order to fulfill self-agenda. **Let me say it again, however, this is the curse, not the original plan of God for married couples, ...or for community.**

**When we come to the NT, we see that sin's power is broken in Christ, and it is possible to return to a plan that entails both partners choosing to come under and support each other, value each other's strengths and insights, and work cooperatively toward a common goal. As the apostle Paul pointed out (Eph. 5:21), this is God's plan for the body of Christ. We are all to order or arrange ourselves under one another in the Christian community. The marriage relationship is a subset of the same dynamic that is at work among all the members of a mature, spiritual community.**

**Headship is not a hierarchical role, or a position. It is a functional role of service.** Christ exemplified headship by "loving her and giving Himself" for the sake of His body (Eph. 5:25). **The Greek word for "head" does not mean "boss" or "authority". It means "source, origin, the one who helps another come to completion".** We see this in the following verses: "...in order that He might sanctify her (set her apart as special and holy, consecrate and dedicate her) cleansing her by the bathing of water and in personal-word, in order that He might present the church to Himself in splendor, having no stain or wrinkle or any such things, rather in order that she might be holy and unblemished." **Christ's "headship" is described as helping the church become all that she can be.** Referring to this word picture, Paul says, **"in this same fashion the husbands are obligated (indebted) to love their wives as their own bodies, ...nourishing and cherishing (imparting tender care and warmth to)" them.** There is no hint of power relations at all, ...no pulling of rank or demanding obedience. **Headship is service, care, affirmation and imparting growth and encouragement, "...according as Christ does the church."**

**In 1 Peter 3, we see again an application of the general attitude of voluntarily choosing to arrange ourselves under others, ...regardless of their response to us.** We are to do it to "every human institution", ...to governors, kings, and leaders, ...to masters, if we are slaves, ...and, **in the same way, wives are to arrange themselves under their husbands.** This is in order that, if some are disobedient to the word of God, through the habitual conduct and attitude of their wives they may be gained, ...won over without a word, as they are observing the chaste and respectful behavior of their wives. **This is not talking about the ideal marriage. This is about what to do in a marriage where one's partner is not following Christ.** Peter counsels these women not to focus on outward adornment, but rather **they are to focus on developing the inner person of the heart, in the imperishable quality of a meek and tranquil spirit,** which is very precious before God. They are to follow the example of women of the past who hoped in God. They adorned themselves with such attitudes, ordering themselves under their husbands. Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him "lord". (Gen. 18:12 -- She was referring to him with respect, *in her own mind*, ...not as a "boss", but with affectionate honor.) Peter says, "...you have become her children by doing good and not fearing any intimidation or threat. In the context of the book, again, **we silence the ignorance of foolish men by our good, respectful and positive behavior.**

**Regarding husbands** (the ones with power in the Roman culture), Peter says, **"...in the same way, living-together-with your wives according-to-understanding as with a more delicate, feminine vessel, dispensing honor (reverence, deference, respect) as also joint-heirs of the grace of life,** so that your prayers might not be hindered." **The husband is to set the tone of the relationship by demonstrating and paying honor to his wife as an equal-heir of grace.** Note that he is *not* encouraged to demand respect or obedience from her. He is to treat her *well*, ...and *affirm* her gifts and abilities.

**Note that even in less-than-ideal circumstances, we can still offer respect, value and honor to our partner.** As we continue to do what is good and beneficial to them, we are asking and trusting God to work through our lives to touch our partner. **We do not have control over the other person, but we do have the ability to determine how we act toward them. As we embrace the mindset of Christ,** we can empty ourselves of our own self-agenda, and entrust ourselves to God, the power of God will enable and encourage us, and **the grace of God will be released and expressed toward our partner.** It is not our job to judge them, criticize them, preach to them, or demand a certain response from them. **Our job is to live out the Christ-life within the boundaries and opportunities He permits for us.** Like Jesus, we are to give ourselves to serve these others, so that they will have nothing evil to say about us.

In Luke 2, we have a very brief glimpse of Jesus at age 12. His family had gone to Jerusalem for the Passover, but when it came time to go back to Nazareth, He stayed behind. The caravan had traveled the entire day, and when evening came His parents became aware that He was not among them. They journeyed back to Jerusalem, and found Him sitting in temple, listening to the rabbis and asking them questions. Everyone was astonished at His understanding. When His parents questioned Him, He seemed genuinely surprised, "Didn't you know that I had to be in 'the things' of My Father?" But, He was only a 12 year old boy. **It was not time, yet, to step beyond the limitations and boundaries of His own life in Nazareth. So, even though He was God the Son, He voluntarily ordered Himself under His earthly parents,** and returned to their home in Nazareth. **Jesus modeled submission to others who did not perceive as much as He did. He kept entrusting Himself to His heavenly Father as the One who judges rightly.**