

G P S

For Grandparents, Parents and Seniors

By Rick Shrader

The Five Phases of Parenting (Phase 2)

Note: This series will consist of five phases: Created-parenting, Pre-parenting, Parenting, Post-parenting, and Grand-parenting. Each of these phases will have four sections.

Second Phase: Pre-Parenting (series articles 5-8)

Section 3. The Newlywed Stage—Unity (art. #7)

“Unless the LORD builds the house, they labor in vain who build it; unless the LORD guards the city, the watchman stays awake in vain” (Psalm 127:1). Newlyweds are still not parents. They have time to settle down and get their house in order before those more chaotic years come. God has designed marital roles and responsibilities for the good and benefit of the marriage. There are three areas of vital importance that concern the couple themselves.

Headship

The Bible plainly says that, “The head of every man is Christ, the head of woman is man” (1 Cor. 11:3); “For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church” (Eph. 5:23). Though many want to see “head” as source or origin, the Bible always means “authority over” whether God as head of Christ, Christ as head of the church, or the husband as the head of the wife.

In the trinity. The Godhead is not the example of the family but the family is the example of the Godhead. The persons of the trinity are seen in two relationships. Ontologically (the very being), the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit have always been equal and their titles are eternal (John 17:5). Economically (administratively), for purposes of creation history, the Son always submits to the Father and never the reverse. The Father always has “authority over” the Son and the Son always does those things that please the Father (John 8:29).

In the church. In a parallel way, Christ is always the head of, has “authority over,” the church and the church always submits to Christ, never the other way around. “And

He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence” (Col. 1:18). Preeminence (*prōteuō*) always means “first place.” He is seated at the right hand of the Father yet highly exalted over the church.

In the family. With Paul we can say that the husband is the head of the wife as the Father is head over Christ and as Christ is head over the church. But as the trinity is equal yet distributed administratively, and as They have unique roles yet the Father loved the Son (John 17:24), so husband and wife, being equal in Christ, have unique roles. The husband loves his wife as the Father loves the Son and Christ loves the church (Eph. 5:25). This kind of headship is always tempered by understanding and honor (1 Pet. 3:7), and by Christ-like love.

Complementary

This word has been used over the past 30-40 years to describe the biblical concept of the husband-wife relationship. Albert Mohler said it succinctly when he wrote, “God enshrined in the marriage union the concept of complementarianism, which upholds the equal dignity of man and woman as both created in the image of God but complementing one another through different gender roles” (*Gathering Storm*, p. 69).

A definition. The English word “complement” (not “compliment”) means, “Relating to or constituting one of a pair of contrasting colors that produce a neutral color when combined in suitable proportions” (*Webster*). That is a beautiful analogy of the Greek word *hypotassō*, to rank under, and almost always is translated “submit.” Kevin DeYoung says, “the word *hypotasso* occurs thirty-seven times in the NT outside Eph. 5:21, always with the reference to a relationship where one party has authority over another” (*Men and Women*, p. 104).

That biblical definition is consistent in various relationships. Not only does that word describe submission of wives to their own husbands (Eph. 5:22; Col. 3:18; Tit. 2:5;

1 pet. 3:1), but also the Son to the Father (1 Cor. 11:3); the church to Christ (Eph. 5:24); citizens to government (Rom. 13:1, 5); slaves to masters (Tit. 2:9); younger to elder (1 Pet. 5:5); children to parents (1 Tim. 3:4); angels to Christ (1 Pet. 3:22); and all things to God (1 Cor. 15:27-28, where the verb *hupotassō* is used six times).

The submission of “one to another” (some call mutual submission) in Eph. 5:21, is always limited by the context of the submission. Nowhere is the husband said to be submissive to the wife. That’s why wives are to be submissive to “their own husbands” and not to everyone else’s husband.

Roles. As in all of the above submissive relationships, the parties have different roles to fulfill. Adam’s role was to name, garden, and protect while Eve’s role was to help and reproduce. A coach is a coach and a player is a player. A General is a General and a soldier is a soldier. This doesn’t mean one is necessarily more skilled than the other (many times it is the opposite), but it does mean that fulfilling one’s position is teamwork without which nothing gets accomplished. Peter instructed husbands to realize that the wife is a weaker vessel than the husband but that both are equally “heirs together of the grace of life” (1 Pet. 3:7).

Genesis 3. Complementarity didn’t begin as a result of the fall. It began in Genesis 1 and 2 as the way God made male and female. The sin of Genesis 3 broke that relationship. Adam failed to lead and Eve failed to follow. As a result, Eve’s “desire” (*teshugah*, see 4:7) was to rule over her husband, and Adam’s response was to rule harshly (*mashal*) over Eve. “She would attempt to usurp his authority. And he would respond by trying to impose a despotic, authoritarian rule over her that would suppress her in a way God never intended” (MacArthur, *What the Bible Says About Parenting*, p. 186). The modern-day Christian challenge is to fix that sinful tendency with a biblical complementarian relationship.

Dominion

Men and women, made in the image of God, have joint-dominion over the earth. When the issue of roles is settled, they can move forward in the purpose for which God has brought them together.

Dominion mandate. God made human beings to be the caretakers of His creation. “Then God said, ‘Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth’” (Gen. 1:26). In verse 28 God repeated the word “dominion” and added the word “subdue.” This was easier for Adam and Eve before the fall. Yet, after the fall, this command was not rescinded, but difficulty was now added to Adam’s work of tilling the ground, and to Eve’s work of having children. In

addition, this dominion was extended to Noah and his family after the flood (Gen. 9:1-7). It remained valid to David when he penned Psalm 8.

Ongoing dominion. In God’s progressive revelation to man in coming dispensations, the dominion responsibilities were modified to fit the times. McCune explains, “This program of stewardship responsibility began with the Dominion Mandate of Genesis 1:26-27 and is forwarded by the progressive, unfolding of God’s revelational light in succeeding dispensations” (*Systematic Theology*, I, p. 139). Some things were added (responsibility to human government) and some things were brought to an end (Mosaic law) and some things have always remained the same (the family structure).

In the dispensation of grace in which we live, local church responsibility and the great commission have become the responsibility of every believer and every family. We may live at different times and in different locations, but every family should be active members of a local church and should make their home a witness for Jesus Christ.

Setting parameters. Every Christian family in the age of grace has a part in the mandate responsibility. New couples must remember that they come from different families and backgrounds, sometimes very different. Yet, they must now blend into one family with their own convictions and habits. The newlywed stage before children come into the home and things get hectic is the time for the new couple to work these out between themselves. Here are five areas that need agreement. 1) The husband is the head of the home but the husband and wife are partners in managing the home (1 Pet. 3:7). 2) Family devotions, corporate prayer, doctrinal discussions, should be free and open in a Christian family setting (Deut. 6:4-9). 3) The local church must be the most important institution for the family outside of the home itself (Heb. 10:24-25). 4) Discipline of the children, appropriate for each age of development, must be agreed upon before the inevitable time of disobedience occurs (Prov. 23:13-14). 5) Personal separation issues for the family must be settled by husband and wife before they become a problem (2 Cor. 6:14-18). By these and future agreements, the Christian home can be the place of love, respect, help, and service to God.

“The loving complementarity, in which the husband is a Christlike, sacrificial leader and the woman his gracious, compatible partner, is vital both for a God-honoring relationship which is in keeping with God’s original vision and design but also as a basis for effective parenting.”

Andreas and Margaret Köstenberger, *Equipping for Life*, p. 39.