

There is the story of the wife who had become so domineering that her husband insisted she see a psychiatrist. The wife eventually agreed and so the couple booked an appointment for a visit. The husband waited outside, flicking through old copies of Country Life, and eventually his spouse emerged after the hour-long session, and so he asked her, "Did you make any progress?" "Not much," she replied. "It took me fifty minutes to convince that man that his couch would look better against the wall."

Whatever the age, whatever the culture, there does seem to be interwoven into the fabric of human existence a tension between the male and female of the species. This is a tension which often expresses itself in the attempted exercise of power: the dominance of men over women- chauvinism or the attempted dominance of women over men- feminism. It is sometimes referred to as 'the battle of the sexes'. Now some would argue that this is entirely normal. The Christian would agree that from one standpoint conflict is normal in that this is just one way human beings act out their self-centredness in a world which has turned away from its Maker. But to say that something is normal is not the same thing as saying it is proper. To say something is happening normally is a matter of statistics, to say something is acting properly is a matter of design plan and purpose. For example, I might say that Lee's car is acting normally when it requires three turns of the ignition key to get it going- that is normal for Lee's car. But that is not what the manufacturer had in mind when the car was designed; it is simply not acting *properly*. But in order to know what is the proper way men and women are to treat each other we have to have access to the great Designer's plan. And we have that when we turn to the Bible, which amongst other things contains God's blue print for humanity. It is there for example in Genesis 1:27 '*God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them*'. So the way men and women are to relate turns on them being 'god-like' in some respects. Now at this point we could tease out what this means by moving in one of two directions. We could look at the rest of Genesis 1 and 2 and see how the man and women relate in God's world, and work back from there to the nature of God. If we are made in his image, look at the image

and then draw conclusions about the reality being reflected. Alternatively we could go about it the other way around by looking at what God has revealed about himself and then seeing how we are to reflect that- in other words consider the template-God and then work out more fully how the copy should look-men and women. And that is what I want us to do this morning.

Over the last few weeks we have seen something of what the Bible has to say about God being Trinity. It balances two revealed truths. The first is that God is One- this is his *unity*. There are not several gods, but only One God who is dependent upon nothing and everything is dependent upon him. But secondly within this unity there is a wonderful difference. There is the eternal Father who eternally begets the Son. And from the Father and the Son there is an eternal procession of the Holy Spirit. All three persons are *equal* in their *deity*, one is not any ‘more’ God than the other and so all three persons are to be worshipped, adored and obeyed. However, because of the difference the relationship is *ordered*. And when you think about it, there has to be order for things to function smoothly in *any* relationship. Consider, for instance, an army. Is one soldier of more value than another? Inherently speaking, no- at the level of their humanity they are *all* of equal worth. But that doesn’t mean to say that there is no order, for the captain is above the private in rank and it is part and parcel of what it means to be a captain that he issues commands and it is integral to what it means to be a private that he carries out the commands. And that order can’t be reversed without upsetting the nature of the relationship. So a private can’t command a captain to do things, for he will cease to be a private and the captain cease to be a captain. And so it is with God. John 3:16 tells us that ‘God (the Father) so loved the world that *he gave* his one and only Son so that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.’ Wouldn’t it at least grate, if not be nonsense to read, ‘The Son so loved the world that he gave his Father’? It is Father’s who beget and ‘give’ not the other way around. Similarly, when we think of the Holy Spirit. In John 15:26 we are told that the Spirit *proceeds* from the Father. You end up with a total mix up if you start speaking of the Father proceeding from the Spirit. In other words, when the Bible speaks about ‘The Son being in the bosom of the Father’ (John 1:18); and Jesus saying, ‘The Father is greater than I’ (John 14:28) and the Spirit not glorifying himself but glorifying the Son (John 16:14), it is telling us something about what God is like

within himself namely, that there is a hierarchy or ordering as part of God's being. In terms of godness- the Father, Son and Spirit are equally divine. In terms of their relationship there is subordination or submission going on between the different persons- the Spirit submits to the Son and the Son submits to the Father.

But you say, 'All this talk of submission smacks of domineering'. Well, when *we* try working things out by ourselves that is often the way it ends up- *forcing* people into submission, *telling* people what to do and so we have struggles. But that is not the way it works itself out within the Godhead and it is not the way it should work out between men and women who have been brought back into a proper relationship with God.

There are two key ideas in the Bible when it considers proper relationships, either within the family of the Godhead, or the human family or the family of the church. They are *headship and submission*. If we can, let's just put to oneside our twisted human ideas of what these involve and take a look at how these work out between God the Father and God the Son, and then the way they should work out between husbands and wives.

First, **headship and submission within the Trinity**- let's turn to John 5:16ff. Now we heard last week how within the Trinity there is a concern for others, an other-person-centeredness, which is the nature of true love. And we see that here in v 19-20 '*Jesus gave them this answer: "I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does. 20For the Father loves the Son and shows him all he does*'. The picture is that of an apprentice Son. Jesus though equal with God in terms of his deity does not act independently of God the Father. In fact as the Son he subordinates himself to his Father- which is what sonship involves and as such he works in perfect harmony with the Father. And how this works itself out is illustrated by the picture which lies behind this saying that the Son only does what he sees his Father doing, because *whatever* the Father does the Son *also* does. In this sort of society trades were passed on from generation to generation. Sons did what their fathers did. So if your father was a carpenter, chances are that is what you would be. What the father craftsman would do would be to pass on the secrets of the family trade

by showing the son all that he does, and the son would carefully watch how his father works and imitate him so by bit until he could do exactly what the father did. Now some would say, but are we not all sons of God? In one sense, yes. But not in the sense Jesus is speaking of here. I have never spoken a universe into being. I have not created light and darkness. I have not raised the dead. But God has and Jesus is claiming that is what he does too- as we say- ‘like father like son.’ He does whatever the Father does, he is the supreme apprentice son. And in this the Father shows he loves the Son for he takes him into his confidence if you will, he wants his Son to be the perfect expression of his character to the world and the means of salvation of the world. And in turn the Son shows his love to the Father by willingly submitting to the Father. This is a *glad* submission by Jesus, because you willingly submit to the one you love and who loves you and has your best interests at heart. Although equal, the Father and the Son have different roles, roles, based upon their ‘position’ if you like within the Trinity. The father is head- in terms of authority- over the Son, and the Son, who exercises God’s authority in the world- submits to the Father. That is how it works out between the different persons of the Godhead and, you know what? That is also the way it is meant to work out between a man and a woman in marriage. This is Paul’s argument in 1 Corinthians 11: 3 *‘The head of every man is Christ, the head of the woman is her husband and the head of Christ is God.’*

So lets’ see how this headship and submission is meant to be worked out in a marriage relationship. First of all submission as we turn to 1 Peter 3: 1-6. Peter is primarily speaking to wives who have non-Christian husbands, but the same principle applies across the board. He says, *‘In the same way be submissive to your husbands.’* And that comes at the end of a whole section of teaching about the way Christians are to follow the example of Jesus in glad submission- to political authorities (1 Peter 2:13;) and earthly masters (2:18). Submission, then, means being more like Jesus, not being more like a door mat. And so we have the outworking of what is given in creation as men and women reflect God’s image. There is the order of the man who is given a position of responsibility and authority and Eve who is created as companion and helper-that is the order. They, like the Father and Son, are equal in terms of value and humanity, but different in terms of their respective roles by virtue of their nature- the husband is to show

loving authority to lead in the marriage and the wife is to show glad submission and so enriching the marriage. And look at the way Peter describes such a submission, which is reflection of Christ's submission- three times it is spoken of as 'beautiful'. It is of 'great worth' in God's sight-v4. And this is a matter of doing what is right-v6 with Old Testament precedent in the example of Abraham's wife Sarah. The submissiveness reflects that of Jesus when it is said to be of a 'gentle and quiet spirit'-v4. This doesn't mean that a woman is to be seen and not heard, but it does mean that she will not be incessantly demanding with a 'me, me, me' attitude, rather the reverse- a putting of the needs of others before one's own. This is the way one Christian woman commenting on these verses puts it: "The woman with a quiet and gentle spirit is not a feeble pathetic woman with no voice. She is a woman who has enormous strengths and self control. She knows when it is best to leave things unsaid. She is selfless. She is not demanding, pushy, assertive or aggressive. Instead, she is wonderfully beautiful. We have all witnessed wives who badger their husbands-criticizing them publicly and demeaning their manhood. Such women are demanding, selfish and in the end, ugly." (Nancy Loots- Briefing Issue 324).

The same writer goes on to explain that seeing this submission as being modelled by the Lord Jesus was liberating and practical in her own life, she writes: "I realized that I had to make a willing and conscious decision to submit to my husband. Submission is not something that just happens. As a wife, you have to *decide* to be submissive. Every day I am challenged as to whether I am going to willingly submit to my husband or actively rebel against him. It is up to me to decide whether I am going to nag, complain or criticize, or whether I am to wholeheartedly support him and have the wisdom to bite my tongue." Now Peter is saying here that that type of conduct has great witnessing power to an unbelieving husband. How much more should it be a natural outworking in a *Christian* marriage?

Which brings us to the issue of headship. Remember that the overruling principle is concern for others first as we see it in God- 1 Peter 3:7- 'Husbands in the same way be *considerate* as you live with your wives and treat them with *respect* as the weaker vessel and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers.' There is nothing domineering or

chauvinistic about that is there? So let's try and understand how this headship is meant to operate by working again from God back to us and ask: how does God exercise his loving leadership? How did he do it with Jesus for example? The answer: by speaking. Although on only two occasions does Jesus, and those around him, hear the *audible* voice of God- 'You are my Son with whom I am well pleased' at his baptism and transfiguration- the primary way the Lord Jesus heard God's voice- as do we- is in Scripture. In fact even when God spoke audibly he was simply quoting two passages of the Old Testament- Psalm 2 and Isaiah 42. When tempted by Satan to avoid the way of the cross, Jesus responded doing what?- quoting Scripture, 'Man shall not live by bread alone but by every word which proceeds from the mouth of God.'- Deuteronomy 8:3. There is no doubt that it was through the Old Testament Scriptures that Jesus understood himself as the Son of God and his mission to die for the sins of the world. Back in Genesis, God relates to Adam, and so exercising his headship over him, by speaking. He does so with Israel through the law and the prophets and he does so through the church by the Bible.

So if God lovingly leads his Son and his people- the bride of Christ- by speaking and surely that is the way husbands are to lead in marriage. Now it is confession time! I would suspect from what I gather from other wives and my own that the main complaint about husbands is not that they are being *too* directive in the marriage- telling the wife and family to do this and that- but by not being directive *enough*. Far too often, husbands (myself included) find ourselves coping out, remaining silent when we should speak and so leaving the wife to make the decisions. Isn't that so? It may be a bit of a caricature picture, but one which sadly too often reflects reality of the man coming home from work, sitting in his favourite chair with his head safely buried behind the newspaper while the wife is trying to get some comment from him, but which usually turns out to be little more than an disinterested grunt. One of the differences between men and women is that women talk to relate, and when we as men do not engage in talk, we are not relating and so the woman feels undervalued. By hardly speaking we are failing to show interest in her well being, sharing her concerns, joys and hopes. But this sounds like we should only talk about the big things, not so, it is the fact that we men show little interest in *anything* that is such a source of frustration and disappointment for many of our wives. Why is this? Well, husbands might find

some things not very interesting- ‘Shall we catch the train or go by car?’ ‘Shall we decorate the kitchen or the living room first?’ ‘How are we going to arrange the pick up of the children from their friend’s house?’ Our response? ‘Dunno’? Or ‘Whatever you want dear.’ Translation- ‘I can’t be bothered with this’. My wife is such a whiz that she can decide and do lots of things brilliantly without me- but she often *wants* to include and involve me, but tragically, like many men I have a tendency to retreat into my cave- “too tired”, “more important things on my mind”, “it is too much of a drag”. And so little wonder that because men are silent, some women decide to do their job for them when it comes to leading the family. Now this was Adam’s failure in Eden. *He* not Eve was given the command by God to eat of any fruit from any tree bar one. It was Eve who listened to the serpent and engaged in a theological debate with him and took the forbidden fruit. While all of this was happening what was Adam doing? The answer standing there with his mouth shut- and if he had been wearing trousers at the time his hands would have been stuffed firmly into his pockets. The text in Genesis 3 strongly suggests that Adam was standing right *next* to Eve and he didn’t say a word. He *should* have stepped in to protect his wife; that was his responsibility to bring God’s Word to bear which was entrusted to him. But like most men ever since he was happy to abdicate his responsibility and leave it to his wife with calamitous results. Friends the husband is meant to lead by speaking God’s Word into the relationship- a speech which is gentle but firm, loving and patient. Men, we must repent of our weak leadership in our homes- it is a scandal. Many decisions of course are made jointly- and in this the husband is to be committed to both listening and speaking *but* when it comes to the crunch and an impasse is reached the he is to express his caring leadership by making a decision weighing heavily the best interests of others, *especially* his wife.

Now, who would have thought that the doctrine of the Trinity could be so practical? God is the perfect being, we are designed to function in a certain way based upon his own nature, his ways are therefore the best ways. Left by ourselves, of course, this would be an impossible ideal, but there is the good news, we are not left by ourselves, for there is the third member of the Trinity who humbles himself to come within us and so enable us, as we submit to him, to become more like the God we worship in the nitty gritty of family life.

