



Harmonic Connections PLUS LEGACY INSTITUTE

"An educated individual is an empowered individual."

Religion and Relationships

TRADITIONAL MARRIAGE VOWS have been the foundation of men and women's relationships throughout American society. Traditional vows not only reflect and dictate a hierarchy of authority and leadership for men, but also determine women's responsibilities in the home and throughout society.

Religion, specifically the Christian religion, influences how people view gender roles in the household in the United States. Christian institutions continue to be foundational in setting the expectations for the ideal model of the family, where men are the financial providers and women care for the home and children. However, some couples in healthy relationships have never reflected this model. And some continue to maintain traditional beliefs about predetermined gender roles, even though these gender roles are not realistic to most people in their everyday lives.

Religion and Gender Roles

There is a tendency to view Biblical scriptures as Biblical absolutes that should only be interpreted one way, but that is seldom the case.

There are different doctrines and beliefs surrounding the romantic partnership of

marriage. But how do you determine which doctrine is the **correct one**? There are many areas in the Bible where there is a lot of disagreement. For example, consider baptism, the holy spirit, evidence of salvation, requirements for clergy, or gender roles in marriage. How do you determine which doctrine is the "correct one" in any of these situations?

Different denominations, churches, and individuals read the same passages from the Bible and come to different conclusions. These different perspectives show beliefs that often conflict with one another about how people should express their Christian beliefs. The existence of so much diversity within Christian doctrines is evidence that not only do people interpret scriptures in different ways, but they also feel their convictions so strongly that they are willing to establish churches in neighborhoods where other Christian churches already exist to share their beliefs with others.

Gender Roles in Biblical Context

The different ways you interpret scriptures and see the world are influenced by your *experiences, exposure, expertise, environment* and *education*. They shape the foundation of what you believe.

People's individual perspectives will have a major influence on what they expect in their relationships and their tolerance or their willingness to adapt to other's perspectives. There are couples who prefer traditional power structures and those who prefer to share power in

various ways. Both of these types of couples often say that they have based their perspectives on Biblical beliefs about gender roles in romantic partnerships.

Ephesians 5:21-31 (New International Version) is an example of a Biblical text about romantic partnership in marriage that is interpreted differently by different people. Ironically, this passage is used as a reference by Christians as well as those in secular parts of society to support traditional gender roles of men and women. The scripture passage states:

Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. Wives, submit yourselves to your own men as you do to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also women should submit to men in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. In this same way, men ought to love women as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. After all, no one ever hated their own body, but they feed and care for their body, just as Christ does the church—for we are members of his body. “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.” This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church. However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.

After the encouragement about men's and women's mutual submission toward one another, there are admonitions that women submit to men and respect them. There are also instructions that men model the headship Christ shows to the church, love like Christ loves the church, and sacrifice themselves as Christ did for the church – his wife.

Christ modeled ***servant leadership*** that was not oppressive, but instead provided

a way for His followers to grow and excel to their greatest potentials. This type of leadership Christ displayed is different than the military leadership style that is often suggested for marriage partnerships.

Servant leaders' focus is on trying to discover what the people following them need to be successful. It is closely linked to Biblical contexts of romantic partnership because of the instructions

given for men to model their behaviors after Christ's leadership.

Let's consider how this passage is viewed from different perspectives.

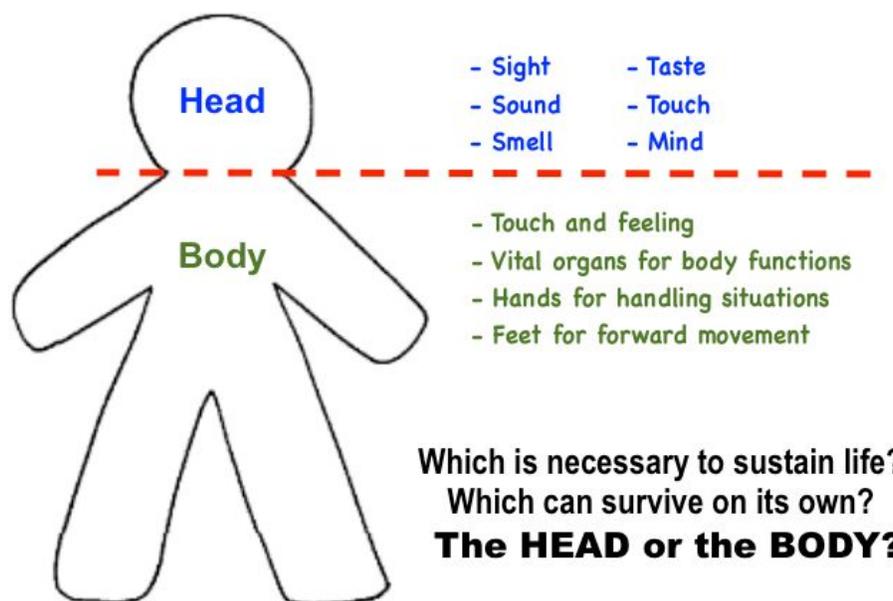
Traditional Hierarchical - Classic Couple

In a traditional hierarchical context, *the head* refers to the husband being the leader, decision maker, and financial provider, while the wife operates in a supportive role maintaining the household and the children. Historically, United States legislation and social structures supported this paradigm as the model for romantic partnerships. Laws continue to support this hierarchy by allowing men to be paid more than women, even within different racial groups. From a traditional perspective, the *headship* is *hierarchical* leadership.

Interdependent Shared Power - Alliance Couple

On the other hand, those who believe in *shared power* view the equality of men and women as equity or fairness in gender roles. They emphasize each partner's *submission to one another* as a foundational principle of romantic partnership, upon which every other aspect of the relationship is built. Each partner is focused on contributing to the partnership from their area of strength, while covering and complementing each others imperfections.

For some, this passage is a literal metaphor relating the man to a physical head and the woman to a physical body. Those who believe in shared powers reject hierarchical authority of men based solely on physical differences between men and women's anatomy. Instead, this perspective highlights how the head and body are dependent on one another to show the collaborative relationship men and women could have as they partner their strengths together in romantic partnership as *one flesh*.



Those who believe in shared powers do not believe that Christ made Himself a superior, boss, supervisor, or manager of the church—the body of Christ. To these couples, the view of Christ from a domineering position makes him more of a military leader that gives orders than a servant leader who *lays down his life* as the passage of scripture states. They also point out other scriptures that suggest equality and equity between men and women.

The principle of the number 11. One Flesh Ministries (OFM) is an organization committed to providing enrichment for married couples. The founders, Robert and Natalie Watts, explained marital roles in romantic partnership based on the symbolism found in the number 11. To teach the principles of side-by-side positioning between spouses as it is shown in Ephesians 5:21 and 31, OFM approached marriage as *the joining of two "1s" that connect and synergize to create a new entity represented by the number 11.* It is believed that there is symmetry in the principle of the number

11 in the romantic partnership of marriage. In their book, **11:11**, Robert and Natalie explained:

The beauty of 11 is this, if necessary the digits can switch places and the number remains the same. It does not change its appearance or value. The same is with [a husband and wife]. There are times when [the] wife appears to be in the front and at times it appears it is [the husband]. But, we reflect oneness, standing together and supporting each other... There is no competition in being One Flesh. (p. 104)

Through the number 11, OFM emphasized the uniqueness of the romantic partnership of marriage that exemplifies the mystery of *two becoming one flesh*, and how spouses can reflect one another as they partner together to lead and support one another based on each spouse's personal strengths. *Shared leadership* or *co-leadership* would be characteristic of this leadership structure.

The POWER OF THE # 11 IN MARRIAGE

“Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ...”

1 → **11** ← **1**

SPOUSE SPOUSE

...and the two will become one flesh.”

~Ephesians 5:21, 31

Connection • Synergy • Partnership • Flexibility • Interdependence

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Hybrid Titular - Crown Couple Model

The titular model is a hybrid or mixture of the *traditional* and *shared power* models. In the titular model, many of the individual beliefs that a couple has about men and women are traditional. This means that the man is viewed as the head or leader of the household, even if he is not the financial provider. However, a husband and wife are more likely to work together to satisfy the needs in their household in non-traditional ways.

Leaders who hold titles and honors of a certain position without the duties, power and/or responsibilities of that position are *titular* leaders. There is no obligation to honor a titular leader, because it is an honorary position.

The British monarchy is an example of titular leadership based on service. In England, the hierarchy and power of the monarchy is in name only and the British monarchs no longer have actual power. The leadership role of the monarchy has been transformed from its previous medieval and imperialistic position of domination into one where the monarchy is a ***servant of the people***. **The monarchy maintains the image of power, but lacks the substance and structure associated with power.**

In households that practice titular headship, the woman most likely reinforces *the man's leadership position because her consent and agreement is necessary to maintain the power dynamic*. This is very similar to the British monarchy where the will of the citizens allows continuation and maintenance of their position.

Titular leadership in romantic partnerships maintains the honor of the male in hierarchical leadership of the household without the traditional domestic roles, financial duties, and/or powers associated with the role. When a male operates in the role of the leader "in name only" his leadership may not be associated with the duties he performs. The duties, responsibilities, and powers are flexible in households where men hold titular leadership and are often shaped to meet the needs of the household.

A man's leadership that is based on serving the female partner will strengthen the influence of titular male partners, whether they are financial providers for their households or not.

Power Couple Mentoring was developed to provide additional information and objective educational tools that couples can use to effectively structure their unique household situations.

PIES Dimensions of Romantic Partnership			
	CLASSIC COUPLE 	CROWN COUPLE 	ALLIANCE COUPLE 
Type of Power	Traditional Hierarchical	Hybrid Titular	Interdependent Shared Powers
Leadership Style	Hierarchical Leadership	Servant Leadership	Co-Leadership
Headship Structure	Man is the head where headship means leader, commander, or supervisor; the one who is "in charge"	Nominal (name only) leadership that may exclude responsibilities; man perceived to have innate and intrinsic leadership abilities	Interdependent; flexible; head viewed anatomically as a metaphor for the husband as the "head" and the woman as the "body"
Power Dimension (power & decision making)	Husband makes decisions	Decisions likely made together, with greater weight on the husband's perspective	Both man and woman are decision makers
Individual Dimension (values about manhood & womanhood)	"Man and woman innately created with certain characteristics to fulfill predetermined roles"	"God-given" or innate characteristics of male headship/ leadership	Emphasizes mutuality ad partnering that highlights each partner's strengths, while acknowledging physical differences
Economic Dimension (educational & employment positioning)	Man holds economic responsibility for the household	Man expected to be the financial provider and the woman may assist	Either man and/or woman may contribute to household finances
Social Dimension (domestic roles & responsibilities)	Man focuses outside the home; wife is in charge of domestic affairs	Man and woman have greater responsibility in the home	Domestic responsibilities likely to be determined based on strengths, abilities, time, etc. of individuals
Pros	Hierarchical leadership is pre-established and there are fixed gender roles, when both spouses willingly accept roles, conflict about gender roles is reduced	Reduces conflict about leadership positions in the home	Allows each spouse to operate in his or her own strengths to function within the household; allows compromise and flexibility about gender roles
Cons	Man or woman may not naturally fit or be equipped to fulfill the traditional expectations of the gender roles	Potential conflict about expectations for leadership duties; dependent on woman's compliance and agreement to view the man as the leader of the home	Requires continual communication and problem solving to maintain agreement and make adjustments in relationship roles

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The **PIES Dimensions of Romantic Partnerships Model** is based on research titled [Non-Conventional Gender Roles in Relationship Education Curricula for African Americans: A Content Analysis](#) conducted by Dr. Andrea Little Mason for [Harmonic Connections PLUS](#).