

Qualified Headship:

**That the Father's Authority within his Proper Sphere is
Qualified and Limited, as Respecting the Marriage of his Daughters**

by Travis Fentiman



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Contents

Introduction	2
Historic Reformed Quotes	8
Headship Scriptures	23
Liberty of Conscience	27
Limited Authority Scriptures	29
Relation of Spheres of Authority	38
Lawful Resistance	40
Conclusion	43

Introduction

Does the Bible teach that a father may forbid the marriage of his daughter for any reason? Must the father's will always be obeyed if he does not require one to sin, though he is acting in ignorance and sin himself? A rising tide in Christianity believes the Bible's answer to these two questions is Yes. This paper demonstrates that the Bible's answer, and the answer of the large part of historic, reformed Christianity, is No. Daughters and their suitors are justified before God in getting married against the father's will in certain grievous situations where, in the words of the Scottish First Book of Discipline (1560) and the Westminster Directory of Public Worship (1646), there is not "just cause."

To introduce the issue at hand the definitions of Unqualified Headship and Qualified Headship (what this paper argues for), are given. Then two practical illustrations are given to further pinpoint and elucidate the differences between the two positions. Next a dozen historic, reformed documents and authors from the 16th and 17th centuries are quoted in order show what the best of church history has had to say on the question.

To begin examining the Biblical evidence and argument in chapter three, the scriptures relating to a father's authority are listed and analyzed. The following chapter analyzes the Biblical doctrine of Liberty of Conscience, which much of the argument hinges on. Next, the scriptures that teach Limited Authority, which are largely unknown today, are examined in detail. What follows is how the three spheres of God-instituted authority (family, church and state) relate to each other. Then the Biblical doctrine of Lawful Resistance is proved and analyzed, before the Conclusion of the whole matter is given.

May this paper help you to become further acquainted with the will of God in your life, that you may serve Christ in the liberty that He has purchased for you, as all will give an account on the Last Day, not before their fathers, but before Jesus Christ the Lord (Rom. 14:7-12).

Definitions

Unqualified Headship:

The father's authority within his proper sphere over the family (provision, protection, nurture, and discipline) is unqualified and unlimited, and is to be obeyed as unto the Lord as long as he does not command one under him to sin. His express will is the standard of right and wrong conduct to those under him for those things that God has given Christian liberty for (things not commanded or forbidden by God). If the father exercises his authority sinfully, those under him are always obligated to suffer under it and obey it without exception.

Qualified Headship:

The Father's authority within his proper sphere over the family (provision, protection, nurture and discipline) is qualified and limited. While he is to be obeyed as unto the Lord even in things pertaining to Christian liberty, and the sinful exercise of his authority is to be suffered under and born long with, there is a limit such that those under him are no longer required to obey him, as their ultimate authority in things pertaining to Christian liberty is not the father's express will, but the law of God.

If the father exercises his authority in an excessively sinful way (being recognized by many involved), and one's conscience is convicted that the law of God applies to the situation in its various providential circumstances differently, other authorities confirming this, and the normal means of rectifying the situation has been to no avail, the individual may lawfully disobey their father (it being pleasing to God).

Illustration 1

The husband is leaving for the afternoon and tells his wife to go grocery shopping before he gets back. After he leaves, their two year old son falls and splits his head open on the sidewalk. The mother only has time to either take her son to the emergency room or to go grocery shopping. Does she sin against God if she disobeys her husband and takes the child to the emergency room?

Implications

If one believes that the father's authority is unqualified and that right and wrong is determined for those under him by his express will, then the wife should go grocery shopping though her son bleed to death. She has completely fulfilled her responsibility in fully obeying her husband. The child's death falls upon the father's responsibility and is an unfortunate providence.

If one believes that the wife should take their son to the emergency room then one believes that there are qualifications to the authority of the father. The wife determines what she should do before God by applying God's law to her providential factors and various responsibilities to others, which overrides, due to the nature of the situation, her general obligation to obey her husband. For her to do anything else would be to disobey God's will as it is understood objectively (apart from the father's understanding of it) in providence by scripture.

Disobedience in the illustration primarily hinges on the father's absence and lack of knowledge of the situation. Are there other situations where the father's (voluntary or involuntary) absence and lack of knowledge of circumstances (or refusal to admit or investigate them) warrant disobedience to his will due to limited temporal and personal factors, and the importance of the situation?

Suppose the father was present when the child cracked his head open, and he told his wife to put a band-aid on it and that they were all going to go grocery shopping. He is convinced that the band-aid is a sufficient remedy for the injury, having a great concern for the welfare of the child, wanting to do what is best for him. The wife knows that the band-aid is insufficient, though the Father wants what is best for him, and that the child will bleed to death. Should the wife, recognizing that the father, though he has good intentions based on biblical convictions to provide for and protect his family, is misreading the situation and does not rightly understand God's will in the matter (and is hence out of accord with scripture and is in sin), disobey her husband and take the child to the emergency room?

If one answers no, that the wife should go to the grocery store as her husband said, one is saying that the ethical obligation of the wife to the husband in the smallest matter over-rides nearly every other ethical obligation one may have. If one answers yes, that the mother take the child to the emergency room, then one is admitting that there is warrant to disobey the father in certain pressing situations where the father sincerely misunderstands the providential circumstances, the scriptural principles that apply to it, and God's will in the matter.

The woman's ethical obligation, and hence responsibility, is different in the two views. Under an Unqualified Headship, all of the woman's responsibilities are through her husband and subject to his approval. She has no relationship that is not subordinate to her relationship to her husband. That is, she does not have relationships independent of her husband, or the father in the case of a daughter. God would hold the mother guiltless for obeying her husband and letting the child die, as the mother had no relationship to the child except through her husband and his express will.

Under the Qualified Headship view the woman has relationships apart and distinct from her husband. While these relationships are under his governance, there are limits and qualifications to his authority over them, such that there are certain occasions where the wife would need to disobey her husband in order to fulfill her obligations to someone else. The wife's primary relationship is to God, and to fulfill His will it would at times necessitate that she act upon her relationship to others before that of her husband. God would hold her guilty for not saving the child's life, because she has an obligation to save her child's life before God, before obeying her husband to go to the grocery store. Under the Qualified Headship view there are times where disobedience to one's husband or father is obedience to God, and obedience to God necessitates disobedience to one's husband or father.

It may be objected that in the illustration the mother's choice to preserve the life of the child is not one of Christian liberty but of positive moral obligation. The question

arises whether things of Christian liberty ever come into the category of positive moral obligation due to the process of long periods of time, aggravated circumstances and the unique characteristics of the persons involved.

Illustration 2

Consider the case of a father who tells his young son to sleep on the floor so that a visitor may take his bed. The Bible does not say where any particular individual is obligated to sleep so this falls under Christian liberty, which the father has authority over. The young son is not bothered by the inconvenience. However what if the father tells his young daughter to sleep on the kitchen floor for no particular reason. She obeys him. He then, night after night, tells her to sleep outside in the grass, in the closet, in the garage and many other inconvenient places. She is very troubled by this but wants to obey her father as unto the Lord with respect to these things of Christian liberty. She is so confused and miserable after months of this, having a softer constitution, that she loses weight and cannot adequately perform her normal responsibilities.

Implications

The unqualified headship position says that until the father relents in his time, it is sinful for her to do anything other than what he says. The qualified headship view says this matter of where to sleep, which normally falls under Christian liberty, has become sinful to the daughter involved as it causes her to break the 6th commandment in depleting and damaging her body and spirit. She is under positive obligation to disobey her father in order to obey God in keeping his 6th commandment to protect and preserve her life. The principles of scripture, and hence the father's authority, is qualified and limited by the circumstances and peculiar characteristics of the persons involved.

If the father unreasonably and sinfully forbids something to a daughter, which the daughter is called to by Christ, does not have the gifts to live without, is thereby thrown

into strong temptations such that she or others are concerned about her positive obligation for self preservation, and considering her positive obligation to serve Christ without distraction in her calling (1 Cor. 7:35), it being contingent on many precarious providential factors working together, is she positively obligated to do what would otherwise normally be understood to fall within Christian liberty?

By and large, the answer of Reformed Christian history with regards to daughters entering into marriage against their father's unreasonable disapproval, is yes.

Historic Reformed Quotes¹

Order of Quotes

Martin Luther

Register of the Pastors of Geneva

1546 Marriage Ordinance of Geneva

John Calvin

History of the Church of Scotland, Spottiswood

Scottish First Book of Discipline

Old Church Life in Scotland, Andrew Edgar

Westminster Larger Catechism

Westminster Directory for the Public Worship of God

Westminster Confession of Faith

Matthew Poole

John Collinges

Martin Luther, That Parents Should Neither Compel Nor Hinder the Marriage of Their Children, And That Children Should Not Become Engaged Without Their Parents' Consent (1524)

It is quite certain therefore that parental authority is strictly limited; it does not extend to the point where [] wreak damage and destruction to the child, especially to its soul. If then a father forces his child into a marriage without love, he oversteps and exceeds his authority. He ceases to be a father and becomes a tyrant who uses his authority not for building up -- which is why God gave it to him -- but for destroying. He is taking authority into his own hands without God, indeed, against God. The same principle holds good when a father hinders his child's marriage, or lets the child go ahead on his own, without any intention of helping him in the matter (as so often happens in the case of step-parents and their children, or orphans and their guardians, where covetousness has its eye more on what the child has than on what the child needs).

¹ These quotes were compiled by R. Andrew Myers

In such a case the child is truly free and may act as if his parent or guardian were dead; mindful of what is best for himself, he may become engaged in God's name, and look after himself as best he can.

Martin Luther, Letters of Spiritual Counsel:

As I have written before, children should not become engaged without parental consent. **But at the same time I also wrote that parents should not and can not rightly compel or prevent their children to please themselves. ... In short, I pray you not to delay your consent any longer. Let the good fellow have peace of mind. And I cannot wait much longer. I shall have to act as my office requires.**

-- Letter dated June 4, 1539

See also letters on this same topic to John Schott (May 1524) and Anthony Rudolf (May 12, 1536)

Philip Edgecombe Hughes, ed., The Register of the Company of Pastors of Geneva in the Time of Calvin, p. 73:

...In the case of children who marry without the consent of father or mother at the age when they are permitted to do so [stated as being ages 20 for a man and 18 for a woman on the previous page], as above, if it is known to the court that they have acted lawfully while their fathers have been negligent or excessively strict, the fathers shall be compelled to assign them a dowry or to grant them such portion and position as would have been the case had they consented to the marriage.

John Witte, Jr. and Robert McCune Kingdon, Sex, Marriage and Family in John Calvin's Geneva (Vol. 1): Courtship, Engagement, and Marriage, pp. 165, 172, 184:

1546 Marriage Ordinance of Geneva

1. Regarding young people who have never been married, none, whether sons or daughters, who have a father still living shall have the power to contract a marriage without the permission of their father unless they have attained the legal age, that is twenty years for a son and eighteen for a daughter. And if

after reaching the said age they have asked their fathers or had them asked to marry them and their fathers have not attended to it, in that case it shall be lawful for them to marry without their father's authority.

...

7. Where children marry without their father's or mother's permission at the age permitted above and it is established by the court that they have done this lawfully because of the negligence or excessive strictness of their fathers, let the fathers be required to grant them a dowry or provide them such a share or position as [they would have given] if they had consented to it.

...

Calvin gave many examples of the proper obedience that children should render to their parents in conformity with the Decalogue. Included was the duty of children to seek their father's consent to make a "binding oath," and the duty of the father, in turn, not to withhold or condition his consent capriciously (Doc. 5-2). Calvin concluded that, "if a daughter, while living with her father, has vowed anything without his knowledge, it is of no force." This was the closest Calvin came to tying the doctrine of parental consent to marriage to the fifth commandment.¹⁸

18. See Comm. Harm. Law Exod. 20:12; Serm. Deut. 5:15; Comm. and Serm. Eph. 6:1-4.

John Calvin, Commentary on I Cor. 7.36-38:

36. But if any one thinketh that it were unseemly for his virgin. He now directs his discourse to parents, who had children under their authority. For having heard the praises of celibacy, and having heard also of the inconveniences of matrimony, they might be in doubt, whether it were at all a kind thing to involve their children in so many miseries, lest it should seem as if they were to blame for the troubles that might befall them. For the greater their attachment to their children, so much the more anxiously do they exercise fear and caution on their account.¹ Paul, then, with the view of relieving them from this difficulty, teaches that it is their duty to consult their advantage, exactly as one would do for himself when at his own disposal.² Now he still keeps up the distinction, which he has made use of all along, so as to commend celibacy, but, at the same time, to leave marriage as a matter of choice; and not simply a matter of choice, but a needful remedy for incontinency, which ought not to be denied to any one. In the first part of the statement he speaks as to the giving of daughters in marriage, and he declares that those do not sin in giving away their daughters in marriage, who are of opinion that an unmarried life is not suitable for them.

The word *ajschmonei~n* (to be unseemly) must be taken as referring to a special propriety, which depends on what is natural to the individual; for there is a general propriety, which philosophers make to be a part of temperance. That

belongs equally to all. There is another, that is special, because one thing becomes one individual that would not be seemly in another. Every one therefore should consider (as Cicero observes) what is the part that nature has assigned to him.³ Celibacy will be seemly for one, but he must not measure all by his own foot;⁴ and others should not attempt to imitate him without taking into view their ability; for it is the imitation of the ape -- which is at variance with nature. If, therefore, a father, having duly considered his daughter's disposition, is of opinion that she is not prepared for celibacy, let him give her away in marriage.⁵

By the flower of her age he means the marriageable age. This lawyers define to be from twelve to twenty years of age. Paul points out, in passing, what equity and humanity ought to be exercised by parents, in applying a remedy in that tender and slippery age, when the force of the disease requires it. And it requires to be so. In this clause I understand him as referring to the girl's infirmity -- in the event of her not having the gift of continency; for in that case, necessity constrains her to marry. As to Jerome's making a handle of the expression sinneth not, for reviling marriage, with a view to its disparagement, as if it were not a praiseworthy action to dispose of a daughter in marriage, it is quite childish.⁶ For Paul reckoned it enough to exempt fathers from blame, that they might not reckon it a cruel thing to subject their daughters to the vexations connected with marriage.

37. But he who standeth firm in his heart. Here we have the second part of the statement, in which he treats of young women who have the gift of abstaining from marriage. He commends therefore those fathers who make provision for their tranquillity; but let us observe what he requires. In the first place, he makes mention of a steadfast purpose -- If any one has fully resolved with himself. You must not, however, understand by this the resolution formed by monks -- that is, a voluntary binding over to perpetual servitude -- for such is the kind of vow that they make; but he expressly makes mention of this firmness of purpose, because mankind often contrive schemes which they next day regret. As it is a matter of importance, he requires a thoroughly matured purpose.

In the second place he speaks of the person as having no necessity; for many, when about to deliberate, bring obstinacy with them rather than reason. And in the present case⁷ they do not consider, when they renounce marriage, what is in their power, but reckon it enough to say -- "such is my choice." Paul requires them to have power, that they may not decide rashly, but according to the measure of the grace that has been given them. The absence of necessity in the case he appropriately expresses in the following clause, when he says that they have power over their own will. For it is as though he had said -- "I would not have them resolve before knowing that they have power to fulfill, for it is rash and ruinous to struggle against an appointment of God." But, "according to this system," some one will say, "vows are not to be condemned, provided these conditions were annexed." I answer that, as to the gift of continency, as we are uncertain respecting the will of God as to the future, we ought not to form any

determination for our whole life. Let us make use of the gift as long as it is allowed us. In the meantime, let us commit ourselves to the Lord, prepared to follow whithersoever he may call us. (Revelation 14:4.)

Hath decreed in his heart. Paul seems to have added this to express the idea more fully, that fathers ought to look carefully on all sides, before giving up anxiety and intention as to giving away their daughters in marriage. For they often decline marriage, either from shame or from ignorance of themselves, while, in the meantime, they are not the less wanton, or prone to be led astray⁹ Parents must here consider well what is for the interests of their daughters, that by their prudence they may correct their ignorance, or unreasonable desire.

Now this passage serves to establish the authority of parents, which ought to be held sacred, as having its origin in the common rights of nature. Now if in other actions of inferior moment no liberty is allowed to children, without the authority of their parents, much less is it reasonable that they should have liberty given them in the contracting of marriage. And that has been carefully enacted by civil law, but more especially by the law of God. So much the more detestable, then, is the wickedness of the Pope, who, laying aside all respect, either for Divine or human laws, has been so daring as to free children from the yoke of subjection to their parents. It is of importance, however, to mark the reason. This, says he, is on account of the dignity of the sacrament. Not to speak of the ignorance of making marriage a sacrament, what honor is there, I beseech you, or what dignity, when, contrary to the general feeling of propriety in all nations, and contrary to God's eternal appointment, they take off all restraints from the lusts of young persons, that they may, without any feeling of shame, sport themselves,¹⁰ under pretense of its being a sacrament? **Let us know, therefore, that in disposing of children in marriage, the authority of parents is of first-rate importance, provided they do not tyrannically abuse it, as even the civil laws restrict it.**¹¹The Apostle, too, in requiring exemption from necessity,¹² intimated that the deliberations of parents ought to be regulated with a view to the advantage of their children. Let us bear in mind, therefore, that this limitation is the proper rule -- that children allow themselves to be governed by their parents, and that they, on the other hand, do not drag their children by force to what is against their inclination, and that they have no other object in view, in the exercise of their authority, than the advantage of their children.

38. Therefore he that giveth in marriage. Here we have the conclusion from both parts of the statement, in which he states, in a few words, that parents are free from blame if they give away their daughters in marriage, while he at the same time declares that they do better if they keep them at home unmarried. You are not, however, to understand that celibacy is here preferred to marriage, otherwise than under the exception which was a little before expressed. **For if power be wanting on the part of the daughter,¹³the father acts an exceedingly bad part if he endeavors to keep her back from marriage, and would be no longer a father to her, but a cruel tyrant.** The sum of the whole discussion amounts to

this -- that celibacy is better than marriage, because it has more liberty, so that persons can serve God with greater freedom; **but at the same time, that no necessity ought to be imposed, so as to make it unlawful for individuals to marry, if they think proper; and farther, that marriage itself is a remedy appointed by God for our infirmity,**¹⁴**which all ought to use that are not endowed with the gift of continency.** Every person of sound judgment will join with me in acknowledging and confessing, that the whole of Paul's doctrine on this point is comprehended in these three articles.

John Spottiswood, History of the Church of Scotland: continued to the end of the reign of King James VI, Vol. 1, pp. 366-367 (this may be the earlier proposed text of the section on marriage in the Scottish First Book of Discipline, see below):

Of Marriage.

Marriage ought not to be contracted amongst persons that lack judgment to chuse.

Therefore we think that children and infants cannot be lawfully married in their less age, that is, if the man be within thirteen years of age, and the woman within twelve at least.

If any have been married within those years, and kept their bodies pure and unconjoined with each other, we think not that such can be compelled to adhere as man and wife by reason of any former promise; but if after the years of judgment they have embraced one another by virtue of the last consent, having ratified the promise made by others for thorn in their youth, the same should be held as married persons.

Public inhibitions should be made, that no persons under the power and obedience of fathers, tutors, and curators, either men or women, contract marriage privately, and without the knowledge of those to whom they live subject, under the power of the Church censure ; for if any son or daughter be moved towards a match, they are obliged to ask the counsel and assistance of their parents for performing the same. And though the father, notwithstanding their desires, have no other cause than the common sort of men have, to wit, lack of money, or because they are not perhaps of a lineage and birth as they require ; **yet must not the parties make any covenant till the ministry or civil magistrate be acquainted therewith, and interpose their request for the parent's consent; which if they cannot obtain, finding no just cause why their marriage ought not to proceed, in that case they, sustaining the place of the parent, may consent to the parties, and admit them to marry, for the work of God ought not to be hindered by the corrupt affections of worldly men. We call that the work of God, when two hearts (without filthiness before committed,) are so joined, that they are**

content to live together in the holy band of matrimony. If any commit fornication with the woman whom he requires in marriage, then both of them do lose the foresaid benefit, as well of the Church as of the magistrate, for neither of them ought to be intercessors for filthy fornicators.

The father or nearest friend, whose daughter being a virgin, is deflowered, may by the law of God compel the man who hath done the injury to marry his daughter ; yet if the father, by reason of the offence, will not consent unto the marriage, he may in that case require the dowry of his daughter, which if the offender be not able to pay, he ought to be punished in his body by the magistrate, with some other punishment.

In a reformed church marriage ought not to be privately used, but in open face and presence of the church; also for avoiding dangers, we think it expedient that the bans be proclaimed three Sundays, unless the persons be well known, and that no suspicion of peril can arise, and then may the proclamation be shortened at the discretion of the minister. But in no ways can we admit marriage to be secretly used, how honourable soever the persons be; and therefore esteem Sunday before sermon the most convenient time for celebration of marriage, and that it ought not to be used upon any day else without the consent of the ministry.

Marriage once lawfully contracted may not be dissolved at man's pleasure, (as our Saviour doth witness) unless adultery be committed; which being sufficiently proved in the presence of the civil magistrate, the innocent party (if they require it) ought to be declared free, and the offender put to death, as God hath commanded. But if the life of the offender be spared, yet may not the Church be negligent in their duty, which is to excommunicate the wicked, and pronounce the innocent party free. And notwithstanding, if the offender shew any fruits of penitency, and earnestly desire to be reconciled to the Church, he may be received to the participation of the sacraments, and other benefits of the same.

If any shall demand whether the offender after reconciliation may again marry or not; we answer, that if they cannot live continent, and if the necessity be such as that they fear to fall of new into the offence of God, we cannot deny them the remedy appointed. If the party offended may be reconciled to the offender, then in no case we judge it lawful to the offender to marry another, and the solemnization of their marriage must be of new in the face of the church, but without the proclamation of the bans. This we offer as the best counsel that God giveth us in so doubtful a case; howbeit we judge the best reformation were to prefer God's commandment, and punish those crimes, as he requireth, with death.

Scottish First Book of Discipline (1560), Ninth Head:

Of Marriage

Because that marriage, the blessed ordinance of God, in this cursed Papistry has partly been contemned, and partly has been so infirmed, that the persons conjoined could never be assured of continuance, if the bishops and prelates list to dissolve the same; we have thought good to show our judgments how such confusion in times coming may be best avoided.

And first, public inhibition must be made that no persons under the power and obedience of others, such as sons and daughters, [and] those that are under curators, neither men nor women, contract marriage privily and without knowledge [of their parents, tutors, or curators, under whose power they are for the time]: which if they do, the censure and discipline of the church [ought] to proceed against them. If the son or daughter, or others, have their heart touched with desire of marriage, they are bound to give that honour to the parents that they open unto them their affection, asking of them counsel and assistance, **how that motion, which they judge to be of God, may be performed.** If the father, friend, or master, gainstand their request, and have no other cause than the common sort of men have (to wit, lack of goods, or because they are not so high-born as they require), yet must not the parties whose hearts are touched make any covenant till further declaration is made unto the church of God. **And, therefore, after they have opened their minds to their parents, or such others as have charge over them, they must declare it also to the ministry, or to the civil magistrate, requiring them to travail with their parents for their consent, which to do they are bound. And if they, to wit, the magistrate or ministers, find no just cause why the marriage required may not be fulfilled, then, after sufficient admonition to the father, friend, master, or superior, that none of them resist the work of God, the ministry or magistrate may enter in the place of the parent, and by consenting to their just requests may admit them to marriage. For the work of God ought not to be hindered by the corrupt affections of worldly men. The work of God we call [it], when two hearts (without filthiness before committed) are so joined, that both require and are content to live together in that holy bond of matrimony.**

If any man commits fornication with the woman whom he required in marriage, then do both lose this foresaid benefit, as well of the church as of the magistrate; for neither of both ought to be intercessors or advocates for filthy fornicators. But the father, or nearest friend, whose daughter being a virgin is deflowered, has power by the law of God to compel the man that did that injury to marry his daughter. Or, if the father will not accept him by reason of his offence, then may he require the dot [dowry] of his daughter; which if the offender is not able to pay, then ought the civil magistrate to punish his body by some other punishment.

And because that fornication, whoredom, and adultery, are sins most common to this realm, we require of your honours, in the name of the Eternal God, that severe punishment, according as God has commanded, be executed against such wicked offenders. For we doubt not but such enormous crimes, openly committed, provoke the wrath of God, as the apostle speaks, not only upon the offenders, but also upon such places as where, without punishment, they are committed.

But to return to our former purpose: marriage ought not to be contracted amongst persons that have no election for lack of understanding; and therefore we affirm, that bairns [children] and infants cannot lawfully be married in their minor age, to wit, the man within fourteen years of age, and the woman within twelve years, at the least. Which if it chance any to have been, and have kept their bodies always separate, we cannot judge them bound to adhere as man and wife, by reason of that promise, which in God's presence was no promise at all. But if in the years of judgment they have embraced the one the other, then by reason of their last consent, they have ratified that which others did promise for them in their youth.

In a reformed church, marriage ought not to be secretly used, but in open face and public audience of the church. And for avoiding of dangers, it is expedient that the banns be publicly proclaimed three Sundays (unless the persons are [so] known, that no suspicion of danger may arise, and then may the banns be shortened at the discretion of the ministry). But in no wise can we admit marriage to be used secretly, however honourable that the persons are. The Sunday before sermon we think most convenient for marriage, and it to be used no day else without the consent of the whole ministry.

Marriage once lawfully contracted, may not be dissolved at man's pleasure, as our master Christ Jesus does witness, unless adultery is committed; which, being sufficiently proven in presence of the civil magistrate, the innocent (if they so require) ought to be pronounced free, and the offender ought to suffer the death as God has commanded. If the civil sword foolishly spares the life of the offender, yet the church may not be negligent in their office, which is to excommunicate the wicked, and to repute them as dead members, and to pronounce the innocent party to be at freedom, be they never so honourable before the world. If the life is spared (as it ought not to be) to the offenders, and if the fruits of repentance of long time appear in them, and if they earnestly desire to be reconciled with the church, we judge that they may be received to participation of the sacraments, and of the other benefits of the church (for we would not that the church should hold those excommunicate whom God absolved, that is, the penitent).

If any demand, whether that the offender after reconciliation with the church, may not marry again: we answer, that if they cannot live continent, and if the necessity is such as that they fear further offence of God, we cannot forbid them to use the remedy ordained of God. If the party offended may be reconciled to the offender, then we judge that in nowise shall it be lawful to the offender to marry any other, except the party that before has been offended; and the solemnization of the latter

marriage must be in the open face of the church like as the former, but without proclamation of banns.

This we do offer as the best counsel that God gives unto us in so doubtsome a case. But the most perfect reformation were, if your honours would give to God his honour and glory, that ye would prefer his express commandment to your own corrupt judgments, especially in punishing of those crimes which he commands to be punished with death. For so should ye declare yourselves God's true and obedient officers, and your commonwealth should be rid of innumerable troubles.

We mean not, that sins committed in our former blindness (which are almost buried in oblivion) shall be called again to examination and judgment. But we require that the law may now and hereafter be so established and executed, that this ungodly impunity of sin have no place within this realm. For in the fear of God we signify unto your honours, that whosoever persuades unto you that ye may pardon where God commands death, deceives your souls, and provokes you to offend God's Majesty.

Andrew Edgar, Old Church Life in Scotland (1886), Vol. 2, pp. 157-158:

In the First Book of Discipline, it is said that **marriages should not be proceeded with till** either the parents of the parties desiring marriage give their consent, or **it be found that there is no reasonable cause for the parents' withholding consent.** The Westminster Directory says that the consent of parents or guardians should be obtained to the first marriage of children, and especially if the children be under age. Pardovan in the beginning of last century, declared that such consent is necessary, "necessitate praecepti sed non necessitate ineditii" whatever that may mean beyond what could have been expressed in plain English. There are cases on record, therefore, in which proclamations of marriage have been sisted or stopped, or attempted to be stopped, by parents and guardians, on the ground that parental or tutorial consent had not been given to the proposed union. In 1614, the minister of Kirkintilloch wooed and purposed to marry the daughter of one of the city ministers of Glasgow. The bride's father was dead, and her curators attempted to prevent the marriage. The case came before the Presbytery of Glasgow, but **the Presbytery told the curators that they "had no place to stay the marriage, and ordained the said Janet to betake herself to some of the ministers' houses that are within the town, which it shall please her to choose, till the solemnization of her marriage."** In 1648, one John Shaw, described as merchant in Straiton, gave in a petition to the Presbytery of Ayr, that "his proclamation of marriage, which wes stayed in Mayboill, might go on with Katharine Girvan there." It is stated, however, in the Presbytery records, that "in respect that John Kennedy, notare in Mayboill, father-in-law to the said Katharine, gave in reasons why the said proclamation of marriage ought to be stayed, the Presbyterie delayed the matter till the next meeting; and, in the mean time,

ordained John Kennedy his said bill and reasons therein contained to be subscribed by his wyf, the mother of the said Katharine, and a coppic thereof to be deliverd to the said John Schaw complainer." **These cases shew that parents and curators were not allowed, without just and sufficient reasons, to hinder the marriage of their children or wards; but that, in the words of the First Book of Discipline, when the ministry find no just cause why the marriage may not be fulfilled, they may enter in the place of parents, and allow the marriage to proceed.***

*The Westminster Directory says that "Parents ought not to force their children to marry without their free consent, nor deny their own consent without just cause."

Westminster Larger Catechism:

Question 137: Which is the seventh commandment?

Answer: The seventh commandment is, Thou shalt not commit adultery.

Question 138: What are the duties required in the seventh commandment?

Answer: The duties required in the seventh commandment are, chastity in body, mind, affections, words, and behavior; and the preservation of it in ourselves and others; watchfulness over the eyes and all the senses; temperance, keeping of chaste company, modesty in apparel; **marriage by those that have not the gift of continency**, conjugal love, and cohabitation; diligent labor in our callings; shunning all occasions of uncleanness, and resisting temptations thereunto.

Question 139: What are the sins forbidden in the seventh commandment?

Answer: The sins forbidden in the seventh commandment, besides the neglect of the duties required, are, adultery, fornication, rape, incest, sodomy, and all unnatural lusts; all unclean imaginations, thoughts, purposes, and affections; all corrupt or filthy communications, or listening thereunto; wanton looks, impudent or light behavior, immodest apparel; **prohibiting of lawful, and dispensing with unlawful marriages**; allowing, tolerating, keeping of stews, and resorting to them; entangling vows of single life, **undue delay of marriage**; having more wives or husbands than one at the same time; unjust divorce, or desertion; idleness, gluttony, drunkenness, unchaste company; lascivious songs, books, pictures, dancings, stage plays; and all other provocations to, or acts of uncleanness, either in ourselves or others.

Westminster Directory for the Publick Worship of God:

Parents ought not to force their children to marry without their free consent, nor deny their own consent without just cause.

Westminster Confession of Faith, XXIV.III:

It is lawful for all sorts of people to marry who are able with judgment to give their consent. Yet it is the duty of Christians to marry only in the Lord. And, therefore, such as profess the true reformed religion should not marry with infidels, Papists, or other idolaters: neither should such as are godly be unequally yoked, by marrying with such as are notoriously wicked in their life, or maintain damnable heresies.

Matthew Poole, English Annotations, Jeremiah 35.19:

...which brings in another question, Whether parents have a power to oblige their children in matters which God hath left at liberty...2. **Unquestionably parents have not a power to determine children in all things as to which God hath left them at liberty, for then they have a power to make their children slaves, and to take away all their natural liberty. To marry or not, and to this or that person, is matter of liberty.** Parents cannot in this case determine their children; Bethuel, Gen. xxiv.58, asketh Rebecca if she would go with Abraham's servant before he would send her...5. Parents being set over children, and instead of God to them, **as it is their duty to advise their children to the best of their ability for their good; so it is the duty of children to receive their advise, and not to depart from it, unless they see circumstances so mistaken by their parents, or so altered by the providence of God, as they may reasonably judge their parents, had they known or forseen it, would not have so advised. But that parents have an absolute power to determine children in all things as to which God hath not forbidden them, and that children by the law of God are obliged to an obedience to all such commands, however they may see their parents mistaken, or God by his providence may have altered circumstances, I see no reason to conclude...**

John Collinges in Matthew Poole, English Annotations on I Cor. 7.36-38:

36 But if any man think that he behaveth himself uncomely: there is a general and a particular uncomeliness; some things are uncomely with respect to all persons; of such things the apostle doth not here speak; but of a particular uncomeliness with respect to the circumstances of particular persons. Neither doth uncomely here signify a mere indency and unhandsomeness, but such a behaviour as suiteth not the general rules of the gospel, which judgment is to be ruled by the circumstances of persons, as they more or less desire marriage. If she pass the flower of her age: if she be of marriagable years, or rather, if she beginneth to grow old, and need so require, and be desirous of marriage, so as the parent seeth reason to fear that, if he gives her not in marriage, she will so dispose of herself without asking her father's advice or leave, or be exposed, possibly, to worse temptations: which two things seem to interpret that term, if need so require. Let him do what he will, he sinneth not: let them marry; in such a case as this a Christian parent shall not sin, if he disposeth her in marriage: let her marry to such a person as she loveth, and her parent seeth proper for her. He speaks in the plural number, because marriage is betwixt two persons. The reason of this determination is, because the apostle, in his former discourse, had no where condemned a married estate during the present distress of things, as sinful or unlawful, but only as inexpedient, or not so expedient as a single life during the present distress; he had before determined, ver. 9, that it was better to marry than to burn. Now no inexpediency of a thing can balance what is plainly sinful. If therefore the case be such, that a man or woman must marry, or sin, though marriage brings with it more care and trouble, yet it is to be preferred before plain sinning.

37 Nevertheless he that standeth stedfast in his heart; if a man be resolved to keep his daughter a virgin, not uncertain in his own mind and wavering what he should do, upon a just consideration of circumstances; having no necessity; and doth not see a necessity to dispose of her, either for avoiding some sin against God, or for the better providing for himself and the rest of his family; but hath power over his own will; but hath a perfect freedom in his own will, so that his will be not contradicted by his daughter's fondness of a married life; **for in such a case the father, though he would willingly not dispose of his daughter in marriage, yet ought to be overruled by the will of the daughter, and so hath not a power over his own will, being forced by the rules of religion to take care of the soul and the spiritual welfare of his child; for though the parent hath a great power over his child, and ought to consent to the marriage of his child, yet he hath no power as to wholly hinder them from marriage.** And hath so decreed in his heart that he will keep his virgin; if he be fully resolved, upon a due consideration of all circumstances, and the virgin be satisfied, and yields up herself in the case to her father's pleasure, in such a case, if the father doth not put her upon marriage, but resolves to keep her unmarried, he doth well; that is, not only he shall not sin against God, but he doth that which is more eligible,

considering the present circumstances of things, and better than if he did find out a husband for her, and give her to him (as it is expounded in the next verse).
38 So then he that giveth her in marriage doeth well; there is no general rule for all parents in this case, where the duty or sin of parents may arise from their or their children's different circumstances. But supposing that a parent, having duly weighed all circumstances, that she can forbear; in such a case as this, if the parent disposeth her in marriage, I cannot say he sinneth, but he doth what he may do. But he that giveth her not in marriage doeth better; both with reference to the present state of things in the church and in the world, and with reference to the young woman's liberty for the service of God, he doth better, if he doth not so dispose her. The thing is in itself indifferent, and Christians must be in it ruled and inclined one way or another from circumstances.

Summary

So far from the Qualified Headship position being limited to isolated persons in extraordinary times and circumstances, the view, as the quotes above demonstrate, is represented over 240 years during the reformation and post-reformation eras by multiple reformers, commentators, theologians, books of church order and civil legislation from England, Scotland, Germany and Switzerland. It was the official view of the Scottish church, being expounded in the First Book of Discipline, and the general practice of the era in that nation as recognized by multiple historians. The view was not limited to extraordinary and turbulent periods of history, but was enacted on a large scale in reformed cities by civil law and presbyteries during peaceful and normal periods of societal life. Qualified Headship was promoted by the international publication of standard commentaries on scripture authored by some of the leading theologians of the day.

These men did not hold that whatever came out of the mouth of the father is always obligatory upon those under him except scripture expressly prohibit it. Rather, while recognizing that scripture as special revelation is the sole standard of ethics, the subordinate means of determining how to act in a given situation was the individual's conscience before God, as he rightly understands providence through general revelation, applies scripture to it and it is confirmed by the consensus of others, including other

earthly authorities. This is how some of the men quoted above could speak of the ‘work of God’ in bringing two hearts together in desiring marriage, and that the father ought not to ‘resist this work of God.’ Many of the men quoted above not only held that it was a sin to prevent a marriage without sufficient and necessary reason (there being a sinful exercise of authority which must be obeyed), but that the father had no authority to do so and hence did not have to be obeyed.

Headship Scriptures

General

There are many passages in scripture which assert the father's authority over his household, and in specific his authority in giving his daughters in marriage:

Ex. 20:12 "Honor your father and your mother,"

1 Cor. 11:4 "The head of the woman is the man,"

Col. 3:20 "Children, obey your parents in all things: for this is well pleasing unto the Lord."

1 Cor. 7:37,38 "Nevertheless he that stands steadfast in his heart, having no necessity, but has power over his own will, and has so decreed in his heart that he will keep his virgin, does well.

Num. 30:3-5 "If a woman also vow a vow unto the LORD, and bind herself by a bond, being in her father's house in her youth... But if her father disallow her in the day that he hears; not any of her vows, or of her bonds wherewith she has bound her soul, shall stand.

These are very clear statements. Yet it is as equally clear from the rest of scripture that these statements are qualified. As plain and direct as the 5th commandment is, one does not have to obey one's parents outside of their authority, if, for instance they seek to legislate in the civil or ecclesiastical sphere. Another example is that while a daughter must obey her parents when under their authority, she does not have to obey her parents in the same way when under the authority of her husband. That the father's authority is limited to his proper sphere is generally admitted. The question at hand is whether the father's authority is qualified and limited within his proper sphere.

1 Corinthians 7

In 1 Cor. 7:25-40 Paul is giving his advice (v. 25) on whether fathers should give away their daughters in marriage during a time of persecution. The context is one of a ‘present distress’ (v. 26) in which time was short (v. 29) and being married and attending to normal earthly cares would burden one unnecessarily (v. 28) in the midst of the threat of losing one’s life (v. 29-30). In light of such circumstances, Paul’s recommendation to those who have enquired for his counsel is that it is better to remain single if possible, and the father that keeps his daughter from marriage does better than he who gives her in marriage (v. 38). This is the specific question, within highly contextualized circumstances, that Paul is answering.

Paul’s argument generally assumes that the father has authority to give his daughter in marriage. However the extent of his authority or qualifications to it, especially in other circumstances, is not being addressed. There are many circumstances Paul does not address, nor could, in writing such a brief letter. Is Paul asserting that the father has authority to withhold his daughter from marriage in every possible circumstance in history without exception? No.

A basic principle of interpretation is to determine what the author is speaking to and what the author is not speaking to: to set the limits of legitimate interpretation of the passage. Thus Calvin and Collinges, as quoted above, believed that 1 Cor. 7 is qualified, along with many, many other interpreters and commentators. As Poole said (as quoted above), “But that parents have an absolute power to determine children in all things as to which God hath not forbidden them, and that children by the law of God are obliged to an obedience to all such commands, however they may see their parents mistaken, or God by his providence may have altered circumstances, I see no reason to conclude.”

It is a basic hermeneutical fallacy to take one seemingly plain passage of scripture without qualification and exalt it above every other principle of scripture. Matt 5:34 says, “swear not at all.” One might interpret this at face value and believe that it is always

wrong to swear by an oath or vow. Yet, throughout scripture lawful oaths and vows are commended. Matt 23:9 says “call no man your father upon the earth.” Yet Stephen calls those over him, “Men, brothers, and fathers” (Acts 7:2) and David called Saul his father as one having rule over him (1 Sam. 24:11). 1 Pet. 3:3 says that women should not wear gold, yet Genesis 1 says that God created all things good and 1 Tim. 4:4 says that “every creature of God is good, and nothing is to be refused if it is received with thanksgiving.” The burden of proof is on the one who asserts that the passages commonly used to support unqualified headship are in fact unqualified.

Numbers 30

This passage says that a father can annul the vow of his daughter, “being in her father’s house in her youth,” on the first day that he hears of the vow. This presumably applies to marriage vows. The purpose of this law, as most commentators agree, is to prevent the daughter from making a rash vow which would undermine the father’s governance of his household.

Notice that the father’s authority over his daughter and her vows is qualified. He must annul the vow on the first day that he hears of it. That is, he cannot wait 3 days, 3 months, or 3 years to annul the vow. This is to protect the daughter from a tyrannical father who would give his consent at one time and then take, or threaten to take, it away later. The father is also obligated by this law of God to give a timely, and immediate in some cases, decision and response, or else his authority is void. That is, the father’s authority, by which the daughter must obey him, is qualified by reasonable restraints, and God recognizes this in His Word.

The passage also qualifies the father’s authority in that the daughter must be living in his house and be in her youth. While it is possible, and perhaps probable, as many commentators agree, that this law applies to sons and other minors in the household, and even to older daughters, it is clear that age, being specifically mentioned, is a significant factor in a situation to which this case law would apply. Thus, as quoted

above, numerous theologians, pastors and magistrates took the age of a daughter into account when determining God's will in the matter. These men said that the significance of the factor of age is so obvious that even the civil laws of the land allow women over 18 or 20 years of age to marry without their parents' permission.

Undoubtedly the reason for this is that the woman over 20 is an adult and can exercise responsible liberty, making competent decisions for herself in the way she desires to live. Paul says, "When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things," (1 Cor. 7:11). Gal. 4:24,25 contains a similar thought, "Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster." It is clear that the father has authority over his daughter while she remains unmarried and in his house, but it is not clear that the extent of that authority is the same for a 23 year old as it is for a 3 year old. The theologians, pastors and civil magistrates quoted above did not think so and their practice was not that of an Unqualified Headship view of Numbers 30.

If the primary purpose of the case law in Numbers 30 is so that a daughter does not make a rash vow under the reasonable oversight of her father, then it is not clear that the case law applies to situations where significant time has elapsed, the daughter is older, the decision is well thought through and the father has significantly unreasonable restrictions. Neither Numbers 30 or 1 Corinthians 7 address cases where the father is exercising his authority in an acutely sinful and unreasonable way, and the daughter is persistent in her persuasion of seeking a godly marriage. If the Bible were longer, perhaps there would be case laws addressing this. Since it is not, we must interpret the 5th Commandment, Num. 30 and 1 Cor. 7 in light of the other principles of scripture that cohere with them.

Liberty of Conscience

Liberty of Conscience Stated

The most significant principle that limits and qualifies all God-given human authority, civil, ecclesiastical, and patriarchal, within their respective spheres is the doctrine of Liberty of Conscience. The doctrine is argued and stated in Rom. 14:5-12:

“Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind... For none of us lives to himself, and no man dies to himself. For whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord's. For to this end Christ both died, and rose, and revived, that he might be Lord both of the dead and living... for we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ... So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God.”

Christ ultimately is the Lord of the conscience and no one else, and our obligation is first and foremost to Him. The purpose of why Christ rose from the dead and bought us from the power and dominion of sin is so that we can serve Him. The Westminster Confession of Faith, 20.3 says that the purpose of Christian liberty is “that, being delivered out of the hands of our enemies, we might serve the Lord without fear, in holiness and righteousness before Him, all the days of our life.”

The Westminster Confession of Faith

The Confession rightly qualifies Christian Liberty in 20.4: “they who, upon pretence of Christian liberty, shall oppose any lawful power, or the lawful exercise of it, whether it be civil or ecclesiastical, resist the ordinance of God.”

The Confession, however, right before that, states the purpose of God giving Liberty of Conscience and instituting the human authorities of family, church and state with His power: that they “are not intended by God to destroy, but mutually uphold and preserve one another.” That is, human government, including parental authority, is for

the purpose of protecting Liberty of Conscience, so that men and women may serve Christ in their liberty.

To protect Christian Liberty, the Confession says in 20.4, God has set limits on all authority (family, church and state), that it must be “lawful.” If it is not “lawful” one does not resist the ordinance of God and hence does not sin, as one is not disobeying God’s will. There is such a thing as unlawful authority, and it does not need to be obeyed, because it is not within the ordinance of God. Without the rule and limitations of law upon authorities, persons are left with “an implicit faith, and an absolute and blind obedience” which “destroy liberty of conscience, and reason also,” (20.2). God’s Law, as it is revealed in the whole of scripture, gives authority its binding nature, without which, authority is not binding on the conscience.

The Unqualified Headship position holds that the only restrictions God’s Law places on the father’s authority is that he must rule within his sphere and not command those under him to directly sin. The father has authority from God, though it be sinful of him, to restrict and remove, if he chooses, all the Christian Liberty of those under him within his sphere. The Qualified Headship position holds that if a father over-steps his God-given authority within his sphere, being qualified by the principles of scripture which protects the Christian Liberty of those under him, he does not act with the authority of God and one does not need to obey him. To obey the father in such a case is “to betray true liberty of conscience,” (20.2).

Limited Authority Scriptures

Is a magistrate's authority (whether it be civil, ecclesiastical or patriarchal) co-extensive with its respective sphere, such that the magistrate must always be obeyed within his sphere if he does not command one to sin, or is his authority further limited by scripture such that there are points where the magistrate can lawfully be disobeyed within his sphere when he has not commanded one to directly sin?

Civil

Scripture gives numerous examples that civil authority is limited within its proper sphere. The O.T. makes it clear that civil magistrates have the lawful right to call persons before them and apprehend them for such a purpose. Yet Christ instructed His disciples that there would be times in which they could flee from the government (Mt 10:23; 24:9,16). Paul fled from the governor of Damascus through a window, who would have apprehended him (2 Cor. 11:32,33). Paul would not have sinned by passively submitting to the governor's authority in appearing before him. Yet Paul resists the governor's civil authority. Christ Himself directly disobeys the will of Herod in refusing to leave the country (Luke 13:31-33), and rebukes Herod for it. Persons are able to resist lower civil magistrates by appealing to higher civil magistrates (Acts 25:9-12; 28:19). God blesses lawful resistance: "Then the Spirit came upon Amasai, who was the chief of the thirty, and he said, "We are yours, O David, And with you, O son of Jesse! Peace, peace to you, And peace to him who helps you; Indeed, your God helps you!" (1 Chron. 12:18). When no other civil authority can be appealed to, one is able to appeal the King of Kings grounded in one's Liberty of Conscience: "And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void to offence toward God, and toward men." (Acts 24:16)

Ecclesiastical

Scripture gives numerous examples that ecclesiastical authority is limited within its sphere. Ecclesiastical rulers have the lawful right to call persons before their presence, and to be answered upon inquiring into persons' doctrinal beliefs and teachings. Yet when Jesus appeared before the High Priest, Jesus returned his question with a respectful rebuke (Mt. 26:20,21) and afterwards would not answer his questions (Mt. 26:62,63), though it would not have been sinful of Jesus to answer his questions in a straight forward manner. When no other ecclesiastical authority can be appealed to, one may appeal to God, who is the Highest Priest in the person of Christ, grounded in one's Liberty of Conscience: "And Paul, earnestly beholding the [ecclesiastical] council, said, 'Men and brothers, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day.' And the high priest Ananias commanded them that stood by him to smite him on the mouth."

Patriarchal

1 Sam. 20
1 Sam. 25
Luke 2
Matt 12
Matt 6, 19
1 Tim. 5:1,2
Col. 3:20

1 Sam. 20

Is the authority of the father the only instituted authority that is unqualified and unlimited within its sphere? Rather, scripture gives numerous examples that patriarchal authority is limited within its sphere. Jonathan communicates with David and gives counsel to David in secret contrary to his father Saul's express desires (1 Sam. 19:1,2; 20:30,31). This happens over a significant period of time (1 Sam. 20:1,2). It would not have been sinful for Jonathan to cut off all ties and communication with David. So far from doing this, Jonathan specifically talks to his father in order to find out information to tell David (1 Sam. 19:3-7). God specifically acts against Saul's sinful use of authority, being on the side of Jonathan and David, by causing Saul's messengers, and even Saul himself, to be overcome with prophecy so that they could not capture David (1 Sam.

19:20-24). Jonathan and David plan together to devise a strategy in what way they may best resist their father's sinful intentions (1 Sam. 20:1-23), give each other a mutual commitment (Jonathan's father not knowing about it), take an oath upon God's name to confirm it (1 Sam. 20:16), and trust the Lord to bless it (1 Sam. 20:23,42). Jonathan respectfully resists his father Saul by asking him what David has done, demanding a reason for what his father was asking (1 Sam. 20:32), and was rightfully angry with his father's sinful attitude and actions (1 Sam. 20:34). Saul specifically commands Jonathan to fetch David (1 Sam. 20:31), which is not sinful in-and-of-itself, and Jonathan not only does not obey his father, but actively helps Jonathan get away (1 Sam. 20:35-40). Jonathan disobeyed his father, not because he had to, but because he loved David (1 Sam. 18:1; 20:17,41).

1 Sam. 25

Scripture gives more examples of limitations of a father's authority within his sphere. David had treated Nabal's servants and herds well, providing protection for them as opportunity provided in a dangerous time (1 Sam. 25:15,16). Yet Nabal is unwilling to return the gracious favor and says "Who is David, and who is the son of Jesse? There are many servants nowadays who break away each one from his master. Shall I then take my bread and my water and my meat that I have killed for my shearers, and give it to men when I do not know where they are from?" (1 Sam. 25:10,11) Nabal is suspicious of David and casts a negative light upon David, a righteous and God fearing man, claiming for his excuse that he does not know him and hence cannot trust him. Nabal is correct in that he was not formally obligated by David's kind services and didn't owe him anything. Nabal argues that he is doing what is in the best interest of those under him for whom he is responsible, as Nabal claims he would have to take away from the food and drink of his own shearers to give to David. Nabal gives his pronouncement with his reasons, and goes his way to attend his own business. Yet God says that he "was harsh and evil in his doings," (1 Sam.25:3). Nabal was one who was "such a son of trouble that a man cannot speak to him." (1 Sam. 25:17) Without telling Nabal (1 Sam. 25:19) and contrary to his desires and express verbal statement (1 Sam. 25:11), Abigail, his godly wife, prepares

two hundred loaves of bread and two bottles of wine, five sheep, and hundreds of clusters of grapes and cakes in order to feed David's men (1 Sam. 25:18).

It would not have been sinful for her to have submitted to her husband's known will by not doing anything and seeking to obey him. Yet because of past history, the sinful character of her self-righteous husband who avoids conflict and retreats, and the aggravating, serious circumstances of the situation, Abigail actively does everything in her power to actively undo Nabal's words and actions. She recognizes and tells David respectfully that her husband is foolish and makes unwise decisions. She disobeys her husband out of conscience to God, whom she lives before and is responsible to, being convinced that she does God's will in the matter, (1 Sam. 25:26). Abigail acted instantaneously, as the situation required, knowing that prompt action was necessary. Nor did she consult with anyone else or appeal to other authorities. She was not worried what her husband would think, or was hindered by feelings of guilt, but using her own divine right of Liberty of Conscience she formed her own judgments as to what God's law as applied to providence required of her. In all her actions she trusted the Lord to bless her righteous efforts (1 Sam. 25:26,28,29). David then blesses Abigail for her disobedience (1 Sam. 25:32) and confirms that it was the Lord's will for her to do such (1 Sam. 25:32,34). Though David did not have a completed canon of scripture, nor did the scriptures specifically address his present situation in name, David recognizes God's will, approval, and actions in providence as the events unfolded, that God had pleaded his cause (1 Sam. 25:39).

Luke 2

In Luke 2:42-50, Jesus, being 12 years old, "tarried behind" in Jerusalem as his parents left to go home from the feast of Passover. After a day of travel his parents noticed that he was missing, turned around and found him on the third day talking amidst teachers in the temple. His mother asks him "Son, why have you done this to us? Look, your father and I have sought you anxiously." Jesus responds, "Why did you seek me? Did you not know that I must be about My Father's business?"

Jesus' actions were deliberate. This is seen in that his parents noticed He was gone after a day of travel, preparing to settle for the evening. They expected Jesus to sleep in their company. Jesus, on the other hand, had to find at least two nights lodging from others besides his parents back in Jerusalem. When Jesus realized that they had left without Him, did He travel quickly after them, trying to make up the time? He did not even send messengers to try to catch them or send news with those departing in their direction. The parents would have had to travel a day back to Jerusalem, which means they probably spent the greater part of another day looking for him. His mother seems to be somewhat surprised that He was in the temple, as her parents sought Him anxiously elsewhere (Luke 2:48). They probably searched where they had camped or lodged in Jerusalem and other familiar places. Yet Jesus does not go to any of these more obvious places so that his parents could find Him easily. Jesus' actions were deliberately neglectful of his parents' desires within their proper sphere of governance.

If Jesus held to Unqualified Headship He should have admitted his wrong in not doing what his parents expected and realized that He can only do God's will for his life through them, as they were the authority over Him, as long as He remained unmarried. However, Jesus did not hold to Unqualified Headship, and the parents interpretation of the circumstances and what they and He should do (leave Jerusalem to go home) was wrong. Jesus, a minor, was not only right, but right in acting upon his Liberty of Conscience before God to do what was right though it went contrary to his parents' understood will.

The principle that qualified the parents' authority over Jesus' actions in this scenario was that Jesus was seeking first the kingdom of God, and he was doing it apart from his parents and his obligation to them. Jesus responds to his mother with a rhetorical question, and says that she should have known that He must seek his Father's will before their will.

Nor is this only lawful for Jesus as he held the messianic office. Jesus' messiahship did not give Him the right to break God's law and sin. Jesus was acting as a human son, though He had a special relation and knowledge of his Father and his will for Him as the messiah. The standards that governed Jesus' actions in this situation are not in principle different from that which governs a daughter, or other minors.

Matt 12

In Matt 12:46-50 Jesus directly disobeys his mother's will in something that would not have been sinful for Him to perform. While Jesus talked with a crowd, his mother and brothers stood at the edge desiring to talk with Him, though not being able to come close. When Jesus is made aware of this he does not perform her desire, instead continues to do what He was doing and makes it a point of illustration for a spiritual lesson. The lesson is something of a rebuke to his mother. His mother was pressing that her close relation gives her the right to speak with him, when so many strangers are taking up his attention. His response is that she is on the same level of relation to Him as these strangers, as the spiritual relation of Christ to his people is greater than that of natural relations. Thus, Christ will continue speaking with the crowd.

If Jesus had held to Unqualified Headship He would have realized that not being married He was still under her authority and that his mother's will takes precedent over everything else that He was doing. Rather, Jesus reads the situation, recognizes that He is an adult and that his obligation to honor his mother is not the same as it was when he was a child, realizes from the teaching of scripture that spiritual things are often more important than natural ties, realizes that his mother's concern is of low importance, that the need of the people in front of Him is of great importance, and He acts before God to seek first God's kingdom instead of his mother's minor desires.

Matt 6, 19

Matt 6:33 says that the principle obligation of every person created by God is to "seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness" before anything else. All

authorities, as the WCF says, and every level of responsibility of persons is to work towards this end. This principle, though not contrary to any authority, or able to dissolve any authority, qualifies all human authority, including patriarchal authority.

Matt 19:29 says, “everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My name’s sake, shall receive a hundredfold, and inherit eternal life.” This passage, unlike (Mt 10:35-38), is not speaking of active persecution of Christians. Rather, it is speaking of Christians voluntarily leaving their families in order to serve Christ. The immediate context is that of Jesus saying that a rich man would have to give up his riches in order to come and follow Christ during His earthly ministry. Peter states that the disciples have left everything to follow Christ, and then asks what they will receive in return.

The circumstance to which this teaching applies is not one where the Christian is forced to leave his or her home. The passage does not mention whether or not the parents are Christian or whether they are consenting to the choice of the individual to leave home. What the passage teaches is that there are circumstances where, in order to serve Christ more freely, an individual must in Liberty of Conscience decide to leave their family, as their obligations to Christ are more important than their family obligations. Parents cannot fully know one’s peculiar nature, circumstances, and specific situational responsibilities. The individual must make the choice. If the individual, in the circumstance of this passage, simply stays home and obeys whatever their parents tell them to do, though they have obeyed their parents, they have not obeyed Christ.

1 Tim. 5:1,2

1 Tim. 5:1,2 says, “Do not rebuke an older man, but exhort him as a father, younger men as brothers, older women as mothers, younger women as sisters, with all purity.” While Paul is writing to Timothy, who is a pastor, these instructions apply generally to all Christians. This passage says that there is a lawful way for a younger person to spiritually exhort an older lady, though she is a wife to another man. The

relationship that the younger person has to the older lady is that they are both Christians who live before the face of God. This relationship exists apart from the older lady's husband, which is why the younger person does not need to go to her husband to spiritually exhort her. If the ladies have relationships which are not always mediated through their husbands, then they have responsibilities and hence obligations to others apart from their husbands, which he does not necessarily have authority over. Neither Paul nor Timothy held to Unqualified Headship, where all relationships and obligations of women are mediated through their husband or father.

Col. 3:20

Colossians 3:20 (see also Eph. 6:1-3) says, "Children, obey your parents in all things, for this is well pleasing to the Lord." Is this qualified in any sense? The Unqualified Headship position admits that this statement is qualified. Though the verse says "all," children do not need to obey their parents if they command them to sin. Nor does it apply to "children" that are married. The Unqualified Headship position holds that the verse does not apply to all "children," nor does it apply to "all" things. They assume however, that it applies to everything else and to everyone that is a child who is not married, whatever their age be.

This statement, though, has a context. The verse before it speaks of husbands and wives, and the verses after it speak of slaves and masters. Different classes of Paul's hearers are being addressed. Does everyone who is not a husband or wife fall under the category of "children"? No. 1 John 2:13-15 gives an exhortation to little children, a different exhortation to young men and another exhortation to fathers. Paul addresses young men and young women directly in Titus 2:4. In 1 Tim. 5:14 Paul directly distinguishes young women from children. Paul cannot be referring to young women who are married, as in 1 Tim. 5:14 he counsels them to get married and to have children. Young women, in contrast to obeying as little children are to do, are to be taught by the older women (Titus 2:4).

Hence older single men and women are not included in Col. 3:20. There is a biblical obligation for little children to obey in all things, yet scripture says to older folk, “be not children in understanding.” (1 Cor. 14:20). While older youth must give honor to their parents, this scripture does it make it sinful if they do not obey their parents in every last thing in every circumstance.

When one cannot appeal to a higher patriarchal authority, one may still appeal to the “One God and Father of all” (Eph. 4:6), grounded in their Liberty of Conscience (1 Sam. 20:3,4,23,42; 25:26). In such a case, one is not acting on one’s own authority, or rebelling against lawful authority, but is acting upon the authority of God in resisting unlawful authority, the father being subject to God’s authority.

Relation of Spheres of Authority

God-ordained civil, ecclesiastical and patriarchal authority have equal authority with separate jurisdictions. One is not above or below the other, though persons are (normally) subject to them all. The president is subject to honor his father and subject to the spiritual discipline of his elders. An elder is subject to the civil discipline of the president and must honor his father. A father is subject to the civil discipline of the president and the spiritual discipline of his elders.

As the persons of the family of a father are all members of Christ's church, the elders' authority extends over all of them and over the spiritual/moral life of the family. A person, fathers included, can in principle be disciplined for any sin, though discipline need not ensue for every sin. Disciplinable sins typically include those that are apparent, prominent and troubling, especially those that are aggravated and severe. It is right, and necessary in order to protect the innocent, that elders exhort and discipline a father who unjustly withholds his daughter from marrying a godly man. If unrepentance ensued, such a father should be excommunicated as he has severed himself from communion with Christ for his unrepentant sin. The church would then declare that the young man and daughter could be married.

This is not to place the authority of the church above the authority of the father. The father did not have authority to sinfully and aggravatingly withhold his daughter from a godly marriage. Nor was it the authority of the church that gave the daughter the right to marry. The daughter has the God-given right of Liberty of Conscience to lawfully pursue a godly marriage of which her father has no authority to forbid upon unjust grounds. As she marries herself to her husband, by his and her vows, the church and state recognize, confirm and bless this lawfully constituted marriage. Though the father believes that the marriage is not lawfully constituted because of an Unqualified Headship view of Numbers 30, the church and state recognize, upon Biblical grounds,

discerning God's will, that the marriage is lawfully constituted, which confirms the daughter's Liberty of Conscience in deciding to marry.

It should be noted that engagement vows before witnesses are a binding obligation to marry, and cannot be lawfully broken except in the event of adultery, abandonment or death (Mt. 1:18,19). In marriage, it is God that joins the people to be "one flesh" (that is, one person), and this relation cannot be lawfully severed except by adultery, abandonment, or death. If the two persons sinned in the process of marrying each other, the two persons remain married, though they should repent of their sins when made aware of them.

Lawful Resistance

Scripture spells out how inferiors are to resist unlawful authority under normal circumstances. The first step is that they are to respectfully, verbally protest and give reasons for their conviction of conscience (if possible from scripture), rebuking if necessary the authority as a father (Mt. 12:2,3; 15:2,3; 26:20,21; 1 Tim. 5:1,2; Jude 8,9). It is lawful to plead our own case if it is just (John 19-23). It is also lawful at times to be silent and unrevealing of information when asked by superiors (Matt 27:12-14; John 19:9). The second step is to use the normal means of appeal to other authorities to intercede and plead your cause (Ex. 18:26; Matt 18:15-20). The third step, if one still does not have the liberty to perform one's duty before God, is flight (Matt 10:23; 12:14-15; Acts 14:5,6)

If God commands one to do something, it implies doing all the necessary things in order to do what He has said (Larger Catechism, #99). Likewise, if it is lawful to resist at a given point, it is lawful to do everything necessary in order to resist at that point (LC, #99). That is, if a minor has a right to act upon conscience before God upon a great point, the minor is not obliged to obey the father on smaller points which would prevent the minor from carrying out the greater point. If such were not the case, a father could oblige a minor at many smaller points in order to cut off the means of the minor to obey God at the greater point.

The world is full of circumstances that are not normal, and the Bible is full of approved examples of lawful resistance where not all the normal means of resistance are exercised. The proper means of resistance in each case must be weighed upon its own peculiar circumstances. Irregular circumstances are not to prevent our obedience to God. For instance, it does not seem necessary in America to appeal a father's disapproval of his daughter's desire to marry a particular person to the civil courts. In most states, if the daughter is over sixteen years of age, she has the legal right to marry without her father's

consent, and the state implicitly gives its approval as the state will uphold the marriage in court. In complex ecclesiastical situations which are very irregular, and may at points be dubious, it is not clear that all of the normal procedures are pre-requisite to lawful resistance by the individuals involved. The foundation that lawful resistance rests upon is not human authorities' recognition and approval of one's cause, but lawful resistance by individuals rests upon the approval of God, to which human authorities are to give their confirmation.

It is clear that in a lawful marriage it is God, and no human authority, that joins the two persons to be one person, upon their vows. Matt 19:6 says that it is God that joins the parties in marriage: "What God has joined together, let no man separate." In such a case where a daughter disobeys her father in order to marry a man (upon just grounds), the father may in his sphere declare that he does not recognize the vow and that the two are living in fornication. Yet if God approve of the marriage, then the father's pronouncement does nothing to annul it, as it is God that joins the two together in marriage upon His own authority. The church and state would then recognize what God has joined together. If no human authority recognizes the lawful marriage, yet God atill does, and the marriage stands in His courts before His eyes.

It may be complained by the father that the minors involved did not go through all the normal means of resistance, the father giving his own ill interpretation of the events (Gen. 31:26-28), but God will uphold the righteous nonetheless (Gen. 31:24,29,42) and their sufferings (Gen. 31:36-42). When human parties, during the process of resistance, cannot be reconciled, each believing that they are justified in their case, they must part, leaving the matter for God to judge: "May God judge between us," (Gen. 31:53). Though all parties have their sins involved in the situation, yet God still makes a difference between those with a righteous cause and those who act unrighteously. Though Job had many sins (Job 38:2;40:4;42:6), yet God upholds him in his cause and condemns his friends (Job 42:7,8). The psalmist had many sins which needed God's mercy (Ps. 26:11), yet he could plead his righteous cause, that God would act on his behalf and uphold him

in it: “Judge me O Lord; for I have walked in my integrity. I have trusted also in the Lord; therefore I shall not slide,” (Ps. 26:1).

Conclusion

The father's authority, specifically with regards to preventing his daughter from a godly marriage, is qualified by other principles of scripture as they apply to the providential circumstances. A father's disapproval of such a marriage, due to the imposition of unreasonable conditions, sinful character patterns, a gross misunderstanding of the situation and the application of biblical principles to it, may not necessarily be binding, especially with regards to the daughter's age, unique natural and spiritual capacity, and her obligation to serve Christ in Liberty of Conscience. In the words of the Scottish First Book of Discipline and the Westminster Directory of Public Worship, the father, in such a situation, needs a "just cause" to prohibit the lawful marriage.

"And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."

-John 8:32