
Paul and the Use of Authority

Children, Slaves, and Wives

Introduction

A great deal of the burden that society places on men has to do with the perception that "real men" have control and authority over other people. A great deal of the conflict over what women should or shouldn't do in the church has to do with debates over who should have control and authority over other people. A great deal of the debate over the relationship between men and women in marriage has to do with who should have control and authority over each other.

But Jesus taught that Christians were not to exercise control and authority over other people. In this study we will see how the Apostle Paul applies Jesus' teaching against the use of earthly authority to family relationships. We start with the ultimate authority-based relationship: Slavery.

Paul and Slavery

In the time of Jesus, the Roman Empire governed all of Europe, the Mediterranean, and the Middle East. Paul wrote his letters to people who lived in the Roman Empire. Roman society was organized around a class of powerful men who controlled large numbers of other people – their own wives, children, and slaves. In fact, the English word "family" comes from the Latin word that referred to a man's household, including his slaves. More than one third of the population of Greece, Italy and cities such as Corinth were slaves, with another third former slaves. Understanding what Paul says about submission in the family requires us to first look at how Paul says slaves should be treated. Then we will read what Paul says to children, then his instructions to wives.

Read 1 Cor. 7:21-23

1. In the Roman world, people might be born into slavery, but they might also have become a slave by selling themselves in order to pay debts, to acquire one of the high-status jobs that could only be held by a slave, to become a Roman citizen (freed slaves of Roman citizens became citizens themselves), or simply to escape poverty.

What does Paul say about slavery in these verses?

He says slave vs. free is not important to God, but "If you can gain your freedom, do so" and "Don't become slaves of men."

Read 1 Timothy 1:9-11

2. With whom does Paul group slave traders? (Your translation may say "man stealers" or "kidnappers" instead of "slave traders" in verse 10, but presumably the idea here is of someone who enslaves others.)

With murderers, liars, those who kill their parents, etc.

Read Philemon vs. 8-21

3. Philemon's slave, Onesimus, has apparently run away to be with Paul. Paul sends him back to Philemon with this letter. Although Paul does not make any demands on Philemon, read what Paul is suggesting. What is Paul asking Philemon to do?

Free Onesimus and accept him back as a brother in Christ.

4. From these verses, does it appear that Paul approves of slavery?

Read Eph. 6: 5-8

5. Nonetheless, how does Paul tell slaves to behave? List the verbs in Eph. 6:5-8 that describe what they are to do.

Obey, fear (respect), be sincere. Teachers, if you have a chalk board or paper, write "slaves" at the top and list these behaviors under it. See the summary at the end of this study for more directions.

Children and Parents

Read Ephesians 6:1-3

6. What does Paul ask of children? Again, list the verbs that describe what they are to do.

Obey and honor **both** parents. Teachers – Write “children” next to slaves and list their verbs.

Husband and Wife

Read Ephesians 5:22-24, 33

7. What does Paul ask of wives? Once again, list the verbs.

Submit, respect. Teachers – Write “wives” next to “children” and list what they are to do.

8. What is the difference between what wives are asked to do and what is asked of children and slaves?

Wives are asked to “submit” rather than to “obey.” We will see in a later study that the Greek word translated “submit” did not mean to obey.

Masters, Fathers, and Husbands

The things Paul says to slaves, wives, and children, read all by themselves, makes it appear that he agrees with the Roman customs and rules. His advice to slaves, children and wives, however, is interspersed with instructions to husbands, fathers, and masters, none of which is the least supportive of what was understood to be the proper authority structure of the Roman family:

Ephesians 5:21-6:9: "Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ..."

Wives, be subject to your husbands, as to the Lord.

Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.

Slaves, be obedient to those who are your earthly masters...serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord...

Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her...

Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger; instead, bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord

Masters, do the same to them, and forbear threatening, knowing that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and that there is no partiality with him.

Read Ephesians 6: 9

9. How does Paul expect masters to treat their slaves?

To "do the same" – serve their slaves! Forbear threatening, and remember that God doesn't acknowledge any superior status on the part of masters over slaves. Teacher – Write "masters" under the "slave" section and list the class' response.

Read Ephesians 6: 4

10. What does Paul ask of fathers?

Don't exploit their children (exasperate or provoke them to anger.) Remember that in the fallen world, men wanted children so that they would serve their fathers. Teachers – Write "Fathers" under the children's section and capture this information.

11. For what are fathers to use their children's obedience?

To bring them up in the ways of the Lord.

Read Ephesians 5: 25-31

12. What does Paul ask of husbands?

Love their wives as their own selves; give up their selves for their wives; to nourish and tenderly care for them. Teachers: Write "Husbands" under the "Wives" section, etc.

13. Look at the verbs you listed for slaves and masters, wives and husbands, and children and parents. In your opinion, was Paul telling men they had the right to exercise authority over their families?

No – he was telling them that they could not use the power given them by Roman law to threaten, coerce or dominate their slaves, children or wives.

Paul's advice to slaves, children and wives recognized that the worldly authority given to men was undeniable and unavoidable. All of these people were bound together by Roman law. But rather than telling Christian men that their responsibility is to dominate their families, or that

they have a right to use them for their own purposes, Paul told them how Christians deal with the authority given to them by their culture. He said, If you get to be the boss, be the boss the way Jesus was:

"...the only way in which lordship can be defined properly...within the Christian community is the way in which Jesus carries it out....Jesus fills up the entire lordship space, doesn't allow anybody else in there, and then comes down and operates out of the servant space. He invites all of the rest us to join him there, male and female." (S. Scott Bartchy, audio tape, "Jesus, Power, and Gender Roles" and accompanying handout.)

The central expression of Christian commitment is the voluntary surrender of privilege. If society makes you a lord, the Christian (and Pauline) response is to instead be a servant.

Personal Applications

14. In what ways do these ideas about how a Christian should handle power affect you personally?

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Slaves	Children	Wives
Obey	Obey	Submit themselves
Serve wholeheartedly	Honor	Respect
Respect		
Be sincere		
Masters	Fathers	Husbands
Do the same to the slaves	Don't exasperate	Love
Don't threaten	Train and instruct in the Lord	Sacrifice self interest
Remember God doesn't acknowledge masters' superior status		Nourish and care

The Concept of Submission in the Writing of Paul

Introduction

One aspect of Paul's writings that is troubling to modern readers is his admonition that wives practice "submission". This study examines how his advice on "submission" fits with the notion that Christians are not to hold authority over each other.

Submission

Read Ephesians 5:22 and Col. 3:18

"Wives, be subject to your husbands, as to the Lord." (Eph. 5:22)

"Wives, be subject to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord." (Col 3:18.)

1. How have these passages usually been understood?

To teach that woman should be below her husband in marriage. These verses have also been used to tell women that they must submit to their husbands' violence against them. And because the woman was supposed to be below her husband, these verses have been used to argue that she must be below all men in the church as well.

Part of the problem we have in understanding Paul is that the word "submission" or "subjection" has bad meanings in English. In English, a submissive person is thought of as docile, inferior, meek, weak, quiet, numb, without authority, in need of guidance, like a child or as someone who has given up in despair.

2. Does "submissive" have good or bad meanings in your local language?

The way we use the word translated “submit” or “be subject to” in English is not the same as the way Paul used it. The New Testament writings advised all kinds of people to “submit themselves”: Christians to their leaders (Hebrew 13:17; “Obey your leaders and submit to their authority”) and to worldly authority (1 Peter 2:13; “Submit yourselves for the Lord’s sake to every authority instituted among men...”, Titus 3:1; “Remind the people to be subject to rulers and authorities...” and Romans 13:1; “Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities...”); younger people to their elders (1 Peter 5:5; “Young men, in the same way be submissive to those who are older. All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another...”); slaves to masters (1 Pet 2:18; “Slaves, submit yourselves to your masters with all respect.”); Christians to each other (Eph. 5:21; “Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ”) and to God (James 4:7; “Submit yourselves, then, to God.”); and the church to Christ (Eph 5:24 “Now as the church submits to Christ...”).

But in none of these cases does “submit yourself” imply “obedience,” giving up, changing one’s opinion to agree with someone else’s, or acting from a position of weakness (Walters, 1997; Kittel, 1964). That is not what the word meant. When Paul tells people to “submit” or “subject themselves” to other people, he is not telling them to allow themselves to be trampled under foot or sat on. He is telling them to stop trying to trample or sit on other people themselves.

What Paul tells us here is the same as when he writes that Christians should “value other people as better than yourselves” (Phil. 2:3). **Whenever Paul writes that someone should “submit themselves” to someone else, he is reminding us of Jesus’ teachings that Christian are not to participate in the worldly struggle for power and prestige.**

Submit to One Another

“Wives, submit to your husbands” (Eph. 5:22) is often quoted as if it were a free-standing text. In truth, it is not even a complete sentence, let alone a complete thought. Although most modern translations make a break between verse 21 and verse 22, they are part of the same sentence. Verse 22 doesn’t even contain a verb, but implicitly “borrows” its verb from the beginning of the sentence in verse 21:

20 always and for everything giving thanks in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God the Father, 21 being submitted to one another out of reverence for Christ, 22 wives, to your husbands as to the Lord.

Paul’s advice for wifely submission cannot be seen apart from his teaching that **everyone** in the family should “submit to each other” out of reverence for Christ. Why out of reverence for Christ? Because this is what Jesus did, always turning away the worldly power that was offered him in order to serve us in love. In submitting to each other, we act as Jesus did and so honor him.

A further confusion is the meaning of “as to the Lord.” Often we read this as if women are to submit to their husbands as if their husbands were God. The other passage where Paul addresses wives clarifies this understanding: “Wives, be subject to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord.” (Col 3:18.) Wives are to be subject to their husbands as part of their reverence for the Lord – not as if their husbands *were* the Lord.

4. How does this understanding of submission change the way you read this passage? (Don't keep confused by the use of the word “head” here – we will explain that in the next study.)

5. Through the ages, men have been taught that they have a duty to actively subject rebellious wives and children. Philosophers urged Greek and Roman men to “rule” their wives. The social pressure on men to be masterful also encourages this kind of behavior. However in the New Testament, the only one who actively "subjects" things to himself is Christ in union with the Church, and that only to turn them over to God (*Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*).

"The word authority is never used in the New Testament to describe any aspect of the husband/wife relationship (except in 1 Corinthians 7:4). Husbands are never instructed to exercise authority over their wives. Wives are never commanded to obey their husbands or to submit to the authority of their husbands, and no threat ever accompanies the injunction for wives to submit to their husbands." (Gilbert Bilezikian, 1985, pp. 167-168.)

Read 1 Cor. 7:4

6. This is the only time authority is used to describe an aspect of the husband/wife relationship. To whom does Paul attribute authority in this passage? (Imagine what a radical saying this must have been in Paul's time.)

Personal Applications

7. Is there any way in which your personal relationships would be changed if both husband and wife submitted themselves to each other?

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Paul and “Headship”

Introduction

Another problem in understanding what Paul taught about Christian marriage is his use of the word “head” to describe a husband’s relationship to his wife. Once again, approaching scripture with the focus on self-giving service leads to a very different understanding of these verses than the traditional one.

“For the husband is the head...”

Read Ephesians 5:20-24:

20 always and for everything giving thanks in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God the Father, 21 being submitted to one another out of reverence for Christ, 22 wives, to your husbands as to the Lord. 23 For the husband is the head of the wife just as Christ is the head of the Church, He is Himself the Savior of the body. 24 Just as the church is subject to Christ, so also wives ought to be, in everything, to their husbands.

and 1 Corinthians 11:3:

The head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God.

1. What do people usually understand “head” to mean in this passage?

Boss, superior, master, leader, servant leader, authority, the one in charge, the one in front, the one on top, the coordinator, etc.

2. How have these verses been understood traditionally to define the relationship between husband and wife?

People will say a variety of things here. In other studies, comments have included: Men are the brains, women are the heart. The husband is over the wife. Husbands own us. Women have to do what men tell them to do. The husband is the leader of the relationship. At the extreme: Man is the only one who can have a relationship with God – women can only have a relationship with her husband. Traditionally, these verses have been used to justify the notion of a Biblically ordained “chain of command” with this order of dominance: God, husband, wife, children.

In some languages, the word “head” has this meaning of “leader,” “boss,” or “superior authority.” The word that Paul used, however, **did NOT have any of these meanings.**

The word that Paul used, *kephale* (kef-ah-LAY) refers to the thing physically at the top of an object, such as the “head” of a column, or a fountainhead. Its most common use is simply the body part; a person’s head. Rarely, it could mean “source,” as in the head of a river. It was also a military term for the soldier that was first into battle – not the general, but the one in the position of greatest risk. When Paul wrote, *kephale* never meant “authority over,” leader, boss, chief or ruler.

In fact, when New Testament writers meant to say “leader” or “ruler”, they used the word *arche*. A related word is *archon*, which referred to a magistrate, chief, prince, or ruler. If a writer meant “authority” in general, he might use the word *exousia*. Other words Paul could have used (but didn’t) include *kyrios* (lord) or *despotis* (also translated “lord” or as “head of the household.”)

None of these words is the one used by Paul to refer to the relationship between husband and wife in Ephesians 5 or 1 Cor. 11. As we explore the Bible further we will see that for a husband to be the “head” of his wife is a wonderful thing – but Paul did not intend his use of the word “head” to mean that a man should hold any kind of leadership or power over his wife.

“...as Christ is the head of the Church...”

Man is referred to as “head” of woman only twice in the New Testament (Eph. 5:20-24 and 1 Cor. 11:3), but Christ is called the head of the Church several times. Ephesians 5 specifically makes an analogy between man and Christ as head, saying, “man is head of the woman as Christ is the head of the Church.” Understanding what it means for Christ

to be head of the church should greatly expand our understanding of Paul's head/body metaphor in marriage.

Ephesians 1:9-10 uses a related word that clarifies what Paul means by this metaphor.

Read Ephesians 1:9-10

*For he (God) has made known to us in all wisdom and insight the mystery of his will, according to his purpose which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to **unite** all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. (RSV)*

The word translated "unite," *anakephalaio* ("bring together" in the NIV) is literally, "to head up." The word is translated as "to sum up," "to unite," or "bring several things together in one." (See the *kephale* in *anakephalaio*?)

3. Keeping in mind the meaning of the "head" as someone who "brings things together in one," consider the following verses about the Christ.

*Colossians 1:17-18: "He is before all things, and **in him all things hold together**, and he is the **head of the body**, the church;"*

*Col. 2: 19 (Paul is speaking of someone pursued "idle notions":) He has lost connection with the **head, from whom the whole body, supported and held together by its ligaments and sinews, grows as God causes it to grow.**"*

*Ephesians 4:15 (Paul tells us that in Christ we are no longer infants, blown here and there:) "Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the **head**, that is, Christ. From him the **whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.**"*

*Ephesians 1:22 "And God placed (subjected) all things under his feet and appointed him to be **head** over everything for the church, which is his body, **the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.**"*

*Col. 2:9-10 "For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, and you have been given **fullness** in Christ, who is the **head** (kephale) over every rule (arche) and authority..."*

4. What are the common elements in these verses?

The head holding or bringing things together; head and body together = fullness or completion.

Ephesians 1:22 is particularly important in our attempt to understand the difference between “head” as ruler and “head” as one who unites. In this verse, Christ is one with the church, which is his **body** and his **fullness**, and the things that are subjected to Christ are under his *feet*, not his head. **Thus the head does not subjugate, dominate or rule the body but reigns together in unity with it.** (Bilezikian, 1985):

*Ephesians 1:22 “And God placed (subjected) all things under his feet and appointed him to be **head** over everything for the church, which is his body, **the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.**”*

Greek scholar Richard Cervin wrote, "What then does Paul mean by his use of *head* in his letters? He does not mean 'authority over' as the traditionalists assert, nor does he mean 'source' as the egalitarians assert. I think he is merely employing a head-body metaphor."

Head + Body = One flesh

5. How does translating *kephale* (head) as something like “creator of unity,” (two individuals coming together in one) instead of “authority over” help our understanding of Ephesians 5:20-33? As you read this passage, note how Paul uses the head/body metaphor.

20 always and for everything giving thanks in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God the Father, 21 being submitted to one another out of reverence for Christ, 22 wives, to your husbands as to the Lord. 23 For the husband is the *creator of unity (kephale, head)* with the wife just as Christ is the *creator of unity (kephale, head)* of the Church, He is Himself the preserver of the **body**. 24 Just as the church is subject to Christ, so also wives ought to be, in everything, to their husbands.”

25 Husbands, love your wives, as Christ also loved the church and gave himself up on behalf of it, 26 in order that he might sanctify it, cleansing it with the washing of water by the word, 27 so as to present the church to himself glorious, without a spot or wrinkle or anything of the kind, but in order that it might be holy and without blemish. 28 So ought also husbands to love their wives as their own **bodies**. He who loves his wife loves himself. 29 For no one ever hates his own **flesh**, but he nourishes and cherishes, as also Christ the church, 30 because we are members of his **body**. 31 "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and shall cleave to his wife, and the two will become **one flesh**." 32 This is a great mystery, but I speak as to Christ and as to the church. 33 Nevertheless each of you should love his wife as himself and a wife should respect her husband.

6. What does it mean for a couple to seek unity in with each other? Does this give “being subject” to each other a clearer meaning? How would such a marriage differ from one in which one or both partners are trying to be the one who is the boss?

7. What effect would it have on a relationship to have the **husband** as the one seeking unity and completion within the marriage?

At the time when Paul wrote, nurturing care was expected of women. A wife had to take her husband's desires into account – it was her role in life. For the husband to seek unity with his wife was not the cultural norm. To be the “head” is not a privilege but a sacrifice, requiring a man to put his wife's needs at least on a level with his own. Paul asked men to imitate Jesus, who in his role as head, “gave himself up for the church.”

8. Another problem we sometimes have in understanding what Paul was saying is his statement that wives must “respect” their husbands. Imagine the following scenario: A husband gives up his worldly right to be his wife's ruler, and seeks not to rule or lead but to be in unity with her. Is it possible that his wife might have difficulty respecting him in that new role? How hard would it be for a husband to act as Jesus did if his wife did not respect him for doing so?

But Why Not, “The Husband is the Foot...”?

If Paul means for man and woman together to be equal and united, the question arises of why the husband is named as the head, rather than the body, or the foot, or heart. Cervin suggests Paul uses “head” to suggest pre-eminence – going first. According to him, the husband is the first among servants.

We would take this suggestion even further. Service was expected of women. A wife's self-sacrifice had no necessarily Christian meaning, as it was her role in life. Thus for a couple to make their relationship one of unity, the husband had to be the head – the first to surrender privilege – because the woman had no authority to give up. For the husband, such service was a sacrifice, probably of everything a man had been raised to expect in life. This parallels Paul's statement that Jesus, as head of the church, “gave

himself up for her." When a man behaved in the way Paul suggests, it undoubtedly came solely from Christian love.

"Because man continues to love (his wife) sacrificially as his own body in marriage, in return a Christian wife binds herself to her husband in a similar relationship of servant submission that expresses their oneness. The imposition of authority structure upon this exquisite balance of reciprocity would paganize the marriage relationship and make the Christ/church paradigm irrelevant to it." (p. 161)
"...submission is the proper response to servanthood. It is the very meaning of mutual submission." (Gilbert Bilezikian,, 1985, p. 159)

Personal Applications

9. How does this understanding of what is Paul saying about "headship" within Christian marriage enrich or challenge your own relationship?

10. Husbands, how can you be more like Jesus in creating unity with your wife?

Wives, how can you show greater respect for your husband as he follows Christ?

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Paul and the Problem Passages: “Let the women be silent”

Introduction

Despite evidence that Paul was as concerned about freeing women as Jesus, his championship of women has often been lost because of a few “problem” passages. I Corinthians 14:34-35, which seems to demand that women not speak in the churches, is one such passage.

“For they are not permitted to speak...”

Read I Corinthians 14:34-35:

“The women should keep silence in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be subordinate, as even the law says. If there is anything they desire to know, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for women to speak in church.”

1. How have these verses been used traditionally to define women's roles in the churches?

Although no church that I know of ever enforced this rule absolutely (that is, outlawed any speech by women at all), this is often used to prohibit formal speech by women – sermons, prayers, or teaching.

John Temple Bristow, in *What Paul Really Said About Women*, notes that the word translated “speak,” *laleo*, means “talk.” “If someone wished to write in Greek the sentence, ‘Please do not talk during the prayers,’ the verb would have to be *laleo*. And since Paul’s instructions were given to a congregation troubled with tumult and discord during the worship services, he told the women not to *laleo* – that is, not to converse.” (p. 63) He quotes a story told by Kari Torjesen Malcolm, whose parents were missionaries in China:

“My mother used to compare the situation in Corinth to the one she and my father faced in northern China. Back in the 1920s when they

were first to bring God's message to that forgotten area, they found women with bound feet who seldom left their homes and who, unlike the men, had never in their whole lives attended a public meeting or a class. They had never been told as little girls, 'now you must sit still and listen to the teacher.' Their only concept of an assembly was a family feast where everyone talked at once.

"When these women came to my parents' church and gathered on the women's side of the sanctuary, they thought this was a chance to catch up on the news with their neighbors and to ask questions about the story of Jesus they were hearing. Needless to say, along with babies crying and toddlers running about, the women's section got rather noisy! Add to that the temptation for the women to shout questions to their husbands across the aisle, and you can imagine the chaos. As my mother patiently tried to tell the women that they should listen first and chitchat or ask questions later, she would mutter under her breath, 'Just like Corinth; it just couldn't be more like Corinth.'"

Bristow continues: "Paul approved of women praying and prophesying during worship. He insisted that men and women should be together, and that in Christ they are one. But these were new and radical ideas to both Jew and Gentile. In practice, sexual equality among Christians led to a disregard for orderliness and courtesy during worship, especially on the part of women who were unaccustomed to listening to public speakers or to participating in public worship. To such women, Paul said, 'Hush up.'" (p. 64)

Other scholars, however, point out that the word used in 1 Corinthians 14 commanded women not just to be quiet, but "silent." "[W]omen are reduced to absolute silence in the church," writes Gilbert Bilezikian in *Beyond Sex Roles*. "To leave no doubt regarding the meaning of the command for women to 'keep silence in the church,' it is also stated in the form of its negative corollary, 'they are not permitted to speak.' The twice-repeated use of the basic verb for oral communication *to speak* extends the range of the prohibition to any form of articulate expression. It applies to all manners of speech such as prayer, prophecy, tongues, interpretation, evaluation, teaching, and even to the whisper of women who might be tempted to ask their husbands a question during the congregational worship."

2. Is there any evidence that Paul himself demanded absolute silence from women?

None at all. In his same letter, Paul wrote approvingly of women praying and prophesying in church. (1 Cor. 11) Many of the "churches" were simply small groups meeting in homes. It would have been absurd to literally refuse to allow women to speak in their own homes.

So what is going on here? Let us look at some of the laws to which Paul may have been referring in verse 34: "Out of respect to the congregation, a woman should not herself read in the law." "It is a shame for a woman to let her voice be heard among men." "The

voice of a woman is filthy nakedness." "Let the words of the law be burned rather than committed to women."

But these "laws" come not from the Bible, but from Jewish oral traditions, later written down in such documents as the Mishnah and the Talmud. There were no Old Testament laws that limited women's speech.

These laws cannot describe what Paul really thought. It was not like Paul to use the laws and traditions of the Jews "as a final authority on a matter of controversy in the church. He spent a large share of energy battling against these very 'traditions' of the Jews." (Katherine Bushnell, 1923, p. 201)

What!

Read the passage again, this time including the next verse, I Corinthians 14:36

"The women should keep silence in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be subordinate, as even the law says. If there is anything they desire to know, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for women to speak in church.

"What! Did the word of God originate with you, or are you the only ones it has reached?" (1 Cor. 14:36)

"The grammatical structure of this verse indicates a sharp break with the preceding statement....Recent scholarship has called attention to the disjunctive force of the particle e ["What!"] that precedes it. A colloquial equivalent of such as "Bunk!" instead of "What!" would come close to rendering the effect of dissociation between the prohibition statement (vv. 33-35) and Paul's response to it in verse 36" (Bilezikian, 1985, pp. 151-152).

6. In other words, Paul writes the words in verses 34 and 35, calls what it says "bunk" (nonsense), then asks his readers if God has given special knowledge to them alone. To understand what is going on in these verses, look to the wider context of 1 Corinthians: (Note: There were no quotations marks in NT Greek.)

6:12:

10:23:

6:13:

8:8:

7:1:

15:35-36

7. What is the pattern here? Do verses 14:34-36 follow the same pattern?

I Corinthians is a letter Paul wrote in response to a letter from the Corinthian church. In these verses, he quoted back to them things they wrote initially, then responded to their statements. 1 Cor. 14:34-36 follow the same pattern.

"We should be ready to suspect Paul is making a quotation from the letter addressed to him by the Corinthians whenever he alludes to their knowledge, or when any statement stands in marked contrast either with the immediate context or with Paul's known views." (Professor Sir William Ramsay, quoted in Bushnell, p. 205).

8. Let's look at this passage (verses 34 and 35) to see if it meets Ramsay's criteria for quotation rather than being Paul's own opinion.

Does Paul allude to their knowledge?

Yes, he cites the "law."

Does the statement stand in marked contrast with the immediate context?

Yes, Paul's response to the new imposition of an old, non-Christian rule was an emphatic "What!"

Does the statement stand in marked contrast with Paul's known views?

Yes. Paul never supported the Jewish oral traditions known as the "law." Further, later in this same letter Paul writes with approval about women speaking in the church.

Furthermore, following this disjunctive "What!" Paul switches pronouns, from "they," the women being forbidden to speak, to the second-person masculine in verse 36 – "Did the word of God originate with you (masculine)? Or are you (masculine) the only people it has reached?" (NIV) This passage has traditionally been understood to be a rebuke to the noisy women, but if that is the case, why shift pronouns? Why not continue with "they"? It is more likely that Paul is correcting those who dared propose this new regulation:

"The two clauses of verse 36 may be paraphrased: 'Since when have you become the source of divine revelation so that you make your own rules? Or are you the exclusive recipients of a divine revelation that the rest of us should know about?'" (Bilezikian, pp. 151-152)

9. What, then, is Paul really saying in 1 Corinthians 14: 33-38?

That women should be allowed to speak in Church. This understanding of 1 Cor. 14:33-38 is a sort of exception that proves the rule: Paul writes something that seems contrary to our position that he believed in equality – then we find evidence that not only didn't he write the passage, he was completely opposed to it.

"Just Like Corinth"

Some scholars believe that 1 Cor. 14:33-38 is an interpolation – a passage added later by someone besides the original author – both because these statements makes little sense as coming from Paul, and because they seem to break the flow of the discussion before and after it, which is about speaking in tongues in an orderly manner. But if Corinth was the wild place that Kari Torjesen Malcolm's story suggests, it makes sense that Paul would address this issue here. Perhaps this is what was going on: The church in Corinth was having problems keeping an orderly service. One group of people suggested that the problem might be solved if the women were told to shut up. Paul answers their questions about speaking in tongues in the first part of chapter 14 and suggests some guidelines for keeping things under control (vs. 27-33), then rebukes their suggestion about silencing the women, because silencing women is contrary to God's will. He then goes on to say, "Therefore, my brothers and sisters, be eager to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues. But everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way" (vs. 39-40). Seen in this light, the "problem passage" is not out of place at all.

Personal Applications

10. Do you know anyone (including yourself) whose ministry has been hampered by the traditional interpretation of these verses? How might you encourage that person?

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Authority Over Their Own Heads

Another Exception that Proves the Rule?

Introduction

1 Corinthians 11:1-16 is another passage in the writings of Paul that has been used to limit the ministry of women in the church and family. This discussion of whether or not women should cover their heads while praying and prophesying is, as Leonard Swidler wrote, “a notoriously difficult passage to understand, so much so that scholars often debate what is even a correct translation.” Some of the lines of reasoning Paul seemed to be using don’t make much sense either to modern Christians – egalitarians or traditionalist – or in its original context.

Few Christian denominations require women to cover their heads in church anymore, and so this study may not seem relevant to modern Christians. This is still an important passage, however, because it is used to justify both hierarchy in marriage (vs. 3) and the so-called biblical “order of creation” (vs. 7-9) – both ideas used to argue that God wills that woman be subordinated to man. Further, the statement that “woman is the glory of man” was used historically to argue that only man was created in God’s image.

This is an exciting passage because when we pull together the threads already presented in these studies, we find that what Paul is saying here is quite the opposite of what it has often been interpreted to mean.

“A Really Weird Passage”

Read 1 Corinthians 11:2-16

1. Which parts of this passage support the egalitarian position?

The discussion about whether women should wear head covering while praying and prophesying assumes that women should speak and teach in church. Also, vs. 11-12 is a strong statement of the mutual dependence of man and woman.

Remember this passage is in 1 Corinthians, a letter Paul wrote in response to a letter from the Corinthians, and that there were no quotation marks in Greek. Bruce Fleming and other scholars think that vs. 4-6 is another case where Paul is repeating to the Corinthians a statement that they had written to him earlier, or, in this case, is quoting back to them an argument for women's head coverings with which the Corinthians were contending. These verses are reasonable as a quote, since they make no sense otherwise. For instance, verse 4 states that a man praying or prophesying with his head covered dishonored his head – but neither Jewish, Roman, nor Greek cultures (and the congregation at Corinth would have been a mixture of all three) thought men's head coverings were a problem either in or out of worship (Massey, p. 114). In fact, the Old Testament law required Hebrew priests to wear an elaborate headdress on holy occasions. Verse 5 states that it is shameful for a woman to pray or prophesy with her head uncovered, but neither Roman nor Greek religions required women to cover their heads in worship, and if Jewish women in Corinth wore veils on the street, they probably took them off when they came into the synagogue. Further, Christian women did not cover their heads until Tertullian began pushing for the practice at the end of the second century: Massey states that Tertullian “alludes to the former customs, doubtless in the previous generation, in which the matter of veiling was left entirely to the individual, just as it was her choice to marry....” (p. 112.)

2. If you don't think these verses are a quotation of an argument made for why women should cover their heads in worship, how might you make sense of this passage otherwise?

I don't know what the right answer is here. Maybe Paul really did want women to cover their heads, perhaps so as not to give offense to outsiders, as he tells believers in 1 Cor. 10: 28 not to eat meat sacrificed to idols if an unbeliever points it out to them. The point here is not that it is wrong to eat the meat (in verse 25 and 29, Paul tells them it's fine) or that going covered or uncovered means anything to God, but that Christians should not confuse non-believers. Larry Iannaccone says this is just a really weird passage and everyone, including Paul, is entitled to say things occasionally that no longer make sense to us.

If verses 4-6 are indeed Paul quoting a Corinthian idea back to them, what follows is not justification for treating women differently than men, but Paul's argument against that statement. As you read the next verses, remember that the word translated “head” in verse 3 does not mean “authority” but is instead a metaphor of oneness. Turn around the traditional assumption that Paul's reference to woman's source in man is a sign that she is inferior (only in man's image, not God's) and see what happens to this mysterious passage.

Reread 1 Corinthians 11: 2-8

“For a man indeed ought not cover his head, being the image and glory of God – but woman is the glory of man. For man didn't come from woman,

but woman came from man; and indeed man was not created for the sake of the woman, but woman because of the man.”

3. Remember our study of Genesis 2. What did the woman’s creation out of the man’s flesh mean? Did the fact that woman was created because of man’s need imply that she was inferior to him?
4. To be something’s glory is to be what magnifies it, what makes it great. Would you like to be called the “glory” of your family? Of your country?

Paul is saying here that yes, man is the glory of God, and since woman is the glory of man, she is just as worthy as he is. She was created to be one with him and to magnify him. For the same reason that a man prays with his head uncovered, a woman is free from legalistic requirements to cover her head (Fleming).

Read 1 Corinthians 11:10

“Therefore a woman ought to have authority over her head...”

This verse has been understood to mean that women should have someone in authority over her. The veil is the symbol of that authority, that is, a sign that she is in submission to someone else. Despite how many translations read, however, there are no words for “signs,” “symbol”, or even “veil” in the original Greek text. The word used here is unambiguously “authority.”

Further, as Bruce Fleming writes, these are the same words that are used to describe Jesus’ authority over the waves and the authority of the two witnesses in the Revelation to shut the heavens and to turn water to blood.

William Ramsay agrees, writing that the idea that this passage meant anything but that the woman had control over her own head would be laughed at by Greek scholars. “No one would have thought of it” (that a woman ought to have someone in authority over her) “but for their presupposition on how to read this passage” (paraphrased by Keener, p. 58)

5. What is Paul saying here?

He says that a woman has the authority to decide for herself whether or not she covers her head. She has authority or control over her own head.

Read 1 Cor. 6: 1-3, and 11:10-12

“...because of the angels,” the conclusion of verse 10, is another oddity (and another reason why Larry says this is just a weird passage.) However, Paul helps us out here,

as he has already mentioned angels earlier in this letter. 1 Cor. 6:1-3 advised the Saints to use their own judgment in settling differences among themselves, since they will judge both the world and *angels* (v.3). Fleming suggests that Paul means that women should be able to decide the simple matter of whether or not they should cover their heads in worship – “after all, she will judge the angels!”

6. What is Paul saying in 1 Cor. 11: 11-12?

Man and woman are equal – not without the other – before God. God does not treat them differently. He could be saying that they should take each others’ opinion into account in deciding if it is appropriate for a woman to cover her head. This is, after all, a little thing (1 Cor. 6:1-3).

Read 1 Cor. 11: 13-15

This verse could be translated “Nature does not teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a disgrace to him...” rather than “Does not nature teach you that...” There are no punctuation marks – including question marks – in the original manuscripts. This reading makes more sense than the traditional one. Neither Greek, Roman, nor Jewish cultures considered long hair on men to be shameful. On the contrary, Nazarites, people who took a special vow to serve God, were not to cut their hair. And nature does **not** teach that long hair on males is shameful: male (not female) lions have the long hair, male peacocks the long, beautiful feathers, etc.

Read 1 Cor. 11:16

“But if anyone is disposed to be contentious, we have no such custom, neither do the churches of God.”

7. The Greek says “no such custom,” not “no other custom.” What is the bottom line for Paul?

If anyone wants to argue about this – we have no custom that says a woman should cover her head.”

Patching it Together

1 Corinthians 11 starts with Paul’s encouraging the Corinthians to imitate him as he imitates Christ. He praises them for remembering what he has taught them.

“Now,” Paul writes, “I wish you to know that the head of every man is Christ...” The word translated “head” does not mean boss or leader, as we assume it does in English, but is used elsewhere by Paul to suggest completeness and harmony between the head

and the body. Is Paul making a word play here? He is about to address the Corinthians about whether or not women must cover their heads in worship. Paul may be saying, I am writing to you about heads, but remember that your true head is Christ, and man and woman are one in God.

There is a chiasmic pattern in verses 2-16. Chiasm is a form of Hebrew poetry in which the first line of a poem or other statement is repeated in altered form in the last line, the second line or thought is repeated second to the last, etc. Thought A corresponds to A'. This correspondence helps us determine what is really being said, and the center of the chiasm is the most important thought. Paul writes:

A I praise you for your attempts to follow my word... (v.2)

B You're dealing with people who say a man shouldn't cover his head, but a woman should (vs. 4-5)

C ...and that it's shameful for her hair to be seen – if she won't cover it, she should cut it off, and vice versa (v. 5-6)

D Don't you know that woman was made equal to man (is man's glory) and should decide for herself whether she wants to cover her head? (vs. 7-10)

(Chiasmic center – the most important point):

For man is not without the woman, nor is woman without the man. Woman came from man, now man comes from woman – but really, all things come from God (vs. 11-12)

D' Judge for yourselves whether a woman ought to cover her hair (vs. 13-14)

C' Far from being a source of shame, a woman's hair is her glory (v. 15a)

B' A woman's hair is given to her for a covering (v. 15b)

A' If they still want to argue about this, we have no rule that says a woman must cover her hair (v.16)

Application

9. This passage is a good example where assumptions about hierarchy and power (the "head" references in v. 3, our assumptions that woman's creation after man means she is a lesser creation) creates a biased interpretation of Paul's words. In what other places in your life do you need to eliminate assumptions that hierarchy is God's will?

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Special thanks to Bruce Fleming for his insights on this study. We hope we have done him justice.

Usurping Authority

1 Timothy 2 and Women in Leadership

Introduction

1 Timothy 2:11-15 is another of the last of the “problem passages.” This one passage, apparently denying women the right to teach or hold authority over men, has had a greater impact in limiting women’s participation in the church than any other verse in the Bible. This passage is obviously about power, however, and so we must be very carefully not to let preconceptions about hierarchy get in the way of understanding it.

A Word Alone

Read 1 Timothy 2:11-15

A major difficulty in understanding 1 Timothy 2:11-15 is that we don’t know the meaning of a key word in verse 12, *authentēin*. This word is usually translated “to have authority” in modern translations, but the underlying Greek word is not the word used throughout the New Testament for authority (*exousia*.) This is the only time this word, *authentēin*, is used anywhere in the New Testament, and it was rarely used elsewhere in Greek literature. Its original meaning referred to someone who commits suicide or a family murder (Kroeger and Kroeger, 1992). The Kroegers’ extensive study suggests that Paul may have meant “to hold oneself to be the source” of something. By the first century, when Paul wrote, it may have meant to “domineer” (Bauer, Arndt and Gingrich, 1974). This is the meaning underlying the translation found in the King James Version, “to usurp authority”. The root of the word means “self”, and closely related words mean “self willed” or “proud willfulness.” It apparently did not have the meaning of “having authority” until nearly two hundred years after Paul wrote the letter to Timothy (Kovacs, 1982). At the point in time when Paul wrote, *authentēin*’s meaning was clearly negative. Whatever it was that women were prohibited from doing was something that no one of either gender should do.

The document we call 1 Timothy was a letter written to an individual, Timothy, whom Paul had asked to stay in Ephesus in order to keep the congregation there from accepting false teachings (1 Tim. 1: 3-4). But despite the efforts of them both, the church at Ephesus was deeply troubled by those who “want to be teachers of the law, but they do not know what they are talking about...” (v. 7), who occupied themselves with “meaningless talk,” “myths and endless genealogies” (vs. 4,6). Paul had already ejected two of the worst false teachers from the church (v. 20).

1. Suppose that Paul did mean that he did not want women “to have authority” over men. Who did Paul allow to hold authority over other people?

No one! See the earlier studies (“What does it mean to be Lord,” “Becoming Transparent to Christ,” “Paul and Authority”) for information on the Christian attitude about the use of authority over others.

What women are denied in v. 12 – especially if the word meant to “domineer” or “usurp authority” – was already explicitly denied to men by Jesus (Mark 10:42-43). The thing that women shouldn’t do, men shouldn’t do either. And in fact, Paul has already said as much just a few sentences earlier:

Read 1 Timothy 2:8

2. What is Paul telling the men of the congregation in Ephesus to stop doing?

Being angry with each other and arguing/disputing/contending.

This problem was part of a pattern, as is seen in the next passage, where Paul addresses “the women, likewise”:

Read 1 Timothy 2:9-10

3. What were the women of the congregation doing that Paul wants them to stop?

They were flaunting their wealth, getting all dressed up (immodestly) for church.

4. The men were quarreling and the women were dressing extravagantly. Think about the motives underlying these behaviors. Although the behavior took a different form for the men as opposed to the women, what is it that both groups were doing?

Competing among themselves. Both the men and the women were trying to be the “top dogs”, to be the dominant persons, within their own groups.

Re-read 1 Timothy 2: 11-12

The next verse, 11, instructed women to learn quietly (not “silently”), “in full submission.” Paul does not say to whom they were to submit. Verse 12 reads that he is not permitting (present imperfect) a woman to *authentain* (infinitive) “of (or like) a man” (genitive or possessive.) There is no preposition for “over” in the text.

Look at this in context of verse 2 to 10. Paul has said, “I want” the men to stop trying to have their own teachings accepted by everyone else; “I want” the women to stop trying to top each other; and “I am not permitting” (if Paul had spoken English, perhaps he might of said, “and heaven forbid” or “please don’t let”) the women to scramble for power the way the men were. In other words, Paul is trying to get the congregation to stop trying to be self-defined authorities. The men have been fighting among the men, and two have already been cut off for teaching false doctrine. The women, for the most part, have been competing among the women, but it appears that some of the women have crossed over from female power struggle, (where you come out on top by being the best-looking and having the nicest clothes), to arguing with the men and teaching false doctrine as well. A woman is not to do this, anymore than the men are, but is to learn quietly, in submission to correct teachings.

Teaching Men

Read Acts 18:24-26; 1 Corinthians 14:3-4; 1 Corinthians 11:5

5. Assuming that to “edify” or to instruct is similar to teaching, do these verses suggest that Paul had any problem with women teaching correct doctrine?

Interestingly, it was in Ephesus that Priscilla taught Apollo (Acts 18; Kroeger, 1978.) Certainly Paul would not now forbid women to do what he had praised Priscilla for doing. In the context of the rest of 1 Timothy, which refutes both false teachings and *authentain*, the kind of teaching Paul forbids is not the teaching of correct doctrine but something with a more negative connotation. (For example, “to preach” may be generally positive in English, but has negative meaning in a statement like “Don’t preach to me!”) It was probably the false teachings or the assumption of non-Christian authority that Paul meant when he said he was not permitting women to teach.

"Creation Order"

Read 1 Timothy 2:13-15

The so-called "order of creation" is the justification for many of the arguments made for a low position of women. The "creation order" theory says that since Adam was created first, and Eve was created only for his "sake," men are to have authority over their wives. Verses 13 to 15, along with 1 Cor. 11:8, had been traditionally interpreted as Paul's reason for why women are denied authority over men: Adam was created first, then Eve, and she became a sinner because she was deceived.

The rest of this passage, vs. 13-15, is Paul's refutation of the false teachings that these women were promoting, the things he did not want women to teach (see the Supplement to this lesson for problems with the traditional interpretations of vs. 13-15). Richard and Cathy Kroeger trace a number of ancient stories that are close to those criticized by Paul in verses 13-15: a myth that taught that Eve was created before Adam; one that said that Eve knowingly chose to defy God's commandments and that this was not sinful, but good; and others that condemned women for having sex or bearing children (Paul further denounced such false asceticism in chapter 4, vs. 1-5.) For more detail on these false teachings, see an article by Catherine Kroeger, "Ancient heresies and a strange Greek verb," or her book with Richard Kroeger, *I Suffer Not a Woman*.

The True Source of Authority

Read Matthew 23: 6-10

6. True Christian authority lies not in holding power over other people, but in letting the authentic will of God shine through us (see Study Eleven, "Becoming Transparent to Christ," for more information on this point). How does this definition of authority mesh with this passage in 1 Timothy (beginning with Paul's advice about the men's behavior in v. 3)?

Many in the congregation – women as well as men – at Ephesus were more interested in selling their false ideas to others than in following correct doctrine. They were disciples of men (the false teachers) and/or wanted to be "rabbis" (teachers of the law, v. 7) themselves.

Applications

7. Think of people you know who are truly Godly leaders. How would you describe the authority these people have?

8. Think of Christians you know who let the will of God shine through them. Do they necessarily hold positions of power in the church? Are they only men?

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Supplement

Problems with traditional interpretations of 1 Timothy 2:11-12

Read 1 Timothy 2:11-12

1. How has this passage been interpreted traditionally?

To restrict women's teaching of men (in some churches, women could teach boys in Sunday School only until they were 12 or so) and to prohibit women from positions that involved leading men.

Read 1 Timothy 2:13-15

The next two verses, 13 and 14, have traditionally been seen as Paul's explanation of the prohibition in vs. 12:

(12. women shouldn't teach or have authority over men, because...)

13. *For Adam was formed first, then Eve; 14 and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor.*

2. What was the traditional explanation for Paul's prohibition? (If you don't know the history, you can figure it out from the verses.)

First, there was the "creation order" argument – man was formed first, so woman should not have any kind of authority over him. Second, there is the argument that woman was deceived and became a sinner – therefore she should not be trusted with decision-making authority over a man.

3. Verse 15 is considered to be the last part of this explanation:

"Yet she will be saved through childbearing, provided they continue in faith and love and holiness, with modesty."

What are some possible explanations of what this verse may mean?

(1) That women were saved by having children. (2) That Christian women will survive childbirth, if they are faithful, loving, etc. (3) That they will be saved through the birth of the Child (Christ.) This is a reference to Genesis –woman will be saved through “her seed” (Jesus) who will bruise the serpent’s head (Genesis 3:15).

4. Are there any parts of this explanation that you find hard to reconcile with other aspects of Christian doctrine?

“For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor.” (v. 13,14)

“Creation order” – We have seen in other studies that there is no “creation order.” In fact, the arguments for man’s domination of women based on his being formed first come not from Genesis, but from this very passage and a misunderstanding of 1 Corinthians 11.

Woman’s tendency to be deceived – This explanation of female subordination seems to argue that Adam was more righteous than Eve because he sinned willingly. This is an odd doctrine of sin, and one which is not consistent with other of Paul’s statements (“For as all die by Adam, so all will be made alive in Christ” I Cor. 15:22).

The interpretation that Eve was a greater sinner than Adam because she was deceived is inconsistent with Paul’s own statement a few paragraphs earlier: “I am grateful to Christ Jesus our Lord, who has strengthened me, because he judged me faithful and appointed me to his service, even though I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and a man of violence. *But I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly* in unbelief, and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus...Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.” (1 Timothy 12-15; emphasis added.) Those who sin in ignorance are more readily granted grace, in Paul’s theology.

This passage also implies that all women are being punished because of Eve’s sin. But if Christ redeemed men from Adam’s sin, isn’t it logical to assume that he has redeemed women from Eve’s?

“Yet she will be saved through childbearing, provided they continue in faith and love and holiness, with modesty.”

Possible explanation (1) That women were saved by having children.

If women are saved by having children, what about the doctrine of grace? If you don't have children, are you not saved? This is a chilling doctrine, completely unChristian.

Possible explanation (2) That Christian women will survive childbirth, if they are faithful, loving, etc.

If this verse means that Christian women who continue in "faith and love and holiness, with modesty" will survive childbirth, the early church, sadly, already knew that this wasn't always true.

Possible explanation 3: That woman will be saved through the birth of the Child (Christ.) This is an allusion to Genesis – Adam was created first, woman became the sinner, but woman will be saved through "her seed" who will bruise the serpent's head (Genesis 3:15).

This is a nice explanation, and one that makes sense of v. 15 in relation to the verses about Adam and Eve. It would, however, be a very unusual thing for Paul to say. He never refers elsewhere to Christ as a child. It is through Christ's death we are saved, not his birth. Besides, the Greek says "childbearing," not "birth of a child." (*Study Bible for Women.*)

Also, why the change from "she shall be saved" to "provided they continue"?

Although I do not know what exactly these verses mean, Paul was almost certainly not saying what he has traditionally been assumed to say.

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The Mystery of Marriage

Returning to One Flesh

Introduction and Review

This series of studies began with Jesus' statement that the ideal relationship between man and woman was to be found "in the beginning," in God's statement that they were created to be "one." Our study of creation led us also to the statement that the first humans were "naked" and "unashamed." A "naked and unashamed" relationship among people who are "one," is one of honesty, fearlessness, total acceptance and commitment.

The apostle Paul tells that marriage is a metaphor for the relationship between Christ and the Church. He says it is a "profound mystery" (Ephesians 5:32): How do two people, let alone the entire Christian community, become one? If Genesis 2 is a picture of the ideal relationship before sin, Paul, Ephesians 5 shows us how we regain that oneness in redemption.

Mutual Submission

Read Ephesians 5: 20-33

1. Who is addressed in verses 20-21?

The entire Christian community.

2. We saw in an earlier study that Paul intended "submission" and "head" to mean something different than we think they do. What does Paul ask of wives in verses 22 -24 and verse 33?

That they "submit themselves" (no meaning of "obey" or even "agree with") and respect their husbands.

3. In verses 25-30, Paul states what the husband's attitude should be toward his wife. What does it mean in the marital relationship if the husband does each of these things?

- be willing to "give himself up" for his wife:

Jesus died for the church, but it's doubtful if Paul meant for husbands to literally die for their wives. Jesus also "emptied" himself, gave up his own will, in order to reconcile us to God. By analogy, husbands should be willing to give up having their own way in order to be one with their wives.

- cleanse her from every blemish:

Many spouses are competitive with each other, hating to admit when the other person is right. Traditionally, men did not want their wives to hold better jobs than they had, or to make more money. Paul asked men to let their wives grow in Christ and in godliness, without fear that they will be passed up or embarrassed.

- love his wife as he does his own body:
- nourish and care for his wife:
- leave his father and mother and be united to his wife:
- love his wife as he loves himself:

4. What would happen to the relationship if the husband did all of these things, and the wife failed to "respect" him?

It would be difficult, if not impossible, for the husband to make these sacrifices for his wife if she took advantage of him, or thought less of him because of his loving behavior.

5. Could two people be “one” if one behaved as Paul tells husbands to do and the other did not respond in kind? Given what the husbands were supposed to do, what does it mean for the wife to “submit herself”?

That she, like him, give up the insistence on having her own way. Bristow suggested that some alternative understandings of the word translated “submit to” might be “be supportive of, or give allegiance to.” A wife’s support is analogous to the husband’s “care and nourishment”. A supportive wife would help her husband be the best he can be. A wife who “gave allegiance to” her husband would be loyal to him and so build a relationship of trust between them. It would be safe for him to love her in the way Paul directed.

Read Matthew 19:4-6 and Genesis 2:24-25

6. What is the ideal relationship between man and woman, according to Jesus? Who does Jesus say first said this?

Jesus tells us that the ideal is that “a man shall leave his father and mother, and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh. So they are no longer two, but one” (Matthew 19: 5-6) He further tells us that this was what God intended when he created man and woman (v. 4).

Paul quotes this same ideal in Ephesians 5:31.

7. Genesis 2:24-25 also tells us that the man and his wife were “naked, and were not ashamed.” What does it mean to have a relationship in which one can be “naked and unashamed”?
8. Compare a relationship in which one can be “naked and unashamed” with Paul’s recommendations for husbands and wives in Ephesians 5.

Many scholars have suggested that Paul was a great supporter of the “status quo” (the way things were) and that his writings in Ephesians 5-6 were an attempt to assure the Roman rulers that Christians were good citizens who supported the system of patriarchal authority that Rome valued highly. These scholars note parallels between

Paul's writing and the so-called Household Codes written by Greek and Roman philosophers, which advised men on their obligations to rule their wives, children, and slaves, and which demanded the obedience of those so ruled. If Paul was drawing on those Household Codes in writing Ephesians 5 and 6, however, he used them to turn the status quo upside down. In Paul's household, husbands are not told to rule their wives, but to give themselves up for them. Wives are not asked to obey their husbands, but to align themselves with them in harmony and oneness.

Ephesians 5: 21-33 is not about hierarchy and authority. Rather, it is a set of instructions on how to reclaim the goal of a humanity "one flesh, naked and unashamed." This is the ideal relationship of Genesis, restored by Jesus and preached by Paul: Reconciled to God in Christ, no longer alone, we once more become fearless, honest, and giving, capable of "submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ." Only then can we experience the "mystery" of two becoming one.

Applications

9. Remember that marriages in the time when Paul was writing tended to be arranged matches. How is it possible to be "one" with someone you did not choose?

10. How close are you to being "one" in your relationships with other Christians? Do you believe this is possible? What stands between you and this ideal?

References

Craig S. Keener, *Paul, Women and Wives*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1992.