

Turning “Headship” on Its Head

Ephesians 5:21-33

October 25, 2020

Introducing the Household Code

Common in secular Greco-Roman culture

Husband/wives, parents/children, masters/slaves

Two important things to realize:

ONE: Low view of women; lack of power in the cultural system

Aristotle quote in **Politics**:

“moral virtue belongs to all of them; but the temperance of a man and of a woman, or the courage and justice of a man and of a woman, are not, as Socrates maintained, the same; the courage of a man is shown in commanding, of a woman in obeying.”

TWO: the tenuous nature of Christianity in the Roman Empire

Suspicion of sedition: “Lord” love feasts, abstinence from the emperor cult, idols

Paul’s mission strategy: avoid unnecessary disruption, approach with leaven

A leaven in the yeast approach to total transformation

Work within the system to overturn the system

With this in mind, we turn to the subversive way that Paul uses a household code to further the kingdom by simultaneously maintaining social order while upending the parts of it incongruous to God’s kingdom way.

Ruling Idea:

Submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ: **5:21**

The verb submit is not even used in best manuscript tradition: **5:22**

How does this idea of mutual submission play out in marriage?

In light of the nature of the Roman-Greco Household

Paul will link the cultural understanding of marriage to Christ and the Church

By doing so he will change the inner dynamics which will eventually change structure

To the Wives

How would wives have heard the exhortation to submit to their husbands?

Do I really have a choice?

Paul calls for an expected behavior but reframes it with Christ/Church analogy

Submit to husbands as a way of submitting to Christ (cf. **6:5,7**)

Use your submissive posture to portray the grand story of the Church to outsiders

Submitting = respectful attitude (**see v.33**) as opposed to obeying everything he says
Pauls empowers wives to choose their submissive attitude rather than submit to it
Similar to Jesus' teaching: if a soldier forces you to go one mile, go two: **Matt 5:41**
Instead of resentment, wives live in current context in freedom of a nobler narrative
This display of respect (**see v. 33**) will honor Christ

To the Husbands

How would husbands have heard the statement they were heads of the wives?
Stating the obvious, they would relax, and the trap is sprung!
Paul by using the Christ/Church analogy turns cultural headship on its head!
Gave Himself up for her (from the heights of heaven to the low of the cross!) **v.25**
For her good: splendor, wholeness, holiness! **vs. 26-27**
But wait! There's more!!
Brilliantly synthesizing three threads: **Leviticus 19:18, 1 Cor 12, Gen 2:24**
Husbands need love their wives as their **OWN** bodies: **v. 28**
A profound expression of the equality of husband and wife
We see this in Paul's teaching elsewhere: **Galatians 3:28; 1 Cor 7:4; 1 Cor 11:11-12**

Back to Original Intent

We see the unspoiled marriage picture in Genesis 1:26,28
Called to have dominion together
Power hierarchy is traced as a result of sin and curse: Gen 3:16

Key Observations

- Paul gives primary exhortation to the husband with power and tells him to lay it down. Paul's affirmation that the husband is the head is not the teaching point of passage. Ironic to use a passage meant to lay down power as a passage justifying taking it up
 - The Christ/Church = Husband/Wife analogy centers on union, not positional hierarchy
 - Paul's methodology of transformation is not to upend social structures in violent revolution but to change them from the inside out through kingdom relationship ethic permeating and unending social norms
 - The ruling kingdom relational ethic is to be mutually submissive to one another, or in Jesus words, to love one another in the same way He loved us!
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