

A WIFE'S STATUS IN RELATIONSHIP TO HER HUSBAND

IS A WIFE TO BE SUBORDINATE TO HER HUSBAND?

THE ANCIENT GENTILE VIEW OF WOMEN

- Plato's (424-347 B.C.) view was that: "It is only males who are created directly by the god's."
- Aristotle (384-322 B.C.) stated that: "Women are defective by nature."

Sadly this was a common view throughout the ancient world and in time came to be part of the culture of the churches of Christendom, especially as certain statements in the standard translations of the Bible were used to promote a view of women which treats them as **secondary to men** and restricts what they may do as Christians. Why?

SCHOLARS WORDS AND TRANSLATIONS

One of the difficulties for truth seeking Christians is that our standard Bible translations let us down—sometimes badly. There seems to be no translation that completely says **what the scholars** (lexicons, commentaries etc) **tell us the text should say** on all points on this subject. For instance, Eve is made to look like a lesser person very early on in the biblical account.

WAS EVE SUBORDINATE TO ADAM?

Most translations have Genesis 2:18 say: "I will make a helper fit for him" as if the woman was an 'add on.' Much better are the translations in the NAB: "a suitable partner for him" and in the REB: "a partner that suits him." However, the Hebrew *ezer* means "strength" or "power" and so this verse is really saying: "*I will make a power corresponding to man.*"

MAN'S EQUAL

- ❖ "The man said, 'This is now **bone of my bones**, And flesh of my flesh; She shall be called Woman, Because she was taken out of Man'" (*Gen. 2:23 NASB*).

Walter Kaiser, professor of Old Testament informs us that:

The idiomatic sense of this phrase "bone of my bones" is a "*very close relative*" "*one of us*" or in effect "**our equal**." The woman was never meant to be an assistant or "helpmate" to the man. The word mate slipped into English since it was so close to Old English *meet*, which means "fit to" or "corresponding to" the man... What God had intended then was to make a "power" or "strength" for the man who would in every way "correspond to him" or even "be his equal," *Hard Sayings of the Bible* p. 94.

There is nothing in the Genesis Two account to indicate that Adam was placed in a leadership role over Eve. Even when they both had to answer to God for their wrong-doing by breaking God's command regarding the tree, Eve was not judged for any insubordination toward Adam, because the passage never shows her as having to be subordinate to him. Furthermore, if Eve had been required to be subordinate to Adam, then he alone, as the leader, would have been questioned and held responsible by God. However, this was not the case. As we shall see later in the study of 1 Timothy 2 the key difference between them in this situation was that Adam had considerably greater knowledge of God than Eve did, so that she alone was later deceived by the Serpent.

A WIFE'S STATUS AFTER EVE SINNED

- ❖ “To the woman he said, ‘I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing; with pain you will give birth to children. Your **desire** will be for your husband, and he *will rule over you*’” (*Gen. 3:16 NASB*).

In *Hard Sayings of the Bible* Kaiser further tells us that:

The Hebrew word *tesuqah*, now almost universally translated as “desire,” was previously rendered as “**turning**.” The word appears in the Hebrew Old Testament only three times: here in Genesis 3:16, in Genesis 4:7 and in Song of Songs 7:10. Of the twelve known ancient versions almost every one renders these three instances of *tesuqah* as “turning,” not “desire.”... Furthermore, the Latin rendering was *conversio* and the Greek was *apostrophe*, words all meaning “a turning.” With such strong and universal testimony in favour of “turning,” how did the idea of desire ever intrude into the translators agenda? ... Katherine C Bushnell ...traced it's genesis to an Italian Dominican monk named Pagnino ... **It is time the Church returned to the real meaning of this word.** The sense of Genesis 3:16 is simply this: **as a result of her sin, Eve would turn away from her sole dependence on God and turn to her husband ...** We may conclude, that *tesuqah* does not refer to the lust or sexual appetite of a woman for a man. Neither does the verb to rule over her express God's order for husbands in their relationships to their wives. pp. 97-99.

From this it is clear that this is not a command that husbands **must** rule over their wives, but rather, because of a woman's **turning** away from God and to her husband he will **take advantage of her**.

BUT ISN'T IT ONLY MAN WHO IS IN GOD'S IMAGE?

- ❖ “For a man ought not to cover his head, since he is **the image and glory** of God, but woman is **the glory of man**” (*1 Cor. 11:7*).

From professor Manfred Brauch we learn that:

He [*Paul*] does not say that woman is the image of man; she is only his glory. For Paul knew that, according to Genesis 1:26-27, human beings as male and female were created in God's image...Thus the woman as man's glory is only in recognition of the temporal sequence of God's activity, since her being is derived from the being of Adam. But no less than man, woman is the glory and image of God since she too is “from God” (11:12). *Hard Sayings of Paul* p. 145.

WOMAN IN GOD'S IMAGE

- ❖ “Then God said, ‘Let us make **man** in our image, according to our likeness ... God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; **male and female** he created them’” (*Gen. 1:26, 27*).

This reference to mankind - both male and female - shows both to be in “the image of God” and so Eve obviously was equally “the glory of God” along with the man even though Paul doesn't mention that fact in this context. So woman is both “the glory of man” and “the glory of God”

IS HEADSHIP AS ‘STRICT AUTHORITY’ REALLY BIBLICAL?

- ❖ “But I want you to understand that **the head** (Gk *kephale*) of every man is Christ, **the head** (*as meaning “taking priority over as source”*) **of a wife is her husband**, and the head of Christ is God” (*1 Cor. 11:3*).

This verse is generally understood as a demonstrating a chain of command with levels of authority. Certainly the Greek word *kephale* means “head” in its physical literal sense; but in its metaphorical sense it has the meanings of ‘taking priority over,’ ‘source,’ or ‘origin.’ It does not mean ‘having strict

authority over' as in the common English usage of 'he is the head of his family' in any domineering sense. The metaphorical usage of *kephale* in the Koine Greek is stated in Liddell and Scott's lexicon to be that of 'source' or 'origin' and several leading scholars have adopted this view point. Yet, in contradiction of that fact Wayne Grudem writes that: "A new search of 2,336 examples of *kephale* from a wide range of ancient Greek literature produced no convincing examples where *kephale* meant "source."” Furthermore, linguist D.A. Carson states that: "Although some of the New Testament metaphorical uses of *kephale* could be taken to mean "source," all other factors being equal, in no case is that the required meaning; and in every instance the notion of "headship" implying authority fits equally well or better. *Exegetical Fallacies* p.37.

STRONG EVIDENCE FOR 'SOURCE'

Notwithstanding these views there is strong evidence that 'authority' or 'rulership' was not the NT picture and that 'source' most likely was one of the meanings of or part of the meaning of *kephale* as the following theologians state. For instance, Professor Manfred Brauch shows regarding the word *kephale* that:

The linguistic evidence points strongly, if not overwhelmingly, away from the common reading of "head" as "chief," "ruler," "authority over," though there are many conservative scholars who would challenge this. The most exhaustive Greek-English Lexicon covering Greek literature from about 900 B.C. to A.D. 600, among numerous metaphorical meanings for *kephale*, does not give a single definition which would indicate that in common ordinary Greek usage, *kephale* included the meaning "superior rank" or "supreme over" or "leader" or "authority." ... However, among the range of meanings which *kephale* had in ordinary Greek were "origin" or "source" or "starting point" and "crown" or "completion" or "consummation."

Hard Sayings of Paul pp. 136-137

Brauch then goes on to explain that the Hebrew word *ro'sh* has the figurative meaning of "leader" or "chief" or "authority figure." Yet he notes that in producing the Septuagint:

when the translators, however, sought the appropriate Greek word to render this figurative meaning, they used not *kephale*, but *archon* ... It is clear from this data that the Greek translators were keenly aware that *kephale* did not normally have a metaphorical meaning equivalent to that of *ro'sh*; else they would have used it for most, if not all, occurrences of *ro'sh* when it carried the meaning "chief" or "leader" ... Another factor to take into consideration is that no where else in the New Testament is *kephale* used to designate a figure of authority. *Ibid.* pp. 137, 138

Regarding *kephale* Emeritus professor Gordon Fee explains that:

The metaphor itself is often understood to be hierarchical, setting up structures of authority. But nothing in the passage suggests as much ... Paul's understanding of the metaphor, and almost certainly the only one the Corinthians would have grasped, is "head" as "source," especially "source of life". This seems to be corroborated by vv. 8-9, the only place where one of these relationships is picked up further in Paul's argument. There he explicitly states that man was the original source of the woman (cf. v.12). Thus Paul's concern is not hierarchical (who has authority over whom), but relational (the unique relationships that are predicated on one's being the source of the other's existence). *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* pp. 502-503.

With reference to 1Corinthians 11:3 *The NIV Theological Dictionary of New Testament Words* states:

Here *kephale* should probably be understood not as ruler but **as source** or origin. The creation narrative of Gen.2:21-23 assigns a priority to the male. p. 679

So there is abundant evidence that in NT times there was no such thing as headship in the sense of 'authority over' or 'ruler' but rather the indications are that **it is in the sense of his being a source for**

her. Furthermore, it is clear that a husband would never be authoritarian or domineering; but rather that he has a God-given responsibility to work within his family in a loving way as demonstrated in Philippians 2:3, 4 and in Ephesians 5:25 as the context of verses 21-24 shows.

IN WHAT SENSE DO WIVES “SUBMIT” TO THEIR HUSBANDS?

Ephesians 5:21-24 Moffatt, NAB, NJB, Unvarnished (REB, NLT, NKJV):

21“**Be submissive to one another out of reverence for Christ.** 22Wives, [*submit*] to your own husbands, **as to the Lord.** For the husband is the head (*taking priority over as source*) of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Saviour. Now as the church *submits* to Christ, so also wives should *submit* in everything to their husbands.”

SUBMISSION IS AN ATTITUDE NOT A ROLE OF SUBORDINATION

Ephesians 5:21 says: “**Be submissive to one another out of reverence for Christ.**” So there is **no rule** that one group of Christians must be any more submissive than any other group. In imitation of Jesus this is **an attitude** that a Christian must develop. As well as his submissiveness to God, Jesus was submissive to his disciples in many ways including the washing of their feet. So a wife’s submission to her husband does not mean she is subordinate to him i.e. of a lower rank, but rather it means that she is willing to yield or consent to something if it does not contradict what is true or go against a right principle. However, husbands are equally to submit to their wives according to Ephesians 5:21 as with all the other brothers and sisters in Christ.

ALL ARE SUBMISSIVE JUST AS CHRIST WAS SUBMISSIVE TO OTHERS

In the phrase “Wives, [*submit*],” the word *submit* is missing from the Greek text and is only implied from the previous phrase, which therefore means that the phrase “...*submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ*” is part of this subject concerning wives. The following are only some of the many examples of Christ’s submission to others and which all Christians should imitate:

- ❖ “But **I am among you as one who serves**” (*Luke 22:27*).
- ❖ “Take my yoke on you and learn from me, because I am gentle and **humble in heart**, and you will find rest for your souls” (*Matt. 11:29*).
- ❖ ““It must *not be this way among you!* Instead whoever wants to be great among you must be your servant, ... just as the **Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve**, and to give his life as a ransom for many”” (*Matt, 20:26, 28*).
- ❖ “If **I** then, your Lord and Teacher, **have washed your feet**, you too ought to wash one another’s feet” (*John 13:14*).
- ❖ “...we must **help the weak**, and remember the words of the Lord Jesus that he himself said, ‘**It is more blessed to give than to receive**’”” (*Acts 20:35*).
- ❖ “For even **Christ did not please himself**, but just as it is written, “*The insults of those who insult you have fallen on me*”” (*Rom. 15:3-5*).
- ❖ “... live in love, just as Christ also loved us and **gave himself for us**, a sacrificial and fragrant offering to God” (*Eph. 5:2*).

THE SAME AS OUR SUBMISSION TO CHRIST

So it is “**out of reverence for Christ**” that a wife is submissive to her husband in the same way the Congregation is to be submissive to Christ i.e. in it is a humble response to Christ’s own self-giving/sacrificing attitude. It has nothing to do with control, power, coercion or the making of demands by a husband; but rather it is submission “**as to the Lord.**”

A CONTEXT OF LOVING ONE'S WIFE

Ephesians 5:21-24 is set in the context of the husband loving his wife as himself and sanctifying her as well as his being the source, like the head of a river, of necessary material, emotional and spiritual good things. The admonition of "submitting to one another" shows that a husband would fulfil his wife's needs and take into account her concerns and wishes, rather than putting his selfish interests first (Phil.2:3, 4).

A RELATIVE SUBMISSION TO A HUSBAND

Submitting "in everything" could not be in any absolute, universal sense because a sincere Christian woman would want only to believe and do exactly what the Scriptures say to her:

- ❖ "Likewise, wives, be subject to your own husbands, so that even if some do not obey the word, they may be won without a word by the conduct of their wives..." (1 Peter 3:1).

Clearly this, too, is a relative subjection because such unbelieving husbands may attempt to dissuade their wives from scriptural truth or conduct. So with the above information is there any Scriptural way that could sustain the principle of authoritarian headship rather than the relationship being simply that of different roles for husbands and wives?

BUT WHAT DOES "LAW OF HER HUSBAND" MEAN?

Romans 7:2 KJV:

"For the woman which hath an husband is bound by the law to her husband so long as he liveth; but if the husband be dead, she is loosed from **the law of her husband.**"

Modern translations express it as:

- "she is released from the law concerning/regarding the husband." NASB, HCSB
- "she is released from the law of marriage." ESV and NIV
- "she is discharged from the obligations of the marriage-law." NEB
- "the laws of marriage no longer apply to her." NLT

So there is no reason for a Christian husband to imagine that he can make laws or rules for his wife that must be obeyed. This phrase in Romans 7:2 refers to the normal obligations in a marriage.

SUMMARY

So we can see that Christianity elevated women's position far above that of the general population of the time. However, over time male dominated society has misused the Scriptures in the area of translation to put women in a secondary position. So a correct translating of terms and phrases and an understanding of the culture of the time give us the picture that Jesus and the apostles would want us to live by.

From the above examination of the Scriptures, their language, and their background the best view of the status of women shows that men and women are equal in God's eyes but have different yet complementary roles in all aspects of life. But what is the status of women in the Christian Congregation? This subject is examined in the next Study.

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