

Sunday, February 26, 2023

Re. Submission, Giftedness and Genesis 1-3 (The Epic Story of the Bible - Revisited)

A. Submission

What about the issue of male leadership, headship, and women being in submission -

1 Timothy 2:11- "a woman should learn in quietness and full submission"

1 Corinthians 11:3 - "Now I want you to realize that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man and the head of Christ is God."

Ephesians 5:22-24 - "Wives submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body of which he is the Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything."

Let's look at the entirety of Ephesians to get an understanding or context to help us understand this concept of submission and headship.

Ephesians 5:21-6:9. First of all, Paul begins this section with an admonition to "submit to one another out of reverence for Christ." So first, we are all called to an attitude of mutual submission. This is really, really counter-cultural. The world looks for hierarchy and then that hierarchy is enforced. He who has the power sets the rules and enforces the rules. Jesus called his followers to something totally different - see Matthew 20:20-28.

"You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant and whoever wants to be first must be your slave — 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."

Look at how Paul describes this husband - loves his wife like Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her...; loves her as he loves his own body...; re-imagines Gen. 2 and the unity pictured there ("for this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife and the two will become one flesh.")

So what does Paul mean when he writes that "the husband is the head of the wife?" What does this "headship" mean? One thing we know is that it means the same thing that it means when he talks about Christ being "head" of the church. That is the example he uses. So what does that mean?

Let's consider how Paul uses it in other verses in Ephesians.

First, he writes in Ephesians 1:9-10 -

And he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment, to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ.

So, what does Paul say that this headship that is Christ over all things look like? Paul explains in more detail in Ephesians 1:19b-23:

That power is like the working of his mighty strength, which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. And God placed 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.

Is there a difference in how Christ is head over everything and how Christ is head for the church? Seems so. It appears that Paul is saying that Christ is head “over” all other rulers, authority, power and dominion — those are the things in the world that he conquered by his death and resurrection. So those things are put under him.

But he is also head “for the church.” While Christ is King and sovereign, Paul here gives us a picture of something different when it comes to the church. Christ’s headship for the church is for the benefit of the church and this makes sense because the church, Paul writes, is the “fullness of Christ who fills everything in every way.” You see in this a picture of oneness. It is not a picture of the church being “under” Christ but a part of Christ.

This is further confirmed by Paul in Ephesians 2:6-7 —

And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.”

Paul gives us a picture of Christ seated on his throne in heaven and he says that we Christians are seated with Christ in the heavenly realms! Paul uses a figure of speech here that expresses how sure he is of this that it is as if it has already happened (“prolepsis”).

See also Colossians 3:1-3. This also makes sense of 1 Corinthians 6:2-3 — “do you not know that the saints will judge the world?” It makes sense that the saints will be involved in the judging process since we will be sitting on Christ’s throne with him!

Now, let’s look at Ephesians 4:15-16 —

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 help together by every supporting ligament grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.

Once again, Paul speaks of Christ as head, but again it is a picture of being for the church (i.e. the head acting for the benefit of the body) so that the church might grow/mature “into him.” Christ as head wants us to grow into his image and each doing their part to create this one, united body. Christ is the source of this growth.

So, now back to Ephesians 5:23. Which view of “head” do you think Paul has in mind when he talks about the husband being head of the wife just like Christ is head of the church? Is it that the husband has rule over the wife as Christ has rule over his defeated enemies? Or is it that the husband is to be the source of his wife’s support, nourishment and growth? Is the husband to be head “over” or head “for” the wife?

Paul actually makes the answer quite obvious - "as Christ is the head of the church." The Greek word here is "te" - the same word translated "for" in 1:22!

Compare 5:29-30 with 4:15-16. Same concept.

If Christ makes the church sit with him on an equal place judging in the heavenly realms, then it seems by comparison that a husband would work to put his wife on an equal place and doing the same kind of things.

In 5:31-32 Paul returns to the idea of the "mystery" and applies the language of Genesis 2 (prior to the fall) -

For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife and the two will become one flesh. This is a profound mystery - but I am talking about Christ and the church.

Notice the picture of unity. The church is Christ's body and they are one. This is the reality that Paul wants for husbands and wives. It is a metaphor of the wife as her husband's body. They are one - united. And if they are one, they are equal - no hierarchy here whatsoever. Husbands in the kingdom of God, put their wives on the throne with them and act for their benefit, not over them.

What did Christ do for the church? Ephesians 5:25-27 —

Husbands love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and **gave himself up for her** to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.

Is there submission in our relationship with Christ? Yes, there is. But it is not a relationship of power built on fear or punishment. It is about being transformed to become like Jesus. It's not merely obedience, but being changed to be united with him. Following the example of Jesus, empowered by the Spirit, we are changed, transformed and formed more and more into the very nature of Christ. That is unity. That is how the prayer of Christ for unity in John 17:20-23.

This model of Christ and the church (both together sharing dominion in the heavenly places in the new again, redeemed world) is also the model for men and women. In Genesis 1: 26-28 —

Then God said, "Let us make man in our image in our likeness, and let them **rule over** the fish of the sea and then birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth and over all the creatures that move along the ground." So God created man in his own image, **in the image of God he created him, male and female he created them.** God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number, fill the earth and **subdue it. Rule over** the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground."

See also Psalms 8:3-8.

IT IS EASY AND NATURAL TO IMAGINE THAT “HEAD” REQUIRES A HIERARCHICAL RELATIONSHIP OF POWER AND DOMINANCE EVEN THOUGH THE STORY OF SCRIPTURE POINTS TO A TOTALLY DIFFERENT CONCEPT OF “HEAD.”

B. Giftedness

Now then, If we can understand and accept this call for mutual submission without the shackles of hierarchy; how then will the “work,” the work of living into and spreading the good news of the kingdom of heaven?

In the kingdom, it’s not about the roles of men and women, but about giftedness.

Romans 12:3—8

For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you. For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith; if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully.

1 Corinthians 12

Now about the gifts of the Spirit, brothers and sisters, I do not want you to be uninformed... There are different kinds of gifts but the same Spirit distributes them. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work. Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. To one there is given through the Spirit a message of wisdom, to another a message of knowledge by the means of the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, to another miraculous powers to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues. All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he distributed them to each one, just as he determines. Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ... Now you are the body of Christ, and each on each one of you is a part of it. And God has placed in the church first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, of helping, of guidance, and of different kinds of tongues....

Ephesians 4:11-13

So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

We are created by God and He loves us, and accordingly, he has given each of us gifts that are special and important. We have not earned these gifts, but we have received them gratuitously from Him. One gift is not more important than the other but all work together for the building up of the church into the likeness of Christ.

Paul reminds us in these passages that each of these gifts are important and intentional. They begin from a place of unity and are offered to us for the purpose of restoring unity. That we may “become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.”

Paul, however, does not mention gender in the dispersing of gifts. The gifts are dispersed on the basis of “grace” and “common good” by “Christ” or the “Spirit.”

Questions to consider?

Have we used our gifts for their intended purposes?

Have we elevated certain gifts and diminished some gifts in spite of Paul’s teaching in 1 Corinthians 12?

Have we elevated certain gifts that are exercised in the assembly?

Have we limited the use of some people’s gifts solely based on their gender?

If then we are not utilizing our gifts or allowing others to utilize gifts that God through His Spirit has given, are we then by default hurt the church and, possibly, its effectiveness as the body of Christ in the world?

Consider Matthew 25:14-30. By analogy, might a church that doesn’t use its members based on their giftedness be like the one talent man who went and buried his talent. Why did the one talent man do that? Because he “was afraid” (v. 25). And that man is displeasing to his master and described by his master as “wicked and lazy” (v. 26).

So, we should be very careful not to let our fear control our actions. Burying the talents of our gifted people, including gifted women, may be very displeasing to our Master.

To be clear, nothing we are talking about diminishes the value of what women have done in the home or the church. Likewise, nothing we are talking about necessarily lessens what men have done or can do in the home or the church.

C. Back to Genesis and the epic story of the Bible.

In the beginning, as we discussed, Gen. 1:26-28 - God makes male and female in the image of the trinitarian God. There seems to be implicit in the text equality of image bearers and of roles - “God blessed them and said to them...be fruitful...fill the earth...subdue it...rule over.”

Then in the account in Gen. 2, he creates a woman to be a “suitable helper” (ezer) for the man (Gen. 2:15-24), equal as image bearers, but complementing each other based on their God-given giftedness, equal, but different and united in oneness. Remember, this “ezer” is used to describe God — see Psalms 46:1; Psalms 18:6; Luke 1:54 — so this is not a subordinate position).

At least this is the picture of God's intent for marriage. Not a hierarchy, but a complimentary oneness created from their equal image bearing. That is the way it was intended to be. This was what God created and intended.

But then Gen. 3. What was intended by God in the creation is horribly broken. Shame, blame, guilt and coverup is initiated into the world. Death comes to the innocent to provide a covering for sin (a picture of the Ultimate Innocent yet to come). And as a result of the sin, the woman will endure the painful anguish of bearing children into this broken world and, unfortunately, woman will seek her identity in what men think of her and men will use that to rule over them and the ultimate expression of this is when the man names the woman Eve (v.20) (naming is the ultimate ruling over, naming her like he named the animals). The hierarchy is a result of the fall and with that we see possibly the sad picture of when God banishes Adam, the man, from the garden, Eve elects to follow him out of the garden and into a world of more death and brokenness. The result of the fall is broken relationship between God and humans and broken relationship between men and women. This is not what God intended.

Genesis 3:16-19 is not prescriptive (not prescribed by God), but descriptive (consequences of sin described by God).

Might we be reasonable to expect that what God intended in the beginning is what God will bring into existence in the end? In Rev. 21, we see a new heaven and a new earth descending, a place where God will once again fully dwell with humanity. No tears, No death. The old, broken order of things passed away and God "making everything new." New, like in the beginning.

Could it be that what mankind rejected in Gen. 3 was the gracious rule and reign of God? Instead mankind wanted to do it themselves. And what God does between the beginning and the end, is make Jesus Christ the new King of a new Kingdom. And that happens in the anointing of the Holy Spirit at his baptism, his enthronement at the cross ("when I be lifted up") and the his victory over the Kingdom of Sin and Death evidenced by his resurrection.

And so the role of his disciples is to usher into the world whenever we can and wherever we can, the rule and reign of King Jesus, what he commonly referred to as the Kingdom of Heaven. No wonder Jesus, the King, himself prayed - "thy Kingdom come thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven" (Matthew 6:10).

If so, then when we work to bring what was in the beginning into the present (or said another way, what will be in the end into the present), we are honoring his prayer and living out the kingdom in the present. And when we don't, we continue to allow the kingdom of sin and death (Gen. 3) to exist in the world.

So, if we believe that the picture of Gen. 1 and 2 is of both male and female living in equal, but complimentary ways, based on their respective giftedness, in oneness and bearing the image of the trinitarian creative God, is what God intended and what God intends, and is therefore one thing broken by the fall but redeemed in the kingdom of heaven which Jesus wants to see come on earth in the present, then it only seems right that in the church women should be freed to serve based on their giftedness, honoring their image bearing, and the church benefiting from their "ezer." To do otherwise, seems to me to be a continuation by the church of the kingdom of sin and death by endorsing the result of the fall as proper.

No wonder Paul, pointing to and calling for the kingdom to come on earth as it is in heaven wrote one of probably most striking and possibly controversial texts in the Bible for his day and maybe ours -“there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, no male and female, (actually quoting, it appears, Genesis 1:27) for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” Galatians 3:28.

No, Paul is not saying gender is done away with. Of course, it is not. To think Paul supports gender elimination is a gross misunderstanding. Just as Paul cannot and does not by this text eliminate slavery or race differences. BUT WHAT PAUL CLEARLY DOES DO IS TO SAY THAT IN THIS NEW COMMUNITY OF FAITH IN JESUS, (IE. JESUS’ KINGDOM), THERE IS NO DISTINCTION, NO PRIVILEGE ALLOWED FOR THE FREE, THE JEW OR THE MALE. FREE AND SLAVE ARE TREATED THE SAME, JEW AND GENTILE STAND ON THE SAME GROUND AND MALE AND FEMALE HIERARCHY IS NO MORE.

This was revolutionary; this was attention getting and it was the kingdom come on earth as it is and will be in heaven.

**The Epic Story of the Bible
(Making Everything “Good” Again)**

