

## EPHESIANS: GOD'S GLORY IN THE CHURCH (study 8c)

# Newness (pt.3) New Family, New Families

*Here is a subject as pregnant and far-reaching as it is in itself beautiful -- the Christian Home. It is not too much to say that the perfecting of Home is the masterpiece of the Gospel, in its work of social blessing*

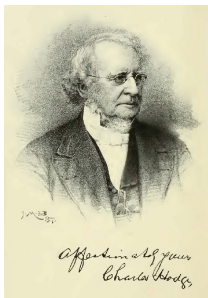
[Moule 281]

### Study 8f: ALL RELATIONSHIPS NEW (5:22-33)

#### 5:22-24 Is the Christian relationship of husband and wife a cultural accommodation? (i.e. to appease the prejudices of Jews, Greeks or Romans?; cf. Matt. 19:3-6)

The ground of the obligation, therefore, as it exists in nature, is the eminency of the husband; his superiority in those attributes which enable and entitle him to command. He is larger, stronger, bolder; has more of those mental and moral qualities which are required in a leader. This is just as plain from history as that iron is heavier than water. The man, therefore, in this aspect, as qualified and entitled to command, is said to be the image and glory of God, 1 Cor. 11:7; for, as the apostle adds in that connection, the man was not made out of the woman, but the woman out of the man; neither was the man created for the woman, but the woman for the man. This superiority of the man, in the respects mentioned, thus taught in Scripture, founded in nature, and proved by all experience, cannot be denied or disregarded without destroying society and degrading both men and women; making the one effeminate and the other masculine. The superiority of the man, however, is not only consistent with the mutual dependence of the sexes, and their essential equality of nature, and in the kingdom of God, but also with the inferiority of men to women in other qualities than those which entitle to authority. ... Because Christ is the head of the church, he is its Saviour; therefore as the husband is the head of the wife, he should not only rule, but protect and bless. [Hodge 312]

The modern understanding of sexual differentiation tends to confirm this biblical teaching. This at least is the thesis of the American sociologist Professor Steven Goldberg in his book *The Inevitability of Patriarchy*. Although it is a conscious response to the feminist movement, he claims that his approach is scientific and not ideological, in that he rests his case on empirical evidence. Nor is his viewpoint to be dismissed as masculine, for the distinguished American anthropologist Dr. Margaret Mead is quoted on the book's dust cover as supporting its thesis: "All the



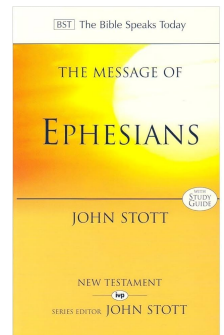
**"All the claims so glibly made about societies ruled by women are nonsense. We have no reason to believe that they ever existed." – Margaret Mead**

claims so glibly made about societies ruled by women are nonsense. We have no reason to believe that they ever existed." [Stott 222]

#### 5:25 What other eternal truth should qualify the husband and wife's view of subjection? (Matt. 11:28-30)

No denunciation of domestic tyranny (the curse of many a home where nominally the Lord is acknowledged) could possibly speak so absolute a condemnation as this appeal does over the morose, selfish, self-indulgent, capricious, arbitrary, "masterful" man, who has presumed to ask for a woman's love and life, and then sinks to the depth of being, in any sense or measure whatsoever, her oppressor. [Moule 291]

... about this authority: Where does it come from? ... it comes from God. The God of the Bible is a God of order, and in his ordering of human life (e.g. in the state and the family) he has established certain authority or leadership roles. And since such authority, though exercised by human beings, is delegated to them by God, others are required conscientiously to submit to it. The Greek works imply this, for at the heart of *hypotassomai* ("submit") is *taxis* ("order"). Submission is a humble recognition of the divine ordering of society. This is plainly taught in Paul's *Haustafeln*. He tells wives to be submissive to their husbands *as to the Lord* (verse 22), children to obey their parents *in the Lord* (6:1), and slaves to be obedient to their earthly masters *as to Christ* (6:5). That is, behind the husband, the parent and the master they must discern the Lord himself who has given them their authority. [Stott 218]



#### 5:26-27 How, and for how long, is the church sanctified? (4:11-13)

#### 5:28-32 Whence does Paul derive his understanding of the relationship of both the body of Christ and man/wife?

The greatest social crime, next to murder, which any one can commit, is to seduce the affections of a wife from her husband, or of a husband from his wife. And one of the greatest evils which civil authorities can inflict on society, is the dissolution of the marriage contract (so far as it is a civil contract, for further the civil authority cannot go), on other than scriptural grounds. The same remark may be made in

## 'Glorious rays of the eternal Purpose' focused on the family

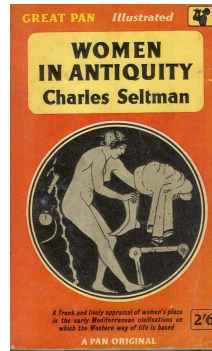
For this home circle is the genuine and abiding unit of human society. And the Gospel, in all its depth and wonder, as well as in its simplicity and tenderness, brings to man a salvation whose blessings can only be fully realized in social human life. So the glorious rays of the eternal Purpose, and the achieved Redemption, and the Sealing by the Spirit, and the Life of the Head in the body, are all focussed from above upon this one spot, that we may see them in their fruits just where those fruits shall best be generated and developed, for the delight of God and man. If we see the process in its lovely efficacy *there*, we have the true pledge that it can yet be efficacious everywhere, in all the true relations of human existence upon earth, in which man is training for his final and endless life in "the Father's House," which is also "the Holy City." [Moule 284]

reference to all laws which tend to make those two whom God has pronounced one, by giving to the wife the right to carry on business, contract debts, hold property, sue and be sued, in her own name. This is attempting to correct one class of evils at the cost of incurring others a hundred-fold greater. [Hodge 334]

The new creation in Christ frees us from the distortion of relations between the sexes caused by the fall (e.g. Gn. 3:16), but it establishes the original intention of the creation. It was to this "beginning" that Jesus himself went back (e.g. Mt. 19:4-6). He confirmed the teaching of Genesis 1 and 2. So must we. What creation has established, no culture is able to destroy. This is also why we should reject the facile argument that since slavery has been abolished, the wife's submission should by analogy be abolished too. If this were the case, then why not complete the trio and abolish a child's obedience as well? No, the parallels are inexact. Slavery is a dehumanizing institution, with no justification in any biblical doctrine. A husband's headship, however, is rooted in creation. [Stott 221]

### 5:33 Should we attach significance to the contrast in this verse?

... a girl was completely under her father's, a wife completely under her husband's, power. She was his chattel, and he had the right to kill her as he had the right to kill his children or any member of his household staff. [Charles Seltmann *Woman in Antiquity* p. 136]



## Study 8g: A NEW VIEW OF FAMILY & SOCIETY (6:1-9)

### 6:1-4 Whence does Paul draw his teaching on responsibilities of parents & children? (Dt. 6:1-9; 14:1,2; Heb. 12:5-11)

... educate them, bring them up, developing all their powers by (gk., instrumental) the instruction and admonition of the Lord. Paideia is a comprehensive word; it means the *training or education of a child*, including the whole process of instruction and discipline. [Hodge 359]

The terror of the slave was that he was absolutely at the caprice of his master. Augustus crucified a slave because he killed a pet quail. Vedius Pollio flung a slave still living to the savage lampreys in his fish pond because he dropped and broke a crystal goblet. [Barclay 180]

### 6:5-9 Is Paul sanctioning slavery? Is he urging passivity as the official Christian position in respect to the harder realities of the world? (Matt. 10:28-31; Gal. 3:28)

If we are to judge aright the message which the Gospel brought to the slave in apostolic days, we must needs make an effort of the historical imagination. For we of the present time think of the institution of slavery in the lurid light of the African slave-traffic and its attendant horrors. It is not solely the ownership of one man by another man which revolts us. It is still more the crushing of a savage by a civilised race, and the treating of a black man as less than human by a white. But the Greek slave at Corinth was not separated by so wide and deep a gulf from his master; nor was his lot so intolerable as the term slavery suggests to modern ears. If it had been, then surely we should have found St Paul proclaiming to Christian masters the immediate duty of emancipating their slaves. [Robinson 129]

I need scarcely remind my reader that the "servant" here in immediate view is the ... bondservant, the slave. The Gospel found slavery in the world; and in many regions, particularly the Roman and the Greek, it was a very bad form of slavery. The Gospel began at once to undermine it, with its mighty principles of the equality of all souls in the mystery and dignity of manhood, and of the equal work of

redeeming love wrought for all souls by the supreme Master. But its plan was -- not to batter, but to undermine. It absolutely declined to patronize, still less to stimulate, political or social revolution; its majestic method is that of social reform, generated from within man, by bringing him near to God in all his conditions and relations. So while the Gospel in one respect left slavery alone, it doomed it in another; and one of the fairest fruits of primeval Christianity in the eyes of observers from outside, was the brotherhood manifestly established between Christian masters and their slaves. [Moule 311]

## True liberation but not through 'equal rights'

Now the very notion of submission to authority is out of fashion today. It is totally at variance with contemporary attitudes of permissiveness and freedom. Almost nothing is calculated to arouse more angry protest than talk of "subjection". Ours is an age of liberation (not least for women, children and workers), and anything savouring of oppression is deeply resented and strongly resisted. How are Christians to react to this modern mood? Our initial reaction to these liberation movements, I do not hesitate to say (although I shall qualify it later), should be one of positive welcome. For we have to agree that women in many cultures have been exploited, being treated like servants in their own home; that children have often been suppressed and squashed, not least in Victorian England in which they were supposed to be "seen and not heard"; and that workers have been unjustly treated, being given inadequate wages and working conditions, and an insufficient share in responsible decision-making, not to mention the appalling injustices and barbarities of slavery and the slave trade. We who name Christ's name need to acknowledge with shame that we ourselves have often acquiesced in the *status quo* and so helped to perpetuate some forms of human oppression, instead of being the vanguard of those seeking social change. Nothing in the paragraphs we are about to study is inconsistent with the true liberation of human beings from all humiliation, exploitation and oppression. On the contrary, to whom do women, children and workers chiefly owe their liberation? Is it not to Jesus Christ? It is Jesus Christ who treated women with courtesy and honour in an age in which they were despised. It is Jesus Christ who said "Let the children come to me" in a period of history in which unwanted babies were consigned to the local rubbish dump (as they are today to the hospital incinerator), or abandoned in the forum for anybody to pick up and rear for slavery or prostitution. And it is Jesus Christ who taught the dignity of manual labour by working himself as a carpenter, washing his disciples' feet and saying, "I am among you as one who serves." [Stott 215-16]



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