
New Man, New Woman, New Life

A Biblical Discovery of Self and Relationship

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The Bible presents us with a three-part story of human relationship with God and with each other. This story reveals human beings created as male and female in the image of God to fulfill an ideal – humanity living together in unity, harmony, and companionship, regardless of gender, race, tribe, age, or social position. The second part of the story traces our rejection of the life of faith and the loss of God’s abundant provision for us. This fall from grace brought division among God’s creation, a striving for power over each other, and the loss of the fearless love for which God created us. The final chapter of this story, however, finds us redeemed – brought back by Christ from the bondage of the fallen world into which we sold ourselves.

This study guide explores that story, showing how redemption not only restores each one of us to wholeness with God, but also brings us back to the creation ideal of unity and balance with ourselves and with one another. Through it we become the New Man or New Woman, restored to New Life in Christ.

Table of Contents

Study 1	Man and Woman in the Beginning	3
Study 2	The Ideal Relationship.....	5
Study 3	Man and Woman’s Position with God	8
Study 4	The End of Unity.....	11
Study 5	Redemption from the Curse	15
Study 6	Honor, Patriarchy, and Dominance.....	18
Study 7	What Does it Mean to Be Lord?.....	23
Study 8	The Freedom that Christ Gives Women.....	26
Study 9	Jesus’s Message to the World: Women are not Sex Objects.....	28
Study 10	Submission.....	32
Study 11	Paul and Authority in the Household	35
Study 12	The Apostle Paul and “Headship”	40
Study 13	The Mystery of Marriage	45
References		48

Study 1 Man and Woman in the Beginning

Matthew 19:3-8

Some Pharisees came to [Jesus], and to test him they asked “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any cause?” He answered, “Have you not read that the one who made them at the beginning ‘made them male and female’, and said, ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh’? So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.”

They said to him, “Why then did Moses command us to give a certificate of dismissal and to divorce her?” He said to them, “It was because you were so hard-hearted that Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so.”

1. The Pharisees felt that they should be able to chase away their wives at will. Why did Jesus tell them they could not?
2. What did Jesus say God intended the relationship between man and woman to be when He created us?

Jesus said that God’s ideal is not to be found in human tradition, or even in the Law of Moses, but in the order established “from the beginning.” He said that the Law, which was given to us because we are by nature hard-hearted and self-seeking, actually contradicted God’s ideal for us.

As we go through this Bible study guide, we will see how Jesus came to restore us to the Ideal of Creation that was lost when human beings turn away from God. Although in Matthew 19, Jesus addressed the marriage relationship, his direction to return to the Ideal goes beyond marriage and family to understanding our own selves – male or female, married or single, rich or poor, powerful or helpless, – our intended relationship with each other, and our relationship with God.

3. Where did Jesus direct us to help us understand God’s intent when He made us male and female?

In the Beginning

Genesis 1:26-29

26 Then God said, “Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth and over every creeping things that creeps upon the earth.”

27 So God created humankind in his image,
in the image of God he created them;
male and female he created them.

28 God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.”

29 God said, “See, I have given you [the form of “you” is plural] every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you [plural] shall have them for food.”

4. Who was created in God’s image, the man or the woman?
5. To whom does God give the blessing of dominion over the earth, the man or the woman?
6. To whom does God give the blessings and responsibility for filling the earth (children), the man or the woman?
7. Note that dominion over the earth and the ability to have children are given as *blessings*, not commandments. This is like saying, “Go in peace!” or “Be blessed!” Does this make a difference in thinking about childbearing’s role in marriage?

Note that marriage itself is a blessing, and not a commandment.

8. What else does God give the man and the woman (verse 29)?
9. What have we learned so far about God’s plan for the relationship between men and women? In these verses, does God treat woman any differently than the man?

Applications/Cultural challenges

10. Jesus told the Pharisees that God’s ideal was not to be found in their traditions. Genesis 1 tells us that woman should not be treated as property but was given everything equally with man. What customary practices are not in keeping with the ideal shown in Genesis 1:26-29?
11. Do these verses make you think about yourself or about your relationships in a different way?

Study 2 The Ideal Relationship

In the first study, we saw that Jesus taught that the ideal relationship between man and woman was not to be found in tradition, or even in the Law of Moses. Rather, God's true intent for us is found in how He created us. In Genesis 1, God created both man and woman in His own image, and gave them both responsibilities for ruling the earth and for child rearing.

Hebrew literature (the Old Testament was originally written in Hebrew) will often give two versions of the same event. Genesis 1 provides a "big picture" of Creation. Genesis 2 gives a "close up" version of the same events, in this case explaining why God created us as "male and female."

The Creation of Sexuality

Genesis 2:7 and 18-25

7 Then the Lord God formed human from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the human became a living being.

18 Then the Lord God said, "It is not good that the human should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner [KJV: a help meet for him]."

19 So out of the ground the Lord God formed every animal of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to the human to see what he would call them; and whatever the human called every living creature, that was its name. 20 The human gave names to all cattle, and to the birds of the air, and to every animal of the field; but for the human there was not found a helper as his partner. 21 So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the human, and he slept; then he took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. 22 And the rib that the Lord God had taken from the human he made into a woman and brought her to the man.

23 Then the man said,

"This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh;

This one shall be called Woman,

For out of Man this one was taken."

24 Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh. 25 And the man and his wife were both naked, and were not ashamed.

The Help Fit for Man

Many English translations of the Bible call the being God created in Gen 2:7 “the man” or “Adam”. The word used in Genesis 2:7-21 is not the regular Hebrew word for man, however. Nor is it a proper name (“Adam”). Rather, the word here is *ha’adam*, a play on the Hebrew word for the red earth, *adama*, from which God made it (verse 7). What God formed from the earth in Genesis 2:17 is “the human” or more literally, “the earth creature.”

1. Following each act of Creation in Genesis 1, God pronounced His creation “good.” How is Genesis 2:18 different?
2. God created both *ha’adam* and the animals from the dust of the earth. In what way did the creation of the human differ from that of the animals (verse 7)?
3. The human cannot find his partner among the animals. What does this tell us about what *ha’adam* needs in his partner? In what way will woman be like man, and not like the animals?

In Hebrew, the words God used to describe the partner the human needed are *‘ezer kenegdo*. These words are often translated into English as “helper as a partner,” a “help suitable,” or a “help meet.”

4. How do people usually understand the statement that woman was created to be a help to man?

The problem with translating *‘ezer kenegdo* as “helper” is that it implies that the woman was created to be inferior and subordinate to man. A helper sounds like someone we might employ to do dull tasks that we don’t want to do ourselves, like wash dishes or dig holes. There is a word in Hebrew for a housemaid or inferior worker - an *ebed*. But this is **not** the word used by God to describe what the man needed.

Instead, God said the man needed an *‘ezer kenegdo*:

The noun, *‘ezer*, is found 21 times in the Old Testament. It means “help”...someone who will succor another, e.g. to help them or aid them. The word is found twice in Genesis 2.

In 16 of the other 19 occurrences of the word, the “help” spoken of refers to help which comes from one who is superior. In most cases, the “help” is God Himself....In those instances where *‘ezer* does not refer to God it is used of such people as kings, who come to the help of another... there is no connotation of inferiority or subordination attached to the word “help” (Fleming).

For an example of the meaning of the word *‘ezer*, or help, consider Psalm 46:1, “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.”

The second word, *kenegdo*, means **suitable for** or **like**. The Hebrew word literally means “facing” – God meant woman to be face-to-face, or on the same level, with the man.

What is emphasized is the common nature and essence of the two beings, as well as their equality. Moses used this word in writing about the creation of woman because he wanted us to understand that God made the woman to be man’s equal (Fleming, pp. 8-9).

When God creates Eve from Adam's rib, His intent is that she will be – unlike the animals – “a power (or strength) equal to him” (Freedman).

God created the woman to be someone strong enough – spiritually, intellectually and emotionally – to help man carry his burdens. Only as his equal could she provide the help he needed.

To find this partner equal to man, God had to take her from the man's own flesh. God put His creation into a deep sleep, and took part of his side (your translation may say “rib,” but it was a big piece of his side, not just one little bone) and built the woman from it (vs. 21, 22).

5. What does the man say when he sees the woman for the first time (v. 23)? Do you hear the joy in these words?

6. From these words, do you think the man thought of the “help suitable” would be a housemaid, or someone more special?

Traditionalists sometimes argue that the naming of woman in v. 23 is an acknowledgment of Adam's dominion over her. But “woman” is not a true name, and what Adam says does not follow a naming convention. “Woman” [*ishshah*] is just a feminine form of “man” [*ish*]. They share a name as well as everything else at this point. What Adam is saying in his joyful proclamation is “Here [at last!] is someone like me!” (Fleming).

Only after the creation of the woman was the earth creature referred to as a man!

Applications/Cultural Challenges

7. How can you show respect for God's creation of woman to be a “help **like**” the man rather than as a “helpmate” or “helper” **for** the man?

8. Verse 24 reads, “Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh.” Jesus said that it was the Creator Himself who said this (Matthew 19: 4-5). What does this mean about where a man's loyalties should lie – with his parents or with his wife? How can a couple honor their parents while still giving their first loyalty to each other?

9. How can parents support their married children's need to give first loyalty to their husband or wife?

10. Verse 25 says that, “And the man and his wife were both naked, and were not ashamed.” Nakedness is a physical condition; shame or lack of it is an emotional or spiritual state. What does it mean for a relationship to be “naked and without shame”?

Study 3 Man and Woman's Position with God

God created us to tend a beautiful garden in which all our needs were provided. Genesis 3 shows us that because of the human desire to do things our own way, we live lives of want and "sorrowful" or "painful" labor instead. This sorrow has never been God's intent for us, however. This study shows us how even now as in the beginning, God wants only good things for us.

Disobedience

Genesis 3:1-13

¹ Now the serpent was more subtle than any other wild creature that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God say, 'You shall not eat from any tree in the garden?'" ² The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden;" ³ but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the garden, nor shall you touch it, or you shall die.'" ⁴ But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not die. ⁵For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." ⁶ So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate. ⁷ Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made loincloths for themselves.

⁸ They heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden at the time of the evening breeze, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden. ⁹ But the LORD God called to the man, and said to him, "Where are you?" ¹⁰ He said, "I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself." ¹¹ He said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?" ¹² The man said, "The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit from the tree, and I ate."

¹³ Then the LORD God said to the woman, "What is this that you have done?" The woman said, "The serpent tricked me, and I ate."

1. Who all is present during the talk between the serpent and the woman (verse 6)? (Note: the form of the “you” used throughout this passage is plural, that is, when the serpent says “you,” he is talking to more than one person.)
2. What happens to the first man and woman’s relationship after they sin? To their relationship with God?

Genesis 3:14-20

¹⁴ So the Lord God said to the serpent: "Because you have done this, You are cursed more than all cattle, And more than every beast of the field; On your belly you shall go, And you shall eat dust all the days of your life. ¹⁵ And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel."

¹⁶ To the woman He said: "I will greatly multiply your sorrow (in Hebrew, *'itsabon*. This word could also be translated "sorrowful" or "painful" work) and your conception; In pain (*'itsabon* or sorrow again) you shall bring forth children; Your desire *shall be* for your husband, and he shall rule over you."

¹⁷ Then to [the man] He said, "Because you have heeded the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree of which I commanded you, saying, 'You shall not eat of it':

“Cursed is the ground for your sake;

In toil *itsabon* or sorrow – the same word as in 16)

you shall eat *of* it

All the days of your life.

¹⁸ Both thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you,

And you shall eat the herb of the field.

¹⁹ In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread

Till you return to the ground,

For out of it you were taken;

For dust you *are*,

And to dust you shall return."

²⁰ The man called his wife's name Eve, because she was the mother of all living. (NKJV)

3. Genesis 3:14-19 is often referred to as “the Curse.” Look carefully at the verses. God uses the word “cursed” only twice. What is cursed?

God put a curse on the ground, but he did not curse the man or the woman. Instead, what God says to them in Genesis 3:14-19 is a prophecy of what will happen to them because of what they have done. These bad things are *consequences* of their actions.

4. To understand the difference between a curse versus foretelling the consequence of a behavior, think about a young child putting out his hand to a fire. His father says, "No, no, don't touch. You will be burned." Suppose the child touches it anyway and is hurt. Is the child suffering because his father cursed him?

Elsewhere Scripture indicates that an individual or category of individuals may be cursed. But a careful reading of Genesis 3 shows that God did **not** place a curse on humankind or on women as a whole.

5. Even as God's describes the sorrows and struggle man and woman will face apart from Him, he assures us that he has not turned away from us entirely. Discuss the meaning of the hope God gave us in Genesis 3:15.

Applications/Cultural challenges

6. Many people have been taught that man and woman were cursed by God in Genesis 3. How does understanding Genesis 3:16-19 as prophecy or God's description of the consequence of their behavior (not as a curse) change the way you think about man and woman's position with God?

7. What are the practical implications of this different way of understanding the curse as a curse on the ground rather than on the people?

Study 4 The End of Unity

The final words in Genesis 2 describe the first man and his wife as “naked and unashamed.” Such a relationship, in which each partner is completely safe and open, must be grounded in God, as it was in Creation. Now, in Genesis 3, we see what happens when we reject God in our relationships.

Division

Genesis 3:1-7, 16-20

¹ Now the serpent was more subtle than any other wild creature that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, “Did God say, ‘You shall not eat from any tree in the garden?’” ² The woman said to the serpent, “We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden; ³ but God said, ‘You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the garden, nor shall you touch it, or you shall die.’” ⁴ But the serpent said to the woman, “You will not die. ⁵ For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” ⁶ So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate. ⁷ Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made loincloths for themselves...

¹⁶ To the woman [God] said: “I will greatly multiply your sorrow (in Hebrew, *itsabon*. This word could also be translated “sorrowful or painful toil”) and your conception; In pain (*itsabon* or sorrow again) you shall bring forth children; Your desire *shall be* for your husband, and he shall rule over you.”

¹⁷ Then to [the man] He said, “Because you have heeded the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree of which I commanded you, saying, ‘You shall not eat of it’:

“Cursed is the ground for your sake;

In toil (*itsabon* or sorrow – the same word as in 16)

you shall eat *of* it

All the days of your life.

¹⁸ Both thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you,
And you shall eat the herb of the field.

¹⁹ In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread
Till you return to the ground,
For out of it you were taken;
For dust you *are*,
And to dust you shall return.”

²⁰ The man called his wife's name Eve, because she was the mother
of all living (NKJV).

From the Garden of Eden to a World of Thorns

As God created them, the first couple enjoyed an ideal relationship with each other, with God, and with all of creation. They lived in a garden that met their every need.

Sin forced them out of the garden and into a world of thorns and thistles. Instead of enjoying life tending a beautiful garden, man and woman must now work hard to survive amid want and fear. The curse on the ground means that scarcity and want become a way of life. Rather than blessings to bring us joy, marriage, sexuality, and the bearing of children became tools of survival. Decision-making became based on material concerns rather than on faith and love for each other.

Cultivators need many children to help in their struggle to get enough to eat and to take care of them in illness or old age. In poverty, **women's most important job is to bear children**. Adam acknowledges this reality when after the fall he says that his wife will be called “Eve,” because she would be the mother of all living (verse 20).

But as God prophesied, in the fallen world, women must do *more* than just bear children. Although many translations of the Bible translate the first part of 3:16 as “I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing,” a better translation would be, “I will greatly multiply your sorrowful (or painful) work and your conceptions” (Flemings). In verse 17, the man is told that he too will have “sorrowful” or “painful” work as a result of turning away from God. Both woman and man have to work hard in order to eat.

Women's work and the demands of childbearing bind them to the household in a way that men's work does not. Some work is hard to do when a woman is pregnant or has a nursing infant. All cultures have learned to divide up the work so that the women do the things that can be done without losing the baby. Men's work is what is left over, that is, work that mothers cannot do. What is considered to be men's versus women's work changes according to the circumstances. For instance, if one can catch fish simply by putting a trap in the water close to home, women may do the fishing. If catching fish requires the fisher to go to sea in a ship for weeks at a time, men will catch the fish.

Historically, tasks that required the coordination of the efforts of other people became “men's work.” Only men, who have influence beyond the household, can mobilize the large number of workers required to do these tasks. (Guyer).

1. What was traditionally considered women's work in your culture? What work do men usually do? (Note: In modern times, many of the things that men once did exclusively, like clear the land or hunt, are no longer done. You might want to think about how things were in the past when answering this question.)

“He will rule over you”

A woman’s high workload means that many of the activities outside of the household are literally none of her business. This results in male dominance over women in the marketplace, church, society, government, and family. But because men are involved in tasks that require coordinating the efforts of many people, they often find that they must either dominate others or be dominated themselves. The more impoverished the economy, the fewer men there are on top and the more men there are on the bottom. The word used to describe this pattern of power in the fallen world, *patriarchy*, applies to not just the rule of men over women, but to the rule of a few men over everyone else, male and female. *Man’s rule over woman and a few men controlling all other men are not God’s will but the results of the Fall.*

In Genesis 1: 28, God blessed both the man and the woman with dominion over the earth and with children. After the Fall, this divine unity was split apart. The things that were given freely as blessings become hard to obtain. The ability to bear children, intended by God as a blessing, came to control and limit woman’s life. The blessing of dominion over the earth becomes a weight on men as they struggle to rule not only the earth but each other as well.

The Fall and Men

2. What does God say will happen to men because of sin (verses 17 – 19)? Give examples of how men suffer from the effect of the fall in their lives today.

Genesis 3

- Man will suffer sorrowful labor
- Man eats by the sweat of his brow
- Will return to the dust

Reality of Fallen World

- Men must work hard to survive (examples:)
- Anxiety and shame, concern about competition, pressure to be the best, show no weakness, dominate others (examples:)
- Death

3. How much does men’s struggle for position or power over each other shape your culture? Marriages? Churches?

The Fall and Women

4. The chart below lists the things that God said would happen to women in the fallen world (verse 16). Give examples of how women suffer from the effects of the Fall in their lives today.

Genesis 3	Reality of Fallen World
• Woman brings forth children in sorrow	• Woman's value is in childbearing • Children are valued as resources to serve their parents, not as individuals • Couples will have more children than they can care for • Demand for many children leads to polygamy and brideprice (examples:)
• Woman will face sorrowful toil	• Woman must work hard to survive • Sexual division of labor, woman limited to work that can be done while pregnant (examples:)
• Woman will "turn" to her husband	• Women are financially dependent on men • Women want to marry dominant men (examples:)
• Husband will rule over wife	• Male dominance of social institutions • Husbands will have more power in the marital relationship • Subordination of women to men (examples:)

Applications/Cultural challenges

5. This study suggests that men's ability and drive to dominate each other, their wives and children in their lives comes from sin, not from God's intent in creation. Identify those practices that need to change in order to defeat the effect of sin in our lives.

In later studies, we will see how the teachings of Jesus and Paul remove the curse on the ground and restore man and woman to the perfect relationship for which God created them.

Study 5 Redemption from the Curse

When the first man and woman rejected God's purpose in their lives (Genesis 3), God's ideal for us was spoiled. We now endure sorrowful or painful work in order to survive. Marriage was no longer based on the unity and love for which we were created and became instead a tool of the fight against the ground. Women work very hard in producing children and caring for them and for their husbands. This heavy workload in the home makes them dependent upon men for cash and protection. Men have to worry about competing with and getting power over other men. It is difficult to reach the Creation ideal – "one flesh, naked and unashamed" – in this kind of world.

Jesus' life and teachings shows us the way back from pain and anxiety to the life in a garden for which we were created.

Matthew 19:16-25

Then someone came to him and said, "Teacher, what good deed must I do to have eternal life? And he said to him, "Why do you ask me about what is good? There is only one who is good. If you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments." He said to him, "Which ones?" And Jesus said, "You shall not murder; You shall not commit adultery; You shall not steal; You shall not bear false witness; Honor your father and mother; also, You shall love your neighbor as yourself." The young man said to him, "I have kept all these; what do I still lack?" Jesus said to him, "If you wish to be perfect, go, sell your possessions, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me." When the young man heard this word, he went away grieving, for he had many possessions.

Then Jesus said to his disciples, "Truly I tell you, it will be hard for a rich person to enter the kingdom of heaven. Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God." When the disciples hear this, they were greatly astounded and said, "Then who can be saved?" But Jesus looked at them and said, "For mortals it is impossible, but for God all things are possible."

1. Jesus' disciples are shocked by what he said about the rich. To what extent do Christians share the belief that the rich are somehow more worthy than the poor?

Matthew 6:25-34

“Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? Therefore do not worry, saying, “What will we eat?” or “What will we wear?” For it is the Gentiles who strive for all these things; and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today’s trouble is enough for today.

2. What is the point Jesus is making in this passage?

3. Contrast Jesus’ statements with God’s word to Adam in Genesis 3:17-19:

Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground. ... for dust you are and to dust you will return.

On numerous occasions, Jesus assures those who follow him that they have returned to God’s abundance. Instead of thorns, those who come back to God can expect the life of the lilies.

This does not mean that we no longer have to work to achieve these things. 2 Thessalonians 3: 6 - 10 says, "...keep away from believers who are living in idleness...with toil and labor we worked night and day...in order to give you an example to imitate. For even when we were with you, we gave you this command: Anyone unwilling to work should not eat."

In Creation, God made human beings to "keep" or "tend" the Garden (Genesis 2:15). With the fall, the ground was cursed, and both man and woman are subject to hard and painful work. Once we accept Christ, however, he redeems us, buying us back from slavery to the ground. If we live in faith we move from laboring painfully out of fear or greed (Genesis 3:16, 17) back to the joyful "keeping" or "tending" of the garden. We no longer have to be frightened about things like food, clothing, how long we will live, etc.

4. Look up the following verses (if you are working with a group, each person take a verse). What aspect of the fall is reversed by Christ in each verse?

I Cor. 15:22, 26

II Tim 1:10

Rev. 7:16, 17

Rev. 21:3-4

Rev. 22:2-3

Application

5. What differences do you think there are between "painful labor" and "tending" or "keeping" a garden? Are there examples of each in your own life?

6. Are the things that Jesus promises us for heaven only? If we are supposed to experience the Kingdom of Heaven now, in this life, how does that affect the way we live?

7. Does being a Christian mean that one should not have to work?

8. If you are redeemed to view work as "keeping a garden" instead of as "painful labor," how might that affect the way you treat your husband/wife? Your children?

Study 6 Honor, Patriarchy, and Dominance

Patriarchy is usually thought of as men striving to keep women in a low position and men in a high one. New Testament historian S. Scott Bartchy, however, notes that patriarchy is not just women under men, but the rule of a few men over everyone else, male and female. This struggle for power among men takes the form of slavery, feudalism, client/patron relationships, and despotism or dictatorship. In patriarchal cultures, men compete and fight to get honor, power, glory, and high position over each other. Maintaining one's pride and avoiding embarrassment are of great importance. All slights or insults must be revenged, for to fail to revenge any insult takes away from family honor and makes the man look weak. War, ethnic strife, distrust and violence are common as family groups scramble for their own survival in the face of limited resources. Men may be expected to demonstrate their manhood or power by drinking a lot of alcohol, sleeping with many women, having children by many women, or humiliating other men. One way to embarrass another man is to seduce or defile a woman in his family. This worldly drive to gain the praise of man, revenge insults and avoid shame results in a strong desire for sons who can help their father or his family reach a high position.

At the time of Christ, the entire known world was ruled by the Roman Empire. Both Roman and Jewish culture were extremely patriarchal (although Old Testament law helped control the worst abuses among the Jews). Jesus taught a Jewish audience; the apostle Paul wrote to people living in Roman cities.

Manly honor

Matthew 5:38-41

“You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’

But I say to you, Do not resist the evildoer. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also, and if anyone wants to sue you and take your coat, give your cloak as well; and if anyone forces you to go one mile, go also the second mile.”

Jesus was not saying that one may not defend oneself against violent attacks. The acts he spoke of—a slap on the cheek, an unjust lawsuit, being pressed into service – were insults, not physical threats. The honor/shame code insisted that any such slight be avenged or the man and his family would lose face. Jesus, in contrast, taught men to refuse to get into the honor/shame cycle. When you are insulted, Jesus said, stop it right there. Similarly, Paul wrote that Christians who sought revenge against other Christians had already lost: “To have lawsuits at all with one another is defeat for you. Why not rather suffer wrong? Why not rather be defrauded?” (1 Cor. 6:7)

1. What is the problem with insisting on revenge? Do these contests ever end?

Patriarchy

Luke 9:59-60

To another [Jesus] said, “Follow me.” But he said, “Lord, first let me go and bury my father.” But Jesus said to him, “Let the dead bury their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God.”

2. What was Jesus offering the young man?

Judging from Jesus’ harsh response, Bartchy suggests that the young man’s father is not yet dead! The young man was saying that before he could follow Jesus, he had to go home to serve his father until he died. In those days fathers ruled their families absolutely and men who wanted their inheritance had to obey their fathers as long as the fathers lived.

Here Jesus criticized patriarchy and the dead, materialistic culture that tells us to seek the things of the world before the kingdom of God. In all likelihood, this young man probably thought he could fulfill the role expected of him by his culture – i.e., “bury his father” and collect his inheritance – and still escape becoming what his father is in the end. But we can’t cheat the devil – if we live by worldly rules, we will die by those rules.

3. If this is a correct understanding of this passage, who are the dead to which Jesus referred? What did Jesus mean when he said, “Let the dead bury the dead”?

Pride and Power

Mark 10:35-37

James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came forward to him [Jesus] and said to him, “Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you.” And he said to them, “What is it you want me to do for you?” And they said to him, “Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory.”

4. What were James and John asking for?

Continue with Mark 10:41-45

When the ten [other apostles] heard this, they began to be angry with James and John. So Jesus called them and said to them, “You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them and their great ones exercise authority among them. However, it will not be so with you. Rather, whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be the first among you must be the slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom on behalf of many” (my translation).

5. Why were the other ten apostles angry with James and John?

6. What did Jesus tell them in response?

These surprising words radically call into question [Jesus'] disciples' view of the kind of power operative in “his glory” by reversing the expectations commonly associated with the title “Son of Man.” According to Daniel 7:13-14, the “one like the son of man,” who came to be regarded during the century before Jesus as the One who is to come to judge the world, will be “given dominion and glory and kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him.” Jesus identified himself as that Son of Man and then radically rejects the privileges associated with the role by asserting that he is ready to serve others, even at the cost of his own life (Bartchy, 1987).

Ethnic and Caste rivalries

Luke 10: 25-39

Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. “Teacher,” he said, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?” He said to him, “What is written in the law?”...He answered, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself.” And he said to him, “You have given the right answer; do this and you will live.”

But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?”

Notice here in this introduction to the parable of the Good Samaritan that the lawyer stood up to “test” Jesus. As you read the Gospels, note the many times someone came to test or try him. This is part of the honor/shame culture, in which men take part in verbal contests to try to embarrass another man or get him to say something that might get him

into trouble. In this case, Jesus won, so the lawyer, “wanting to justify himself,” set another trap, “and who is my neighbor?”

Continue with Luke 10: 30-37

Jesus replied, “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan while traveling came near him, and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, ‘Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend.’ Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?” He said, ‘the one who showed him mercy.’ Jesus said to him, “Go and do likewise.”

7. The Jews hated Samaritans. What point did Jesus make in making a Samaritan the hero of this parable? What are the implications of this story in your country?

A Real Man

Matthew 5:27-28

“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart.”

8. Men often feel compelled to prove their manhood by sexual union with many women, and in some places, having children with many women. Discuss Jesus’ attitude about how a “real man” behaves sexually.

9. What do all of these incidents have in common?

Applications/Cultural challenges

10. How are men limited and harmed by the belief that they must have status and authority over other people?

11. Men: What are the biggest pressures you feel to behave in any of these ways? What is the solution to situations in which you are tempted or pressured to behave in these ways?

Women: Have you ever expected a man close to you to exercise power over other people or to take revenge? How might your behavior or expectations be changed to help the men in your life find their freedom in Christ?

12. As Christians, how and why do we forgive those who harm us?

Study 7 What Does it Mean to Be Lord?

Jesus criticized many of the expectations of his time and ours about what it means to be a man. The New Man in Christ does not require prestige or money or sexual exploits, nor does he try to be above other people. What then, is the meaning of calling Jesus Lord?

“You are the Christ...”

Mark 8:27-33

Jesus...asked his disciples, “Who do people say that I am?” And they answered him, “John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets.” He asked them, “But who do you say that I am?” Peter answered him, “You are the Messiah.” And he sternly ordered them not to tell anyone about him.

Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, “Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.”

In Jesus’ time, the Jewish people believed that God would send a messiah to restore the *earthly* kingdom to Israel. The Jews hoped for a leader like David or Solomon, a righteous king who would free them from the oppression of Rome.

1. When Jesus acknowledged that he was the Messiah, but then said he would be rejected and murdered, why did Peter rebuke him?

Jesus’ response, “Get behind me, Satan!” refers us to the third temptation in Matthew 4:8-10, which reads: “Once again, the devil took [Jesus] to a very high mountain, and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in their glory. ‘All these,’ he said, ‘I will give you, if you will only fall down and do me homage.’ But Jesus said, ‘Begone, Satan! Scriptures says, ‘You shall do homage to the Lord your God and worship him alone.’”

2. What is the relationship between Peter’s expectation about what the messiah would be and the third temptation?

Continue with this reading in Mark 8: 34, 38

He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, "...Those who are ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.

3. Why does Jesus say that his followers will be ashamed of him?

What Jesus was trying to teach his followers about how God uses power was very difficult for them to understand, although he affirmed it many times. Even after the crucifixion, the disciples continued to hold the expectation that Jesus would be an earthly king (Acts. 1:6).

Dirty Feet

John 13:3-10, 12- 17

[At the last supper] Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him. He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" Jesus answered, "You do not know now what I am doing, but later you will understand." Peter said to him, "You will never wash my feet." Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no share with me." Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!" Jesus said to him, "One who has bathed does not need to wash, except for the feet, but is entirely clean....

After he had washed their feet, had put on his robe, and had returned to the table, he said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord – and you are right, for that is what I am. So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. Very truly, I tell you, servants are not greater than their master, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them. If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them."

Unlike some of the Jewish cleanliness rituals, foot washing was a practical need. People wore sandals, and their feet got dirty. Since people ate lying on couches, dirty feet were noticed by everyone. It was an act of hospitality to have a servant at the door to wash the feet of guests. The actual act of foot washing, however, was considered so degrading a task that Jewish servants were not asked to do it – it was left to Gentile slaves instead. “To be girded with a towel was to be acknowledged as a slave” (Black, 2011).

4. Why was Peter so upset? When Jesus took on a servant’s job, what did this mean for what Peter might be expected to do?

5. Why does Peter ask Jesus to wash all of him?

Bartchy suggests that a man in this kind of culture knows that he needs to be completely changed in order to accept this new order of things. Or perhaps Peter was trying to “spiritualize” the incident, so that it became a ritual act rather than a dirty task that he would now be expected to perform.

6. Locate other times when Jesus showed, by word or example, that worldly ideas about authority, honor, and power have no place in the kingdom of God.

7. Is Christian humility a mere symbol or a test? Was Jesus humble during his lifetime just so that he could win the right to forever after “lord” it over everyone else?

The earliest Christian confession, that Jesus is Lord, cuts two ways. First of all, you say that **Jesus** is Lord. What this means then is that anybody else is out as lord. That means the emperor [or president or bishop] can't be lord, that means that my daddy can't be lord, that means that a husband can't be lord. **Jesus** is Lord. That's the first thing to get straight. The second thing to get straight is that Jesus is **Lord**. Now 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 of us to join him there, male and female. If the Lord is Jesus, legitimate power seeks not to control others and things but to empower the powerless, to lift up the fallen, to reconcile, to create healing opportunities, to encourage maturity and responsibility, and to restore community. Note: In contrast to dominating power, this kind of power exists in unlimited supply (Bartchy, 1993).

Application/Cultural Challenges

8. Jesus, knowing that God had given everything into his hand, used that authority to take on a task that his disciples found demeaning, and asked them to copy his behavior. What does this mean for how we should use whatever authority we hold over each other today? What does this mean for the relationship between men and women within the church and family?

Study 8 The Freedom that Christ Gives Women

One of the consequences of living in a world of thorns and thistles is that woman became valued mostly for her ability to bear children, run a household, and satisfy a man's sexual urges. Jesus, however, releases us from the burdens that resulted from the Fall. He redirects attention away from false expectations to point out what is really important in any one, male or female.

Woman and Childbearing

Luke 1:26-28, 30, 34, 35, 38

...the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph....The virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said.... "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus...." Mary said, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" The angel said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will over shadow you...." Then Mary said, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word."

Deuteronomy 22:20-21

If...no proof of a girl's virginity can be found, she shall be brought to the door of her father's house and the men of her town shall stone her to death.
(NIV)

1. What risk was Mary taking in agreeing to bear a child that was not Joseph's? What does Mary's willingness to accept this risk tell us about her character?

Luke 11:27-28

While [Jesus] was saying this, a woman in the crowd raised her voice and said to him, "Blessed is the womb that bore you and the breasts that nursed you!" But he said, "Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it!"

2. What did the woman say was important about Jesus' mother?

3. In the fallen world, women are valued for the number and quality of sons they produce. In contrast, what did Jesus say was important about his mother? What does this mean for what God considers important about a woman?

Woman as Laborer

Luke 10:38-42

Now as they went on their way, he entered a certain village, where a woman named Martha welcomed him into her home. She had a sister named Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to what he was saying. But Martha was distracted by her many tasks; so she came to him and asked, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her then to help me." But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things; there is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her."

4. The words, "to sit at the feet" of a teacher meant that one was his student or disciple. This was not something women usually did. What does Jesus' acceptance of Mary in this role tell us about his attitude toward women?
5. Jesus compared Martha's worries about her role as hostess with Mary's choice of learning God's word. How did Jesus' answer free Martha?
6. What do these two stories about the two Marys have in common? What can men as well as women learn from them?

Application

7. What do these stories mean for women today? For women who are rejected because they do not produce children or produce only girls?
8. How can we escape being "worried and upset" by worldly expectations about what we should be as men or women in order to devote ourselves to what is truly important?
9. Husbands and wives, how can you help free your partners to sit at Jesus' feet?

Study 9 Jesus's Message to the World: Women are not Sex Objects

In the Fallen world, women's sexuality became the property of men. Most cultures have created rules to protect male "rights" to women's sexuality, especially their chastity, which greatly restrict women's everyday freedom to move about or interact with other people. As a result, some people think of women – and the sexual desire that men feel for them – as the source of all evil. They blame women for men's lust, and believe that contact with women is defiling.

This was especially true in Jesus' time. A Jewish man could divorce his wife for simply speaking to a man on the street. Men caught up in such cultures view female family members as threats to their honor, as a woman who was thought to practice bad behavior brought great shame on the family.

Jesus upheld biblical standards of sexual conduct, but shocked people many times when he refused to let fear of women keep him from ministering to them – or from putting them to work in spreading the Gospel.

"If he knew who touched him..."

Luke 7: 36-39

One of the Pharisees asked Jesus to eat with him, and he went into the Pharisee's house and took his place at the table. And a woman in the city, who was a sinner, having learned that he was eating in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster jar of ointment. She stood behind him at his feet, weeping, and began to bathe his feet with her tears and to dry them with her hair. Then she continued kissing his feet and anointing them with the ointment.

Now when the Pharisee who had invited him saw it, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what kind of woman this is who is touching him—that she is a sinner."

1. Why was the Pharisee disturbed?

Continue with Luke 7:40-47

Jesus spoke up and said to him, "Simon, I have something to say to you," "Teacher," he replied, "Speak." "A certain creditor had two debtors; one owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. When they could not pay, he canceled the debts for both

of them. Now which of them will love him more?” Simon answered, “I suppose the one for whom he canceled the greater debt.” And Jesus said to him, “You have judged rightly.” Then turning toward the woman, he said to Simon, “Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave me no water for my feet, but she has bathed my feet with her tears and dried them with her hair. You gave me no kiss, but from the time I came in she has not stopped kissing my feet. You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment. Therefore, I tell you, her sins, which were many, have been forgiven....”

2. Simon viewed the woman only as a fallen instrument of sex. How did Jesus view her?
3. Jesus implied that the sinful woman behaved better than the Pharisee himself had done. What does this tell us about Jesus’ attitude towards women?

The Woman at the Well

John 4: 7, 9

A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, “Give me a drink.” The Samaritan woman said to him, “How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?” (Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans.)

A deep hatred existed between the Jews and the Samaritans. The Jews thought that Samaritan women were always ritually unclean and polluting (Massy, 1989.) Moreover, one of the most important things that ritually unclean women were not to touch were drinking cups – and Jesus asked the woman for a drink! No wonder the woman was surprised.

Continue with John 4: 16-18, 25-26

Jesus said to her, “Go, call your husband, and come back.” The woman answered him, “I have no husband.” Jesus said to her, “You are right in saying, ‘I have no husband’; for you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true!”

....the woman said to him, “I know the Messiah is coming....When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us.” Jesus said to her, “I am he, the one who is speaking to you.”

4. This woman’s sexual history would have made any Jewish man chase her away, a fact of which Jesus was well aware. In fact, he made a point of bringing it up. Did Jesus’ knowledge of her living conditions affect his willingness to speak with her? What important thing does Jesus reveal to this woman?

Continue with John 4: 27

Just then his disciples came. They were astonished that he was speaking with a woman...”

In this culture, men and women did not talk in public, and even in private did not have much to do with each other. Some men would ignore their own wives and daughters in public so that no one would suspect they were behaving improperly. The disciples were shocked.

The Samaritan woman returned to her village and became the first witness to Christ. John 4:39-42 tells us that as a result of Jesus’ conversation with the woman at the well, many people came to know the Lord.

The Double Standard

John 8: 3-11

The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery; and making her stand before all of them, they said to him, “Teacher, this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery. Now in the law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?” They said this to test him, so that they might have some charge to bring against him. Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground. When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, “Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.” And once again he bent down and wrote on the ground. When they heard it, they went away, one by one, beginning with the elders; and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him. Jesus straightened up and said to her, “Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you? She said, “No one, sir.” And Jesus said, “Neither do I condemn you. Go your way, and from now on do not sin again.”

5. What do you suppose Jesus wrote in the dust?

New Testament scholar S. Scott Bartchy suggests it was, “Where’s the man?” It does take two to commit adultery.

6. Jesus told the men, “Let him who is without sin cast the first stone.” How does this response challenge the traditional double standard? (The double standard is the belief that while adultery is a crime for women, it is okay for a man to have women other than his wife).

“Lust in the Heart”

Matthew 5:27-28

“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart.”

Jesus was not talking about feelings of attraction for another person, which are very common and not voluntary. He was talking about lust, the desire to use another person as an object for one’s own gratification.

7. What did Jesus urge men to stop doing? Who does Jesus blame for a man’s lust, the woman or the man?
8. How would women’s lives be different if all men obeyed Jesus and stopped lusting after women?

In each of these incidents, Jesus is reminded of attitudes that would have limited his ministry to women and kept women from coming to their freedom and position in the Kingdom of Heaven. He steadfastly ignored these fears. He even tells men that considering women only as bodies to meet men’s needs was itself a great sin.

Summary

In the fallen world, women are valued for their bodies and their ability to produce children, labor, and physical satisfaction for men (sex). Jesus taught that women’s value was far greater than any of these things. He said instead that a woman’s true value lay in her relationship with God. As he does with men, Jesus tells us that the New Woman in Christ is free to seek first the kingdom of God.

Applications

9. How would your work, school, church or family be better if men and women could work together without thinking about sex?

Study 10 Submission

One part of Paul's writings that is important in understanding the Christian attitude about authority lies in understanding what he meant when he asked wives to submit themselves to their husbands.

Submit yourself

Ephesians 5:21-22 and Colossians 3:18

Be subject [or submit yourselves] to one another in reverence for Christ, wives to your husbands, as to the Lord.

Wives, submit yourselves to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord.

1. How have these passages usually been understood?

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, without authority, like a child or as someone who has given up in despair. In many other languages, to submit is to be very very low and expected to obey immediately without question.

2. What meaning does "submissive" have 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) and to worldly authority (1 Peter 2:13; Titus 3:1; Romans 13:1); younger people to their elders (1 Peter 5:5); slaves to masters (1 Pet 2:18); to God (James 4:7); and the church to Christ (Eph. 5:24).

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; Kittle, 1964).

Submit to One Another

"Wives, submit to your husbands" is often quoted as if it were a free-standing text. In truth, the verse marked Eph. 5:22 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, this is a mistake. Verses 21 and 22 are part of the same sentence. In the Greek text, the half of the sentence labeled verse 22 doesn't have the word "submit" in it at all:

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 own husbands as to the Lord (my translation).

Paul's advice for wifely submission cannot be seen apart from his teaching that everyone in the Christian body – husbands as well as wives, fathers as well as children, masters as well as slaves – should “submit to each other” out of reverence for Christ. Why out of reverence for Christ? Because this is what Jesus did, turning away the worldly power that was offered him in order to serve us in love (see study 5). In submitting to each other, we act as Jesus did and so honor him.

3. How does this understanding of submission change the way you read this passage?

The Greek word Paul used is *hypotasso*. *Tasso* means to put or place. *Hypo* means under. Much of the confusion about what Paul really meant in his use of the word “put under” is that there were three ways to understand this verb. This grammatical idea is called “voice.” Which voice a verb is in changes its meaning. Greek speakers can tell what which meaning is intended by the letters used at the end of the word.

In English, we generally have only two voices. One voice is the active. In this voice, to “put under” or subject something means to actively put it under our power, as a warrior might subject an enemy to his will. *Hypotasso* in Ephesians 5 is *not* in the active voice. Obviously, when Paul told Christians to submit to one another, he did not mean for them to force each other to their will.

In English, the only alternative to the active voice is the passive. This is how we usually read these biblical verses. This kind of submission is to passively accept someone else's power over us. To be submitted or subjected in the passive is to be the conquered enemy, squashed under the heel of the victor.

Paul wasn't telling us to behave like this!



But the word Paul uses is not in the passive voice either. Rather, it is in the middle voice – a voice we generally don't have in English. The Greek middle voice is very hard to translate into English. “(W)hat the Greek middle voice expresses (is) a voluntary action by the subject of the verb” (Bristow 1988). *Hypotasso* in the middle voice means to put **ourselves** under or submit **ourselves** to someone else.

In asking us to submit ourselves to each other, Paul urges us to stop fighting for power and control. This was a fight in which the whole world was engaged – even, unfortunately, within the family – but it was not to be so among Christians. As members of the body of Christ, we are neither high above other people, nor are we squashed below them. Instead, Paul and Jesus taught us to

“value other people as better than (or above) yourselves” (Phil. 2:3). “Be devoted to one another in love; honor one another above yourself” (Rom 12:10). Similarly, Peter wrote, “All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another...” (1 Peter 5:5). **Putting others above us is the same as putting ourselves below (submitting)**. And we do this “out of reverence for Christ” (Ephesians 5:21) – because this is the correct behavior that Jesus showed in every way. Although he was our Lord, he washed our dirty feet.

But like this! Lifting each other up



Whenever Paul writes that someone should “submit themselves” to someone else, he is reminding us of Jesus’ teachings that Christians are not to take part in the worldly fight to put ourselves above other people.

A further confusion is caused by the phrase “as to the Lord.” Often we read this as if women are to submit to their husbands as if their husbands were God. Colossians 3:18 clarifies this understanding: “Wives, submit yourselves to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord.” Wives submit themselves to their husbands as part of their own Christian imitation of Jesus – not as if their husbands were Jesus.

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 is God (Eph. 1:22, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*).

4. How does this understanding of a wife’s submitting herself to her husband fit with woman’s creation as a “help face-to-face” or fitting or suitable for the man? (see study 1)

Applications/Cultural Challenges

5. Is there any way in which your personal relationships would be changed if both husband and wife submitted themselves to each other in imitation of Christ (stopped trying to get their own way at the other’s expense)?

6. In 1 Corinthians 11:7, Paul writes that a wife is her husband’s glory. In Ephesians 5:26-27, he tells husbands to make their wives glorious. How should a couple behave so that the husband can help his wife be glorious without fear that she will then be above him, treat him with disrespect, or lord it over him?

Study 11 Paul and Authority in the Household

In the letter to the Ephesians, the apostle Paul expanded Jesus' teachings about how to live redeemed in a fallen world. Although Paul has been accused of favoring patriarchy, this is a great misunderstanding of his writings. As we look more closely at Ephesians 5 and 6, we see that rather than favoring patriarchy, Paul followed Jesus in rejecting it completely.

Culture places a burden on men by telling them that "real men" should have control and authority over other people. Even if a man is poor and cannot command other men, culture says that he should have authority within his own household.

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 applied Jesus' teaching against the use of earthly authority to family relationships. We start with the ultimate authority-based relationship: Slavery.

Paul and Slavery

Paul wrote his letters to people who lived in the cities of the Roman Empire. In his time, Rome ruled all of Europe, the Mediterranean, and the Middle East. Roman society was organized around a small group of powerful men who controlled large numbers of other people – their own wives, children, and slaves. The original word for family in Rome included a man's slaves, most of who lived in the same compound with the big man, his wife, and their children. More than one third to one half of the people in Greece, Italy and cities such as Corinth were slaves, and another third had once been slaves. To understand what Paul says about submission in the family we will first look at how he says slaves should be treated. Then we will read what Paul says to children, his instructions to wives – and finally his amazing teachings to masters, fathers, and husbands.

Instructions to slaves

Ephesians 6:5-8

Slaves, obey your earthly masters, with fear and trembling, in singleness of your heart as to Christ. [Act] not by way of eye-service to please men but [rather] as slaves of Christ do the will of God from the soul, with good will doing service as to the Lord and not to men. Knowing that each person whatever good thing he does, this he will receive from the Lord, whether a slave or a freeman (my translation).

1. How does Paul tell slaves to behave in Eph. 6: 5-8? List the verbs in Eph. 6:5-8 that describe what slaves are to do in the box below (you will fill in the other boxes later). To whom does the slave owe obedience? To whom does he owe his good works in "fear and trembling" and "singleness of heart"?

Slaves	Children	Wives
Masters	Fathers	Husbands

Instructions to Children

Ephesians 6:1-3

Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. “Honor your father and mother” – this is the first commandment with a promise: “so that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth.”

2. What does Paul ask of children? Again, list the verbs that describe what they are to do in the box labeled “children” above. Why are the children to do this?

Instructions to Wives

Ephesians 5:21-24, 33

Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ, wives to their own husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is head of the wife as also Christ is head of the Church, being himself the savior of the body. Just as the church submits itself to Christ, so also wives ought to their husbands in everything.

....let the wife respect her husband (my translation).

3. What does Paul ask of wives? List the verbs in the box labeled “wives” above.
4. What is the difference between what wives are asked to do and what is asked of children and slaves?

Although many translations of the Bible insert a paragraph break between verses 21 and 22, they are part of the same sentence. Verse 22, in fact, does not even contain a verb in the original

text, but is a part of verse 21. Paul does not ask submission of wives only. Rather, ALL Christians, male and female, are asked to “submit themselves to one another.”

Note that wives are asked to “submit” rather than to “obey.” In English and your local language, there may be little difference between “submit” and “obey.” However, we will see in a study 11 that in Greek, the language in which Paul wrote, the word translated “submit” did not mean to obey or to agree with someone else. Rather, Paul was asking Christians to imitate Jesus by making a purposeful choice to step out of the worldly struggle for power over each other.

5. Why are wives to do this?

Slaves, children, and wives had few or no rights. Their obedience to their masters, fathers or husbands was required by Roman law. In fact, a Roman man could kill a disobedient slave or child. Many slaves, wives and adult children did everything they could to protect or benefit themselves, often through manipulation or flattery (“eye-service” to please men). Paul, however, tells Christians that they do not need to act out of fear, obligation, or self-interest any longer. Instead, they are to give their required service in such a way that they also serve God and show their reverence to Christ.

Instructions to Masters

Ephesians 6: 9

And masters, do the same things to them [their slaves]. Stop threatening them, for you know that both their and your Lord is in heaven, and with him there is no respect for persons.

6. Paul tells masters to “do the same things” to their slaves that slaves were supposed to do to their masters. What were these things? What are the other things he tells to masters do? Write these actions under “masters” in the box above.

7. What does “with [the Lord] there is no respect for persons” mean?

Instructions to Fathers

Ephesians 6: 4

And fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but nurture them in the training and admonition of the Lord (my translation).

8. In Eph. 6:1-3 Paul told children to honor and obey both their father and their mother. He goes on to address only fathers in verse 4. In a fallen world, a son’s duty is to bring glory and honor to his ancestors. In Rome, his obedience and service to his father was required by law, and a disobedient son could be put to death. In contrast, what does this verse tell us about the purpose for which a Christian father used his child’s obedience and honor? Write the verbs in the box under “fathers” above.

Instructions to Husbands

Ephesians 5: 25-33

25 Husbands, love [*agape* in Greek, meaning have caring concern for] 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 it, 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....

Roman men had the right, even the duty, to threaten, coerce and dominate their slaves, children, and wives. Marriages were arranged by fathers to further their own interests, with little concerns for the feelings of the bride or groom. The average Roman bride was a 12-year old girl marrying a man in his late 20s or early 30s. Paul's audience had little experience with modern ideas about romantic love or companionate marriage. Roman wives were expected to give their husbands legitimate heirs (sons, of course) and to manage their households.

Men in honor/shame cultures devote much energy to gaining position for their own family while trying to embarrass others. A wife, who came from another family, would usually be treated with suspicion. Indeed, wives probably did owe their first loyalty to their fathers rather than their husbands. Only after a wife had produced a son might she be trusted. Marriage was not expected to be emotionally intimate: If a Roman had a problem he or she would seek out the advice of a brother, not that of their spouse.

9. How does Paul tell husbands to treat their wives? Write the verbs in the "husbands" box above.

10. Look at the verbs you listed for slaves and masters, wives and husbands, and children and parents. In your opinion, was Paul supporting patriarchy or asking for something different?

The things Paul told Christian men to do – nurture their children and wives! Give themselves up for other people! Refuse to use the worldly power they held over their slaves and children! – were very much opposed to the way their culture expected men to behave.

Paul's advice to slaves, children and wives recognized that the worldly authority given to big men was undeniable and unavoidable. All of these people were bound together by Roman law. But rather than telling Christian men that they had a duty to dominate their families, or that they had 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 a big man or a lord, be the lord the way Jesus was:

[After Jesus' coming]...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 of us to join him there, male and female (Bartchy, 1997).

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.

Slaves Obey their masters Avoid being manipulative (that is, not just "eye-service") Serve God as much as they can even though enslaved	Children Obey both parents Honor both parents	Wives Submit themselves Treat their husbands with respect
Masters Do the same as their slaves Don't threaten (don't use coercive power) Remember God does not acknowledge masters' superior worldly status	Fathers Don't provoke to anger (don't use coercive power) Nurture and instruct in the way of the Lord	Husbands <i>Agape</i> love Love as own body/self Sacrifice for wife Make her glorious Nourish and care Leave father and mother for wife

Applications

11. Why do you think that Paul felt he had to encourage the wives of men who follow Christ to respect them (verse 33)?

12. What do Paul's instructions mean for how parents should treat their children? For how people should treat their household helpers? For how married people should treat each other?

Study 12 The Apostle Paul and “Headship”

The Apostle Paul’s teachings about marriage are intended to bring man and woman back into the ideal relationship of Creation. In order to understand how Paul’s teaching frees us, however, we have to get past the cultural limitations brought on by the Fall. A correct understanding of his use of the word “head” to describe a husband’s relationship to his wife is an important first step.

“For the husband is the head of his wife...”

Ephesians 5:20-23

...always and for everything giving thanks in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God the Father, being submitted to one another out of reverence for Christ, wives, to your own husbands as to the Lord. 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 (my translation).

1. What do people usually understand “head” to mean in this passage?
2. How have these verses been understood traditionally to define the relationship between husband and wife?

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 used here, *kephale* (kef-ah-LAY) refers to the thing physically at the top of an object, such as the head of a column. Its most common meaning 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 a different word, *arche* (or *archon*). 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 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 exercise any kind of authority 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, but Christ is called the head of the church several times. Understanding what it means for Christ to be head of the church will increase our understanding of Paul’s head/body metaphor in marriage.

Ephesians 1:9-10 uses a related word that clarifies what Paul meant:

Ephesians 1:9-10

For [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 [or “bring together”, NIV] all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth (RSV) (emphasis added).

The word translated “unite,” *anakephalaio*, 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*?)

Keeping in mind the meaning of the “head” as someone who “brings things together in one,” consider the following verses about Christ as head:

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 who 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.”

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...”

Ephesians 1:22 “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.”

3. What does “head” mean in these verses?

Ephesians 1:22 is particularly important in our attempt to understand the difference between “head” as ruler and “head” as one who unites or causes us to grow. In this verse, Christ is one with the church, which is his body and his fullness. 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.

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

Ephesians 5:20-31

Note how Paul uses the head/body metaphor in this passage:

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 [one who works for unity] of the wife just as Christ is the head [creator of unity] of the Church, He is Himself the savior of the body. 24 Just as the church submits itself to Christ, so also wives ought to, 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 it, 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" (my translation).

4. 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 Paul’s instruction to husbands in Ephesians 5:25-31?

5. In these verses, what does the husband do as head that is similar to what Jesus does as head of the church (in the verses listed earlier in this study)?
6. What effect would it have on a relationship to have a husband seeking unity and growth within the marriage?

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.” Similarly, a “savior” (vs. 23) was someone who provided a great benefit to someone else, often at great cost to himself.

Another problem we sometimes have in understanding what Paul was saying is his statement that wives must “respect” their husbands. Imagine that 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. Does it ever happen that a wife might get afraid when a man starts acting like a Christian? That she might take advantage of or make fun of him?

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, the foot, or heart. Cervin suggests Paul uses “head” to suggest being the one to go 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. Wifely obedience was required by law. 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 of everything he had been raised to expect as a man. 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....submission is the proper response to servanthood. It is the very meaning of mutual submission." (Gilbert Bilezikian, 1985, p. 159, 161)

Applications

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

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

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

Study 13 The Mystery of Marriage

This series of studies began with Jesus' statement that the ideal relationship between man and woman was to be found "in the beginning," when God created us to be "one." Our study of Creation led us also to the statement that the first humans were "naked and unashamed," enjoying a relationship of honesty, fearlessness, 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": How do two people, let alone the entire Christian community, become one? If Genesis 2 is a picture of the ideal relationship before sin, in Ephesians 5 Paul shows us how we regain that oneness in Christian redemption.

Mutual Submission

Ephesians 5: 20-33

20 giving thanks to God the Father at all times and for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, 21 Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ, 22 wives to their own husbands as to the Lord. 23 For the husband is head of the wife as also Christ is head of the Church, being himself the savior of the body. 24 Just as the church submits itself to Christ, so also wives ought to their husbands in everything.

25 Husbands, love [*agape* in Greek, meaning have caring concern for] 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 it, 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.

1. Who is addressed in verses 20-21?

2. In verses 25-30, Paul described what the husband's attitude should be toward his wife. In daily life, through what actions or attitudes can a Christian man do these things for his wife?

- "give himself up" for his wife
- cleanse her from every blemish
- love his wife as he does his own body/himself
- nourish and care for his wife
- leave his father and mother and be united to his wife

In verses 22-24 and 33, Paul describes the Christian wife's attitude toward her husband. Bristow writes, "Paul...was requesting that wives voluntarily, willingly, actively be subject to their husbands...Since it is asking for something that is voluntary in nature, 'be subject to' is an awkward translation at best. (The word) means something like 'give allegiance to,' 'tend to the needs of,' 'be supportive of' or 'be responsive to.' "

3. In everyday life, how can or should a wife:

- Give her allegiance (loyalty, support) to her husband?
- Show this support in everything?
- Respect her husband?

4. It would be difficult for a husband to do as Paul directs if his wife made fun of him or took advantage. How can a wife make it safe for a husband to care for her as Christ cares for the church?

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

[Jesus] answered, "Have you not read that the one who made them at the beginning 'made them male and female', and said, 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'? So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate." (Matthew)

24 Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh. 25 And the man and his wife were both naked, and were not ashamed (Genesis).

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

Paul quoted this same ideal in Ephesians 5:31.

6. 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”?

7. Compare a relationship in which one can be “naked and unashamed” with Paul’s recommendations for husbands and wives in Ephesians 5.

Some 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 duty 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 peace 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

8. Remember that marriages at the time when Paul was writing tended to be arranged marriages, just as they were in Africa (and in some places, still are). How is it possible to be “one” with someone you did not choose?

9. How does Paul’s teachings on the intended relationship within the household and in marriage apply to our relationships with all other Christians?

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