

CHAPTER VI
EPHESIANS 5—MUTUAL SUBMISSION

While this book is primarily concerned with women's roles in the church, we cannot untangle this issue without also delving into the relationship of husbands and wives. After all, the Genesis accounts that we've already studied deal with marriage, not church governance.

Paul's most thorough discussion of the relationship of husbands and wives is found in Ephesians 5:21-6:9. Because Paul deals very particularly with the subject, we must begin our New Testament study here.

Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.

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

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church—for we are members of his body. “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.” This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church. However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.

Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. “Honor your father and mother”—which is the first commandment with a promise—“that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth.”

Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.

Slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ. Obey them not only to win their favor when their eye is on you, but like slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from your heart. Serve

BURIED TALENTS

wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not men, because you know that the Lord will reward everyone for whatever good he does, whether he is slave or free.

And masters, treat your slaves in the same way. Do not threaten them, since you know that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no favoritism with him.

This familiar passage is often studied and taught in our Sunday School classes, most often when marriage is being studied. In fact, I have observed that those teaching this scripture in the context of how to have a good, Christian marriage often interpret it differently from those who are teaching regarding the role of women in the church. Certainly, we must understand it the same way in both contexts.

Headship in non-biblical sources. Before interpreting the passage, we must first come to an understanding of the meaning of “head” in 5:23: “For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior.” In First Century Greek, what did “head” mean when used figuratively of a person? Kenneth V. Neller, assistant professor of the New Testament at Harding University, offers some very helpful research on this question.⁶²

In extra-biblical Greek literature, *kephale* (head) refers primarily to what is first or supreme, or to an extremity, end, or point. As such, the term was used to designate not only the head of a person or animal, but also the prow of a ship, head of a pillar, top of a wall, source or mouth of a river, or start of a period of time. The word could also signify what was prominent, outstanding, or determinative. ... Nevertheless, there is no example of “head” being used figuratively for a person as “leader” or “chief” before the Septuagint.⁶³

Neller then points out that while “head” does indeed mean ruler in Hebrew, the translators of the Septuagint rarely translated the Hebrew word for head (*rosh*) as *kephale*, preferring Greek words that literally mean ruler or leader (typically *archon*). Thus, it appears that, with the occasional exception, the translators did not consider the Greek *kephale* to be a fair translation of the Hebrew word for head when used of a leader or ruler.⁶⁴

⁶² “‘Submission’ in Eph. 5:21-33,” published in Osburn, editor, *Essays on Women 1*, pages 251-258.

⁶³ The translation of the Hebrew Old Testament into Greek that was made in the centuries between the Old and New Testament, beginning about 250 BC. Because Greek was the standard language of the eastern Mediterranean world in the First Century, most Old Testament scholars were well familiar with the Septuagint, and its use of language influenced the writers of the New Testament.

⁶⁴ Unlike the Greek *kephale*, the Hebrew *rosh* means both head and ruler. But *rosh*, when used to mean ruler, is translated *kephale* only twice in the Septuagint. Isa. 9:14-15 uses *rosh* in a play on words to mean both a literal head and a metaphoric head as ruler, a play on words permitted in Hebrew (as well as

[Continued next page]

In the First Century, *kephale* could also mean “source.” This use is found, for example, in the writings of Philo, a contemporary of Paul. Philo was a Hellenistic Jew who wrote extensively on the Jewish religion. Thus, his use of “head” to mean source is an indicator of the background against which Paul wrote.

Ultimately, however, there is little evidence for the use of *kephale* to mean “ruler,” “leader,” or “source,” although certainly all three meanings are found and are possible. This scant evidence allows commentators to argue for whichever position suits their biases by allowing them to point out the obvious weakness of the evidence supporting their opponent’s interpretation. Ultimately, while these and other meanings are possible in New Testament Greek, the meaning of “head” as a metaphor must always be derived from the context. This is in marked contrast to the English use of “head,” where “head” as meaning ruler is idiomatic. Thus, in English if I say that I am the head of the committee, the head of Joe, or the head gardener, no context is needed to know that I’m the boss. This is just not true in Greek.

For those not practiced in translation, it can be quite difficult to imagine how a word can carry entirely different connotations or idiomatic readings in different languages. “Head” is so well-established in English as “ruler” or “higher in authority” that it seems unimaginable that “head” could mean something else in Greek. But for those of us raised on the King James Version, changing body-part idioms are actually fairly familiar. For example, the KJV accurately translates Philippians 1:8 as “For God is my record, how greatly I long after you all in *the bowels of Jesus Christ*.” In Greek, this surely was easily understood and dignified, but in English, this language is absurdly incomprehensible. That’s because in First Century Greek-speaking lands, the intestines were considered the seat of the deepest affection. Thus, the NIV translates, “the affection of Jesus Christ.” If a First Century Greek were to read a modern text about the importance of having “guts,” he’d think we were talking about love, rather than courage, and he’d be astounded that anyone would associate courage with bowels. The fact is that we just can’t read our idiomatic use of words into other languages, no matter how natural it would seem.

English) but not in the Greek. The translators had to choose either the Greek word meaning literal head, *kephale*, or the Greek word meaning ruler, *archon*, and so chose *kephale*. This does not mean that the translators considered *kephale* to mean ruler—only that the passage demanded a word meaning physical head.

The one passage that uses *kephale* to mean something like ruler is Judg. 11:11, where the meaning is unmistakable. Bristow, *ibid*, argues that *kephale* means something like “leader into battle” in this context, but his argument fails since the Septuagint translation declares Jephthah as the *kephale* “over” others. The use of “over” disallows a softened meaning such as “leader.”

Taken alone, the Septuagint translation of Judg. 11:11 might justify translating *kephale* as ruler, but this verse stands alone in contrast to many scores of translations of *rosh* into other Greek words, typically *archon*, meaning ruler. Thus, it is much more likely that the Septuagint’s uninspired translation of *rosh* is simply a mistake by scribes who knew their Hebrew better than their Greek.

BURIED TALENTS

Headship in the context of Ephesians. The solution is to find Paul's meaning from the context—

(Eph. 1:21-23) In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And God placed all things under [Christ's] 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.

Paul refers to Christ as “head” over everything. But clearly Christ's relationship with the church, His body, differs from His relationship with “everything.” Christ is head—not *over* the church—but *for* the church. His headship is for a purpose, and that purpose is for the benefit of the church. Moreover, we see the church referred to as Christ's “body.” Paul then says that the church is the “fullness” of Christ “who fills everything in every way.” As stated by Francis Foulkes,⁶⁵

We may paraphrase this by saying that it is God's purpose that the Church should be the full expression of Jesus Christ, who Himself fills everything there is.

The conclusion that Christians are not viewed in this passage as being *under* Christ as a “head” is confirmed by Ephesians 2:6-7:

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

First, we are shown a picture of Christ sitting on His throne in heaven at the right hand of God. Paul says that God “seated him ... in the heavenly realms.” We now read that all Christians are seated *with* Christ in the heavenly realms. In this highly symbolic language, the thought is not that Christians (the body) are ruled by Christ (the head). Rather, the thought is that we Christians rule *with* Christ! This is not to say that Christ has no authority over Christians—only that Christ's authority over the church is not the thought contained within the metaphor “head” as used in Ephesians.

Thus, the church is pictured as not so much in subjection to Christ as an extension of Christ. And being a part of Christ, there is no question of being “under his feet.” After all, the church cannot be both under Christ's feet and a part of His body!

The next occurrence of “head” in Ephesians is in chapter 4:

15 Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. 16 *From him* the

⁶⁵ *The Epistle of Paul to the Ephesians* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, Mich. 1963), published as part of the *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries*, edited by R. V. G. Tasker.

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

Once again, Paul refers to Christ as “head” and the church as His body. But we also see the image of the body growing “from him” with the “head” being seen as the source of growth and building up.

While the ancient Greeks did not have the understanding of anatomy that is familiar to 21st Century readers,⁶⁶ it would have been easy enough for a First Century reader to see the “head” as the source of nourishment for the body, and this certainly seems to be Paul’s image. And once again we see the image of the body as the extension of the personality of Christ, with each part doing its own work as part of a single living organism.⁶⁷

To this point, therefore, we see that Christ has the entire universe under His feet, and that He sits on His heavenly throne as a king, and yet we see the church made a part of the person of Christ Himself—not ruled, but a part of the ruler! The church can hardly be in rebellion to Christ, because it is a part of Him.

Understanding of this mystical language comes from an appreciation of Paul’s teachings on the Holy Spirit, through whom Christ indwells His church and all Christians:

(Eph. 3:16-19) I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through *his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts* through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of *all the fullness of God*.

In these and other verses, Paul teaches that Christians are indwelled by the Spirit and that this indwelling allows Christ to live in each Christian’s heart (seat of emotions) and gives Christians power to be filled with all the fullness of God. These are very similar

⁶⁶ We modern folks know that thought and control come from the brain, that is, a part of the head. First Century Greeks thought of thought as coming from the midriff. “Bedale reminds us that the functions of the nervous system were not known to the ancients, who, accordingly, did not view the *head* as we do (they held that man thinks with the midriff, the *phren*).” Leon Morris, *The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians*, *ibid*, pages 151-152. Thus, “head” does not refer to the man as the thinking member of the household.

⁶⁷ We see a very similar image in Col. 2:19: “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.”

BURIED TALENTS

thoughts to those taught by Paul with regard to Christ's headship. This is how Christ fills everything in every way through the church (1:23).

In the imagery of Ephesians, Jesus does not "rule" His Christians through laws and edicts. Rather, He lives within the heart of each Christian to change how each Christian feels and desires. In so doing, the Christian is caused to want the same things that Jesus wants and the Christian becomes an extension of Christ's love.⁶⁸ I don't deny the Lordship and rule of Christ. Rather, Christ's rule of the church is just not the meaning of "head" in the image Paul paints for us.

This brings us back to 5:23: "For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior." Plainly, the "headship" of Christ here is to be interpreted in light of what Paul just said regarding the relationship of Christ to His church. Indeed, the thought is quite similar to the "one flesh" relationship of husbands and wives described in Genesis 2. The church is the "fullness" of Christ and His body.

Thus, the husband, as head of the wife, has an obligation to nourish her, that is, to provide her with her needs for growth and for being built up, just as the church grows and is built up by Christ as its head. Just so, the husband's headship is "for" his wife, not over his wife, just as Christ's headship is for the church, with the world being under His feet (which feet are, of course, a part of His body, the church).

Likewise, the wife has an obligation to her husband, to be his "fullness," that is, to complete that which is lacking in him—that is, to be a suitable complement. And this is to be done by the wife and husband becoming one—not just legally and physically, but one in heart, with common feelings, desires, and goals. This is the Ephesians metaphor of headship—and it is entirely consistent with Genesis 1-2.⁶⁹

"Submission." The next key concept that we should consider is submission. Verse 21 states that *all* Christians are to submit to one another. In the following verses Paul gives examples of this principle in practice, in marriage, between parents and children, and between masters and slaves. The subject in each case is clearly submission to one another. Paul, having so stated once, does not need to restate the command to

⁶⁸ (Phil. 2:12-13) "Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose." See also Heb. 8 and Rom. 8. This doctrine is discussed in greater detail throughout the author's *The Holy Spirit and Revolutionary Grace*.

⁶⁹ One might object to this interpretation, relying on 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 over every power and authority." In this verse, "head" appears to indicate "ruler." But the NIV mistranslates by adding "over" after head. The word is absent in the Greek text, and the KJV is more accurate in translating "of." Christ's being the "head of" every power thus means that He is the source of all earthly power. See Dan. 4:17; John 19:11. In any event, the meaning of "head" in Ephesians must be found in Ephesians.

submit in each paragraph to make it true. Slaves must submit to masters, but masters must also submit to slaves. For example, in verse 6:9 when Paul commands masters to treat their slaves as the slaves are commanded to treat their masters (“in the same way”), he is explaining how the general command to mutually submit is to be fulfilled by masters toward slaves.

Paul first addresses how wives are to submit to their husbands. Wives are to submit to their husbands “as to the Lord.”⁷⁰ At first, this would appear to make husbands dictators. After all, the church is compelled to do all that Christ commands. And yet there are immediate and obvious limitations. For example, when was the last time that Jesus uttered a new command to the church? It’s been nearly 2000 years! While the church has been given some very general instructions, most decisions that the church must make are left to the Christians’ discretion. How much should the budget be? Which programs receive how much money? Do we build a new building? Who should be appointed to head a committee? Who should be our preacher? Should we even hire a preacher? The day-to-day grist of church activity is simply not dictated by our Savior, although the principles certainly are. But there are many different ways to comply with the principles in a given situation.⁷¹ As we will discuss in much more detail regarding Galatians 3:28, Jesus has given us but one command: “love your neighbor” and our relationship with Christ is one of freedom, not subservience.

But Paul does not leave husbands to speculate on what he means. And we cannot press the analogy farther than Paul suggests that we should. He tells husbands that while they are “heads” of their wives as Christ is head of the church, they must love their wives as Christ loves the church. The “headship” of Christ includes the burden of sacrifice. Husbands must give up their lives as Jesus did. Adam gave up a rib. Christian husbands give up everything.

Paul refers specifically to the Genesis 2 account, that husbands and wives become one flesh. In Christianity, husbands and wives are to be restored to the relationship that they had before the curse was pronounced. They must become one flesh. Husbands don’t have dominion; they sacrifice. They give up their quest for control by giving up their lives. And plainly the reference to husbands (and not wives!) leaving their fathers and

⁷⁰ Osburn, in *Women in the Church* 2, p. 156, points out that the verb “submit” does not appear in 5:22, but is implied from the verb in 5:21 (“Submit to one another”). Therefore, it is very unlikely that Paul meant wives to submit to husbands in a way much different from the mutual submission commanded in the preceding verse.

⁷¹ (Matt. 11:30) “For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

BURIED TALENTS

mothers means that husbands must do the most giving up. But this only makes sense. Due to Eve's curse, husbands have the most to give up!⁷²

Many authors conclude from this passage that husbands and wives are "equal" or that they are "partners." Unlike most authors on the subject of marriage, I can talk authoritatively of partnership (in the Greek, the word for partnership, *koinonia*, is also translated fellowship or sharing). As a practicing attorney, I have worked as an employee, been (and am) an employer, and have partners. Some of my employees have been my friends. But I would never consider asking my wife to be to me as my employees are to me. The subordinate relationship of an employee to employer creates barriers and a distance that cannot be bridged by any amount of friendship and love. The relationship imposes limitations on sharing and giving that are insurmountable. No one will deny this who has been both an owner and an employee. Those who disagree are fooling themselves.

Likewise, I would never want to be on the subordinate side of such a relationship. I must say that I never enjoyed being an employee. Being in an inferior relationship to someone else goes against my independent personality and imposes inhibitions that would destroy a marriage.

But being a partner is very much like a marriage. In fact, my partners and I advise new partners entering the firm that becoming a partner is like getting married, except that you'll spend more time at the office with us than with your husband or wife! The comparison is based more on experience than any scripture, but Ephesians 5 bears the conclusion out.

But partnership is often misunderstood. It is not equality. It is mutual sharing and mutual submission. There is no "boss," but the partnership works quite well with an orderly chain of command anyway. The system is a meritocracy. The partner with the ability to handle employees handles employees. The partner with the ability to work hard and generate revenues does so. The partner with the ability to deal with our bank does so. Who is the boss? It depends on what the problem is. The other partners are often required to participate in a decision, but there is not time in the day to participate in them all. And when all the partners must participate, they do so under the leadership of the partner who has the most experience or skill as to the matter under consideration.

The same is true in marriage. Who decides what's for supper? Who decides what the children are to wear? Who decides what bills to pay? Who decides when the kitchen is clean enough? To hear some traditionalistic authors tell it, the husband decides

⁷² While the command of one flesh is found in Genesis 2 and was spoken by Adam before the Fall of Man, the statement that men are to leave father and mother and cleave to their wives is a comment written by Moses, the author of Genesis, in the nature of commentary on "one flesh." Clearly, Adam was not expected to leave his father and mother! Thus, the reference to men leaving their parents was written and speaks to the time after the Fall of Man and the curse of Creation by God.

everything but may in his benevolent discretion delegate some of this authority to his subservient wife. That is simply not what Ephesians 5 says. The husband gives up his dominion and becomes one with his wife. Decisions are not made by domination or even consensus or agreement. They are made in the most biblical of all ways, based on to whom God has given gifts.

As radical as this may seem to some readers, it is nothing new or strange at all. It is how healthy marriages work. Any marriage that works differently is seriously dysfunctional. Frankly, we are very fortunate that most Christians base their marriages on their love and respect for one another—and what works—and not on the theorizing of our theologians.

And this explains very nicely Paul's command that husbands present their wives "holy and blameless." Remember that Paul explicitly refers back to the Genesis 2 account of Adam and Eve before their sin as the ideal for Christian marriage. Any marriage that is based on dominion of one spouse over the other is a corrupt marriage, suffering from the corruption that all Creation suffers from—sin! Christians are called to leave the corruption of the sinful world, and our marriages are included. If we do not do so, we take the holiest of all human relationships and make it wicked. The husband, therefore, is called on to give up his dominion and become one flesh, to rid his marriage of sin, and to present his wife unsullied from the curse of Eve.

Moreover, just as stated in Genesis 3, if the husband demands domination, then he makes his wife a sinner, because her desire will be to rule the husband. Women deeply resent male domination. Consider the wide-ranging sympathy that many women feel for Lorena Bobbitt, for the many battered wives who have killed their husbands, and for the many other women who have taken cruel vengeance on their domineering husbands! A husband may well be able to dominate his wife and even destroy her self-esteem, but the relationship will never be a happy one, even if commanded by the preacher from the pulpit.

Christ's example of submission. But there is more. We can learn much more about husbands and wives from those passages that tell us what Jesus did for the church. Paul plainly states that men are to be unto their wives as Christ is unto the church—in terms of Christ's sacrifice. Paul tells us plainly which aspect of Christ's relationship with the church he has in mind. It is the sacrifice of Christ. We cannot add to Paul by suggesting that Paul also had the Lordship of Christ in mind. Paul just doesn't say that.

The better we understand our Savior, the better we will understand how husbands are to relate to their wives.

(Phil. 2:1-11) If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being

BURIED TALENTS

one in spirit and purpose. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.

Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus:

Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.

And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!

Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

This familiar passage is obviously parallel to Paul's exhortation to husbands in Ephesians 5. Although this passage is about Christ and the church, we can learn much about husbands and wives by taking the same passage and applying the lessons to husbands just as Paul instructs in Ephesians.

Paul begins with instructions on Christian unity. He then explains that Christ Himself is the best example of the attitude that we should have. Thus, when we emulate Christ, we are fulfilling the command to unity. Equivalently, the command of unity, being a command to be like Christ in His sacrificial life, is also a description of how husbands should treat their wives.

Pursuing Paul's analogy, we find that Paul first says that Christ and the church (metaphorically, husbands and wives) should be like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and in purpose. The emphasis on unity fits perfectly the principle of "one flesh." Paul then instructs husbands and wives to have no selfish ambition or vain conceit. Selfishness is plainly the opposite of the one flesh that spouses are called to. Indeed, Paul says that husbands and wives should each consider the other better than himself or herself.

This is the answer to the old question of who should be the boss. The answer is that the wife should consider the husband better than her—but the husband must consider the wife better than himself! Neither can claim superiority. But there is a very important limitation. While wives and husbands must look to the interests of the other, they are each commanded to also look to their own interests. Neither husbands nor wives are commanded to be doormats or to be consumed by the ego and personality of the other spouse. Each has rights as an individual and is entitled to insist on them. Both spouses are entitled to insist on a full measure of self-esteem and personhood.

Paul then uses Jesus as the ultimate example of how Christians should live. Christ chose to give up His superior position. He decided that his superior role was not something to be “grasped,” meaning literally, to be “greedily clung to.” Instead, Jesus chose to take on the form of a servant. Just so, in the world, husbands can, by force of their greater physical size and strength and by leaning on a male-biased culture, dominate their wives. And yet husbands are called to give up their “natural” dominance and take on the role of a servant. If Jesus could do it, then we husbands are not too good to do so.

Paul then explains the consequence of Jesus’ taking on the form of a servant—crucifixion! And this is very same point made by Paul in Ephesians 5. Jesus was willing to die for the church. Husbands must die for their wives. His point is in the nature of Romans 12:1, which tells Christians to offer themselves to Jesus as living sacrifices. Husbands must do the same for their wives.

Another relevant passage is also familiar, but the application to husbands is perhaps unconventional. Nonetheless, in Ephesians 5 Paul tells husbands to emulate Christ’s servanthood, and John 13 gives us an excellent lesson in this.

(John 13:1-5) It was just before the Passover Feast. Jesus knew that the time had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he now showed them the full extent of his love.

The evening meal was being served, and the devil had already prompted Judas Iscariot, son of Simon, to betray Jesus. Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples’ feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him.

The most interesting point is found in the second sentence of the second paragraph in the word “so.” We naturally conclude that Jesus knew that He was ruler of the universe, and despite this, he chose to wash His disciples’ feet. But that’s not right! The Bible doesn’t say that Jesus did what he did “despite” who He is. He washed their feet (including the feet of Judas Iscariot!) *because* He rules the universe! How amazing!

The application is this: the greater a husband thinks that he is, the stronger, the more intelligent, the more stable, or the more mature, the more he has a duty to become his wife’s servant. Husbands, if you are perfect, so perfect that God would give you the entire universe as your private kingdom, you would be just the sort of person who would

BURIED TALENTS

volunteer to wash Judas Iscariot's feet. Thus, we husbands are caught in a perfect trap. The more we think that we're entitled to dominate, the more plain is our duty to serve.⁷³

Some would argue that the foregoing interpretation fails to properly take into account the command that women submit to their husbands. But I have no dispute with Paul's teaching at all. Rather, my disagreement is with those who fail to take into account the command that a husband must "give himself up" for his wife as Christ gave Himself up for the church. We too readily read over this command and falsely assume that husbands are to be like Christ as Kings and Lawgivers. This shallow interpretation is not only contradictory to Ephesians 5, but it also misunderstands the nature of our Savior. Jesus did not come to earth, take the form of a servant, and give Himself up to become a lawgiver—He did these things to free us from law:

(John 8:32) "Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

(Rom. 8:1-2) Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death.

(Gal. 5:1) It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.

(Heb. 2:14-15) Since the children have flesh and blood, [Christ] too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil—and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.

Nothing in Ephesians 5 even remotely suggests that the role of husbands is to dominate their wives. Our role is to free our wives from the dominion of sin—to present them "holy and blameless," unspotted from the curse on the Creation.

⁷³ These points rely heavily on lessons taught by Prof. Randy Harris, David Lipscomb University, in February 1994. Prof. Harris was speaking of the church, and the application to marriage is my own.