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The Man/Woman Relationship in the New Testament

Michael J. Williams.

Two Principles of Approach.

The first principle is that of submitting everything to the gospel. The cross is the centre of our religion and every doctrine and ethic that we hold must be held in the light of the gospel itself. In ethics it is not good enough simply to see the N.T. as a book of rules. The N.T. is not a book of rules, it is good news, and any moral judgements that we want to derive from it we must see in relation to the very nature of the gospel itself. In the man/woman relationship, for instance, it is no good just looking to the N.T. for rules of conduct, one must look deeper to see how any moral judgements are related to the gospel.

The N.T. itself shows that the man/woman relationship is part of the doctrine of God (1 Cor. 11:3) and part of the doctrine of the church (Eph. 5:23). Because of these connections we can only offer pointers to a N.T. doctrine of the subject. To fully understand the N.T. teaching on this subject would involve a full discussion of the doctrines of God, creation, and redemption.

The second principle of study is that of the viewpoint from which we start. Our minds are so conditioned by our own culture and our own language that it is hard for us to understand the true meaning of the Biblical Text. This is especially important when dealing with words that have changed their meaning. We shall see in our study that because we live in a culture that treats women in certain ways we are conditioned in the way we respond to the text. We must make every effort to remove our spectacles.

The Scenario.

The first thing we must realise when we come to look at the Biblical picture of the relationship between man and woman is that it is no still-life. The man/woman relationship, like everything else in biblical theology, is a drama. The man/woman relationship is something that changes in history according to God's plan.

The drama begins at creation. In Genesis there are some very important truths about that relationship. Genesis 1:26 and Genesis 5:2 make it clear

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that the image of God is not something that belongs to the male alone, but to the woman also. Even though Eve comes from the body of Adam it is still God who creates her, and so she has his image. Indeed, properly speaking, the term 'man' does not belong exclusively to the male, it is used of the man/woman creation that God has made. This fundamental fact cannot be stressed too highly, it means that there is at once a diversity and a unity in humanity. It means also that both man and woman have spiritual standing before God, not just the male alone.

It is to 'man' as a whole, both male and female, that dominion is given in Genesis 1:28. It is man and woman together who have dominion over land, sea and air. There is no division here into separate roles for man and woman, there is only the unity expressed in Genesis 2:24. If we still lived in that pre-fall state, then there could be no separation of roles for man and woman in society as we have today in terms of dominion in creation. This pre-fall picture is not one of 'Women's Lib'; not one of equal status or equal job opportunity, rather it is one of complete sharing, complete co-operation in creation.

It is true that some have seen in the Genesis story an indication that the woman is some kind of secondary emanation from man, a second order being. But to accept this is to accept a Gnostic interpretation. The point of the story is not that woman is secondary to man, but that woman and man dwell in complete unity, indeed they are created from unity. The loneliness of the male, if anything, points to the fact that without woman man is 'incomplete'. Some have used Genesis 2:18 to support the idea that woman is the 'helper' of man and therefore subordinate to him in some sense. But we cannot put this interpretation in the Hebrew for 'helper' (*ezer*) because the word is often used of God himself. God can be described as man's 'helper', and he is certainly not subordinate to man (e.g. Ps. 33:20).

So the first act in our drama is told, the second act is Fall. It is the Fall that destroys and separates. It destroys and separates man from God, and it is also the Fall that destroys and separates in the man/woman relationship. In particular Genesis 3:16 describes the breakdown of the man/woman relationship as one of the rule of the male. That the man shall rule the woman is not part of the perfection of God's plan, rather its root is sin, and its beginning is the Fall.

The third act of our drama is redemption. In dying on the cross and rising again from the dead Jesus overcame the power of sin and death. Man no longer stands condemned by the Law, but it is now justified by grace through faith. The broken relationship between man and God now enters a new phase. Christ is the bridge that makes a new relationship possible. But to say this is to say something also about interhuman relationships. The new

relationship with God means that new possibilities open up in human relationships. In Galatians 3:28 Paul draws out the significance of this for the man/woman relationship in particular. Paul is looking here to the fulfilment of all that the cross implies. Ultimately the cross implies that there are no longer male and female. The barrier that the Fall erected between man and woman has now been done away, the dominion that the Fall brought has now been done away. It is not even just that the cross puts man and woman back into the pre-fall state, much more, it means that the work that God began in Eden is now coming to its completion. The fulfilment of the cross for the man/woman relationship is that now both man and woman can come to full personhood. It is very much this truth which Jesus tried to get the Sadducees to see in Mark 12:25. He told them that in the New Age there would be no marriage, rather a completely different order would be ushered in. From this and from Galatians 3:28 it seems that marriage is a stage in the man/woman relationship, a stepping stone to something more.

However this third act has not yet been fully fulfilled. The N.T. has much to say about the time between the cross and its full outworking at the Second Coming. Many things that Jesus died for are not yet, indeed the whole creation groans in waiting for the fulfilment (Rom. 8:19ff). This 'not-yetness' is a feature of the age in which we live. In terms of our personal relationship with God we have the Spirit, but we are not yet perfected. At the moment we are being changed (2 Cor. 3:18). In terms of the relationship between man and woman there is also a 'not-yetness'. The relationship is changed by the cross, but the change is not complete. The Fall has been overcome, but the Fall still will mark the relationship as it does that of man to God. We must go on to see just what we should say about this time between cross and Second Coming in connection with the man/woman relationship, but before we do let me draw two practical conclusions from the scenario.

First, that for Christians to have 'obey' as part of a promise from the woman to the man in a wedding service is to behave as if the cross had never happened. Jesus died to overcome the dominion expressed in Genesis 3:16. Second, that the church in every age must be concerned with growing towards the fulfilment of the Kingdom, and in particular it must allow for the man/woman relationship to change as it goes to fulfilment at the consummation. Galatians 3:28 is the Christian vision towards which we should aim. Some of the implications of the vision cannot be fulfilled this side of the Second Coming, but some can, and if they can, they should.

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The Slavery Argument.

In Galatians 3:28 Paul not only speaks of the vision that the cross gives him for the man/woman relationship, but also of the vision for the slave and master relationship. Paul says here that there is no longer slave or free. It will help in our understanding of the man/woman relationship if we spend a few moments thinking of the way in which the master/slave relationship is tackled in the N.T. There is a connection between the two not only in Galatians 3:28, but also in Ephesians 5 & 6, Colossians 3:18ff, and 1 Peter 2 & 3 where the two relationships are dealt with side by side. A full discussion of the issue of slavery would, of course, be a very long study in itself, but we can offer one or two insights here which will bear on our main theme. A full discussion of slavery could only come with a full understanding of the nature of the Law in the N.T., since 1 Peter 2:13 clearly connects slavery with 'divine institutions for the sake of men' (R.S.V. margin).

One observation that we can make however, is that although Paul prophesies the end of slavery in Galatians 3:28 for those 'in Christ', he does not go on to advise slaves that they must come out on strike, nor does he tell masters to stop having Christians as slaves. What he does is to advise slaves to 'be obedient to their master . . . as to Christ', and masters to remember that there is one Master in heaven (Ephesians 6:5ff). On the one hand Paul is saying that the Christian must respect the social institution of slavery, but on the other hand Paul is changing the inner nature of the way in which the Christian is to think of it. The old idea of slavery is finished because the slave must never think of himself as simply one who exists to please his master (Ephesians 6:6); rather because of the cross, he must realise that he is now the servant of Christ. This is a very radical inner change, it is the realisation that both slave and master have equal standing in the Gospel, and that they both have one true master, even Christ. But having said this, Paul still maintains that the new relationship should be worked out within the old institution. In looking at slavery in this way, Paul is being faithful to his prophecy that one day slavery will end, but also standing for order against anarchy.

In the light of this discussion one can see that the formal abolition of slavery that took place in the West not so very long ago, was an outworking of the principles that Paul himself stood for. Paul gives the slavery institution a new heart, and the new heart eventually expressed itself in an abolition of the institution; an abolition not by anarchy, but by a genuine seeing of the principles behind Paul's teaching. There are, of course, still situations in which slavery exists in fact, though not in name, and I am sure that Paul would regard his way of looking at things as still relevant to these situations.

Paul's understanding of the institution of slavery is paralleled in Acts 21:26 by his attitude to the Law. We may find it difficult to think that the Apostle to the Gentiles should submit himself to the ritual of the Temple; but Paul did it from love. In the same way he asks slaves to submit to the institution of slavery, out of love, not because the institution is eternal. He is saying to the slaves, 'be obedient to your master for the sake of Love'. He is saying that, in Christ, there is neither slave nor free, but, because this is a Fallen world, we must submit ourselves to every human institution for the sake of love. This does not mean that changes cannot take place in human institutions, nor that Christians should not fight for those changes, but rather that, given the situation, this is how to act. Paul shows in 1 Corinthians 7:21 that he can advise a change in formal status as an integral part of his teaching.

What then is the relevance of this to the man/woman relationship and the institution of marriage? The relevance is this, that Paul saw that the cross changed the inner relationship of slavery and that this inner change could mean an outward expression of change; he also saw that the cross changed the inner relationship between man and woman. Since the cross a new vision of the man/woman relationship is given, which will in the end lead to total fulfilment at the consummation, but in the mean time Christians are to acknowledge the inner change, yet live within the social order of the day. As Paul's teaching is quite in line with the formal change that took place when slavery was abolished (indeed it pointed to that change when rightly understood) so it is in the man/woman relationship. Paul's teaching is quite in line with legal redefinition of the marriage relationship. I believe that Paul would have welcomed the new freedom that women today have found within marriage. His teaching is a prophecy of that change, but he would not tell a woman to go on strike against the social order any more than he would tell slaves to go on strike.

From this discussion I deduce that as Paul's teaching is quite in line with legal changes about slavery, so Paul's teaching is quite in line with legal redefinition of marriage. The vision in Galatians 3:28 stands for both. In slavery the institution can be abolished altogether; with marriage Paul does not see the abolition of marriage taking place this side of the consummation, rather he sees a return to the fullness of the Creation pattern (Eph. 5:28ff). Human sexuality (both physical and psychological) are part of man's being this side of the consummation, therefore marriage stands as the fullest vision for man and woman on this side of that fulfilment. But, because of Galatians 3:28, Paul's vision of marriage is changed from Genesis 3:16 back to Genesis 2:24.

Paul would certainly have supported many of the things that have

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been granted to women in this century, e.g. property rights, franchise, equal pay etc. But he would not have been a full supporter of Women's Lib. If women's lib wants to abolish sexual differences, he would say that these will only finally be fulfilled at the consummation.

Women and the Church¹.

If we are right in saying that the full implication of the Gospel is total liberation for women on the one hand, and yet on the other we still live under the influence of the Fall, we shall expect to find a 'not-yetness' about that way in which the N.T. treats the subject of women in the church. The full implication of the Gospel is that women should have all the authority and position in the church that men should have, but we should expect the N.T. to make sure that such a change comes not by going on strike for it, but rather being sensitive to the age in which it finds itself.

In fact this is the very position that we do find. We find that women receive the Holy Spirit at Pentecost (Acts 2:17) and from that moment they share in the ministry of the church. Women have a prophetic ministry in the church as we can see from Acts 21:9. Women also hold the office of deacon in the church (Rom. 16:1 and this is also the implication of 1 Tim. 3:11). Women also labour side by side with the Apostles themselves (Phil. 4:3). From these passages we find women enjoying the liberation of being 'in Christ'. That we find no women bishops is not because women are still treated as secondary, but rather that the time has not yet come because of the social institutions of the day.

In 1 Corinthians 11:3-16 the implication is (see Barrett's Commentary² on this text) that women play a full part in the gatherings of the local church. They pray and prophesy in the assembly. Paul's only reservation is that they should be seen to do this with proper reverence and with the proper sign of authority. (Paul is not here laying down rules for ladies' hairstyles. The point is that there must be due recognition for both men and women within the authority of the church. Part of the social convention made Paul recommend the veil as a sign of reverence and authority. Reverence and authority are the important things and not the veil.) So here we find Paul giving women a place within the ministry of the church.

What then of other passages in the N.T. that seem to deny women that place? I do not think that these should surprise us. I believe the reason is that the N.T. writers wanted to be sensitive to the social institutions within which they lived, just as Paul was sensitive in Acts 21:26 himself, and in Ephesians 6:5 in advice to his slaves.

However 1 Corinthians 14:34,35, seems to deny all ministry to women. How can this be reconciled with 1 Corinthians 11? First, contrary to the

RSV, the phrase 'as in all the churches' is better seen as part of verse 33; but, even so, Paul still seems to say that 'women should keep silence in the churches'. There seem to be four possible ways of reconciling this with 1 Corinthians 11.³

1. 1 Corinthians 11 could refer to private prayer only.
2. In 1 Corinthians 14 the prohibition is not against proper ordered participation, but rather against 'chattering'. This suggestion is based on the fact that the word used is *lalein* which, in classical Greek, can mean "chattering".
3. Paul did not write 1 Corinthians 14:34,35. This suggestion is based on the fact that verses 33 and 36 seem to flow well together and also on certain MS evidence.
4. That the prohibition stems from the particular disorder at Corinth. Perhaps Paul was afraid of the dominant women syndrome leading the church astray as happened later with the prophetesses Priscilla and Maximilla in the Montanist movement.

In his commentary Barrett dismisses the first two possibilities as without foundation, and he opts for the third solution. But even if we have to accept 1 Corinthians 14:34,35 as genuine, then the fourth possibility is still open to us. It means that while 1 Corinthians 11 is a general statement, 1 Corinthians 14:34,35 is a particular instruction for the time and circumstances.

1 Timothy 2:8ff is another passage that seems to deny all ministry to women, but I think that a correct analysis will show something quite different. Indeed the construction in verse 9 shows that the implication is that women should pray (but dressed in a becoming manner). In fact far from denying women a ministry, 1 Timothy 2:9 assumes that they will have a ministry in the church. What then of verse 11 and 'silence'? From 3:11, 5:13 and the tone of the letter, it seems that there was a real problem of women doing too much talking in general. In this context the word silence in verse 11 *hesuchia* does not mean refraining from speaking at meetings, rather it means a quiet way of life in general. This is in fact the very meaning that the word has in verse 2 of this chapter. This use of the word to mean "a quiet way of life" is also the use of the word in other N.T. passages. Verse 12 also seems to deny ministry to women until we realise that the word translated 'authority' is *authentein* which means 'to have absolute authority', 'to domineer', 'to have absolute power or sway'. So what verse 12 is saying is that women are not to seek absolute authority (because absolute authority belongs to God alone, and not even to men). Perhaps we should then translate the verse, 'I permit no women to teach having absolute authority over men (because absolute authority belongs to God)'. There is nothing here

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that prevents women having a proper authority in the church, just as men need proper authority for their ministry.

Although it does not really connect with women's ministry we will look at verse 15 here. It seems to suggest that women should live entirely within the roles of home and family. There seem to me to be three possible interpretations of this text.

1. That a women's path to salvation lies in adopting the roles of motherhood and domesticity. This would mean that a woman's eternal salvation depends on the quiet way in which she performs in these roles.
2. That the word 'salvation' here refers not to eternal salvation but to physical deliverance during childbirth. The word 'salvation' is often used in such a physical way in the N.T. e.g. the healings of Jesus (Luke 8:48 etc.).
3. It seems, in the light of 1 Timothy 4:3, that certain Gnostic doctrines prevailed forbidding marriage and advocating purity. Indeed we know that in the period covered by the early church there were cults that advocated virginity as the highest spiritual state. This could be the background to our verse. Paul is not confining women within a certain role, rather he is saying that within marriage women can be saved to the full because there is nothing second rate about marriage.

The first of these possibilities seems to be so contrary to the whole of the teaching about salvation by grace through faith that it must be rejected. The second interpretation is a strong possibility; but, given the Gnostic tendencies referred to in 4:3, the third interpretation is probably nearer the truth.

Having therefore considered the role of women in the early church, we do find a 'not-yetness' about it. If we seek to apply the N.T. teaching to our own situation there will be differences because of the different human institutions that prevail today. As the gospel is meant to produce the fruit of the Spirit in our own lives as we grow in Christ, so the Spirit will bring more and more of the benefits of Christ's Passion into the life of the church.

Subordinationism.

We must now come to deal directly with passages of the N.T. that deal with the role of women within marriage and the supposed subordinationism that these passages teach. I have chosen the word 'subordinationism' because, in the first of the passages that we shall consider (1 Cor. 11), Paul implies that if we are subordinationist in our view of women then we must also be subordinationist in our view of Christ. Paul teaches that the relationship between man and woman is related directly to the doctrine of the Trinity.

Therefore if we hold anything like a traditional doctrine of the Trinity we cannot be in any way subordinationist in our view of the place of women.

What then does Paul mean when he says that man is the 'head' of the woman? To answer this question we cannot rely on an English view of the meaning of the word 'head'. We must look at the Hebrew and Greek.

It is only when we see the drastic shift meaning from the biblical language to our modern usage, that we shall be able to make sense of Paul's connection of the doctrine of the Trinity to a discussion of hairstyles.

For us today the word 'head' not only means the uppermost part of our body, but also a place of command. The word means 'ruler', 'chief' etc. as in such words as 'headmaster' or 'headquarters'. The verb 'to head' means 'to lead', 'to direct', 'to manage', 'to make decisions' etc. When we read 1 Corinthians 11 this meaning is automatically the one we assume. But to do this is to be mistaken. It is mistaken because our view of the word 'head' is influenced by our view of the brain. We believe today that it is the brain that directs the body. Indeed we often think of the body as a simple machine directed by and ruled by the brain. Hence when we talk of the head we assume that directing power of the brain. But the Hebrew view was quite different because they had no concept of the brain; in fact, they had no word for the brain at all. For them the directing centre of personality was not the brain (and hence the head) but the heart and guts. They thought that our 'grey matter' was no more than stuffing for the head. Had St. Paul wished to say that man is the 'ruler', 'director', 'leader' of the woman he would have had to use the word 'heart' or 'lord' to describe the relationship. It is these very words that he refuses to use. If then 'head' does not mean 'boss', what does it mean?

The words *rōsh* and *kephalē* (Hebrew and Greek for 'head') both have a complex background. The Greek word for 'head', however, is closely linked with the word *archē* that has to do with beginnings and origins. That this is the sense that Paul has in mind in 1 Corinthians 11 is seen from verse 8 where he is talking quite simply of the origin of woman. The word *rosh* also has this basic meaning of 'origin'. It is the word used for 'head of the river' in Genesis 2:10. Now, if we take this idea of the 'head of the river' a little further, we shall see what Paul is getting at. The river can be said to point to its head, it points to its source. In the same way a woman points to the source of her being, namely the man. Paul uses the idea of 'reflecting' to convey this same idea, a woman reflects, the glory of man. The reason that Paul can use the idea of glory to explain what he means by head is that, in the O.T. the head is the place of blessing. It is upon a person's head that God pours his blessings (e.g. Ps. 23,5). The physical head is thus connected with blessing and glory. We can therefore set out Paul's teaching

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diagrammatically as follows (referring to Colossians 1 15,, and Hebrews 1:3 as well):

God is head of	God.
Christ is head of	Christ who is the image and glory of
Man is head of	Man who is image and glory of
Woman.	Woman reflects (or is) the glory of

To say that man is the head of woman is the same as saying woman reflects, or is, the glory of man. We must note very carefully that Paul never completes the diagram by saying that woman is the image of man. Woman is directly in the image of God herself. We can now begin to see why it was important for St. Paul to discuss hairstyles. If a woman's head is uncovered in worship she reflects man's glory and not God's glory. Hence, for worship, the head should be covered. The fundamental point is not hair or hats, but about reflecting the glory of God in worship. (We must also be careful in our discussion not to think of the word 'reflecting' in our modern sense. By a reflection we might mean something 'unreal' or 'secondary'. But the N.T. uses the word in a much bolder way. Christ is indeed very real, yet he is described as reflecting the glory of God).

From this we conclude that Paul is *not* saying here that man is the 'boss' of woman. Indeed the whole concept of 'boss' is quite contrary to the very nature of the gospel itself (see Matt. 23:8ff). What these words 'head' and 'reflection' do show is the closeness of the unity between male and female, and the harmony that there should be between them.

Incidentally this discussion of the word 'head' also throws light on the doctrine of the church, and the doctrine of creation, because Christ is said to be 'head' of both. To say that Christ is the 'head' of creation is to say that he is the *arche* of creation, and also to say that he is the 'end towards which creation moves (*anakephalaisomai* Eph. 1:10). To say that Christ is the 'head' of the church does *not* mean that he is its heavenly leader or director. Christ certainly should be the heavenly leader of the church, but that doctrine is expressed by saying that Christ is the 'lord' of the church. To say he is the 'head' of the church means something quite different. It means that he is the origin of the church by his death, and that he is the glory of the church because he is ascended. It is the heavenly glory of Christ that the church is meant to display on earth. This is why Ephesians 4:15 makes sense when it talks of the church growing into its head; it grows into its head as it is glorified.

Just one final point before leaving 1 Corinthians 11. Verse 11 makes it clear that the relationship of man to woman in one of mutual interdependence. Neither sex has independence of the other, neither sex has dominion.

We must now look at two passages that give practical advice about marriage, Ephesians 5:21ff, and 1 Peter 2:13ff. In Ephesians we must note that Paul deliberately distinguishes between the obedience of children (6.1, *hupakouō*) and the submissiveness of wives (5.22, *hupotassō*). His choice of words can tell us a great deal. In using the word *hupakouō* he is saying directly to the children that they must obey their parents. But in the N.T. the meaning of *hupotassō* is quite different. It carries with it the sense of voluntary submission to the will of another with no thought that the other person is of greater importance. It is the word used in Luke 2.51 of the twelve year old Jesus being in submission to Joseph and Mary. There is no thought there that Jesus has somehow a lower status. It means that although Jesus is now a son of the Law, he gives himself into the human institution of the family.

So very often the word 'submit' has been used to infer some kind of male supremacy. It has been used to deny women property rights, sexual rights, rights of employment, rights of franchise etc. But to use it in this way is to go quite against the voluntary nature of its meaning. If a woman wants voluntarily to give up her right to employment, for instance, to bear children that is commendable, but for society to deny her that right within marriage in the first place is quite contrary to the use of the word *hupotasso*. It is the *willing* cooperation of the spouse that is here emphasised.

If we are going to see the full impact of *hupotasso* for Paul we must see verse 21 as a general introduction to the whole discussion. Submission is the attitude that all Christians are to have to one another. It is the principle behind the discussion of freedom in the N.T. (see Rom. 14 etc.). This is the very reason why a 'strong' Christian must alter his behaviour so as not to offend the 'weaker' Christian. As part then of this general attitude, so should a wife be to her husband, and, although Paul does not use the word in this context, so should a husband behave towards his wife in Christ. The implication of verse 21 for the husband is that he too is subject, and his subjection is later explained in terms of love.

In verses 22 to 24 Paul deals with the specific case of the wife's relationship to her husband. He says that 'wives should be to their husbands as to the Lord'. (Note that there is no *hupotasso* here in the Greek). To tell the wife so to behave is not saying that a woman should treat her husband as lord, that is the opposite of what Paul is saying, as his treatment of 'as to the Lord' in 6.7 shows. He is saying to wives that they must see their marriages *not* in terms of pleasing their husbands, but in terms of pleasing and serving Christ himself. To put this 'as to the Lord' in, is to undermine completely any idea that the man is 'lord' of the woman. Woman has one 'Lord', namely Christ himself. (There is no need here to recover the ground about the word

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'head' because we have already seen that this implies no lesser role for the woman. To clarify this passage; a woman is *not* to be a 'husband pleaser', she is to be a 'Christ pleaser'.)

But we cannot leave this passage here, because Paul goes on to talk of the husbands relationship to the wife as one of love. Unlike our modern word 'love' the Biblical *agape* is well defined, as we shall see that the definition includes the idea that the husband should be submissive to the wife! Paul in this passage draws our attention to the cross in talking of love. He says that husbands should love their wives 'as Christ loved the church *and gave himself up for her*'. Love in the N.T. is seen in terms of self-giving and self-surrender. In Philippians 2 Paul talks of the cross as a willing emptying by Christ. The same words that describe Christ's sacrifice in Philippians 2, should also be seen to be part of what a husband's love for his wife should be. The words there are *paradidomi* (to give over, to yield up, to commit), *kenoo* (to empty, to deprive of proper function), *tapeinoo* (to humble, to bring low) and *hupakouo* (to obey). So, by using the picture of Christ dying for the church, he is urging husbands to lay down their lives with the same kind of obedience.

Verses 28 to 33 make it clear that Paul is going back before the Fall to the creation ordinance. He is seeking to stress the unity and mutuality of marriage. It is the unity of self-surrender, of self-emptying. Perhaps following from this passage as a whole we could simply ask in the marriage service, 'Husbands will you surrender yourself in love to your wives; Wives will you surrender yourselves in love to your husbands?' There is no idea that the 'submission' is one way only.

Let us now come to 1 Peter 2:13ff. It is clear from this passage that Peter puts marriage within the category of a 'human institution' (see RSV margin for alternative translation). For the N.T. these 'human institutions' are part of the divine plan for man just as the Law is part of that plan. That the Law has now been fulfilled by Christ does not mean that the Christian should now use his freedom from the Law for licence. In the same way, the Christian must 'submit' within the state. The state will change its particular political expression as history moves forward, but at each stage the Christian must see that his freedom does not destroy the very plan of God himself. When Peter puts marriage in this category he is saying that marriage, as a 'human institution', will change its particular legal definition throughout history just as the state does, but that the Christian should live within these institutions. This 'submission' to the state does not mean that the Christian cannot work for a better state, he can and should, the Gospel being his guide. So with marriage, the Christian should seek for a better legal definition of marriage, with the gospel as his guide. In putting marriage on

the same footing as slavery and the state, Peter relates the whole issue of marriage to the N.T. doctrine of Law.

Unlike so many moderns, Peter and Paul are not afraid of human institutions like the state, like marriage, like slavery, they hold firmly that the purpose of God can be worked out through these institutions. But they also know that in a very important way men are 'free' from those institutions as they are free from the Law. Some modern people want us to scrap the idea of the state altogether by revolution, Peter and Paul could not subscribe to that. But they would most willingly subscribe to changing the state. So then, marriage can be legally changed so long as one does not end up working for its virtual annihilation.

Peter's advice in chapter 3 is basically to wives of non-Christian husbands. He is saying that by their willing submission they should seek to win their husbands for Christ. The wife should do this because her true Lord is Christ himself. We must notice that Peter reminds Christian husbands that they are joint heirs of grace with their wives; there is no idea that grace flows through the husband to the wife. The point of his advice is that women married to non-Christian husbands simply cannot opt out of their responsibility, though the N.T. does say that divorce is possible in certain circumstances. (1 Cor. 7:13)

The Unity of Sexuality.

We must come finally to 1 Corinthians 7.1-7 where Paul gives an important piece of advice about sexuality within a Christian marriage. Paul asserts here categorically that the husband has no right of command over the wife, and that the wife has no right of command over her husband in the sexual act. The wording here is perfectly symmetrical: 'For the wife does not rule her own body, but the husband; likewise the husband does not rule over his own body, but the wife does.' In practice Paul recommends 'agreement' (v5) as the way of decision. How liberating these words are. What a contrast they are to the view that a wife is simply there for the husband's sexual pleasure. I quote from Barrett: 'It is the exact parallelism that is most striking here. Conjugal rights are equal and reciprocal. If the husband has authority over his wife, his wife has equal authority over him. This striking assertion must be borne in mind as we follow Paul's arguments about the relations between man and woman.'⁴ Nor would it be right to say that this statement about the sexual question is of small importance for marriage in general, because, in the Bible, the sexual act is something that symbolises the whole of marriage.

Churchman

Conclusions.

Marriage is about unity, and it is about a reciprocal relationship. In marriage the Christian must seek to find all the freedoms that Christ won on the cross. On the other hand the Christian must not be afraid of the roles that human institutions place on the marriage partners, rather they should work through those roles remembering their freedom. As with our relationship with Christ marriage should be the two partners giving up of themselves so that they find their true selves in the other.

Negatively there is nothing in the N.T. that hints at the husband as decision maker, that the husband rules the wife, that the wife must be confined to roles of domesticity and motherhood, that the man should be the breadwinner, that women should not have property or franchise, that men should lead in politics and in the church. What a pity it is that, at one time or another, people have claimed Biblical authority for these beliefs. In fact the Christian should be the one to lead in change, because he has the light and vision of the gospel to guide him.

Notes

1. See *Women Likewise*, Joyce Baldwin, (Falcon 1973)
2. *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, C.K. Barrett, (A and C Black 1968) pages 246 to 258.
3. *op. cit.* pp. 331ff.
4. *op. cit.* p. 156.