

Towards a Theology of Authority and Submission in Marriage

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Abstract

The twentieth and twenty first-centuries have seen a major debate develop over the role of women in society. For the hierarchicalists represented by the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood', male leadership, as raised in Ephesians 5:24, is critical and overrides all other considerations. To the egalitarian 'Christians for Biblical Equality', mutual submission—as required by Galatians 3:28 and Ephesians 5:21—constitutes the point of departure.

This article explores the possibility of a bridge between the two moderate positions. To do this, the research focuses on four key areas, namely, (1) what is authority and how should it be applied; (2) how does submission relate to that authority; (3) how does authority work within the Trinity where all are equals; and (4) do Paul and Peter's eschatological beliefs assist us in building a bridge between the seemingly irreconcilable passages.

The research concluded that via the application of Paul and Peter's eschatological 'already' but 'not yet' beliefs operating

¹ The views expressed herein are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the beliefs of the South African Theological Seminary.

in the 'now', a bridge opens up to a third biblical alternative. This view operates across all cultures where 'authority and submission in marriage' is neither hierarchical nor merely mutually submissive, but mutually empowering.

1. The current impasse

Every so often, the Church is confronted by dissension within its ranks over one or other theology. This contestation is, in many ways, healthy for the Body of Christ, since in the process of dialogue, truth is advanced. During the second half of the 20th century into the 21st century, the feminist attack caused the patriarchalistic paradigm to be subjected to greater and greater scrutiny (Cochrane 2005:22–25; Grudem and Piper 2006a:xiv; Pierce 2005:59) as variable understandings of authority in marriage were propagated. These included 'middle of the road' understandings that were advanced by two separate groupings, the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood (CBMW) (complementarian) and Christians for Biblical Equality (CBE) (egalitarian), who were reacting to the position adopted by Christian feminists (Pierce 2005:61–67; Piper and Grudem 2006a:xiv). In Chapter 24 of the CBMW's foremost academic defence of a hierarchical interpretation of the Bible, *Recovering biblical manhood and womanhood*, Piper and Grudem (2006b:404) make the following observation:

We are sure that neither the CBMW nor CBE flatters itself by thinking that it speaks for evangelicalism, let alone for the church as a whole. We do not know whether history will attach any significance to our statements. But both groups are persuaded that something immense is at stake. It is not merely a minor intramural squabble. It has important implications for marriage, singleness, and ministry, and thus for all of life and mission. Yet we sense a

kinship far closer with the founders of CBE than with those who seem to put their feminist commitments above Scripture.

When the arguments of these ‘middle of the road’ positions are placed side by side, one is left with key elements that are seemingly irreconcilable. The points where the arguments are problematic are:

For those holding complementarian views (Curle 2012:182),

There is little wonder why Galatians 3:28 is considered to be ‘the fundamental Pauline theological basis for the inclusion of women and men as equal and mutual partners in all of the ministries of the church’ (Scholer 1998:20) and why hierarchicalist House believes it is ‘the only real passage in the New Testament letters that might appear to prove their view on women’ (1990:155). Secondly, the brushing aside by complementarians of Ephesians 5:21 cannot easily be adopted.

For those holding egalitarian views (Curle 2012:182),

On the other hand, (1) the perspective held by the egalitarians (other than Liefeld—where the difference is minimal) in respect to the translation of κεφαλή has significant problems that cannot be overlooked (Curle 2012:169–169); (2) Ephesians 5:24 demands that wives submit to their husbands ‘in everything’; (3) The ‘difficult passages’ such as I Timothy 2:13 also hold serious difficulties for the egalitarians. Otherwise why would Professor of Systematic Theology at Fuller University—Paul Jewett—question the Apostle Paul’s theology and effectively reject the inerrancy of Scripture? (Jewett 1975:119)

Theologians from either side of the debate have tried to circumvent these diametrically opposed texts through various explanations.

However, these have been shown to be weak at best. 'It can be said that no plausible argument (that maintains a "high value" of scripture) has thus far been submitted that adequately reconciles these two positions' (Curl 2012:183).

In considering the possibility of a bridge between the two positions, this article will focus on three key issues. Firstly, I will consider what is meant by authority and submission. Secondly, I will review what is known about the practical functioning of authority and submission within the Godhead. Thirdly, I will investigate whether Paul and Peter's eschatology perhaps holds a key to reconciling the existing paradigms.

2. Authority and Submission

While it is correct that headship is a component of authority within a scriptural perspective, God appears to have placed limitations on how biblical authority should work in practice.

Firstly, the Bible emphasises God-consciousness as the undergirding principle through which he works. This principle is clearly demonstrated in Eden at the time of 'The Fall'. In Genesis 3:6, man focuses on his own wants, desires, and self-improvement, and in Genesis 3:7, on his own pathetically vulnerable state. Both verses indicate the self-centredness of Adam and Eve's sin as they turned from God and focused on issues related to self-esteem. The result of that sin was their removal from God's immediate presence (Gen 3:23). The gospels and the epistles record how both Jesus and Paul addressed the issue of self-centredness (Matt 16:24; 20:20-28; 1 Cor 13:4-5). More than that, they both stressed the need for humans to live in relationship with God and one another, rather than being concerned about their own desires (Matt 6:33; 22:37-40; Rom 15:2-3; 1 Cor 10:24; Phil 2:24).

Secondly, Genesis 3 appears to reflect a second principle that God has set in place—the voluntary nature of submission in contrast to an imposed hierarchical order. (Adam and Eve were free to choose to remain God-conscious or to become self-centred. This is the essence of ‘The Fall’). Jesus also appears to confirm this principle when he tells the rich young ruler to follow him. When the man refuses to follow him, there is no begging, nor coercion. Jesus’ only reaction is one of sadness (Matt 19:16–30).

Thirdly, the Bible appears to indicate that, within the Trinity, there is apparent ‘headship’ by the Father and ‘submission’ by the Son. While the subordination does not appear to be ontological but relational or administrative, this aspect of ‘headship’ will need to be addressed.

These ideas will require detailed analysis before their submission as a theological argument. It is therefore proposed to examine the biblical roles of authority and submission in the light of the above apparent principles. It is anticipated that this examination will reveal that the question to be answered in marriage is not ‘Who is in charge?’, but rather, ‘Who is in submission?’ While it is accepted that the latter question is a corollary of the first, there are issues raised by the second that the first cannot address.

2.1. Authority

Piper and Grudem define ‘authority in general as the *right* (Matt 8:9) and *power* (Mark 1:27; 1 Cor 7:37) and *responsibility* (2 Cor 10:8; 13:10) to give direction to another’ (2006c:78). They go on to posit that

(f)or Christians, *right* and *power* recede and *responsibility* predominates ... Authority becomes a burden to bear, not a right to assert. It is a sacred duty to discharge for the good of others. The transformation of authority (from right and power to responsibility) is most thorough in marriage. This is why complementarians prefer to speak of leadership and headship rather than authority' (2006:78).

The question that this position immediately raises is, 'where does that authority come from?' If one begins with the position in Matthew 28 that 'all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me [Jesus]', it has implications for the manner in which leaders should use authority. Firstly, it follows that all other authority is delegated. Secondly, when one considers the manner in which Jesus' authority operates—one of servanthood (Mark 10:42–44; Greenleaf and Spears 1998; Kelley 2011; Malphurs 2003:31–48)—our perception is instantly widened. Thirdly, if we 'touch (abuse) God's authority, we touch God himself' (Nee 1998:19). Taking points two and three together, any person in leadership does so under caution (Eph 6:9; Col 4:1). Fourthly, the writer to the Hebrews confirms that Jesus is the 'author and perfecter of our faith' (12:2) giving us a sense that the manner in which Jesus uses authority is by way of creation and creativity. This origination and creativity on the part of Jesus should not be misconstrued as power—which is the 'ability to act or produce an effect' (Encyclopaedia Britannica 2011) or 'the exercise of continuous control over someone or something' (Louw and Nida 1988:37.16). Hence, our understanding can no longer be that of a top-down, autocratic domination view of the position. It must be expanded to encompass far more than just the master-servant relationship of the Aristotelian Household Code, where the *paterfamilias* was 'in charge'.

2.2. Submission

Directing attention to the Edenic poem of creation, one encounters a situation where humankind is under the authority of God who created them. In this, God's authority is both authentic and legitimate. Examining the Edenic story, one is faced with a state of affairs where mankind has been placed in an idyllic situation with only one limitation—they may not eat of the fruit of the Tree of Good and Evil (Gen 2:17). This failure has been noted earlier. However, the empowering nature of God's use of his authority has not yet been considered.

Humans were tasked to use their creativity in exercising dominion over the earth. They were told to 'be fruitful and [to] increase in number' (Gen 1:28). Humankind, in the persons of Adam and Eve, chose not to live within the boundary of safety that God had set for them. Essentially, they refused to submit to God. The consequence of their action, according to Genesis 2:17, was death or separation.² God's reaction to their non-submission was not one of vengeance or retribution, but, while it included an aspect of punishment, that penalty would lead to their ultimate salvation. By expelling them from Eden, God removed them from the position where they would forever be without hope (having eaten from the tree of life). Instead, they were separated, for a time, to a spiritual place (*sheol* or *hades*) where they would be in a state of waiting (Lindars 1991:97)—waiting for the Christ who would be the 'author and perfecter of their faith' (Heb 12:2). From the Edenic primeval narrative, we note that, essentially, it was mankind who had the freedom to choose to submit or not to submit. In no way

² One must understand 'death' within the figurative language of the Hebrew people. To them, life is found in community—death in separation.

did God forcefully subordinate the humans who were made in his image. The fact that they chose to ignore the boundary by refusing to submit brought about their own downfall. With more clarity on submission from God's perspective, attention now turns to what is legitimate authority.

2.3. Legitimate authority

Max Weber, the 20th-century philosopher, believed that there were three types of ideal (or legitimate) authority—traditional, charismatic, and rational-legal. This author would posit that it is only when this social contract is recognised from the 'bottom-up' in the form of active, participatory submission that 'legitimate authority'³ occurs.

This understanding of a 'bottom-up' pre-requisite for authority has merit, for unless the person 'under authority' accepts that authority, no *de facto*⁴ authority exists. *De jure* authority may exist, but in order for that authority to be exercised, force may be required. Once force is applied, it can be argued that no longer is the authority legitimate, for it is now coercive⁵.

³ This would not, of course, apply to God's authority, which he possesses through the fact that he is the Creator, and humans are the created.

⁴ The principle of *de jure* (in law) and *de facto* (in fact) legitimacy in authority is well illustrated in the life of King David. In 1 Samuel 16:1a, God stripped Saul of his *de jure* authority of being king over Israel and appointed David (1 Sam 16:1b–13). Nevertheless, Saul remained *de facto* king.

⁵ The question can then be raised about a government's coercive application of the law to bring about compliance. I would argue that in a democratic system, as long as the law being applied by that government was in terms of its democratic constitution and did not contravene God's law, then, the authority would be legitimate as it was being applied by the will of the majority. However, this does not imply that the law is legitimate in the eyes of the individual. An example could be given of many South African taxi drivers, who see the 'law of Rands and Cents' [South African currency] as superseding the law of the road.

In his doctoral dissertation, Curle reviewed some of the possibilities of coercive action by God to ensure submission by mankind (2012:187–188). While the brief survey of selected texts was not exhaustive, no example was found that validly reflects coercion. What was found is the creative use of circumstances that led mankind back to serving God. Accordingly, we can argue that God’s use of his authority, when interacting with mankind is not only legitimate, but it also creatively brings about mankind’s ultimate good. From this, we can posit that God’s legitimate authority is centred in grace (on his part) and voluntary submission (on ours)—not dominance.⁶ As Baukham (2006:68) states, ‘Our response to grace is not the coerced submission of the slave, but the free obedience of love. Its paradigm is: ‘I love to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart’ (Ps 40:8)’. MacArthur comments that ‘the only right response to Christ’s Lordship is wholehearted submission, loving obedience and passionate worship’ (2010:91) that results in Christians being ‘slaved by grace’ (2010:139). This enslavement to Christ brings freedom to the Christian—‘not freedom to do what he or she wants but freedom to obey God—willingly, joyfully, naturally’ (Cranfield 1975:319).

One is thus left in the position that, while authority may be legitimate (*de jure*), it is not always effective (*de facto*). It is only when the person over whom the authority is to be exercised chooses (out of their own free will) to submit, that the authority becomes both legitimate and effective. Any attempt to induce authority ‘from the top’ effectively nullifies the legitimacy and heralds in a coercive display of power. This

⁶ It is recognised that this understanding has implications for one’s doctrine of final/eternal judgment. While this would be the subject of a different dissertation, suffice it to say that an active voluntary submission, as set out above, would fulfil the relationship required in Matthew 7:21–22. Whether or not humans choose to follow that path is their responsibility—in line with Arminian doctrine.

coercion can take many forms. Johnson, Mueller, and Taft have defined *coercion* as 'causing someone to choose one course of action over another by making the choice preferred by the coercer appear more attractive than the alternative, which the coercer wishes to avoid' (2002:7). Thus, coercion can be physical, emotional, or financial, as all three can be used to induce a person to follow a certain line of thinking.

Paul extends voluntary submission to ordinary human relationships in Ephesians 5. He instructs Christians to 'submit'⁷ to one another out of reverence for Christ' (Eph 5:21). Snodgrass interprets ὑποτάσσω as 'arrange under' (1996:292) confirming the understanding of voluntary submission.

In his commentary on Ephesians, Hoehner concludes that the participle ὑποτάσσω is in the middle⁸ voice 'expressing the idea of co-operation where the subject acts as a free agent', rendering a translation of voluntary submission (2002:717). Snodgrass adds a new dimension to submission when he comments that it 'is a crucial ingredient in Christian living ... because it [describes] the self-giving love, humility, and willingness to die that is demanded of all Christians' (1996:292). Thus, as the reader, one is left with the overall concept of a voluntary, sacrificial laying down of rights in favour of one's fellow believers, in mutual submission.

⁷ Greek, ὑποτάσσω. Louw and Nida's translation of ὑποτάσσω includes to need to obey, submit, comply and be subject to (1988:36.18), resulting in the meaning—'to submit to the orders or directives of someone'.

⁸ Louw and Nida describe the sense as 'passive' rather than 'middle' (1988). It is true that ὑποτάσσω sometimes occurs in the active voice. However, when this occurs, 'the power to subject belongs to God himself. This is evidenced in Phil 3:21; Rom 8:20; Eph. 1:21–22' (Melick 1991:311).

3. Practical Functioning of Authority within the Godhead

In 1 Corinthians 15:24–28, one finds key verses relating to understanding authority and submission within the Godhead. Paul states that, at the end of time, everything will be under Christ’s authority, which will then make everything, including himself, subject to the Father. At first glance, this appears to reflect subordination within the Godhead.

3.1. The hierarchical or gradationist position

Perhaps the single greatest difficulty in discussing leadership within the Trinity is finding the correct terminology to describe a concept that is beyond one’s grasp. Complementarians and egalitarians alike, struggle to define what they believe to be true.

For example, Grudem’s (1994:454–470) position that, the ‘Son is eternally subordinated to the Father in role or function’ portrays an image that has disturbing connotations. While Grudem probably does not wish it, this use of the term ‘subordination’ certainly implies a top-down imposition of authority rather than a bottom-up submission. Synonyms of the term are ‘inferior, junior, less, lower, minor, smaller, lesser’ (Merriam-Webster Dictionary 2011).

Perhaps it is because of the semantics that the gradationist position does not reflect the very real tension that exists between the unity/diversity, the equality/unity, and Christ’s submission to the Father. To describe the position as ‘eternally subordinated’ implies subjugation of the Son by the Father, rather than Christ’s voluntary submission. In this, gradationists appear to misstate the truth of the relationship within the Trinity. When the two sides of the debate resolve the issue of

terminology, both sides would be closer to resolving much of the contestation. For the time being, one must 'see through a glass, darkly' (1 Cor 13:12—21st-century King James Version) as one approaches a subject that, by definition, is beyond us.

In his contribution to Pierce and Groothuis's *Discovering Biblical Equality*, egalitarian Kevin Giles posits that maintaining an orthodox view of the doctrine of the Trinity requires rejection of the eternal subordination of the Son to the Father (2005:335). Peter Schemm, a hierarchicalist, rejects Giles's position, distinguishing between 'subordination' and 'functional subordination'. Schemm holds that the latter is not a question of orthodoxy (2005:83), and comments that Giles is not successful in his argument that eternal functional subordination is heretical (2005:86). Within Giles's Chapter 19 and Schemm's book review, the essence of the debate is obvious: 'Is functional subordination theologically sound?'

3.2. Discussion of the hierarchical position

Letham, in a major work on the Trinity, rejects the concepts of both subordination and hierarchy, preferring the concept of *taxis* or order that excludes gradation or rank (2004:480). Quoting Torrence, Letham expounds the position that the Trinity functions by way of 'position not status, by form and not being, by sequence and not power, for they are fully and perfectly equal' (Letham 2004:400; Torrence 1996:176). In discussing Christ's obedience to the Father, Letham maintains that there is neither subordination nor inferiority as both are uniquely equal in being and deity (2004:481). To understand Letham's position, one must follow the development of his thoughts:

Since God is Spirit (John 4:21–24), we must think of him in a spiritual manner, not in conformity with Earthly analogies ... God in his own being eludes our grasp... He is an eternal communion of the three *hypostases* in undivided union (461–462). Each person is wholly God and the whole God. The three are no greater than one ... The true order is not a rank, but an orderly disposition. In that order, with no diminution of deity or severance of unity or identity, the Father begets the Son and spirates the Spirit. In our salvation, the Father sends the Son. Never are these relations reversed ... The submission displayed by the Son while securing our redemption reflects eternal realities in God. This must be done in such a way as not to undermine the one being in God, in which all three persons completely inhere (2004:482–483).

In commenting on Grudem's position, that the Son is eternally subordinated to the Father, Letham comments that it is 'outside the boundaries of the tradition' (2004:490). He is equally harsh with Giles's understanding and lack of stress on the distinctions between the three persons (2004:492), even though Giles has 'a strong and emphatic grasp of the consubstantiality of the Son and Spirit with the Father' (2004:491). After attacking Giles's position on a number of theological fronts, Letham concludes:

In the end, Giles's argument collapses. It is self-defeating. He has to point to the submission of Christ on earth as a paradigm for the mutual submission that he calls (rightly) on us all to display ... Giles misses the point that if the Son submits to the Father in eternity, his submission could hardly have been imposed on him, for he is coequal with the Father, of the identical divine being. He submits willingly (p. 495).

Erickson, after lengthy debate of both positions, concludes that the best way of interpreting the relationship within the Godhead is in the understanding that not one action performed by any of the three *hypostases* ever excludes the participation of the other two—‘the Father’s will, which the Son obeys, is actually the will of all three members of the Trinity, administered on their behalf by the Father’ (2009:248). Erickson’s position that, even though 1 Corinthians 15 appears to favour a gradational relationship, the equivalence view better explains a relationship that is immensely difficult for humans to grasp (‘God is one’ [Rom 3:30; Gal 3:20] and also, God is a trinity) with fewer Biblical distortions (p. 248).

3.3. A Trinitarian understanding of marital authority

In a manner similar to that of the equivalence Trinitarian position, husbands and wives are unified in marriage. The texts relating to this unity are equally mystifying. The fact that in marriage, they become ‘one flesh’ (Gen 2:24; Matt 19:5) does not refer only to the fact of their physical sexual relationship. Paul, writing in 1 Corinthians 6:16, states that when two people have sex, they become ‘one flesh’ (Gen 2:24). First Corinthians 7:14 indicates that, through the wife’s union with both Christ and her husband (even though he is an unbeliever), ‘he is sanctified by God’ (and *vice versa*). Seemingly, the oneness between married couples goes beyond mere physical relations. This oneness in Christ can only be explained through an eschatological interpretation, which will be explored below. For the moment, it is important to focus on the unity within the Godhead and apply it to marriage.

Applying Letham’s position to marriage, we find that true order is not about rank, but orderly disposition. Within that order, without diminishing the value of either man or woman, the husband gives direction to the marriage. The submission displayed by the wife in her

relationship with her husband reflects eternal realities in their marriage. This (leadership and submission) must be done in such a way as not to undermine their ‘one being’ (Matt 19:5; 1 Cor 6:16; 1 Cor 7:14) in Christ, in which (both) persons completely inhere. Thus, based on Letham’s understanding of the Trinity, while marital relationships are equal, there is still a measure of leadership by the husband.

Within the context of the Trinity (above), it was determined that, even though the actions of God are directed by the Father, all three persons jointly authorise the act. Applying this reality to marriage, even though direction may appear to be given by one spouse, the unity of the two brings about mutual authority. The long-term result of relational unity is spelt out by the Balswicks (2006:36): ‘As spouses mutually permeate one another they achieve interdependency (emotional connection) in which neither spouse loses distinctiveness’. However, the point is well taken that, while the Trinity will always act in a united manner because of the omniscient character of God, the same cannot always be said of humans.

4. A Possible Alternative to the View Held by Complementarians and Egalitarians

4.1. A further biblical perspective

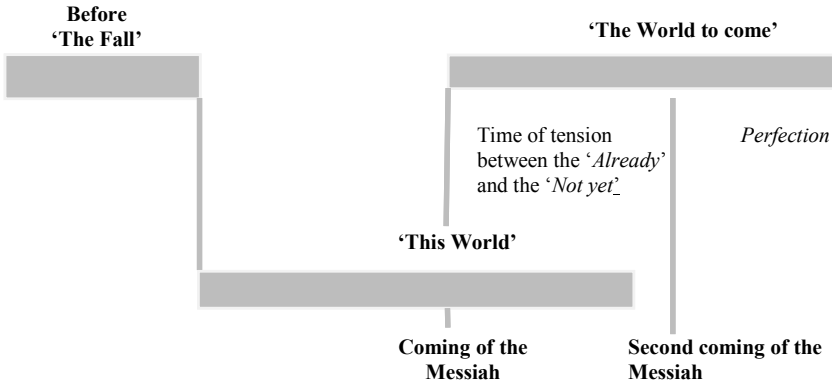
In the evaluation of a biblical understanding of marital authority, the reader and exegete are ultimately faced by two seemingly irreconcilable truths. Firstly, a consistent translation of κεφαλή must include the precepts of honour and authority (Curle 2012:183). Added to this, wives are specifically required to ‘submit to their husbands in everything’ (Eph 5:24). Secondly, mutual submission by Christians to Christians

and, by extension, husbands to wives is required by Ephesians 5:21 and Galatians 3:28.

There is, however, a possible bridge between the opposing verses, one that has its roots in Galatians 3:26–29. Hove (1999:46) expresses the view that the believer's union with Christ is conveyed by Paul in four different ways, namely, (a) 'in Christ Jesus' (3:26, 28), (b) 'baptised into Christ' (3:27), (c) 'clothed ... with Christ' (3:27), and (d) '(belonging) to Christ' (3:29). This use of eschatological terms, in the midst of the particular pericope where egalitarianism of privilege is set down, opens the way for further investigation. Each of the polar opposites (or couplets) in Galatians 3 (Jews/Greeks, slaves/free, males/females), is designed to convey the idea of totality or universality. Whether one reads Galatians 3 from the typical egalitarian viewpoint or from the understanding proposed by complementarians such as Cottrell (1994:283), the result is the same; the couplets capture three fundamental ways of viewing the realities of human existence during New Testament times (Koranteng-Pipim 2001:52). What neither understanding highlights is the eschatological theology underpinning Paul's argument.

In Matthew 12:32, one finds the terms 'this world' and 'the world to come', differentiating between the period after 'The Fall' and before 'the coming of the Messiah' (this world), and after the coming of the Messiah (the world to come). In Hebrews 2:5–18, one finds that with the resurrection of Christ, the 'time to come' is already in place. In Hebrews 6:5, the writer speaks of those 'who have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age' implying that Christians are already experiencing the benefits of the 'world to come'. Yet, Paul instructs us through his letter to Titus to 'live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope—the appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour, Jesus

Christ' (Titus 2:12–13). Obviously, humans live in two overlapping ages—'this world' and 'the world to come.' Arnau van Wyngaard, in an unpublished Bible Study, diagrammatically sets out this understanding of time (2004:3).



For Paul, the cosmic Lordship of Christ encompassed both heaven and earth. To him, 'they were not two realms set over against each other ... but rather one structure of created reality (the cosmos of heaven and earth) and human response to that structure involving two ethical directions' (Horton 2002:126; Lincoln 1981:192). Dunn (1998:496) comments: 'The believer's whole life as a believer is lived in the overlap of the ages, within the eschatological tension between Adam and Christ, between death and life'. This time of tension between the 'already' and the 'not yet' expressively explains the duality of the situation faced by believers today.

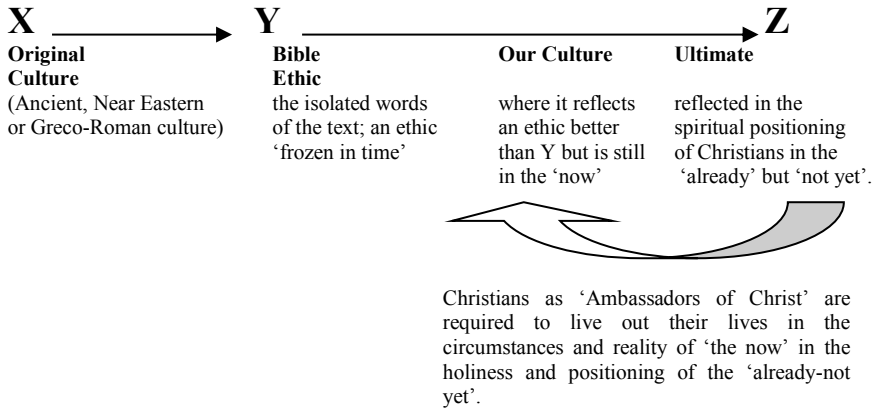
Firstly, like Paul, Christians look forward to the fullness of the age to come (Col 3:4) while experiencing Christ's presence in this present age (Rom 8:11, 26). Secondly, it can be argued that this life 'in Christ' brings with it a second tension—dealing with the reality of the 'now' (Rom 8:17, 35–39; Eph 6:10–20)—that all believers, through Christ, are

called to deal with (Rom 8:10–39). Lincoln (1981:193) sums up the two tensions in his observation that

(T)he force of Phil 3:20 is not, as has often been thought, that heaven as such is the homeland of Christians to which they, as perpetual foreigners on earth, must strive to return, but rather that since their Lord is in heaven their life is to be governed by the heavenly commonwealth and that this realm is to be determinative for all aspects of their life.

Therefore, if one begins with Webb's diagram (2001:32) and adjusts it to take into account the eschatological understandings of Paul,⁹ one is confronted by the following diagrammatic situation of Christians in the early church. Paul refers to them as 'Christ's ambassadors' (2 Cor 5:20), while Peter calls them 'aliens and strangers in the world' (1 Pet 2:11).

⁹ Paul's eschatological views are widespread within his epistles—Christians are 'in Christ Jesus' (Gal 3:26, 28); 'baptised into Christ' (Gal 3:27); 'clothed ... with Christ' (Gal 3:27); 'belonging to Christ' (Gal 3:29) 'joint heirs with Christ' (Rom 8:17); 'seated with him in the heavenly realms' (Eph 2:6); 'our citizenship is in heaven' (Phil 3:20); 'in Christ'; 'in the Lord'. Throughout the epistles, Christians are encouraged to adopt their spiritual position in the 'not yet' and apply it to their current situation in the 'now' (1 Cor 1: 28–31; 2 Cor 3:17–4:18; Col 1:10; Phil 3:7–14; 1 Tim 1:16; 1 Tim 6: 12–19; Phlm 1:9).



Using the image of a 'mezzanine floor', humans can relate to their realities of the 'now' on the ground floor. At the same time, they can relate to Christ who is on the floor above. In this way, one can understand the saying that Christians 'are in this world but not of it'.¹⁰

If we apply this eschatological understanding to gender relationships, we are presented with scriptures that give the understanding of both Jesus and Paul. Firstly, Jesus said that in heaven people 'will neither marry nor be given in marriage' (Luke 20:34–36). Secondly, Paul had similar thoughts in 1 Corinthians 7:29 when he stated that those men 'who have wives should live as if they had none', because this world in its present form is passing away. Therefore, we are drawn to the conclusion that in heaven, the ontological equality of men and women will be the only relationship between the genders. Male headship will not be necessary since there will be no need for hierarchy.

Thus, it is both logical and reasonable to posit that relationships between men and women in the 'already' but 'not yet' are not subject to

¹⁰ The saying has biblical backing in John 15:19; 17:14; James 1:27; 4:4 and 1 John 2:15.

gender status. While this may be true, one also needs to take cognisance of the fact that living in the reality of the 'now' brings with it human needs and cultural realities. To facilitate the provision of these needs and dealing with such realities, individuals may be required to forgo their 'position' of equality in the 'already' but 'not yet' understanding for a greater good. This would be especially true of marriage. It must be stressed that this does not imply a laying down of human rights—only the meeting of Christian obligations. Within Christian marriages, husbands do not have the 'right' to order their wives to do anything; wives do not have the 'right' to demand equality in their relationships. Both have the obligation to submit to one another and to 'be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave (them)' (Eph 4:32). Paul's 'already' but 'not yet' voluntary mutual submission in Ephesians 5:21 bring with it an interesting possibility for the overall exegesis of the marital passages. As both husband and wife submit to each other's authority, one is reminded that such authority should be used to empower creatively. According to Paul, empowering one's wife involves laying down one's life for the benefit of the wife. For her part, the wife is called on to respect her husband. Thus, as the couple empower¹¹ each other, the biological and sociological needs of both would be met.

Thus, there is a possible alternative, whereby the biblical position of apparent hierarchy as required by a consistent translation of κεφαλὴ, together with the explicit command that 'wives should submit to their husbands in everything' (Eph 5:24) can be reconciled with the mutual submission required by Ephesians 5:21 and Galatians 3:28.

¹¹ Jack and Judith Balswick (2006:69), Kathlyn Breazeale (2008:9–13) and Donna Bowman (2006) advocate mutual empowerment in marriage. The Balswicks use a similar rationale to that applied above citing John 1:12–13. However, Breazeale and Bowman appeal to the relational empowerment achieved through Whitehead's Process Theology (1941) that was further developed by Loomer (1976) and Brock (1991).

4.2. Practical application of the hypothesis

While egalitarians believe that Galatians is the ‘Magna Carta’ that demonstrates their view (Jewett 1975:142), it merely discloses the roots of a deeper truth. One must wait for the unfolding of the verities in Ephesians to witness the full-grown tree in all its magnificence. As Lincoln comments: ‘Ephesians is the letter in the Pauline corpus in which the concept of the heavenly dimension (the ‘already’ but ‘not yet’) is most pervasive’ (1981:135).

4.2.1. Review of the ‘already’ but ‘not yet’ eschatology within the letter to the Ephesians

The letter itself is comparable to a ‘liturgical homily’ (Lincoln 1981:136) of the exalted Christ and the Church, written to encourage Christians throughout the Church to experience the life-giving unity of the Spirit. In chapter 1, the reader is introduced to the exalted Christ, whom God has placed ‘far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but in the age to come’ (Eph 1:21, NIV). The reader is then drawn in to understand the position that believers have ‘in Christ’—‘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’ (Eph 1:22–23, NIV). The position is concretised in the second chapter, where believers are said to be raised up with Christ and seated ‘with him in the heavenly realms’ (Eph 2:6). This ‘already’ positioning of believers *in Christ* in the ‘not yet’ sets the stage for the rest of the homily. Chapter 3 advances the heavenly understanding of the role of the Church that is called to make known ‘to the rulers and authorities in the Heavenly realms’ (Eph 3:10, NIV) the manifold wisdom of God that he accomplished in Christ.

In Ephesians 3:13, one is confronted by the 'now' reality of being a Christian. Paul, who has spent his missionary career in dangerous situations (2 Cor 11:23–33), encourages the Church not to be discouraged in any way because of his personal sufferings. The sufferings are part of the calling and not something to be dwelt on. He goes on to pray that the Holy Spirit might strengthen them so that they might come to realise, as he does, the unsurpassable position that Christians enjoy being rooted in Christ's love and indwelt by his Spirit—the benefits of living in the 'already' but 'not yet'.

Chapters 4 and 5 focus on what the values of a Christian in the 'already' but 'not yet' are. Paul begins his sermon by urging believers to live a life worthy of the calling they have received (Eph 4:1).

Immediately, he lays down the basis of their relationships: they must be 'completely humble and gentle ... patient, bearing with one another in love and (they are to) make 'every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace' (4:2–3). Paul spells out that Christ 'ascended higher than all the heavens' (4:10) and from this position gave grace to each Christian (4:7). Some have been tasked 'to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up ... in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ' (4:10b–13, NIV). This is the requirement for 'mezzanine living'. From 4:17 to 5:19, Paul contrasts the carnality of living according to the 'darkened understanding' (4:18) of the 'ways of this world' (2:2)—the 'now' reality, with the value system of the 'not yet'. In 5:18, he concludes the section by instructing believers not to 'get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery', but to 'be filled with the Spirit', which leads to worship (Eph 5:19–20).

Notwithstanding Talbert's argument, that verse 21 is tied to verse 18,¹² where the participle 'Υποτασσόμενοι' is dependent on the verb 'πληροῦσθε', it is clear that Paul's mutual submission of Christian to Christian, in verse 21, transitions life in the Spirit (in the 'already' but 'not yet') with the following verses (5:22–6:9) that deal with the 'now' Household Code (5:21–6:9).

In Ephesians 6:11b–12, Paul warns of the spiritual result of living in the 'already' but 'not yet'. He points out that other men and women are not the Christian's enemy (6:12). The Christian's enemy is the devil supported not only by the rulers, authorities, and powers of this dark world, but also the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Because of this, Christians need to arm themselves spiritually (6:11a, 13–18).

4.2.2. Review of the 'already' but 'not yet' eschatology within the Household Code

The eschatological views that Paul has built throughout the Ephesian passage are continued in 5:22–6:9. In verse 22, one is immediately confronted with Paul's eschatological understanding—'as to the Lord'. Later on in 6:1, we once again find the words 'in the Lord'—alerting the reader to a possible connection between his thoughts on eschatology and those on marriage.

Throughout the passage (5:21–5:32), Paul compares the marriage relationship to that between Christ and the Church. He is focussing primarily on the Church's position as a bride, with Christ as the

¹² Talbert's argument is discussed under *Practical marital out-workings of the eschatology in the Household Code* below.

bridegroom. When one brings in Jesus' parables of the 'wise' and 'foolish' virgins (Matt 25:1–13) and the marriage feast (Matt 22:2–14), and then adds John's thoughts on the 'wedding of the Lamb' (Rev 19:7), the connection to the 'already' but 'not yet' is strengthened.

Consider the interplay within the Ephesians 5 passage between the current cultural position of marital relationships in the 'now' and the future reality of believers in the 'not yet', as Paul compares the marriage between man and woman, and that between Christ and the Church. Lincoln comments that 'throughout the passage the interplay between earthly and heavenly is marked out by the use of comparative particles—ὡς (vv. 23, 24), καθὼς (vv. 25, 29), and οὕτως (vv. 24, 28)' (1981:163). In Ephesians 5:23, the headship/honouring of Christ is compared to that of the husband. In 5:24, the submission of the Church is compared to that of the wife. In 5:25–27, Christ's sacrificial love for the Church is compared to the love for wives required of husbands. In 5:29, the provision of security by the Christ for his Church is compared to a husband's provision of security for his wife.

While it is important to note that the 'already' but 'not yet' position, represented by Christ's relationship with the Church, moves between the Christian's current 'already' spiritual positioning (the engagement) and the final 'not yet' consummation (v. 27), this does not affect the imagery, since in Jewish law, the act of engagement (betrothal) had the same legal effect as that of marriage. As Lincoln states, 'the emphasis on the present aspects of the relation between Christ and his bride well fits the stress on realised eschatology in Ephesians, while the future element in verse 27 indicates that the 'already' but 'not yet' tension is still in operation' (1981:164).

In Ephesians 6:1–4, Paul changes the focus of the 'already' but 'not yet' to relationships between parents and children. Fathers and mothers are

to be honoured by their children. Centring on the ‘now’ Household Code issues that would have arisen within the home, Paul instructs fathers not to exasperate their children, but instead (using ‘already’ but ‘not yet’ values), to ‘bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord’ (6:4). Here, the apostle appears to be contrasting the effect of fathers exercising their patriarchalistic rights under the Aristotelian Household Code with life in the ‘already’ but ‘not yet’, where equality of ontological being is the order. From 6:5–6:9, one once again witnesses Paul’s understanding of the ‘already’ but ‘not yet’ approach to living in the ‘now.’ Slaves are instructed to obey their earthly masters (the ‘now’ reality) just as they would Christ in the value system of the ‘already’ but ‘not yet’. Turning to the masters, Paul points out their ‘already’ but ‘not yet’ equality with the slaves, notwithstanding the fact that in the ‘now’ slaves are mere possessions. The practical display of Paul’s belief is displayed in his letter to Philemon, where he requests (‘I appeal to you’ [Phlm 1:9; 1:10; 1:21]) his ‘dear friend and fellow worker’ (Phlm. 1:1) to release Onesimus as a ‘runaway slave’ (Callahan 1997:38; Dunn and Rogerson 2003:1447), and welcome him as a ‘brother in the Lord’ (Phlm 1:16). Nowhere does one find the ‘top-down’ authority that would have been warranted by someone who owed Paul his ‘very self’ (Phlm 1:19). Instead, one finds Paul asking his friend (Phlm 1:14; 1:19) to empower Onesimus, in the only way that would be meaningful to his humanity; his release as a slave, even offering to settle any debt that Philemon believed that he might be owed (Phlm. 1:18). Paul asks Philemon to do this of his own free will, even though he ‘could be bold and order’ it (Phlm 1:18).

4.2.3. *Practical marital out-workings of the eschatology in the Household Code*

The practicalities of working out this 'already' but 'not yet' value system in the 'now' cultural reality within the Aristotelian Household Code are demonstrated in Ephesians 5:18–6:9. In the passage Ephesians 5:18–21, Talbert maintains that the words in italics below (participles) are directly dependent on the verb 'be filled' (2007:131) Linguistically, this appears to be the most valid interpretation of the passage.

¹⁸Be filled with the Spirit,

¹⁹*speaking* to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit.

singing and *making* music from your heart to the Lord,

²⁰*giving* thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

²¹*submitting* to one another out of reverence for Christ.

In adopting this method of translation, the critical verse (21) is effectively disassociated (to a degree) from the Household Code with its three subdivisions (wives [v. 22–33], children [6:1–4] and slaves [6:5–9]). However, the subjection of the participle in verse 21 to the term 'Be filled with the Spirit' brings to the fore Paul's eschatology. In it, one can see the 'already' but 'not yet' ontological requirement of all Christians to 'submit yourselves one to the other'. The mutual submission demanded by this verse (a) can only be read as a 'Trinitarian' voluntarily 'bottom-up' surrendering of the shared equality and not as a 'top-down' authority-driven demand, and (b) extends to the Christian relationships between husbands and wives, fathers and children, masters and slaves at the mezzanine level.

It follows that the so-called Household Code set out in 5:22–6:9 reflects Paul's recognition of the cultural realities present at the time. In these verses, Paul gives practical advice to Christians who find themselves in positions of authority or under authority. Focus now turns specifically on gender relationships, although the arguments are equally applicable to children and slaves.

If one views authority as the 'ability to empower' (as argued earlier), the question that confronts each of the genders (in applying the authority given to them through the submission of their partners) is: 'how best can I empower my spouse?' Paul anticipates the question and answers accordingly. He instructs women to voluntarily recognise the current patriarchalistic culture and lay down their equality, surrendering it as they would to Christ. With the words 'Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord' (Eph 5:22), Paul recognises that in order to empower their husbands (who need respect) wives need to honour their husbands as the 'head' (Eph 5:23, 33) (Liefeld 1986:139). Conversely, Christian husbands, spiritually acting out of their 'already' but 'not yet' location, need to lay down their current cultural patriarchalistic advantageous positioning (the 'now'), in a sacrificial manner (Eph 5:25–28) so as to provide their wives with the love and security (Eph 5:25, 29, 33) that they need. As Swartley (1983:204) comments,

So also, love—even in a patriarchal society – calls the male in his cultural prerogative of power to love as Jesus loved, to forgo his cultural prerogative of power and to recognise that women are equally God's image. Instead of prescribing rigid roles, love affirms unity, partnership and interdependence, with each person seeking to image God in the divine fullness of Jesus Christ, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith. Only as men and women fully affirm each other do they live as God's image.

In this practical application of the 'already' but 'not yet' and the 'now' hypothesis, it was observed that 'Trinitarian' mutual submission is a very real aspect of Christian living, notwithstanding the patriarchalistic household cultural realities.

5. Conclusion

In view of the arguments put forward above, there is merit in adopting the following position for biblical marriage between Christian couples:

All authority, in heaven and on earth belongs to Christ Jesus (Matt 28:18). Therefore, all other authority is delegated. It follows that any person who is in a position of leadership does so under caution. Authority can be divided between *de jure* (legal authority that has its ultimate source in God) and *de facto* (actual authority within a set of circumstances). Effective *de facto* authority is given by the one submitting and cannot be imposed from the top. In view of the fact that spouses are ontologically equal in heaven (where there is no need for hierarchy), men and women are in a position of equality in the 'already' but 'not yet'. Since both husbands and wives are commanded to submit to each other, as Christians (Eph 5:21), neither has unilateral control. In similar manner to the *koinonia* within the Trinity, submission voluntarily flows out of the intimacy of the 'in Christ', 'already' but 'not yet', 'mezzanine' lifestyle with one's spouse. In submitting to each other, both yield authority to the other. However, authority is not so much the ability to command, but the ability to empower.

Ephesians 5:21–33: teaches two key principles. Firstly, in order to empower his own wife, the husband should lay down his 'now' position of patriarchalistic privilege through sacrificial 'servant leadership'. As the husband ensures the security of his wife (and her children) in the

spheres of fidelity, finance, emotion, and sexuality—she experiences love towards him (Curle 2012:66).

Secondly, for her part, a wife is required to honour her husband in everything. This gives her husband what he needs most (other than sexual fulfilment); a feeling of respect and support that empowers him to face the world¹³ (Curle 2012:66).

Because women (in general) are culturally conditioned to be responders as opposed to initiators (Curle 2012:25), men should be the first to actively empower their wives. As men and women actively empower each other, their emotional and physical needs will be met. It must be noted, however, that men and women, being human, will, from time to time, act out of their carnal ‘now’ position of self-centredness, instead of their position ‘in Christ’ (Rom 7:23; Gal 5:17). The required response to this is repentance by the offending party and unconditional forgiveness by the one offended (Matt 18:22–35).

Christianity is a radical belief system. Its ‘founder’ or ‘author’, to whom all authority in heaven and earth was given (Matt 28:18; John 17:2), washed his disciples’ feet. After washing their feet, he said to them: ‘You call me “Teacher” and “Lord” and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you should also wash one another’s feet’ (John 13:13–14, NIV).

Thus, within the Christian faith, there is no place for hierarchical positioning, religious domination, or acquired socio-economic

¹³ Groeschel notes that ‘In so many ways, a husband is in the process of becoming what his wife sees in him. Since she knows him better than anyone else, if she says he’s no good, he’s tempted to believe it. If he thinks he’s amazing, he’ll start to believe he can accomplish a lot’ (2011:114).

positioning. When the King of Kings and Lord of Lords (1 Tim 6:15) commands that we love one another as he has loved us (John 13:34), there is no place for 'power plays'. All that is of consequence is the kingdom of God and its proclamation. This missiological standpoint was central to the position adopted by Paul throughout his epistles. When married Christian couples apply the above-mentioned principles, regardless of their culture, they will meet each other's biological and sociological needs. In so doing, women will live without abuse, and men will not experience emasculation; the two predominant gender issues currently being experienced within marriage. Simply put, 'authority and submission in marriage' is neither hierarchical nor merely mutually submissive. Rather, it is mutually empowering. As husbands and wives live together in the 'already' but 'not yet' and empower each other, the gospel of grace will be demonstrated through the Christo-centric example of their lives.

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