

This second passage that we will be reading is a text which is controversial. It is referred to a lot in conversations concerning the proper roles in marriage. The 5th chapter of Ephesians is usually said with some sense of dread by many. We are going to be reading several verses but only one of these verses gets the focus and that is verse 22 in chapter 5.

Over the past few weeks, we have been reading through this letter written to Christians in Ephesus which we know as Ephesians. It was written by Paul or a close associate of Paul's.

Today we come to a text which generates lots of emotion. We are going to begin reading in verse 21 but I noticed something interesting that the interpreters of the NIV chose to do. In the NIV, which is the pew edition, the interpreters have chosen to group texts of Scripture into sections with headings.

You will notice if you open the NIV that the interpreters chose to not include verse 21 with the verses that follow. I think that was a big mistake and leads to a misinterpretation of this text.

Read Ephesians 5:21-6:9

As Eric and Letarshia portrayed in their reading, this is a passage of Scripture which has tended to distance people from one another. Words about how wives should be subject to their husbands and how husbands are the head of the wife breed some sense of discomfort in many relationships today.

But as we heard in our reading, husbands and wives are not the only relationships addressed. We also heard Paul say that children should obey their parents and honor their mother and father.

But we also heard that slaves are to obey their earthly masters with fear and trembling. I can imagine this text being preached in this sanctuary directing enslaved African-Americans in the early 1860s to obey their white masters.

So, what do we do with this text and with the earlier one we read from Genesis? Well, the first thing we must do is to not use these texts as a way of supporting a system where we are the beneficiaries to the subjection of others.

For instance, how many times have men said that women are subordinate to men because women were created to be helpers or helpmates as recorded in Genesis 2? The connotation is that women are to be helpers like an apprentice is to master craftsman.

However, there are a couple of other places in Scripture where the word helper is used to describe God. In the Psalms and in Isaiah in the Old Testament God is the one who helps like the woman helps the man in Genesis. Helper is not a subordinate role unless we want to say that God is subordinate to human beings.

The second point to make about this Genesis text is that the creation of the woman is made because the human being is alone. Many scholars interpret this story of Creation in such a way that the original human, Adam is a generic human being and sexual differentiation does not occur until the woman is made from the side of the human being.

This interpretation is based on the different Hebrew words for male and female that are used before and after the creation of the woman from the human being.

Returning to the Ephesians passage, how do we handle the instructions concerning submission of wives to their husbands and husbands being the head of the wife?

For a good explanation of this text, I am going to refer to our president. Not our real president but the fictional president on the show West Wing. In this scene, President Bartlet and the First Lady are discussing the sermon which they both just heard. Listen to President Bartlet offer his interpretation of this passage.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yVtCcacNUxQ>

In the midst of a culture where women were second class citizens to men and slaves were second class to those who enslaved them, Paul offers some incredible words of challenge to this class hierarchy. We read here in these words about how they are to be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ.

We read here about how husbands are not to treat their wives as property but rather to love them in the same manner as Christ sacrificed himself up for the church. Husbands are told to love their wives as they love themselves.

Fathers are told to not abandon their responsibilities toward their children but to be involved parents. Masters are told to not threaten their slaves but to recognize that the one great Master is God in heaven.

This text ends with words which are rarely quoted when this text is cited. After giving guidance to masters, Paul says that in God there is no partiality.

Rather than looking into this text and finding how others should act toward us, we all should investigate texts like this and see how we are to act toward others. And what comes through very strongly in this text is about putting the needs of others before our own. What comes through very strongly is how in God's household codes that God shows no partiality.

Later in the service we will be sharing the Sacrament of Holy Communion. Holy Communion is a sign that in God we are all one. Jew and Gentile, Male and Female, Children and Parent, Slave and Free.

We are invited to the table and invited to submit our lives to Christ and to affirm that in God there is no partiality. AMEN.

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-Given: August 26, 2018 in Allison Creek Presbyterian (York, SC)