

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **BIBLICAL VIEW OF HEADSHIP**

#### **3.1 INTRODUCTION**

The issue of the headship is not only a concept affecting Africans but, among others, there is also biblical perspective that addresses the issue.

It is interesting to see that the concept of “headship” is not a foreign concept from the Bible. It was used in some of Pauline letters like Col.3:18 and Eph.5:21-24. But the question still remains:

“Are the African people understanding and applying this concept the way they should?”

In the next chapter about “African view” the author will determine whether the African view is correct or wrong. From all these passages the author chose Ephesians in order to make short exegetical remarks so that he can try to open up the meaning of this concept from a biblical point of view. The biblical and the African meanings will also be compared.

#### **3.2 EXEGETICAL REMARKS ON EPHESIANS 5**

##### **3.2.1 Translation**

The NIV translates these verses as follows:

“Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For the

husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which He is the Savior.” (Eph.5:22-25)

The author wants to point out that in the original Greek they did not have “submit” in verse 22, but it was assumed latter, since it was read in verse 21. Gaebelien (1978:75) is of the opinion that verse 22 may be grammatically attached to verse 21 since the contents coincide more naturally. In other words, the best translation would have been to join verse 21 and 22 into one so that the translation would possibly be:

“Submit to one another out of reverence to Christ, wives to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife.” (5:4)

Robertson (1931:544) says “*be in subjection*” was not in the Greek text of the Bible and Jerome knew of no manuscript with it. There are two reasons for this subjection according to Paul, viz:

Lordship of Christ (v22) and headship of man in Christ (v23).

### **3.2.2 Important concepts and verbs**

There are two main words that are striking here, viz: “submission and headship”. The Greek “*hypotithemai*” in the middle can best be translated as “to bring to subjection, put to someone’s notice, to subordinate, etc.” (Robertson, 1931:545).

Gundry says:

“If the verb is in the middle, it is not a compulsion, but impulsion, not external pressure, but internal prompting. It is also not a yielding under constraint, but with ready mind.”  
(1977:72)

The root of the verb is “hupposatou” which means “to obey or to submit”. Gaebelein (1978:75) indicates that the verb occurs 23 times in Pauline letters and denotes subordination to those considered worthy of respect, either because of their inherent qualities or more often because of the position they held. To avoid unnecessary mistakes, it is to their own (Greek “idios”) husbands that wives must subject (Col.3:18). That is what Gundry mean when saying:

“The rule as here laid down in general, binding on every member of the church, regardless of sex- men as well as women, husbands as well as wives. No room for preferential rights.” (1977:72)

According to Vine (1981:142), the dictionary meaning of “idios” is “one’s own or private or peculiar to oneself”. In Acts 4:32, for example, the meaning of the whole phrase is better translated in the following way: “Nor did anyone claim that anything he had belonged to him alone”. The

“idios” which is omitted in the parallel passage in Col.3:18 is something more than a simple possessive. It always conveys the idea of what is special and gives a certain note of emphasis or intensity. It does not mean the husband as lord and master (Robertson, 1931:365).

The word “head” is from the Greek “kephale” meaning “head, top, that which is uppermost.”

“In relation to something, chief or one to whom others subordinate” (Zodhiates, 1992:40). It can be best translated without an article, like : “For a husband is head of his wife”. There should be no article with “aner” or kephale just like there is no article in “Christ is head of...”. According to Thieme the Greek word “*aner*” is man in his noble sense, and is the highest word for man found in the Greek language. By interpretation it refers to Adam, who was a noble man before he sinned. By application it refers to all believers in Jesus Christ, regardless of sex, male or female, bond or free. (1970:3)

Lenski (1963:433) says that the omission of an article indicate that the headship of man to his wife must not be understood as equal to headship of Christ to His church. It also should be clear that Paul is not even, as some think, using the Old Testament figure of “Head” in the sense of a ruler over a body of people as was done in Judges 11:11, 2 Sam.5:17, 22:44 and 2 Chron.11:19.

This is the comparison, but with a tremendous difference which Paul hastens to add, either in an appositional clause or as a separate sentence (Robertson, 1931:545). Blomberg (1994:208) supports the meaning of “head” in Corinthians as either “source or authority”. He goes on to say that “the head of Christ is God” was used as a reference to the incarnation in order to avoid the ancient Arian heresy of claiming that God created Christ. The vast majority of all church history understands “head” as “authority”. The author supports the above view, adding it to Gundry who says:

“The word ‘head’ has been used to prove divine order of command in which the husband takes his direction from Christ and the wife from the husband. But as in 1 Cor.11:3, the meaning of ‘head’ is not that of ‘leader’, but of ‘source’, ‘respect’ and ‘responsibility.’” (1977:70)

Van der Walt describes the meaning of the “head” as follows:

“In the sense of fountain, source, genesis or growth point it fits in beautifully with marriage. Christ as the head should also indicate what the man’s headship should mean. And whenever Christ in Scripture offers men an example to follow, it is not his strength, authority or dominance, but his humility, self-denial and service. In this regard Christ’s

headship (in relevant texts in Corinthians, Ephesians and Colossians) always means a source of life, growth and service.” (1988:33)

He goes on to summarize the meaning of man as the head in three ways.

“An unselfish loving and responsible husband.

Unifying principle where man and woman are one flesh.

Head as authority- Jewish view. From Jewish “rosh”, meaning “chief”, it would be derived that something is the head over something else, hence man is head over woman”. The author thinks this meaning was biblically found and the Jews were culturally using it to dominate their wives.

### **3.2.3 Background**

The epistle was not directed to novices in Christian faith, but to those who, having achieved some maturity in spiritual experience, wished to go on to fuller knowledge and life (Tenny, 1975:319). The recipients of the letter were the “Christians” who were saved in Ephesus. According to Matthews (1996:909) Paul shows the recipients that they were saved by Grace (1:2), and they should now persevere in their Christian calling.

The fact that he uses Christ and Church as his illustrations is evidence that he has the Christian home in mind (Wiersbe, 1989:50). In other words, the fact that Jesus is mentioned to exemplify the head it is because

the family that is discussed must be a Christian family. The other thing that the reader should remember is that many church gatherings of that place and time took place in houses of church members. That is why Osiek, Macdonald and Tullock say:

“This may not seem remarkable in and of itself, but when we consider the venue for meetings was the house church, an implicit recognition of the role of the mother in the household codes may have fairly significant consequences for the running of the community.” (2006:131)

About submission, we must not forget that the veils which women used on their heads in those times were also an expression of submission. That is why we need to take into consideration Roald’s words when he said:

“The veil has various connotations in western context. A Christian nun wearing a veil might be seen as an image of sincere religiosity, purity and peace, where as a Muslim woman wearing a veil is likely to be seen as a symbol of the oppression of women and as making a political-religious statement.” (2001:255)

This helps us to understand that the expression of submission by the

symbol of the veil cannot be made a rule because its meaning varies from one culture to the other.

### 3.2.3.1 Meanings of submission and obedience

Russel (1974:28) has this to say: “Through a steady flow of documents, papers, stories and actions women testify that they have discovered that male-domination and the submission of women is a sign of personal and social groaning. This groaning is not as a result of God’s original design for creation, but by human disobedience and dislocation”. The groaning above makes it a serious case to observe the reality behind the meaning of submission.

Many people usually confuse “submission” and “obedience” to make them synonyms, but biblically they have different meanings as far as their application is concerned. For example, submission can be demanded from both husbands and wives, but it is logically impossible to be mutually obedient to each other. That is why Van der Walt would say that obedience falls under the language of authority while submissiveness does not.

There is nowhere in the New Testament, where the word authority is used to describe any aspect of the man-wife relationship. Even when reading from Eph.5:21-25 we find no question of obedience, but

obedience is only commanded from 6:1, when Paul now addresses children. The subject of obedience is sometimes misunderstood as submission. It is a misquotation to use obedience as if it means submission. Men nowhere receive the instruction to subject their wives to their authority. Therefore submissiveness is neither obedience nor subjection, and that is a biblical truth (Van der Walt, 1988:38).

We should also understand that the submission which is asked from wives towards their husbands must not be generalized, because a woman is a wife to one man according to the Bible, whereas a husband is for one wife. Let us also not misunderstand that when dealing with husbands and wives both the Hebrew and Greek have no specific meaning of husband or wife. In both languages the two words under discussion mean man or woman and any specific meaning is derived from the context. They may be used to mean "man", "woman", "fiancé", "betrothed", "husband" or "wife" (Hardman, 1959:174). The Old Testament uses general concepts of man and woman. There is no specific word for the married or unmarried woman, but we only use the context to detect which type of woman or man is spoken about in the particular text.

The clear implication is that wives submit themselves to their husbands of their own, not to every man. When we carefully read Eph.5:22 saying :

“Wives, submit yourselves to your husbands, as to the

Lord” and 1 Timothy which says: “Women should learn in silence and humility. I do not allow women to teach or to have authority over men, they must keep quiet.” (1 Tim.2:11)

the due submission is between husbands and wives, not just men and women. Van der Walt (1988:43) shares the same idea with the author when he says that man is not the head of woman outside marriage. In other words, it is a misuse of the Bible to subject women to men in general, simply because they are women and therefore every male gender is over and above her. Our daily experiences are that women are not given the respect they deserve by men under their leadership.

A typical example of subjugation occurred at school. A male teacher used to harass his principal, simply because she was a woman. That is why the same Paul in Col.3:18 emphasized “their own husbands”. The concept “own” help us to understand what type of situation we are dealing with here. This is not general, but specific. This does not rule out that in some cases the Bible speaks about submission to other people in general terms like when Dr. Martin Lloyd Jones argues:

“Since the verb submit was not from the original Greek in Eph.5 22, but was assumed from verse 21, therefore marriage can go well not only when husband and wife

submit to each other, but also to all other members of the community and church to which they belong.” (1973:98)

Gundry supports and emphasizes Lloyd’s argument when he says:

“Bible teachers leap at the word ‘submit’ in verse 22 and chisel it into stone as eternal law. Yet the word ‘submit’ is not even there in the original language.” (1977:71)

Hendricks (1973:31) says that submission is not the exclusive responsibility of the woman. It is the lifestyle of the Christian. To the woman the question is, are you willing to submit yourself, not first of all to your husband, but to the Lord’s plan for you is functioning in marital relationship.

The other point is that since submission is a concept that has something to do with what God expects from us, it means that one cannot do it on his own, except by looking at the exemplarity of Jesus Christ. This is why the words of Kempis (1979:90) are very important when he says that true submission can only be there if we learn from the way how Jesus Christ submitted Himself to His Father.

We are still responsible to understand that other parts of scriptures urge us to submit ourselves to other people as well. Maybe it is also important when we are still analyzing this topic, to mention that, the different types

of submissions must not be confused with the one between husbands and wives. We have, for instance, submission to the state (Rom.13:1, Titus 3:1), submission of slaves to their masters (Eph.6:5, Col.3:22, 1Tim.6:1), subordination to elders and church leaders (1Cor.6:16, 1Pet.5:55 and Heb.13:9), submission of children to parents (Luke 2:51) as well as submission of wives to their own husbands (Eph.5:22, Col.3:18, Titus 6:5, 1Pet. 3:1,5) not *all* women to *all* men. Let me now share Paul's concept of submission where he puts the following categories:

Six of them specifically deal with the marriage relationship between man and wife (Rom.7:2, Eph.5:21-33, Col.3:18-19, 1Thess.14:34-35 and 1 Tim.2:8-15).

Three others stand in context of the woman's behavior in the church, but it is not clear whether they refer to married women or women in general,

since the Greek has one word for both (1Cor.11:3-16, 14:34-35 and 1Tim.2 :8-15).

The other three remaining are: 1Tim.5:2-3 (which deals with how older and younger women should be treated), Rom.1:26-27 (which speaks about unnatural relations between people of the same sex) and Gal.3:28 where he stresses both diversity and unity in Christ.

These submissions must not be treated with equal value since that can lead us into a variety of mistakes, for example, the treatment of the child by parents at home can never be the same as that between father and mother. A child can be chastised when doing something wrong, but a mother cannot. There are different ways of chastising people. In actual fact the relationship which the mother has towards children cannot be equal with the relationship that she has towards her husband. But if we then treat them as equals, the first mistake will be to try to treat the mother equally to the child, and that is where abuse will occur . In other words, the mother will be treated a little better than a child. That is why I want to say that a man's relationship with his wife, after all, is not the same as that between him and his children or his slaves, hence the difference already emerges in that submissiveness is asked of women but never obedience, as in the case of slaves and children.

The second issue is that submission in this context has no connection with slavery, but a voluntary submission in which both the husband and the wife are equal before God and the laws of society, yet they have varying functions and responsibilities.

One should be careful not to draw parallels so easily between slavery and marriage. Slavery is not a societal bond, but a sinful practice dating from a specific era. When we read what Paul say in 1Cor.7:21, we will find that he was also taught about liberty of all peoples and women are included in this concept. That means if we accept certain functions under a fellow human, we must subject ourselves to that individual to accomplish a common goal (Kimathi, 1994:30).

If we ignore the broader imperative of verse 21 in Eph.5, we loose the unique message to the husband and wife in this passage, hence some overemphasize the submission of one towards the other, meanwhile the heart of the matter here is “submission to each other” (Hardman, 1959:46). The author believes it is a mistaken idea to make distinctions between love and submission, because they actually belong together in this context. One cannot love without giving preference to the one loved; the surrender of one’s crowning act of love (1Cor.13:5, John 12:24). Love causes one to submit to the other.

Let us also share 1Tim.2 which says:

“A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or have authority over a man, she must be silent” (1Tim 2:11-12).

Do the above confirm that women must be subjected to men? This is one of the passages that are misunderstood and misused by many traditional African men to subject their wives. We also need to understand the reason why Paul specifically denied the Corinthian women under Timothy’s guidance to neither speak nor teach in the church. A short overview of the background of the church in Corinth will be helpful. Men used the divine services to further their own quarrels and that the women wished to make themselves heard in an offensive fashion. This is another way patriarchs in Africa misuse this passage of scripture. They take it literally, and avoid the context in which it was said.

The Christian women in Paul’s time, following a tradition of thousands of years of suppression, had only just begun to realize what freedom in Christ meant. Accordingly, the Christian women thought that they revealed their liberation by publicly differing from men or dominating discussion while they were not really qualified to do so. They thus wanted to take over authority unfaithfully.

The Corinthian church was confused and carnal, partly because the women were taking precedence over the men, and neither the men nor the women were submitting to the Word of God which was vital in their journey of faith (Wiersbe, 1989:87).

This principle does not actually prevent a woman from teaching or from leading in ministries assigned by the local assembly. But it is clear that Paul was dealing with a complex situation of disorder and disobedience where many women were trying even to rule the men. The situation which Paul addresses in Corinth where Timothy served might differ with the one in our country and our churches today. Therefore it will be unwise of us to automatically read the situation and address the problems out of the context.

Some people still use the expression of “weaker vessel” as Peter says:

“Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives and treat them with respect as they are weaker partners and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life so that nothing will hinder your prayers” (1Pet.3:7).

Can we also use this expression to enforce women to subjection to male dominance? It is interesting to note that the NIV, unlike the other translations uses “weaker partner” in order to indicate that they are

“partners”. Partnership entails equality, and equality means treating each other with respect. The word “weak” in this sense does not give us authority to oppress and undermine women, but it reminds us of the creation order and purpose in which God created us.

If the woman was created to be a helpmate, it is obvious that she would not be given all the qualities that the other person has. When we look, for instance, at man’s physical abilities we can see that women are not such strong people to compete with men physically, hence women are usually the ones who become man’s punch bag without them responding. God gave women certain capabilities that men will seek help from, but not strength to defend themselves from violent men. They are given the beauty of giving birth as a thing that men cannot do. This is a process in itself that closely reveals the strength they have.

Women use more energy when giving birth, which men never experience, that also limits her physical life. But it does not mean that their weakness in this respect makes them inferior people, because if that was the case men would also be inferior at duties that need women. Vine says that in the spiritual sense, it is said of the rudiments of Jewish religion, in their ability to justify anyone.

The poor legal position which women had compared to men in those olden days resulted also in their weakness (Vine, 1981:204). What is

meant is that the way the community of those times (being dominated by men) treated women (e.g. traditional courts), caused women not to believe in themselves, hence they just thought they cannot do anything without the other person's approval.

Peter says:

“Wives, in the same way be submissive to your husbands so that if any of them do not believe in the word, they may be won over without words by the behaviour of their wives” (1Pet.3:1 and 5).

For this is the way the Holy women of the past who put their hope in God used to make themselves beautiful. The phrase “*in the same way*” places responsibilities on both. They were submissive to their own husbands. We do not get any impression that women are subjected to their husbands in such a way that they have no say at all. In this relationship with men Peter here speaks of a divided home, where the husband is not a Christian while the wife is one who believes. The woman is given a responsibility of leading by example with the aim of winning the husband to Christ. That is why Peter did not speak about submission alone in this passage, but he also included respect and honour to indicate that the issue is to educate the man through exemplary life.

Teaching has different methods, for example, teaching by exemplary life is a good way of educating others. In other words, the woman in this situation was not to reprimand or teach her husband like we usually do in the church, but deeds must speak louder than words for her. Maybe the question of “why?” may also be shared. The probability is that the husband might have been hostile to be preached to by his own wife, considering the customs and traditions of that time, but a practical example could be the better way to protect the women. Some of the traditions handled women badly and women were not allowed to stand and preach before men, especially without covering their heads as in 1Cor.11:15. De Haan says:

“We believe the custom of Christian women wearing short hair is contrary to the scriptures and against the clear teaching of the word of God.” (1970:123)

This also confirms that Christian leadership must be done through submissiveness. One clearly sees the works of action in Christ who washed His disciples’ feet in the book of John 13:1-17. The challenge for practical theology is that we become care givers to them who are oppressed.

This was a clear way of submitting but also teaching the twelve apostles what to do in their ministries, and He led them by example. So many may

feel undermined or subjected whenever we speak about submission, but the truth is that we can lead by becoming submissive.

The author is in line with some of the early church fathers, who acknowledged the importance of emphasizing that men and women are equal before God. Van Rensburg (1990:105) made a direct quotation of Father Augustine's words:

“If the woman had been intended to rule over the man, then the Lord would have made Eve out of Adam's head, if she had been intended as a slave of the man, she would have been made out of the bone from his feet. But Eve was taken from his side because the woman was intended to be the equal companion of man.” (1990:105)

When we look at the word “submission” in Ephesians we need to realize the time and circumstances in which Paul lived. To be the “head of the house” was to accept the common notion that authority was the male's rightful providence. Children and women were only responsible to obey blindly. Hence abuse will be normal in this case, because the wife was not equal to her husband as a person or any other way. In Africa, this has become a cultural problem that allows patriarchy to abuse women. (Warunta & Kinoti, 2000: 140)

The contemporary interpretations of Eph.5 that describe the wife as finding total fulfillment in her relationship with her husband, gives an expression that the wife is so “under” the authority or umbrella of her husband that she is not to speak or act except at his direction. This gives us the background that enables us to understand Paul’s commands to both husbands and wives. So the Christian view which Paul emphasizes here is that women are seen as persons of equal worth and value. That in itself upholds human dignity (*ubuntu* in African custom).

We also need to remember that there is a difference between “submit and subject” because whenever we speak of subject there must be an object, which is not the case with submission. There may be problems if the word submission is used only as a command and not a responsibility. In other words, the submission that the Bible teaches is not a blind one in which the woman must blindly accept everything without questioning, but it is a submission that allows her to be responsible also. Let us take an example of Christ’s submission to His Father just like it is written in Matt. 26, when He says:

“My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me.

Yet not as I will, but as you will” (Matt. 26:39).

His word indicates that He is submitting Himself to someone responsible towards His life. Jesus is very sure that under God’s wings He will be

safe even during those suffering hours of His life. It is quite different to someone who is ordered to be submissive to someone without responsibility, for instance, submission to a man who always beats you.

This submission can not go without trust that I am under someone that I trust and will not forsake my life. So this submission included responsibility, trust and faith towards the protective Father who would take care of His soul even when dark clouds shaded His life. One preacher said that the only medicine to put woman under submission is to love them. If she feels loved the development of trust occurs which will never give her any problem whenever she thinks of being submissive to her husband. Therefore, the good concept which helps to negate submission, is love.

Another issue under submission is the “fear of God”. In other words, Paul’s command must be understood in this way: “Submit to your husband in the Lord”, where “in the Lord” becomes a conditional clause. This would mean that it is not in everything that the wife would submit herself to the husband, but only in issues which are not contrary to the

Lord's word. That is why Van Rensburg says:

“This proves to me basically that the marriage that is being spoken about here is the one of Christians, since we cannot speak about the fear of God to non-Christians. Therefore the submission to your husband is part of your submission to the Lord. That is why the conduct of husband's life towards his wife has to be like Christ's conduct towards His Church.”  
(1990:108)

We are of course born sinners through the original sin, hence we can not expect in our sinful status to live a perfect life, even in our marriages, but we are challenged to continue with the struggle. The good thing is firstly to get back to God and seek ways that can help us to live peacefully in marriage, because the patterns of this world alone (culture and traditions included) cannot really meet God's requirements for us to live a holy and happy life in marriage. Hence the author supports this view by saying that this condition is very important because to those marriages that are governed by African traditions, it will not be easy to abandon the abusive practices, but if one is a Christian, he or she can understand better.

La Haye has this to say:

“Women need to be extremely careful that they are

respectful to their husbands, but there may be some instances when they need not be submissive or obedient “to their own husbands.” (s:a:78)

Like La Haye, personally I do not think it is submission and respect when one is forced to do what is wrong in order to secure his/her own marriage. The violation here is of human dignity. It is like being asked to do something that is absolutely contrary to the Scriptures, for example adultery, lying, stealing, etc., which is contrary to the way a Christian has to live. Wiersbe (1989) also followed Van Rensburg’s words:

“Paul was nowhere suggesting that women are inferior to men, or that all women must be in subjection to all men in every situation.” (1990:4)

In the context of Eph.5:21, from which the verb of submission is derived also into verse 22, God’s intention is that of equality of both man and woman when it comes to submission. The Bible reads: “Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ”. The other issue to be remembered is that the word “submission” is not only used to refer to man-woman relationship in the Bible, but it is also used in other spheres of life, for example, between the government and the civilians (Rom.13:1). Therefore, it will be easy to make mistakes if we take the concept “submission” as applying only to the relation between male and female.

Marriage is a true reflection of Christ's relationship to His church. If one reads Ephesians 5 in comparison with 1Cor.11:3, 14:34 and Titus 2:5 the equality between husband and wife becomes a practical one. From God's institution of marriage it has also become apparent that the married woman is meant to be a help to her husband. She has been given a certain status. Husbands and wives are like two cog-wheels, next to each other, a small one and a big one. Their cogs fit into one another; without the big one the small one just cannot function and vice versa. In other words, they are dependent on each other. However, we should not confuse the command given by Paul with a false submission like when the woman is treated like a slave in the house while the man trembles over her. Schalekamp once said:

“We must remember that a spoilt husband is a greater catastrophe than a spoilt pet.” (1990:138)

When we also compare this verse with that of Gal.3:26-29, it makes sense to speak about submission from both sides, depending on the situation (Schalekamp, 1990:138). In short, men and women are to treat each other with grace, respect and dignity.

### 3.2.3.2 Meanings of authority and headship

Traditionally, in African culture, people take it for granted that whenever we speak about headship, authority is automatically a part of the discussion, because the head is taken to be connected to authority and submission. Van der Walt (1995:8) says that authority in marriage seems to be always reciprocal, in which the two people give the same loyalty to each other. When we speak about “authority”, the African’s view of it is summarized in the following key words: hierarchical, centralized, according to seniority or status. The structure of authority is constituted from the top down, for example, ancestors, chief, father, eldest brother, etc. In other words, it favors men more than women. According to Lee (1968:124), authority is a word with many shades of meanings and it is easy to slip from one to the other unwillingly. Lee went on to give four types of definitions of authority, viz:

“(1). Legal conferred on a person by a reason of the office he or she holds, e.g. minister. (2). Moral authority which depends partly on office and partly on readiness of other people to accept the claim made for him (her) that he represents God in pronouncements, e.g. pastor. (3). Authority that comes from accumulated experience, e.g. scientists and physicians. (4). Psychological authority that is derived from emotional attitude like young and adult.”

Many Christians too still hold a hierarchical view of authority which functions vertically from the top down. In accordance with this God is the highest authority and all the lower authorities also emanate from Him. He delegates His authority to the highest human figures of authority, for example, a king, state president, a chief director or principal who will also delegate to holders of lower offices (Van der Walt, 1995:8-9).

The basic error here is that this view has no distinction between human and divine authority. The word authority (*exousia*) occurs more than hundred times in the New Testament, the first being in 1Cor.11:10 where it is expected of the woman to have a sign on her head to signify her husband's authority, for the sake of the angels.

The second time the concept was used in 1Cor. which reads:

”The wife's body does not belong to her alone but also to her husband. In the same way the husband's body does not belong to him alone, but also to his wife” (1Cor.7:4).

Seeing that authority here is reciprocal, this verse cannot be used to suggest that the man has a kind of authority, which his wife does not share in equal measure, and that in fact is the concept of partnership. If we keep in mind how generally it was accepted and believed that the man

is the carrier of authority in marriage, it becomes a big surprise to learn that there are seemingly no grounds for it in the Scriptures. If the question of who carries authority may be asked here, 1Cor.7 says:

“A wife is not the master of her own body, but her husband is, in the same way the husband is not the master of his own body, but his wife is” (1Cor.7:4).

This may be an accurate answer. Some scholars would try to argue that this verse must be used only when sexual intercourse is the topic under discussion, because they understand it in the context of sexual relationships, but the author believes that we need not confine this beautiful message to that point alone, since the husband and wife do not only live together for sexual intercourse, but for other reasons as well, like bearing children, glorifying God, etc. It is the author’s conviction that in Christian marriage the husband seeks to please the wife, and the wife seeks to please the husband in everything, sexual intercourse included. It is not a good view to understand authority as if one person must suffer like:

“One policeman used violent arguments on his wife and beating her the reason being to express his authority over her” (Vanderpool, 1977:54).

The main question to ask is who owns who in this passage, but the answer will of course be “no one owns the other”. It is mentioned that no one between male and female has authority over his or her body, but each one of them has authority over the other. Headship may therefore not be interpreted as authority or governing or dominion.

When we come to the “headship,” according to Gaebelien, Paul had already marked out a hierarchy in which God is seen as the head of Christ, Christ as the head of the church, and the man as the head of the woman in 1Cor.1:12. Gaebelien continues to say:

“Marriage is thus interpreted in the sublimest terms. Paul regards the husband, even to an infinitely lesser degree, as the PROTECTOR of his wife. That is what the Bible knowledge commentary stress that the husband must be the protector of the wife.” (1978:76)

The Church as the bride of Christ readily acknowledges His authority and seeks to please Him in every respect. When marriage is seen in the light of this higher relationship between Christ and His body, the wife will find no difficulty in submitting to her husband and vice versa.

Wiersbe is very much opposed to “submission as slavery” and he simply does not mean that she becomes a slave of the husband, since the husband

is also obliged to submit to Christ as Christ submits to the Father. The concept introduces a relationship among people who respect each other, centered on trust and love. He emphasizes:

“Headship is not dictatorship.” (1989:50)

This is true because the Bible does not see the headship of man like the pagans of Paul’s time, and as traditional Africans also do. In the structure of the society men are given the role of the head of the house, a role also affirmed by God in Eph.5 (including responsibility in that role). But what is amazing is that their headship is modeled on the way Christ loved His church, and not on the concept of human systems of authority. This headship focuses attention on the variety of services to serve the subordinate. In the same way Christ suffered for the church, husbands are to nurture their wives, seeking always to help the wife grow as a person and as a Christian. That is why the word love (*agapao*) in Greek) means seeking the highest good for another person, where Christ’s sacrificial death gives a clear example of dying for us so that we may be regarded children of God once more.

Robertson (1931:41) is of the view that the Greek “*aner*” which indicated “a husband” instead of “the husband” is in a sense putting any man belonging into the class of husbands. It is best taken as an independent clause, starting in a definite and emphatic way an important point in

which Christ, who resembles the husband in respect of headship, at the same time differs from the husband. Christ differs from the husband in the sense that He is also what the husband is not, viz: saviour. That is why Van der Walt says:

“Christ’s headship of the church is unlimited, that of the man over the woman is limited and qualified, because the man can never redeem his wife as Christ does in the Church.”  
(1988:33)

Zodhiates is of the opinion that the husband is in relation to his wife in so far as they are one body (Matt.19:6), and one body can have only one head to direct it, not to dictate or enslave it. John Calvin on the other hand understands that this relation is equal to the law of God in Matt. 22, viz: it is both horizontal and vertical. He says:

“Paul begins with wives, whom he enjoins to be subject to their husbands, in the same manner as to Christ. Not that the authority is equal but wives cannot obey Christ without yielding obedience to their husbands.” (1992:40)

In other words, the obedience to God must first be seen in the household relationship. This is becoming clearer when Van der Walt advocates that the Christian husband fulfils his role as head best when he serves and

loves his wife unselfishly. This concept challenges African traditional men who oppress women, and regard them as inferior. It is also a challenge to care givers. Whenever we speak about the husband as the head, we must also think about the husband as the leader. From the passage of John 13:1-17 Jesus stresses two main things about Christian leadership, which are:

Leadership as a self-denying service, and not domination for the sake of self-gratification. It is important to note that a leader is part of the team, and not in the first place a commander or the giver of command to others. Christ saw the execution of authority as a shared responsibility in which strong, gifted individuals acted as servants to strengthen others, so that they could also participate in the decision-making process.

Although Christ did not make this passage a direct application to the relationship between husbands and wives, the relevance of the passage is immediately clear. That is why we cannot say that the command of submission was the responsibility for wives alone, but for both. Finally, authority is a concept that can be applied relatively according to situations. In other words, one's authority does not apply to all situations, for instance, if one has authority in a certain home, it does not imply that the same authority is applicable in other homes. But above all, Randal teaches that the best message on authority is the Gospel of Jesus which

declares that all authority is given by Christ. He says:

“Christ is the Lord, and South Africa is part of his world and under his judgment.” (1972:80)

No one is having authority above Jesus Christ. This concept is extremely important in helping patriarchal men to know and understand how authority works. It will help to address the issue of liberation.

### 3.2.3.3 Did Jesus liberate women during his ministry?

According to Cone (1975:82), Jesus the liberator, the helper and the healer of the wounded, is the point of departure for valid exegesis of scriptures from a Christian perspective, hence he mentions that Jesus must reveal Himself in the struggle of the oppressed for freedom.

In other words, if a preacher ignores to preach Jesus as a liberator to the oppressed, the message becomes irrelevant. Jesus Christ defined the duties and responsibilities of His followers without any conditions related to sex or gender. He treated all sexes as equals. That is why Jersild and Johnson said:

“No one is to hide his light under a bushel. Men as well as women are commanded to bring forth the fruits of the spirit which is love, meekness, and gentleness. Women as well as men should be engaged in the great work of public

reformation for they are equally responsible moral beings.”

(1983: 165)

The short message above opens us to understand that even before He liberated those in some captivity, Jesus viewed both men and women as equals and He never gave one special privilege over the other.

Denny says:

“The role and the rights of women and children have to be taken into account in ways in which they were not in the Victorian society. We can learn from Jesus’ attitude to women even in the restricted society of His day.” (1976:45)

Denny’s quotation implicates that he had a serious concern about how women were handled in his time, which lead him to learn how to solve that problem from Jesus Christ Himself, and that is the problem that made the author decided to do this study. The author also wants to take the reader’s mind back to Jesus’ attitude of working with women, that this attitude will be liberating women from the bondage of inferiority.

Fiorenza (1986: 67-68) thinks that the oppression of women in the society resulted from the theology that sees Christian theology as a sexist theology. According to her the Scripture is not only the source of truth, but also the source of untruth, oppression and domination, and especially

women became the victims of the application of the negative parts of the scripture. Therefore she declares openly that she as a feminist theologian approaches the Bible in a biased way when she explores it, with the eye on the women's movement or the rights of women.

It is just a disgrace that her ways of liberating women pushes her into a corner where she starts minimizing the word of God into just a mere work of people. The author does not deny that she feels pain when women are oppressed, but that does not give her a right to blame God's inspired word. It is therefore not good to use a wrong concept when correcting another wrong concept. Two wrong concepts will never make one right concept. My fear is that if we allow our emotions to deal with man's abuse of the Bible we may also abuse it, hence we will be left without God's word and counsel in everything.

We must first understand that Jesus' main aim in coming to the earth was to save people from their sins, which included liberating them from the bondage of sin. Every element that could lead us to sin was forbidden and removed by Jesus Christ, including the element of enslaving women who are also God's intended people.

In view of the above, we find that Jesus lived amongst the Jews who had the culture of seeing women as inferior. In his ministry he did something to show that He did not support the culture or tradition of seeing women

as less important than men, because God created them in God's image. That is why some of the examples of how He liberated women in particular instances were quoted.

He had women as part of His ministry, which was not allowed by Jewish customs. According to the Jews, a woman had to take only the domestic responsibilities and was not allowed to speak in front of men. Jesus Christ's ministry accepted both genders equally. In Matthew we read that:

“For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and my sister and my mother.” (Matt.12:50)

This brings the understanding that for all the genders, Jesus had an equal feeling. It also clarifies that in Jesus' ministry; women were allowed as equal partners. Even at the climax of things, when Christ was raised from the dead, the first people to visit and find an empty tomb, were women. Maybe that is why, when we read in Luke 8:1-3 we find that apart from the twelve, there were also a number of women who followed Jesus Christ, including Mary Magdalene, Johanna, Susanna and many others.

This chapter shows how important women were to Jesus' ministry. If disciple meant pupil, follower and servant, then these women automatically qualified to be amongst the disciples. That is why Van der Walt goes on to saying that even when the rabbinical parables explicitly

excluded women, Christ used women in His parables like in Luke 4:24-26, 11:31, 15:8-10 and 21:1-4.

The Bible reads as follows:

“Martha, Martha, you are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her.” (Luke 10:41-42)

This is one of the clear indications that Jesus Christ was interested in women as being His audience whom are cared for by Him, and not men alone. Maybe it will also be important to mention that we know from this verse Jesus’ view that all mankind is equal, irrespective of sex or gender; the only thing is that both must do the will of the Father.

An African writer, Ogbu U Kalu related his own experience about women who helped to spread the Gospel in the African continent. He said:

“Since the establishment of Christianity in Africa, there has always been an upsurge of female religious leadership particularly in the prophetic, revival movements of African Instituted Churches of Neo-Pentecostal Christianity. In these churches women have been experiencing a measure of Christian ministerial freedom and equality that was denied to

them by the mainline churches. Not only are they visible in ecclesiastical leadership as founders of churches, bishops, pastors and evangelists, but they also function as prophetesses, prayer leaders, healers and heads of church organizations and departments. One remarkable woman that was even recognized by Portuguese Roman Catholic church was Kimpa Vita in Kenya.” (2005:422-423)

The author agrees with the view above since he also wants to share his little experience about the mainline church and their treatment of women. The other reason why the African Independent Churches (AIC) around our townships grow faster than the mainline ones, is that women feel safe and are treated with care and love. The author wants to share two case studies that he made from his home church.

Two stories are going to be shared in order to show woman’s leadership. Both happened at a funeral of someone. The first one is that we had a woman who left our church after some misunderstandings with some elders. Before she left, the woman was very passive in the church to an

extent that she could not even represent our church in any programmed during public services like weddings and funerals.

But soon after this woman left our church, we attended a funeral of a member of her new church and she was in the programme to represent the church. Her speech is remembered till today by some of our elders who were present at the funeral, since she spoke like a leader without being shy or afraid that she was known to us since she had been worshipping with us.

After some discussions with her afterwards, asking her why she left our church, she indicated clearly that in our church women were not given chance to express themselves, hence she was given the task in her new church and she used it as part of her leadership. Women in some mainline churches are not given leadership chances and enough freedom to express their own talents and gifts; hence they join the AIC where they will be given those opportunities. The mainline churches do not want women in office, but some men who are in office are useless and more helpless than some female figures that are in the church. That is why Kalu indicated that since the 1970's ministries and churches founded by women have multiplied all over Africa. (2005:424)

The second story is of the obituary of another former woman member of

our church which was read at her funeral. Before joining her new AIC, this woman could not even give her tenth to the church. But many of our members wondered when the reader of her obituary said:

“Death was so bad because the deceased passed away when she was trying to pay up the money for the church building that she pledged at a value of five thousand rands. She used to offer everything from her house to serve in the church, but now we lost her.”

Even with this one, the main reason why she was a hard worker in her second church while she was not in ours is that her new church allowed women to take leading roles in the church, and that helped them to see what responsibilities are theirs in the church. Our churches are mainly led by men and women get the information secondarily, even their responsibilities come secondarily, hence they are of less importance. If the mainline churches which are victimized by these incidences do not do something to put women where they belong in church structures, the researcher sees them deteriorating very fast while the AIC will enjoy the rapid growth. Let us analyze how Jesus broke the concept of dominance among women.

#### *3.2.3.3.1 The adulterous woman*

We read about this story in John 8:1-11.

An example of a woman caught in the act of adultery is another way in which our Lord accepted women as equals in the kingdom of God. The Jews in Christ's time saw women as inferior and as a result they were quick to condemn her. Jesus showed His compassion to her and treats her equally than He would have a man in this position. In other words, the Jews were very fast in judging women who committed this kind of sin compared to men who committed the same sin. Actually, the man was not even brought to Jesus. It was not necessary, since man was holy.

They got two people (man and woman) committing adultery, but the man was left free while the woman was brought to Jesus for judgment. The interesting thing here is that Christ's answer or judgment to the woman was affirming as he said:

“Neither do I condemn you, go now and sin no more.” (John 8:11)

Although this was painful for the Jews who brought her to Jesus, this was a liberating message, which gave the woman a second chance which they had not expected. Their judgment of the woman was so harsh and that was caused by the way they regarded the woman as a target, since they left the man with whom she was committing the sin out there.

The author believes it would also have been difficult for the Jews if Christ asked them to fetch the man with whom the woman committed adultery as the second culprit, since their intention was to condemn the woman alone. Louw and Kendal share the same view with Jesus here, that no one is entitled to judge others. They say:

“No law, practice, or policy of government at any level shall discriminate on the grounds of race, ethnicity, color, creed gender, or religion.” (1986:158)

This quotation above forms part of the drafts which were used to draw the bill of rights in the South African constitution. Together with Koning, the author understands the fact that since God created everything it means that He is the One to have final determination on every human life. No one is allowed to judge between rich and poor, superior and inferior, except God Himself. (1988:134).

The second story continues to unpack or share equality in service, ministry and liberation.

#### 3.2.3.3.2 *The Samaritan woman*

He had time to teach individual women by accepting them as children of God. There was a reaction from Christ’s disciples when they found him at the well, speaking to a woman who was a Samaritan, or the lower class.

Their reaction was:

“Just then His disciples returned and were surprised to find Him talking with a woman.” (John 4:27a)

Their main concern here was not that the woman was a Samaritan, but the fact that He was speaking to a female which was not allowed by the Jewish people, especially in public. The truth is that:

“No self-respecting rabbi would teach a woman the law, or even speak publicly with a woman for longer than necessity demanded.” (Verhely, 1984:95)

Therefore the problem of the disciples was steered by the discourse that took a longer time than was expected in Jewish customs.

Contrary to what was expected of Him, He broke the law in the eyes of His disciples for the sake of the woman’s salvation. By doing this, although He did not come especially to liberate women, He liberated them since He gave them time to discuss issues that affected their salvation with Him. What really is amazing of Jesus’ disciples here is the fact that they never had a problem when other women followed and supported Jesus’ ministry with their own belongings, but they wanted to show their concern when he taught this woman. The Samaritan woman was known for her prostitution to an extent that she became a laughing

stock in the society. That is why she was going to fetch water alone in midday because she was shy that people would laugh at her because of her behavior. But what Jesus did here was to liberate her from the bondage of prostitution, oppression of man and abuse by the community.

He did not only liberate her, He also changed her life since she now started to call people to listen to Jesus when He taught. Besides this, His redemption also included women as we read: Peter's mother-in-law (Mark 1:20-31), the woman who suffered from the issue of blood (Mark 5:21), Jairus's daughter (Mark.5:35-43), the widow of Nain (Luke7:11-17) and the crippled woman (Luke 13:10-17). All these women were treated with grace and dignity. Our Lord liberated them from the oppression that surrounded them in that community. With the above in mind let us now analyze the story of the two sisters of Lazurus. Several stories will be explored in order to show how Jesus liberated women.

#### *3.2.3.3.3 The story of Martha and Mary*

The well known story of Martha and Mary in Luke 10:38-12 teaches us that Jesus gave Himself time to teach women in their homes. Instead of supporting the human judgments that would judge Mary for ignoring her domestic responsibility, Christ reprimanded Martha, a hardworking person in the kitchen, but praised Mary for sitting and listening to His teachings. She had to sit with men (disciples) and receive the same

teaching. The salvation of both male and female was and is still of an important concern to our Lord Jesus Christ. He did not allow the Jewish set of laws and regulations to hinder this sole purpose of coming to liberate both men and women who were sinners. Once again the following story is another clear example of liberation. Let us now analyze the story of the woman who was sick and rejected by the community.

#### *3.2.3.3.4 The woman who had bleeding disease*

We read about the woman who was saved from bleeding in Luke 8:40-48). Women according to Jewish customs were not allowed even to touch Jesus or any male Jew. That is why verse 44 shares that this woman came from behind to touch Him. It was because she did not want to be seen touching him, since she was going to be rebuked or punished for that action, or even be killed. The desperate woman pushed her hand through a broken seam in the crowd and, for a fleeting moment, clutched the corner of His garment. In verse 46 we get the evidence that Jesus did not see who that person was, but He only sensed that someone touched Him. Gire (1989:49) says that the power left Him to surge through the hemorrhaging woman, and immediately she felt a rush of her youthful health returning. Then He said:

“Someone touched me, for I perceive that virtue is gone out of me.” (Luke 8:46)

The woman later realized she could no longer hide herself from Jesus and she openly confessed that she was healed. Jesus healed those who confessed irrespective of color or gender. He ignored the sanctions which the Jewish people had towards women in particular, and saved them from faith instead of using gender in order to destroy the dignity and image of God in woman.

#### *3.2.3.3.5 The first visitors to the grave*

Women were the first people to visit Christ's grave as we read in all Gospels (see Luke 24:1). That is why Mark also recorded their question in verse 3 which reads:

“Who shall roll us away the stone from the door of the sepulcher?” (Mark 16:3)

This gives a clear indication that only women walked to the grave since it was the duty of men to pull away the stone that was used to close a grave in those times. If they went to the grave with at least one male for the first time, this would have been no problem for them I believe, but women alone may have this type of problem.

Men were there, including the apostles, but the Bible recorded that women alone went out to the grave in the morning. Without reasoning too much, the author accepts that this was because of how Jesus accepted

them as partakers of the Kingdom in His lifetime; hence they loved and remembered Him on the third day. Their going to the grave was affirming the One who respected them and treated them with great dignity. The next story will help to affirm the great ministry in which the women participated.

#### *3.2.3.3.6 Women served in Jesus' ministry*

Luke recorded about women who served in Jesus ministry with their own belongings. Those liberated women, according to Luke 8:1-3 did not stay behind, but followed Him with their service all the way. Not only women lived during Jesus' time, but men also were there, even saved in the ministry, but we only read of women as those who helped with their belongings for Jesus' ministry to continue. This was not the service that was done once Christ visited them, but the Bible shows that they followed Him from town to town with their help. In other words, they became part of the group which included the apostles in following Jesus' ministry. The author is of the opinion that these women were part of the 120 disciples that were recorded in Acts 1:15. In short, Jesus did not only have men in the group that He personally taught, but women were included also, since He came to save people who sinned.

Another argument which some philosophers use to argue that Jesus was a male figure; therefore He represents the maleness of God, which

undermines women. Johnson says:

“Since the man Jesus is confessed to be the revelation of God, the Christ symbol points to maleness as an essential characteristic of the divine being itself. This is exacerbated by exclusive use of father and son metaphors to interpret Jesus’ relationship to God, and by use of *logos*, connected in Greek philosophy with the male principle, to articulate his personal realities God with us. The statement ‘who has seen me has seen the Father (John 14:9) is taken literally to mean that we can physically see God in Jesus.’ (1985:108)

The author’s argument against the above claim is that when we read from Acts Jesus’ answer to Saul was:

“I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.” (9:5)

When we go back to 9:2 it states clearly that Saul was persecuting both males and females because it reads as follows:

“He went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether *men or women*, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem.” (Acts,9:2)

This statement indicates that Jesus was represented by both males and

females who were victims of Saul's persecution. This means that Jesus did not excuse one gender, but He included women in the class of those persecuted. This qualifies the equality of men and women in the eyes of Jesus. Boff says:

“Jesus spoke to the women of Jerusalem on the cross because the crying voices of women expressed compassion for Him.” (1982:59)

The fact that Jesus addressed these women was because He cared for everyone who felt pain for Him, irrespective of gender. The last three stories will be able to finalize the way equality is used as a way of affirming women.

#### *3.2.3.3.7 Women as especially privileged people*

Finally, the reader will come to realize that women were important despite the Jewish customs. From the Old Testament we read about women who were privileged to play important roles in the political and community life. A few examples are: Tamar, Rahab, Ruth and the wife of Uriah. These women were included in the genealogies of Matt.1:3, 5, and 6. The role played by Abigail when the war between Nabal and David nearly broke out in 1Sam.22 is very remarkable for a woman because she got in to resolve the difference between two men. In other words, despite

her being a woman, she played an important role in solving their dispute. Men were present in the House of Nabal, but they did not think faster than what Abigail did in order to stop the dispute before it bring the unexpected results. Men might have helped in these types of situations in other times, but this time a woman was at the forefront.

#### *3.2.3.3.8 Women as examples of faith*

Paul calls Phoebe a deacon of the congregation in Cenchrea in Rom.16:1. Both commentators Wiersbe and Matthew Henry agree that this woman was a deacon, a very important role played in the early church. The word used for “servant” in this verse was the same applied to the deacons. According to Gottwald (1984:398) she received this title because her service and office were influential in the community and the church. How wonderful that after decades of women suppression Paul acknowledged that some women were so gifted that they were given opportunity to take lead in this Christian church. Some men were members of the congregation, but Paul speaks about Phoebe as a faithful Christian amongst them there. 1Tim.3:11 indicate that these women were deacons themselves and not those they were the wives of the deacons.

A great challenge for mainline churches in breaking the chain of oppression of women, especially within the church. When reading the Gospels, we find many places where Jesus healed and helped a number of

women, for instance, He healed Simon's mother-in-law, and He also aided a widow by raising her son to life in Luke 7:11-17. Therefore Jesus' healings as well as forgiveness that he extended towards women established His concern for oppressed women in general. His concern was of course a liberating one (Cassidy, 1978: 24).

### **3.3 PRELIMINARY CONCLUSIONS ON THIS CHAPTER**

Being the head of the wife does not mean to be a boss (Van der Walt, 1988:37). When the author speaks about a "boss" he wants the reader to understand the situation where a man has a final say in everything. The example given by Grace Kimathi (1994:24) of a traditional husband (Moses Marimba) in chapter 3:41-42, is a clear picture of a boss. A boss has an unquestionable dictatorship over his wife, which is not biblical. If man and woman were both created by God to accompany and complement each other, it means they are dependent on each other, and therefore, not one of them is above the other. We may differ in gifts, talents and responsibilities, but that does not imply that either of them is a minor person. De Bruyn (1993:227-228) indicates that we are all stewards of God on earth, and as a steward is someone appointed to look after someone's possessions, it will be unfair for a husband to try and own his wife like property, since she is also a companion to his stewardship.

Given the Jewish concept of oppressing women, it will be interesting to connect this concept in African culture. The following chapter will deal with the African view of headship after an overview of the biblical concept of the headship of man.