

## CHAPTER 5

### POSSIBLE COMPARISON BETWEEN TRADITIONAL AFRICAN VIEW AND BIBLICAL VIEW OF HEADSHIP OF MAN

#### 5.1 INTRODUCTION

When we look at both the biblical and African view of headship of man there are many things that indicate that something went wrong when Africans were constructing their own way of life on the question of how men and women should live together as husbands and wives. This was as a result that they made their own policies without thorough understanding of what God, the initiator of everything, intended with marriage. A few examples on this concept will be used in order to expose the problem of traditional/ biblical view.

#### 5.2 TABLE OF COMPARISON IN SHORT

##### AFRICAN VIEW

1. Man-initiated marriage
2. Woman as sexual object

##### BIBLICAL VIEW

1. God-initiated marriage
2. No object-subject, but equality



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| 3. Man's headship by power               | 3. Man's headship by love                                      |
| 4. Woman as object of submission         | 4. Both submit to each other                                   |
| 5. Woman protect man's evil ways         | 5. Both protect each other                                     |
| 6. Wife-beating                          | 6. Respect of human beings, male and female. God created them. |
| 7. Man has unquestionable decision       | 7. Decisions reached in consensus                              |
| 8. Sayings dominate woman                | 8. Sayings equate man and woman                                |
| 9. Wife as a source of children          | 9. Both responsible for childbearing                           |
| 10. Procreation as sole purpose to marry | 10. Sole purpose of companionship                              |

The main problem is to understand the headship of man that was written in the Bible, but the real meaning thereof slipped from the minds of our people and their behavior. That is why man sees himself above his wife to an extent that he acts as if she is his property in his house. The message is clear: our African traditions are very rich in respect of human life in some elements of life, but the issue of headship needs to be revisited and understood better since the application thereof becomes abusive to women and wives.

Firstly, God created everything, including sexuality for us in order that we view it as good. That is why He initiated marriage and made it good. But the question of women as sexual objects comes in, even though sexuality was created good by God, human beings defined it badly and began to misuse it, especially men.

Out of the good things that the Lord God had made, human being turned some upside down so that the word good can be replaced by bad or evil, to be the process that the devil uses to trick us. Genesis indicates that God's creation of woman and bringing her to the husband for them to be one was a very creative thing to do (2:24-25). Therefore, what followed after Gen. 3 when human beings fell into sin, is that the whole order that God designed was disordered by humanity. In emphasizing the importance of God having created both sexes, Van der Walt says:

“We are not simply born man and woman. We also have to develop that way. We have to live out our gender identities in everything. Especially because God wants us to live as man or as woman and to serve him and our fellow man (sic) in that specific way. Each sex therefore has a set of basic, unique gifts and contributions to make.” (1990:79)

That is true because when God created male and female, He expected them to have different responsibilities in order to overlap and assist each other.

The concept of male dominance did not come up at the creation order of God, but it came as a result of man's fall. According to Rush the domination relationship style is born out of the conflicts that occur in the retaliation mode between man and woman. (1989:68) In fact, we cannot enter into a domination relationship until the struggle for control is over and someone in the relationship emerges as a victor, using that control to get his or her needs met at the expense of the other. The dominator is always committed to self's needs and develops a superiority attitude. He goes on to give the characteristics of a domination relationship as follows:

“The person being dominated begins to avoid conflicts

The personality of the individual being dominated is suffocated. The dominated person's creativity is stifled. The oppressed person eventually becomes the slave of the dominator. The person under domination resorts to manipulation. Both parties lose respect for the other

The dominated person eventually moves to an isolation style” (Rush, 1989: 70).

In creating marriage, God never intended that women would be oppressed by men, but that they should be equal companions. Gen.2:18 clearly indicate the main aim of the creation of both man and woman was partnership in marriage, which she will be of help to a lonely man. According to Warunta and Kinothi Dr Eddah Gachukia affirmed that the misuse of the Bible has caused much suffering in the lives of many Christians. They say:

“The question of women’s submission to their husbands has made the husbands to assume the superiority complex and make women to “obey” the Bible even out of context.”  
(2000:124)

Even if some people argue that the male was created first, which does not condone that woman is secondary and inferior, but it emphasizes that God had an order when creating things. That argument cannot hold water since it would be possible that if He wanted, God might have created a woman first, but He chose His own order that must not be used as an argument for male dominance. That is why Paul says:

“There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male or female: for you are all one in Christ.” (Gal.3:28)

Paul teaches us here that the Rabbinical and Pharisaic teachings that were derived from Mosaic Law, find their fulfillment in Christ. This means that the laws that were used to govern the people of God during Moses’ times, must not be misused to oppress other people, but must be read in the light of what Jesus has done for the people at the cross. Some of those laws were very much oppressive to the other gender, but Jesus’ coming on earth also helped to define them better than before. For instance, the decree of divorce which was in practice in Moses’ time was explained in more details to give it a true meaning by Jesus in Matthew 19:1-9.

This verse teaches us that oppression of women does not only take place in our society, but it also took place in ancient Jewish society. This is to clarify that God is not interested in our debates about gender and so on, but He is interested in the salvation of human beings through Christ. The responsibilities in marriage vary, but for a common goal. That is what Van der Walt means when he says that the two sexes need each other. (1990:79) One most important but forgotten issue by African husbands is that when the Bible speaks about two people in marriage, both husbands and wives, it does not promote any type of inequality. The Bible has its

emphasis on the principle of man and woman being equal in the eyes of God where no one is more important than the other.

Man and woman were created as equal partners in the community. From an apartheid government we learnt that men were ruling the country alone, while women just had to follow their laws. Women were actually seen as minor and could not sign any document without the permission of the husband or father. But presently, in a new democratic South Africa we find some women being able to take the lead the country in a responsible way, a good example is that of the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma, which is exceptional. We may find that very few men can compete with her in what she is doing for the country now. Our church is composed of about 40% of people being mothers who are single parents while we also have plus/minus 30% of those who are married and maybe 20% of young people plus 10% elderly people (unpublished church statistics).

Out of these groups, when analyzing the statistics, it becomes evident that most of those in single parenthood (women in particular) are managing their households very well. Even some of those who are married are not to be compared with them when coming to managerial skills, both in the church and the homes. The author used to tell people who say that if Adam had to live in Eden alone for the rest of his life, the trouble in the

garden would have been unbearable, that are why God saw that it was important to create a companion for him.

The terms of submission and obedience are very much biblically found, but they are misused by men in order to be in the position of power, which sometimes ends up destroying the creation of God. The author strongly agrees with Rush (1989:76) that many Christians wind up in domination relationship styles because of their spiritual convictions. In some religious circles there is an over-emphasis on the husband as a leader in the home and church with the wife in a submissive role. This makes both the church and the home oppressive structures.

The author disagrees with the way some husbands carry out their leadership roles, especially if it affects their wives negatively. During the apartheid times the Bible was used in order to promote oppression of other people. A good example is that of the “creation theology” where people would claim that God created everything in order and placed everything in its own place for a purpose, but if we try either to mix or move this order it is not allowed, meaning that whites and blacks should not be mixed or touched as such. That is why Engelbrecht and Van Dyk say that creation theology was also used in Nazi Germany to support a policy of racism. They go on to say:



“In South Africa too, the so-called orders of creation are often used to accentuate differences between the races and to legitimize the policy of apartheid. The argument runs as follows; it was God’s will to create various races and therefore one should acknowledge and maintain these differences.” (1987:31-32)

They used scripture to justify their own position of superiority. Creation theology according to my understanding was as bad as apartheid itself because it promoted nothing other than separation, segregation and division.

When McArthur explains what Paul meant in 1Cor.7:4 he says:

“According to this verse, you give up the right to your body; it belongs to your partner. You have released the authority over your own body to your partner. The present tense of “exousia” which means “to have authority over” indicates a general statement that is always true.” (1986:36)

Besides the fact that this mutual authority over one another’s body must continue and last throughout marriage, it must be done willingly from the heart. Smith says the same:

“Oh, be generous in your self surrender. Be glad and eager to throw yourself completely in his loving arms and to hand over the reigns of government to him. Whatever there is of you, let him have it all. Give up forever everything that is separate from him.” (1983:199)

Therefore, we also encounter the same thing here. An African man finds very good words in the Bible (obey and submit), then he uses them to mean that woman must have no objection if it is not only to obey and submit herself to man. It is very disturbing to see that this obedience and submission is unconditional and unquestionable to an extent where even after the woman has been beaten, she would run to the kitchen and bring food to the man without asking any question. Smith’s argument is that Christian obedience must bring joy, hence she says:

“Perfect obedience would be perfect happiness if only we had perfect confidence in the power we are obeying. Then the Christian obedience in this context will be to surrender oneself without limitations or reservations. This can only take place if the figure to which one surrenders herself is responsible and loving.” (1983:196-197)

Learning from women like Abigail that God did not create woman only to listen and follow what man said, but she would sometimes initiate

something different. This woman understood that Nabal was her husband, but he also made mistakes as a human being. That is why she ran to meet David and pleaded with him to stop the planned battle that erupted from the stubbornness of her husband. Because of her presence, the battle that would have taken her husband's life and maybe the whole family was stopped before it took place. (1 Sam.22:14-38)

The author remembers one court case where this man aged 45 was guilty of raping a 16-year-old girl around Malamulele area. When the magistrate asked: "Why did you do this?" he answered: "Because I used to see this girl passing by our street, wearing very short skirts that could make me feel like sleeping with her." Can we condone his acts because of the way the girl wore her clothes?

The sin started here with him thinking about her in her mini-skirts, and then he allowed his own lust to control him. That is why when Jesus went on to explain verse 29, He teaches us to take care of our own bodily parts especially when they mislead us into sinful desires. The author is of the opinion that women must be given the value they deserve, rather than being seen as mere sexual objects.

It is also important to note that sometimes women degrade themselves, because of having lived in that type of world for a long time, some of them turned to understand that they were born mainly to please men

sexually, that is why some proudly allow men to see them as such. That is what Warunta and Kinothi (2000:125) mean when they say that women have developed such low self-esteem that they feel worthless and lack confidence in their capability to manage on their own. Sometimes they are convinced by their husbands that they are responsible.

The Bible has many verses which indicate that women are very important people in our communities and have special roles to play. From the Old Testament we read of women like Esther, Ruth, Abigail and others having played important roles in their times, which is still remarkable even to some women today. Therefore, undermining them by seeing them as sexual objects for men is putting them into a position that they do not deserve.

Most women are seen as doormats for men, hence they are found protecting their husbands even when it is not a good thing to do. For instance, since many women fear to be socially stigmatized as “divorcees”, they prefer to stay in abusive relationships and protect men who use and abuse them (Warunta & Kinothi, 2000:125). The fact that men are superior and alone deserve such protection, speaks volumes.

The researcher wants to argue against Ryie who supports that men are superior by saying:

“If men were responding to the call to vocational Christian service, the question of the ordination of women might not arise.” (1991:42)

This view is like when one is saying that women must be allowed to take leadership roles only on condition that men are failing. The author believes that the gifts of the Holy Spirit that Paul taught about in Ephesians does not first search whether the male or the female is ready, but they are given to every individual because of God’s own choice and reason. That is why the author understands Ryie’s (1991:49) argument as unfounded when he says that Phoebe, who is called a deaconess in Rom.16:1 was not a deacon, but she was just given the title of her husband since she was accompanying him to serve among the widows.

The reader needs to know that this is an opinion, not God’s word. Maybe he was also influenced by the tradition that women are inferior, and writing from such a perspective.

One member of a certain church at Malamulele was divorced simply because her husband heard rumors that his wife was having an affair with his neighbor, meanwhile it was the husband who was involved in an extra-marital affair. So let us try to imagine if all women would respond to their husbands’ extra-marital affairs in the same way as men are doing, how many marriages would still be surviving. In many marriages women

fight with all their might for the marriage to continue, while men enjoy themselves without working hard in their marriages.

When this attitude is compared with the Bible, one finds that God's ordained marriage emphasizes the issue of woman as a "helpmate" to man, which the author understands being that even when coming to the issue of protecting each other, it was supposed to be on equal bases. This equality is supported by Moltman who argues:

"Since all human beings reflect image of God as in creation story, then all human beings are equal with one another in their essence." (1984:11)

The author is not propagating that marriage is there to cover or protect sins that people do, but he means whenever protection is needed for the good of the word of God, that is where this supplementation must come in. If it is a matter of sin, the church must apply its disciplinary measures instead of protecting men. If Paul understood man as the protector of his wife, then the issue of women trying to protect their husbands becomes just the reverse side of the story. (Gaebelein, 1978:75)

The tradition of restricting a widow for an extended period of time from other activities cannot be biblically founded, for example black garments for widows. It is not well balanced because there are no such restrictions

to the husband when he loses his wife through death. The most painful part is that when such a widow is not allowed to speak to other men nor change black clothes until the unveiling of her husband's tombstone, the man who is in a similar situation walks freely without any restrictions.

Many people in our hometown grumbled because one Christian church elder's wife died, and just before the unveiling of his late wife's tombstone, he was engaged to another girl. Many people in our town, including Christians, were complaining that if it was the woman who did this, people would say that it was too early for her to get another husband, and that may cause them to suspect her of killing her husband in order to give the second one a chance. But the author understands that there would have been no complaints if women were also allowed to do the same as men when approaching this problem. The issue of dealing properly with men and women is an important element that needs to be dealt with equally.

The above problem follows traditional customs and not the biblical values. Therefore, we can understand how African people underestimate women and put them to subjection. Men and women should be seen as equals, particularly in terms of going through sorrows and joys of this life. This is why the feminist theology becomes so aggressive when masculine forms are used in a way that they define God in masculine

terms. They ask how we can allow men to do such horrible things to the feminine side of humanity. That is why Van der Walt argues that liberation of the woman cannot take place without the man. It also means that if a man does not allow his wife and all other women to be themselves, he only denigrates himself.(1994:154)

The reader needs to accept that even our fore-fathers who played a role in the compilation of African idioms or sayings, were more influenced by their culture and tradition to an extent that even some of the sayings written about women, will need re-evaluation and balance, for the sake of freeing men and women from this bondage. We can take for instance the Shangaan idioms that were quoted in chapter 3, which not only violate the image of women completely, but also the men who wrote them. Can we make it a general statement by saying?

“A woman’s word has no value or her words will not be the same as that of man in court.” (Junod, 1990:188)

Ogbu Kalu remarked about the flourishing churches under the leadership of female leaders although “many women leaders also face resistance from male authority”. (2005:440)Then this saying remains meaningless, especially when, after some observations, men can be found who use domination and oppression or saying useless things in courts. We do have



men in leading roles of our country that used to speak useless things in villages and courts. The example is of a ward counselor below.

The incident occurred in our township where a young man was shot by his workmate. As one of the councilors of the village stood up to respond, instead of comforting the bereaved family and all the people who were at the funeral, he steered up an attitude of hatred to the co-workers of the deceased. Unfortunately, the real culprit was in jail by then, and those coming to the funeral were innocent men, for instance, pastors and community members.

The situation was almost out of hand until the author preached and comforted the people. Even women were grumbling about the words of this man this day. So we started having a picture how some men are more useless than women, therefore, our sayings are proven wrong since they are one-sided.

If the society assigned a superior status to husbands because of the reasons mentioned by Zinn and Eitzen:

“He makes more money

He has more prestige in the community

He works outside home and has more power.”

(1990:43)

then such a society misunderstood the responsibilities assigned to each of the two by God the Creator in the Garden of Eden. The biblical message of God's judgment when man fell into sin said:

”Cursed is the ground because of you, through painful toil you will eat of it.” (Gen.3:17b)

The verse clarifies what man must do. It is not an excuse that can be used by men to put their wives in subjection because this is what God said... The author thinks it would even apply when a man is unmarried. It is his responsibility to make more money for his family and he must work outside the home because he was commanded to do so.

But on the other hand, if the issue of making more money was to be taken as literal as possible, the problem would be to answer the question: “What about the situation where women gets more money or salary than their husbands do?”

The author's argument here is that if making more money in the family implies that one becomes a head, then women who earn more money than their husbands should be given the headship task in their families. The author is of an opinion that they will do a good job. Then the biblical message that man is the head will automatically be affected.

We do not have to use this reasoning since it would mean that the husband must then be subjected, which many husbands would hate. Let us accept that the husband and wife's responsibilities that God gave unto them must not play a role in order to disturb women's rights in any way, but their responsibilities must complement their relationship without hindering their equality.

Following in the same thought let us analyze the problem of clitoridectomy and infibulations. Clitoridectomy and infibulations were done to girls and are still being done in some parts of central Africa. They are not having their roots in the Bible.

The Bible never taught people to do such disgraceful things to women, right from the beginning, but it should be as a result of cultural and traditional influences to human life. According to Thiam, the process was done in order to prevent the woman from having sexual intercourse before marriage, which is a bad teaching because the author believes that it is true that the biblical message condemns pre- or extra-marital sexual intercourse in the strongest terms. It only teaches without allowing us to humiliate the woman in the above described manner.

If such humiliation was promoted by the Bible, God would also have designed more or less the same humiliation to men since He values us as equal partakers in His Kingdom. According to Nyirongo (1994:51), all

men are equal and society must strive for maximum equality because they are all created in God's image.

But if our traditions maintain this view on women, children that are abandoned by their fathers, aids victims and broken marriages are still going to be our problems from generation to generation. Our country is fighting poverty which occupies more than half of our population, of which in many cases the cause is that sexual abuse and rape bring unexpected children who need shelter, care and welfare. On the "Sunday Sun" of 24 July 2005 the main headline of the front page has bold letters: "I cheated on my wife." The honorable president of UDM was confessing that his tradition of seeing women as inferior let him to cheat on his wife until his girlfriend told the media about the child that was born and he was supposed to pay maintenance for.

According to the author the president, because of the traditions of undermining women, took advantage of and cheated on her and now the outcome makes him accept that he has cheated on his wife. If we are still having such leaders who undermine women this way we have a big problem in our country. Therefore it seems that women's rights will remain one of the major battles even in future (Sunday Sun, 42 July: 1 and 5).

The issues of poverty and women's rights are related, because if women are not treated the way they deserve, that is according to the Bible, the consequences thereof will include poverty. Many women would rather choose to stay in an abusive relationship, instead of facing poverty alone. This becomes one of the reasons why many women stay in the abusive relationship; they just want to get food and shelter, hence Warunta and Kinothi say:

“Many women remain in abusive relationships because they have nowhere to go. Many women are economically totally dependent on their husbands; leaving marriage for them would mean living in poverty with no shelter and security.”(2000:125)

This is true because the author also came across a woman who were always being beaten by her husband, who even confiscated some of her properties like a cell phone, but she still said that she would die in that relationship because she did not have other resources to make a life, except staying with such a husband as long as he brings food home.

Some men still misuse the Mosaic Law in the first five books to unjustly divorce women, like when Clemens pointed out that the letter of divorce

mentioned in Deut.24:1-4, was seen as a scape goat for men who thought that women were seen as disposable toys which could offer man pleasure for a while. This believe of humiliating women was there even during the times of Moses. The researcher thinks to understand this passage clearly; one must read it in the light of Matt.19:1-12. Of course if it was only a matter of writing a letter of divorce which was only allowed to men, then men would use this chance to divorce and remarry all the time. This tradition is a fruit of the rabbinical schools of Shammai and Hillel. Shammai accepted divorce on grounds of unchastely, while Hillel accepted divorce on grounds of physical blemish or even a trivial cause of dislike. (Ryie, 1991:44)

This is one of those reasons that are mostly used in our country to an extent that marriage is seen as something that lost its value. If this type of understanding continues to dwell in the minds of people today, women will continue to be treated as clothes which are used by men or used in the way fashion clothes are used. Once the fashion passed, they are given away.

But Jesus cleared the air by indicating that Moses allowed them to divorce, not because God allowed it, but because the people of that time became so hostile to an extent where Moses as a person would fear for his life, hence he allowed them. In other words, the fact that a leader allows

something to be done, does not guarantee that God also allows it. Some situations can become so violent towards church leaders and pastors that they may find themselves accepting even bad things for the sake of relieving their lives from danger.

The Bible does not condone any form of divorce, unless there is a proven record of unsolved adultery, as Jesus mentions in Matt.19:9. If we want to maintain God's order of creation, including the good view of woman, we must not trace the definitions of concepts like marriage, love and others from after the fall of man into sin, but we must look for those concepts right from before the fall, where God's creation was still in order.

That is why the Lord Jesus challenged His questioners in Matt.19 back to the original institution of marriage and showed that the bond was intended to be indissoluble (Ryie, 1991:141).

The author says this because human beings became corrupt after the fall, which made him see many things on the reversed side or upside down, for instance, the people of Moses' time defined their marriages in terms of the fall that resulted in women being subjected to be victimized by their husbands, which was never the case in Eden before Gen.3.

The inheritance of a widow by one of the relatives that Kuper mentioned is done not only in Swazi marriages. The author witnessed the situation when his father passed away, when the widow, his step-mother, was forced to choose the man with whom she could continue her life. The researcher was one of those called in the house and because he was still a very young schoolboy, she chose him, knowing that it would not work. His uncles who were there were also waiting to be chosen, but she didn't choose them. Nyirongo narrated this well when he discussed "oppressive widowhood". He said:

"The widow was not expected to remain single or refuse a second husband assigned to her by the elders. Should she refuse she would have to endure much ridicule and even accusation of witchcraft. Sometimes she would become an outcast for that reason."(1997:118)

In other words, even though her husband had died, she was supposed to remain bound to the decisions that were to be taken by her in-laws. This would lead into a forced marriage where the woman was still going to be abused by her new husband because she did not choose to marry him by herself.

It is a pity that this custom undermines the status of women because in some cultures it is still such a strict rule that disobedience can lead the



wife of the deceased in trouble with her in-laws. But is this custom from the Bible? These customs might have been practiced by some of the Hebrews and Jews of the time, but the Bible does not support them. Lev. 20 discourages such kind of traditions. The researcher comment on that is that if a brother has died of aids, then the custom will be enforcing his brother to die the same way. Even after loosing a husband, the widow must not be forced to do what she does not want to, but she must be granted the right to decide whatever she wants to do.

When we look at the cultural bonds that the Africans use in order to bind the marriage, because of *lobola* and the children factor, then there is a lot to be asked when compared to the Biblical view of marriage bonds. When Nyirongo says that *lobola* is a legal proof of marriage, he also says that it gives the husband an advantage to claim children in case of divorce. (Nyirongo, 1997:114)

If one has to take an oath of staying in marriage even if it is dangerous to her life, for the sake of *lobolo* that was paid for her, then it is obviously going to be negative to her dignity. Is *lobolo* still of value in connecting them to marriage? Is there any love? What about Christian values? Do we just stay for the sake of shelter? Adam and Eve were not enforced to stay together in their marriage because of having children (a concept rooted in African culture), but they were bound together even before children were

born. This simply illustrates that children are gifts from God, but we therefore should not make use of them in order to strengthen our marriages.

Above all, the African traditional view of man's headship does not fit the biblical definition of valuing people. The headship in the Bible is that of loving, caring and supporting our wives rather than seeing them as minors or inferiors. In other words, the loving and supportive husband cannot, for instance, beat his wife, but will look for the ways how to solve problems without bodily abusing her. Let us forget about the question of subject and object when coming to male and female, but think about equality, with human dignity and respect from both. The author concurs with Rush when he says that respect and dignity can be showed by supporting each other's talents and abilities. (1989:128)

Having learnt the differences and similarities that were compared between African and biblical view of headship, and then we need to create a way of counseling, in order that we should correct where the Africans are wrong. This process will help us heal the wounds that were caused by those mistakes or misunderstandings caused by dominant men.

### **5.3 PRELIMINARY CONCLUSION OF THIS CHAPTER**

This chapter was dealing with the comparison between the traditional African view of headship and the Biblical view of headship. The findings

are that the traditional view oppresses women while the Biblical one liberates them. Therefore it was unfortunate that in some areas the African view tries to use some Biblical verses as its source, while not clearly understanding the interpretations of the verses in the context. The conclusion now is that the two views are clearly opposed to each other. The next chapter will concentrate on the pastoral guidelines.