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Carroll Osburn

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January 12, 2011

Voluntary, Mutual Submission (Carroll Osburn)



In the NT, When a person is called to submit, submission is always voluntary The middle sense of *hupotassomai* meaning “voluntary submission” is found in several NT texts, e.g., [Rom 13:1](#) (“Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities”), [1 Cor 16:16](#) (“submit to such as these”), and [Eph 5:21](#) (“Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ”).

It seems to me that the theme of [Ephesians 5:15-6:9](#) is daily conduct of the Christian life. Paul specifically enjoins the readers in 5:15 to “take care how you walk, not as unwise but as wise.” Rather than singing the songs of drunkenness (v. 18), Christians should sing decidedly Christian songs that underscore and encourage the Christian walk (v. 19), continue with a daily prayer life (v. 20), and show mutual deference (“voluntary submission”) to one another (v. 21).

The appeal in v. 22, then, is for wives to demonstrate “voluntary submission/mutual deference” to their husbands. The way husbands show “voluntary submission/mutual deference” is by loving their wives. In a reciprocal relationship, a Christian couple can “walk wisely.”

Similarly, the way children demonstrate “voluntary submission/mutual deference to their parents is by obeying them. Parents demonstrate this attitude by helping their children to mature through responsible instruction and upbringing. In this reciprocal relationship, Christian families can “walk wisely.”

Too, the way Christian slaves demonstrate “voluntary submission/mutual deference” to their masters is through obedience and diligent work. The way masters demonstrate this “voluntary submission/mutual deference” is by avoiding threatening, domineering behavior. In this reciprocal relationship, Christians can “walk wisely” in the culture of slavery in operation at the time.

In this sense, “mutual submission” in v. 21 is urged of all Christians This is certainly in line with the teaching throughout the NT that Christians are to submit to one another”—[Matt 20:26-28](#); [Phil 2:3](#); [1 Pet 5:4-5](#). . . .

This author concludes that in [Eph 5:21-24](#) Paul calls for a mutual submission, a voluntary deference for all Christians,

whatever their roles in life. It is vital to understand that neither Paul nor Jesus before him called for the radical overthrow of hierarchalism. Both had ideals along egalitarian lines, yet both worked within cultural systems of the day—whether regarding slavery or gender roles—and taught Christians to “walk wisely” given certain cultural constraints. Paul’s admonition for mutual submission is still valid for twenty-first century Christians.

Carroll D. Osburn, Women in the Church: Reclaiming the Ideal (Abeline, TX: ACU Press, 2001), 166-169, 171.


Questions:

- Do Christian slave masters facilitate the voluntary submission of their slaves when they treat their slaves as the masters would want to be treated ([Eph 6:5-9](#))? Does this Christian practice contribute to undermining the view that slaves were the property of their masters?
- Do parents facilitate the voluntary submission of their children when they lovingly teach them the ways of the Lord? ([Eph 6:1-4](#)). Does this Christian practice contribute to undermining the view of children as the property of their parents?
- Do husbands facilitate the voluntary submission of wives when they love their wives and give themselves for their wives? ([Eph 5:22-33](#)). Does this Christian practice contribute to undermining the view of wives as the property of their husbands?

Posted by [Martin Hanna](#) on January 12, 2011 in [Biblical Backgrounds](#), [Church and Society](#), [Quotable](#) | [Permalink](#)

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Husband : wife :: parents : children :: master : slave?

That seems like a troubling parallel.

Posted by: [Kessia Reyne](#) | [January 13, 2011 at 09:10 AM](#)

In the time of Paul, many viewed wives and children as property in a similar way as slaves were viewed as property. In this context it is revolutionary for him to write about "submitting one to one another" (Eph. 5:21).

The revolutionary implications of mutual submission is most evident in the Paul's advice to slave masters. After advising the slaves, Paul writes: "and you masters do the same things to them [the slaves]" (Eph. 6:9).

Paul's advice presupposes the existence of the system of slavery. At the same time, the advice Paul gives is grounded in principles that would over time undermine slavery.

These principles also undermine the ideas that children are the property of parents and that wives are the property of husbands.

Posted by: [Martin Hanna](#) | [January 13, 2011 at 11:05 AM](#)

Does the Gospel overthrow these social institutions or does it reveal that they are already overthrown?

Posted by: [David de la Vega](#) | [January 13, 2011 at 12:50 PM](#)

David, it seems to me that: there is a sense in which the evil systems of the world are already vanquished “in principle” by Christ; and a sense in which they continue to exist and are to be ultimately destroyed at the end of the Great Controversy between good and evil.

It is also important to distinguish between, on the one hand, the God-given blessings of marriage, parenthood, and social systems; and on the other hand, the satanic distortions of wives, children, and slaves as property belonging to husbands, parents, and masters.

The gospel does not abolish marriage, but it undermines the concept of wives as property. The gospel does not abolish parenthood, but it undermines the concept of children as property. The gospel does not abolish the need for social systems, but it undermines the concept of slaves as property.

Posted by: [Martin Hanna](#) | [January 13, 2011 at 01:37 PM](#)

Is it we who behave in a manner which will make our society function properly by adopting wise habits for the proper care and feeding of husbands, wives, children and slaves or is it the Spirit at work in us that reveals that the social structures conjured up by this world are futile because they are still unable to create a utopian society? Are we in this world and of this world drawing the means by which to choose good over evil? If we render to Caesar what is Caesar's we attribute to this world the reach of its grasp- futility and all which ends in dust. If we render to God what is God's we attribute the agency of true life and a joy that will not be destroyed. If only God is good then what is the good that we choose to do according to the virtues of this world? If like mathematical axioms and scientific facts we establish knowledge on what we develop then the product will always be what it has been . . . human = filthy rags. Your original questions are based on the author's premise that Jesus and Paul worked within the "cultural constraints". Are Jesus and Paul working within cultural constraints or do they render the cultural constraints the fetters of this world? Does Christ declare that we are of this world? Then why would He teach us to work like the world works? What if the message of the texts quoted is not a means by which we do good but the result of the Spirit of God working through us? The work will then not be bound within cultural constraints but reveal not only the futility of the cultural norms, but the true good that is done by God. Then wouldn't Christ's words be true that we will do greater things?

Isn't Sin vanquished now? Isn't it vanquished more than "in principle"?

Posted by: [David de la Vega](#) | [January 13, 2011 at 09:55 PM](#)

David, I would say: (1) Sin is vanquished in principle by the personal victory of the resurrected Christ. (2) Sin is now being vanquished in the lives of believers through Christ. (3) Sin will be vanquished by Christ so that sin, sinners, and Satan will no longer exist.

I agree with you that Jesus does not teach us to work as the culture of the world works. He teaches us to be counter-cultural. That's why Paul's teaching undermines the concepts of wives, children, and slaves as property (which was then the cultural norm).

Like you, I don't think Jesus and Paul were "constrained" by culture. But they did live and work in a specific cultural context.

With regard to the Spirit, I do not think that we have to choose between whether we work or the Spirit works. We can be workers together with God!

Posted by: [Martin Hanna](#) | [January 13, 2011 at 11:39 PM](#)

By comparing wives to slaves, it's crazy that any women who live by the bible would ever want to get married. Slavery does not sound like a very good principle of marriage. The bible God sure must not like women to much-to make them saves for all time. Even with a nice master, it seems kind of stifling to make none of your own decisions. To obey obediently, and do as your told. and if you are, your master may be nice to you.

Posted by: [Rebecca](#) | [July 21, 2011 at 06:28 PM](#)

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