

An Exegetical Interpretation of Ephesians 5:21-33 In the Context of Christian Marriage in Nigeria

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Abstract- *The New Testament text that most extensively examines the dynamics of marriage relationship between husbands and wives is Ephesians 5:21-33. The popular interpretation of the text falls under two schools of thought namely the conservative and feminist. While the feminist understands the text as advocating for mutual submission of couples in marriage, the conservative interprets the text as calling for the subordination and subjugation of women in the family and society. Consequently, the text is one among many texts in the New Testament scriptures used as barriers by some persons and institutions to put women into the silent background in the socio-political, economic and religious circle in the contemporary time even in Christian circles. The focus of this work is to interpret Ephesians 5:21-33 and the implications for marital stability of Christian marriages in the Nigerian context. Does the author of the text suggest subordination and domination of women or mutual submission of couples in marriage? Should the text be used as a liberative or oppressive text for women in marriage? Moreover, Should the patriarchal culture and ideas in which the bible was written be considered authoritative for all times and in all places? The paper employs the feminist hermeneutical approach. This therefore argues that the motives of Apostle Paul in Ephesians 5:21-33 does not suggest subordination, marginalization or oppression of women in marriage as interpreted by the conservative commentators rather the text calls for mutual submission of couples in marriage. The problem of the former interpretation lies in the extraction of some isolated parts of the scriptures from the context of the letter as a whole, a practice that results in faulty interpretation.*

Indexed Terms- *Christian Marriages, Feminist Hermeneutical Approach, Marginalization, Patriarchy, Women*

I. INTRODUCTION

Given that the bible is written from a patriarchal perspective, most hermeneutical interpretation of the scriptures tend to support patriarchy and negate mutuality. Consequently, the interpretation and understanding of scripture such as Ephesians 5:21-33 has caused division among biblical scholars. The divisions are between the egalitarian and chauvinist or conservative interpreters. Whereas the egalitarian scholars interpret Ephesians 5:21-33 as allowing for equal partnership, and submission between the sexes in marriage or that the married relationship be exhibited mutually, the chauvinist or conservative interpret Ephesians 5:21-33 as not encouraging, promoting and supporting mutual submission in marriage. Does the author of the text suggest subordination and domination of women or mutual submission of couples in marriage? Is marriage a partnership of equals, differing only biologically, or is it a relationship between two equal but very different people, with headship vested in the man? This questions are germane to this paper. The paper aims to hermeneutically correct the patriarchal influenced interpretation given to Ephesians 5:21-33 by most commentators, scholars and institutions, which have hitherto become a basis for the marginalization, domination and subordination of women among some family, Church and society in Nigerian by utilizing the lens of a feminist reading for the interpretation of the text. Marriage institution as in most African societies is patriarchal in nature and as such the man is in absolute control of the home while the woman and children are required to submit to the father as the breadwinner of the family. This system requiring total obedience of the woman and children (even slaves) to the man as the provider of the home which also operates in a Christian home is without doubt influenced by the Jewish and Greco-Roman cultural background of the Bible which sees the man as

positive, powerful, strong, dominant, intellectual and aggressive while the woman is regarded as weak, passive, emotional, intuitive, childish, dependent and submissive. The inability of the wives and children to live up to this traditional expectation of submitting to the man's authority irrespective of his status is one reason for separation, discord and conflicts in most homes, christian homes inclusive with awful effects. It is imperative to note that before the establishment of Christianity the family was long established social unit having an organogram which gave more power and authority to the man or husband. With the advent of Christianity, the already established structure in the family were carried over into the church with an introduction of the new principle as is fitting to the Lord hence suggesting an essential dignity for both men and women in marriage. The wife subordination to her husband in marriage has as its counterpart the husband's obligation to love his wife. This involves the husbands active and unceasing care for the wellbeing of the wife. Does the wife submission entails domination and subordination? As noted earlier, The paper seeks to correct the masculine influenced reading given to Ephesians 5:21-33 by most interpreters, scholars and societies, which have so far become a basis for the relegation, domination and subordination of women among some family, Church and society.

II. CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION

The term complementarians are often considered to be the traditional group. The group asserts that God created man and woman alike with unique gender defined functions. They hold that God designed the man to be husband, father, provider, protector and leader. Moreover, the group submits that man by creation is the head of the home and equally is responsible for provision of godly leadership. The group argues that God created the woman to be wife, mother, nurturer and assistant. The woman is to yield to the man's leadership in the family, church and society. The Complementarians do not advocate mutual submission of the husband and wife in the family or church. Rather, they hold on to absolute authority for male leadership. The Complementarians are also referred to as conservatives. They stand by the authority of the written words in the Bible, taken at face value, without feeling a need for engaging in

further hermeneutical debate (D.M. Lorenzini). The term egalitarians is drawn from the French word *egale* meaning "equal". Thus it involves affirming, promoting or believing in the equal rights for all people. Egalitarianism is the hermeneutical viewpoint that men and women are designed by their creator to have no gender based limitations on what functions or roles each can fulfill in the home, church and society (Adelakun 86). The egalitarians are also referred to as the evangelical feminist or biblical feminist group. This group holds that God designed men and women fully equal and that true egalitarianism calls for equal opportunities in the church and society and equal marital functions in the family. The group upholds the view that man and woman share equal mutual submission and onus in both family and church. The implication of this line of thought is that there is no room for the subjugation and subordination of persons whether male or female in the family, church and society. The egalitarians sustain their views using scriptures like Galatians 3:28 "There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male or female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus" as their Magna Carter for equality in the gender debate.

III. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF EPHESIANS: THE AUTHORSHIP, DATE OF WRITING AND RECIPIENT

The debate about the composition of the epistle to the Ephesians has divided scholars into two opposing groups. While some scholars consent that Apostle Paul is the writer of the epistle; others claim that the writer of the epistle to the Ephesians is "pseudonymous," that is, composed in the name of Paul by one of his faithful followers (Sebastian Kizhakkeyil 220). The latter assertion or scholarly position is ironic in the sense that a good number of scholars have well-regarded Ephesians as the crown of Paul's thought and the queen of the epistles (William Barclay 61). Max Turner submits that those who consider Ephesians Pseudonymous still warmly commends its message (132). Prior to the seventeenth and early nineteenth centuries, the letter to the Ephesians was undisputedly attributed to Paul though some evangelicals are convinced that the evidence of the letter is inconsistent with Pauline authorship (Arnold C.E. 240). Ephesians was composed between 60-90 AD possibly earlier or

subsequent to the collapse of the Jerusalem temple. The location and time of composition is contentious by biblical writers due to the dispute of composition. While some biblical writer uphold that Apostle Paul authored the epistle others sustain that it was composed by a follower of Paul. According to Best, if the letter was written by Paul then it was written while he was in Roman prison (20). Carson and Moo remark that if it was not written by Paul, it must belong to the immediate post-apostolic period, but there are no criteria for locating it with precision (487).

There is no essential proof of the recipients to which the letter to the Ephesians is addressed. Barclay maintains that it was written to believers who did not necessarily live in Ephesus but were either members of a group of Christian community probably in Asia Minor. He also states that it could have been written to Christians in general (70). Kizhakkeyil remarks that the recipient is the Christian community in Ephesus (220). Belz maintains that the epistle specifically addresses, not a mixed group of Jewish and Gentile Christians, but Gentile proselytes (2:11; 3:1), those who have already heard the word of truth, the Gospel of salvation (1:13) and, having been made alive together with Christ and raised up with him (2:1,5-6), are now being further instructed into what new life in Christ implies and how it must positively transform their life in new ways (34).

IV. THE PURPOSE AND MESSAGE OF EPHESIANS

When reflecting on the intention which necessitated the writing of Ephesians, double features have to be considered. Primarily the content of the epistle itself and the second is the epistle's close relationship to Colossians. On the former, Paul's aim is to offer Gentile converts a summary of his own teachings on the significance, effects, consequences, and demands of baptism. The first part of the letter (chapters 1-3) centres on the condensation of Paul's doctrinal instructions while the other part (chapters 4-6) examines Paul's moral teachings. Arnold quoting N. A. Dahl remarks that the letter was addressed to some recently founded congregations to remind the young Gentile Christians of the implications of their faith and baptism and to exhort them to live up to their calling (245). R. P. Martin's stress that the epistle was written

in response to the needs of the predominately Gentile readership to admonish them to appreciate the Jewish background of their faith and thus also their fellow Jewish Christians (5-6).

V. THE SETTING OF EPHESUS

In the words of Micheal White, Ephesus was a proud coastal city which boasted of its status as the first and greatest metropolis of Asia on numerous inscriptions (34). Because of its strategic location both on land and by sea, the city became a major centre of international trade and communication, with sea traffic from the Aegean in the west, the Bosphorus and Dardanelles in the north, Palestine in the East, and Egypt in the south, while the ancient Persian Royal Road connected Ephesus with places beyond the Euphrates. It had long been a vibrant Mediterranean port and, in the imperial period, grew to become the third major urban centre of the Empire after Rome and Alexandria, swelling to a population estimated at between 200,000 and 250,000. When the Epistle to the Ephesians was written, Ephesus had been under Roman influence and control in one way or another for more than two hundred years and had functioned as the capital of Roman Asia for more than a century, having been designated as such by Augustus in 27 BCE (Lisa Marie Belz 39). She further notes that under Roman rule, the city greatly flourished and prospered and, along with having a harbour on all major sea routes in the eastern Mediterranean, was placed at the head of the Roman roads into the interior, facilitating communication and commerce with the new cities founded there. Yet besides being the seat of Roman provincial government, Ephesus also served as an intellectual and economic capital and was a major religious centre as well, being home to the Temple of Artemis, or Artemision, a site of international pilgrimage considered one of the seven wonders of the ancient world (40-42). Ephesus also had a sizeable, influential, and prosperous Jewish population, generally estimated at around 25,000 (Rick Strelan 181). The Jews of Asia Minor as a whole were comparable to that of Alexandria: they were generally urban, Greek-speaking, highly assimilated to Hellenistic culture, well-educated, acquainted with Greek literature and philosophical movements, diverse, and, in most (if not all) respects, Torah-abiding. A number of them were even Roman citizens (Frend 38-39). Belz also notes

that the great city of Ephesus, then, was home to magistrates, bankers, intellectuals, and philosophers, and the destination of traders, businessmen, religious seekers, and refugees from all over the Mediterranean world and beyond. It was a truly international city, a place of philosophical and religious speculation where ideas were shared and exchanged and home to various schools of philosophical inquiry. It was in this vibrant, burgeoning, diverse Hellenistic Roman cosmopolitan city that the primitive Christian community of Ephesus first began sometime in the early to mid-fifties CE (42).

VI. THE STRUCTURE AND OUTLINE OF THE LETTER TO THE EPHESIANS

Ephesians is divided into two main parts. Part one centres on doctrine or theology found in chapter 1-3 and part two centres on duties or ethics as considered in chapters 4-6. After the prologue (Eph. 1:1-1), the first portion offers extended praise directed to God for all the spiritual benefits given to those who are in Christ (1:3-14) which is followed immediately by a commendation to the readers for their faith and love and a petition for wisdom and revelation (Eph. 1:15-23). The audience is reminded of their relationship to God before and after their conversion (Eph. 2:1-10) and the new union of Jewish and Gentile believers who are considered one new person, the church (Eph. 2:11-22). Consequently, there is not only reconciliation of human beings to God but also between Jewish and Gentile believers. Having explained this, Paul, in a parenthetical section, describes the mystery which is the union of Jew and Gentile believers in Christ and his ministry in dispensing the mystery to the Gentiles (Eph. 3:1-13). Paul brings to a close the first part of the epistle by praying that the Ephesian believers might be strengthened in love so that the union of Jewish and Gentile believers might be carried out in God's power (Eph. 3:14-21).

The second part of the epistle is the application showing how the doctrine or theology translates into the conduct of the believers. In other words, the second part shows how the believers ought to behave. The second part is subdivided into six parts, five governed by the imperative "walk" which is used five times in conjunction with the inferential conjunction "therefore". They are: to walk in unity (Eph. 4:1-16), to walk in holiness not as Gentiles (Eph. 4:17-32), to walk in love by imitating God and abstaining from all evil practices (Eph. 5:1-6), to walk in the light by not

becoming like evil doers and their works (Eph. 5:7-14), to walk in wisdom controlled by the Holy Spirit in their domestic and public life (5:15-6:9). Finally he encourages them to be strengthened in the Lord in order to withstand all evil powers (6:10-20). A short conclusion closes the epistle (6:21-24) (Hoehner 61-62).

The Text Ephesians 5:21-33

21. ὑποτασσόμενοι ἀλλήλοις ἐν φόβῳ Χριστοῦ, 22 αἱ γυναῖκες τοῖς ἰδίοις ἀνδράσιν ὡς τῷ κυρίῳ, 23 ὅτι ἀνὴρ ἐστὶν κεφαλὴ τῆς γυναικὸς ὡς καὶ ὁ Χριστὸς κεφαλὴ τῆς ἐκκλησίας, αὐτὸς σωτὴρ τοῦ σώματος· 24 ἀλλὰ ὡς ἡ ἐκκλησία ὑποτάσσεται τῷ Χριστῷ, οὕτως καὶ αἱ γυναῖκες τοῖς ἀνδράσιν ἐν παντί. Οἱ ἄνδρες, ἀγαπάτε τὰς γυναῖκας, καθὼς καὶ ὁ Χριστὸς ἠγάπησεν τὴν ἐκκλησίαν καὶ ἑαυτὸν παρέδωκεν ὑπὲρ αὐτῆς, 26 ἵνα αὐτὴν ἀγιάσῃ καθαρίσας τῷ λουτρῷ τοῦ ὕδατος ἐν ῥήματι, 27 ἵνα παραστήσῃ αὐτὸς ἑαυτῷ ἕνδοξον τὴν ἐκκλησίαν, μὴ ἔχουσαν σπίλον ἢ ῥυτίδα ἢ τι τῶν τοιούτων, ἀλλ' ἵνα ᾗ ἁγία καὶ ἄμωμος. 28 οὕτως ὀφείλουσιν καὶ οἱ ἄνδρες ἀγαπᾶν τὰς ἑαυτῶν γυναῖκας ὡς τὰ ἑαυτῶν σώματα. ὁ ἀγαπῶν τὴν ἑαυτοῦ γυναῖκα ἑαυτὸν ἀγαπᾷ· 29 Οὐδεὶς γάρ ποτε τὴν ἑαυτοῦ σάρκα ἐμίσησεν ἀλλὰ ἐκτρέφει καὶ θάλπει αὐτήν, καθὼς καὶ ὁ Χριστὸς τὴν ἐκκλησίαν, 30 ὅτι μέλη ἐσμὲν τοῦ σώματος αὐτοῦ. 31 ἀντὶ τούτου καταλείψει ἄνθρωπος [τὸν] πατέρα καὶ [τὴν] μητέρα καὶ προσκολληθήσεται πρὸς τὴν γυναῖκα αὐτοῦ, καὶ ἔσονται οἱ δύο εἰς σάρκα μίαν. 32 τὸ μυστήριον τοῦτο μέγα ἐστίν· ἐγὼ δὲ λέγω εἰς Χριστὸν καὶ εἰς τὴν ἐκκλησίαν. 33 πλὴν καὶ ὑμεῖς οἱ καθ' ἓνα, ἕκαστος τὴν ἑαυτοῦ γυναῖκα οὕτως ἀγαπάτω ὡς ἑαυτόν, ἡ δὲ γυνὴ ἵνα φοβῆται τὸν ἄνδρα.

Translated as

Submitting to one another in the fear of God. Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body. Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish. So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself.

For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church. For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones. For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church. Nevertheless let each one of you in particular so love his own wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband

Analysis of the Text

Mutual Submission v.21

“Submitting to one another in the fear of Christ” (NKJV).

The verse above is not the beginning of a new section but a conclusion to the context of wisdom which commenced in chapter 5:15 and more particularly the section that deals with being filled by the Holy Spirit (5:18). In v.18, Christians are instructed to be filled by the Holy Spirit instead of being drunk with wine. The spirit-filled life is characterized by five particles which include ‘be filled by the spirit’ (v.18), ‘speaking to one another’ (v.19a), ‘singing songs and singing psalms’ (v.19b), ‘giving thanks always for all things’ (v.20) and ‘submitting to one another in the fear of Christ’ (v.21). Ephesians 5:21 introduces a new topic of submission that is further developed throughout the household code in 5:22-6:9, particularly in 5:22-33. The word submission (*hypotasso*) means to subordinate, be subordinated, subject oneself or to render obedience (Igenzoza 228). In the view of Hoehner *hypotasso* means submit or subordinate and can be rendered in middle or passive voice. In the passive voice, the verb implies that the person has no control of his or her action while in the middle voice an idea of co-operation is expressed where the subject acts as a free agent. In this context therefore, the verb should be understood in the middle voice since the person is believed to be acting willingly under the control and guidance of the Holy Spirit. Paul’s admonition to wives is an appeal which can only be heeded voluntarily, never by the elimination or breaking of the human will, much less by means of servile submissiveness (716-717).

The verb submit is followed by the reciprocal dative pronoun ‘one another’ indicating that the result of

believers being filled by the Holy Spirit is submission to one another in the body of believers. They submit to one another in humility out of reverence to the Holy Spirit unlike the non believers who tend to take great pride in individualism, independence and self centeredness (O’Brien 412). Achiro comments that Paul uses the middle voice to convey a voluntary submission or subordination which means to act in a loving, considerate and self giving manner towards one another. This act of voluntary yielding to the needs of others is an example of the self sacrificing love which characterizes the Christian community. Paul’s intention was that everyone is obedient, not despising one another nor think of them as better off. Therefore, one another connotes oneness and a sense of equality ruling out hierarchical differences. This only suggests that there should be a horizontal line of interaction between every believer regardless of status, function, gender and rank, serving one another in love (27).

Responsibility of Wives in Marriage vv.22-24 “Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body. Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything” (NKJV).

In these verses, Paul calls on Christian wives to follow the leadership of their husbands in their marriage relationship. He does not impose on them a demand for blind servitude, but appeals to them to comply willingly with the leadership their husbands provide. The verb submit is inferred from the previous participle of the previous verse. The basic idea presented in verse 22 is that women should not seek to assert themselves in the home in a way that could be viewed as ruling, controlling or dominating. Rather, they must acknowledge the God given role assigned to the husband and respect the leadership he endeavors to provide for the family (Arnold 379). It is important to recognize that the passage does not represent a cultural concession to the prevailing forms of patriarchy in Roman households. The passage is countercultural at its core. Paul sets Christ as the example for both wives and husbands, but in particular as he seeks to understand how he is to exert his leadership and authority in the home. The form Paul provides

completely redefines what every first century man in the churches would have assumed as important in their role as husbands. They are no longer to look at the heavy-handed, oppressive ways that their fore fathers ruled in the homes. Rather, they must now look to Christ to see what it truly means to be a leader. Paul instructs the women to consider how they respond to the leadership that the risen Christ provides to the church. The way they respond to Christ should then inform the way they respond to their husbands. Certainly, no first century man perfectly embodied the tender shepherding love and care that Christ provides the church. Thus, it is important to see that Paul does not condition the woman's response on the perfect obedience of her husband to Christ. It should be noted, however, that Paul would certainly not have envisioned Christian wives following their husbands lead into sinful practice or unlawful behaviour, or subjecting themselves to horrible abuse (Arnold 380). The reason Paul instructs wives to submit to their husbands is due to the fact that the husbands-wife relationship in the Christian household is modeled on the relationship of Christ to the church. These role distinctions are therefore not based on something out of Old Covenant now abolished in Christ, nor are they based on some kind of concession to the Greaco-Roman or Jewish cultures. The pattern for role relationship in marriage is rooted deeply in the New Covenant (Achiro 29).

The metaphor "head" used by Paul in verse 23 has been extensively debated by scholars in recent years. Until the 1970s and 1980s, almost every writer on Ephesians 5:23 understood "head" to carry some sense of leadership and authority. A handful of interpreters then began to contend that the word did not convey any notion of authority, a position they argued based on the reassessment of a variety of passages in ancient literature. Rather, they argued that "head" was a metaphor that commonly expressed the idea of source. In other words, as a spring is the source of a stream, so the husband is the source of his wife. They understood this to mean that, historically God created Eve from the side of Adam and, thus Adam is the source of Eve (Arnold 381). The implication of this line of thought is that Ephesians 5:23 does not entail any God ordained leadership that husbands have in relationship with their wives. It also means that since the headship of the husband is likened to that of Christ who rules

and has authority over creation, His rule over people being expressed in his care and nourishment as well as in his headship in order to fulfill His divine purposes, the husbands in this context ought to imitate Christ in their position as head, not becoming autocratic in anything. They are to use their position for the benefit of their wives and family members (O'Brien 413).

Responsibility of Husbands in Marriage vv.25-30 "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish. So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church" (NKJV). The responsibility of the husbands in this text is to love their wives. The love required here is absolute love, love that pursues the maximum good in a person. In other words husbands should love their wives even when they seem unworthy and unloving. Wife's submission is not subject on their husband's love likewise the husband's love is not dependent on the wife's submission. The love to which the husband is called upon is one from a pure heart, it is unconditional, loves when not loved back, gives without getting, and that ever looks for what is best in others (Achiro 34).

The love expected of the husband as defined plainly in v.25b is the kind of love that Christ showed the church. He gave up himself for her in return for nothing. Hence, the love of the husband to the wife is given a Christological definition and its typical characteristic is to give oneself up for the other. Christ is the perfect illustration of love. Christians are to be imitators of God and walk in love just as Christ. Christ loved to the point of giving up his life. John 10:11 a good shepherd lays down his life for his sheep. According to Westcott, the analogy between the husband and Christ relates to love not headship, implying that the husband is supposed to focus on loving rather than enforcing headship over the wife (84). In 1 Corinthians 13:1ff love is likened to all things and is shown as the greatest of all. Christ loved the church not because it was perfectly lovable but in order to make it such. God showed his love for us that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us. (Rom. 5: 8). He loved me and gave up himself for me. (Gal 2:20). For God so loved the world that he gave his only son (John 3:16). This simply implies that whenever the helpmeet is in the wrong, her husband should be able to gently correct

and love even in her weakness. The idea that the Apostle Paul's analogy between Christ and the husband only relates to love according to Westcott is only half the truth since in v.23 Paul uses an analogy between Christ and the husband in relation to headship (84-85). He further maintains that both headship and love are an important part of the analogy. The two function together. Therefore this can only imply that husbands are supposed to equally focus on headship as much as loving.

Application of the Scripture vv.31-33

Appeal to the scripture v.31 "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and shall cleave to his wife and the two shall become one flesh".

Paul in this text carry on to reveal the man's affection as he cites Gen.2:24 to present that in marriage husband and wife are one flesh. The husband should love his wife because she has become an integral part of him. This is illustrative of Christ's intimate unification in conjunction with the *ecclesia*. Just as the *ecclesia* is joined to Christ, so also are wives joined to their spouses. The command for a man to "leave" his father and mother is not a command to literally abandon them. Rather, it means that both spouses will relinquish their primary allegiance to each set of parents and transfer it to each other. In as much as they are obligated to honor their parents (Eph 6:2; Ex 20:12; Deut 5:16), care for them in their old age (1Tim 5:3-4), listen to their advice (Prov 23:22; 6:20), their prime focus is to be on their spouses (Arnold 393). The verb to cleave means to glue, cement, as welding of two metals. It illustrates that husbands and wives are supposed to be knitted together in every aspect of life, thought, interest and physical intimacy. Moreover, the verb has the idea of a man and woman coming together in a close and intimate relationship that encompasses every aspect of their beings whether emotional, physical, and spiritual.

Christ and the Church v.32 "This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church"

There are three possible interpretations of the word mystery in this context. Firstly, it is related to the human marriage mentioned in Gen.2:24. According to the Vulgate mystery is translated as *Sacramentum*. The interpretation of the word conveys marriage as a sacrament of grace. Therefore the marriage of a Christian man and woman is the re-enactment of the marriage of Christ and the church". However this interpretation is unacceptable because Genesis does not give proof of Christian marriage as opposed to a secular marriage. Secular or religious marriage is the joining of two into one flesh (Achiro 39). Furthermore,

it is based on third century Gnostic sources and there is no clear evidence that the understanding was evident in early Christian community (40). Secondly, some scholars think the mystery reflects a deeper meaning of human marriage in Gen 2:24. This cannot be the case because the text already makes mention of the Christians as the body of Christ and Gen 2:24 is just an illustration of that spiritual union. Thirdly, Paul explains this mystery but I speak of Christ and the church. But I speak introduces a new line of thinking. By stating this Paul puts an end to the previous discussion on the union between the husband and the wife (Moritz 125). Paul clearly states that the mystery in question is that of the union between Christ and the Church not the physical union of the husband and wife. Paul quotes Gen 2:24 in support of the union and as an illustration of the nature of the union between the husband and wife.

Husbands and Wives v.33 "Nevertheless let each one of you in particular so love his own wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband" (NKJV).

This verse is an extraction of what had been avowed in v.25-29.

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish. So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it (Eph. 5:33).

Paul uses the singular verb for the persons involved to indicate the individual responsibility to each other. The husband is to love his own wife as Christ loved the church and the wife is to fear her husband (v. 25). The fear that is used here should be looked at as reverence for her husband (Eph. 5:25-29). Christians are called upon to submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. This relates to persons in marriage too. However Paul delineates individual obligations for individuals in marriage. Husbands are to love their wives in a vigilant and caring way as

Christ loves the church and wives are to submit to their husbands and be responsive to the leadership their husbands provide as the church does to Christ. Each should look out for the interest of the other and adhere to the leading of the Holy Spirit for a successful, stable and harmonious marriage (Achiro 40). The amazing thing about this verse is the emphatic way Paul individualizes the discussion. He does this through the phrase each one of you. The emphatic individualization strongly drives home the point that Paul expects every married couple in the Christian community to live by these standards in their marriage relationships (Arnold 397).

The Implications of Ephesians 5:21-33 for Christian Marriages in Nigeria

It is a known fact that most African cultures, customs and traditions in the traditional society are hostile to women. In the Igbo cosmology, in pre-modern Africa, women experience bitter widowhood to determine their guiltlessness in the death of their husband, circumcision is carried out to avoid promiscuity. Women are also restricted from watching masquerade dance or eating certain animal portions like the gizzard. Additionally, they are restricted from making any comments or contributions in meetings that comprises males and females. In other words, they are to be seen and not heard. Women in pre-modern African cultures were deprived of leadership positions and given little or no attention. Similarly, in relation to marriage and the Owerri people in the Eastern part of Nigeria, Amolo and Onuoha remarks that Owerri like other African societies is patriarchal in nature hence marriage is considered an obligatory factor for the continuation of the family line of descent. A childless marriage is a source of serious discontent and leads to serious trouble between a man and his wife. Besides, an all female progeny without a male child could also lead to the marriage of more than one wives or divorce. This is because the Owerri people like other patriarchal societies have regard for male child to enable continuity. Women in the Owerri society are not formally given a pride of place in the family or community because of the general Igbo traditional philosophy. Women are not permitted to talk before men in a general assembly nor take decisions in any matter. This is because the Igbos believe that women have no say in the society. Power and authority lies in the hand of the husband or male child. However, with the advent of christianity in the Owerri most of the socio-economic inhibitions on women have been affected positively (271-272).

The implication of Ephesians 5:21-33 for Christian marriages in Nigeria is expressed in the sense that the

scripture emphasizes mutuality of the husbands and wives in all spheres of human endeavor. Ephesians 5:21-33 encourages the husbands in marriage to see and treat their wives or women as they see and treat themselves. The text (Ephesians 5:21-33) speaks of equal opportunity of the male and female rather than marginalization, discrimination or domination. The text stresses that women and wives be seen as human beings not as inferior beings. The ideology that women are to be seen and not heard in the public is jettisoned from the text. Consequently, all forms of socio-cultural, religious and economic assaults and taboos such as leadership domination by the male in the family and society, wife battering, denial of inheritance, widowhood practices and female genital mutilation hinged on women (christian women inclusive) in some Nigerian cultural spheres are to be disregarded and women treated as equal with the male in the family, church and society and more especially in the Christian family. In other words, Women are to be seen as human beings whose rights are to be protected like their male counterpart.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. For the purpose of stability of the christian marital institution, mutual submission is required by both the husbands and the wives in marriage. Similarly, for the purpose of fairness which Christian marriage stands for, women like their male counterpart in the wider society should be given proper place in the family, church and society to forstall conflict.
2. Religious instructors should consistently and consciously make emphasize to their religious adherent that all Scripture is historically authoritative while some Scripture is normatively authoritative. This means that while all scripture is inspired and profitable for doctrine other scriptures, are culturally conditioned and so may not have universal application as in the case of Ephesians 5:21-33.
3. The various aspects of inhibitions on women ranging from leadership domination by the male in the family and society, wife battering, widowhood practices on account of their gender should be de-emphasized or better still checked by government at the National, State and Local levels and even

traditional society and ensure that perpetrators of such abuse are brought to book.

CONCLUSION

This paper examined Ephesians 5:21-33 from different perspectives including hermeneutics, cultural, and historical. In the examination of the true meaning of the text, it was comprehended that the text, when properly read and understood, is not at all a patriarchal treatise seeking to keep women in the silent background in the socio-economic, political and religious spheres. Rather, Ephesians 5:21-33 is truly a noble eye-opener of the idea of mutual submission between a husband and wife when they freely choose to exchange their consents and enter into a lifelong and exclusive union especially in a Christian union. The idea that women are to be viewed as lesser beings that must remain subservient in the family and observe all customs and traditions which are inimical to them, exploited, suppressed, oppressed, abused and humiliated are to be unheeded.

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