

Household Codes: Men and Women Together
In God's Purposes.

Frameworks: Biblical overview

Let's look at a brief biblical overview before looking at the household codes to help us frame them.

For more detail read: *Lucy Peppiatt- Paul's Women and 1 Corinthians or Discovering Biblical Equality- Groothuis- edited by Gordon Fee. Also, Lynn Cohick- Women in the World of the earliest Christians- Flame of Yahweh; Sexuality in the Old Testament- Richard Davison.*

Old Testament

Both Jesus and Paul see Genesis as authoritative and foundational- **Matt 19:4, Rom 5:14, 1 Cor 15:22, 45.**

Genesis 1:26-28

Men and women (not husband and wife). Here as in Genesis 2 Man is generic, race not gender- in our context humanity. Both male and female in the image, dominion and leadership shared, commission shared. It's crystal clear that the image and kingdom authority is shared.

Genesis 2:19-25

Views opposing equality.

- **Adam in authority because formed first.**

Ridiculous, that way a amoeba, tree or bush is above Adam. Paul didn't mean this in 1 Timothy 2:13.

- **The rights of the firstborn mean Adam is first in authority.**

This is a loose principle that God overturns continually (Abel over Cain, Jacob over Esau, Joseph over brothers, David over brothers) so it cannot be taken as a universal reality.

- **Woman is the helper so inferior.**

Matthew Henry: 'Not out of the foot to be walked over, out of the head to rule over but the rib to be alongside'.

Helper: Used in the O/T 15 out of 19 times of God: 'The Lord is my helper'. Never used of an inferior. No inference here of just here to support the leadership of the male.

Jewett: *'So far as Genesis 2 is concerned sexual hierarchy must be read into the text as it is not required by it'*

Genesis 3: The Fall and beyond.

This is not God's ideal- to put it mildly so we can't quote this as the ideal as some have tried to do! Brings schism into creation and human relationships. This division between men and women has been evident throughout human history.

Matthew 19:4 – Jesus: 'Not so at the beginning'. In Jesus mind Genesis is not only authoritative, but he also appeals to the pre-fall scenario- the original intention. We must do this in life and practice.

Redemption

Kingdom now, paradise, original intention restored. The New Humanity. **2 Cor 5: 16-21, Gal 3:26-29.**

Discuss- choose one- 10 minutes:

How should the fact that together men and women complete the image of God, and share the creation mandate to exercise kingdom stewardship and authority in the earth effect male female relationships both within marriage and beyond it?

What impact can you see that the fall, and the entrance of sin portrayed in Genesis 3 has had on female male relationships through the ages?

What impact should salvation and the coming of the kingdom of God have on all relationships between men and women?

Women in the O/T: In Brief.

Looking at O/T society, it is easy to read women as pictured in inferior roles, both in the religious and social spheres. This doesn't prevent them on occasions fulfilling the highest offices (Military Leader, Prophetess).

- **Miriam:** Prophetess and Leader with Moses- Micah 6:4

- **Deborah:** Military, civil and religious Leader- Judges 4
- **Huldah:** Refutes the argument that God only uses a woman if he can't find a man (Pawson and others). She was a contemporary of Jeremiah and Zephaniah. Five national male leaders came to her for advice on the law **2 Chronicles 34: 14-28.**

We should note:

- **Agrarian society,** subsistence economy (iron age), requiring partnership for survival and demarcation of roles, child rearing being one of the keys to economic survival (why paradise is full of food and seed analogies- symbolised prosperity).
- **Rediscovering Eve-** Carol Meyer suggests a re-evaluation. Women key in economy, enterprise, and technology.
- **Proverbs 31 Woman:** Normative. It is idealised but not an exception. Business, entrepreneurial, independent, respected, married, a mother. High functioning woman and these traits are idolised. No mention of her sexuality, or status only in relation to her husband. Quite remarkable.

Matriarchs: Richard Davidson- *"They were respectful to their husbands yet intelligent, forceful and directive."* Equal in covenant e.g. Both Abram and Sarai had the covenant name change.

Meyer: *"They (the matriarchs) grace the pages of Genesis with their strength and their power."*

Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel display that despite the patriarchal society, which was widespread beyond Israel, uniquely Israel's women lived a "functional gender balance."

Women in the life of Jesus- In Brief.

Luke 10:39. Mary at the feet of Jesus. Formal phrase for disciple, learner (Acts 22:33- Paul 'at the feet' of Gamaliel- literally in the Greek). Mary applauded for learning rather than taking the traditional servant role in the kitchen.

Women travelled with Jesus and financially supported him- **Luke 8:1-3.**

John 20:10-18- Women as the witnesses of the resurrection whose testimony would not be accepted in court. Mary as the first apostle, "sent one," heralding the resurrection to the disciples.

Women in Paul- In Brief.

I have excluded **1 Cor 11: 4-16** (v 11-12 summarise Paul's view), **1 Cor 14: 34** (women were prophesying), **1 Timothy 2: 11-14** (women were teaching authoritatively- Phoebe), not because of their complexity, but because they are isolated passages from the clear thrust of scripture. Happy to address them in q & a but they are not central to the household codes.

Gal 3:26-29- Neither Jew, nor Greek.

Many women on Paul's teams and in leadership. James Dunn asserts that we must build from what is clear throughout Paul and not from passages like 1 Corinthians 11 which are more difficult for all sorts of reasons.

Lydia- Businesswoman, leader of the Church in Philippi- **Acts 16: 14, 40.**

Phoebe- **Rom 16:1**- Bearer of the book of Romans from Paul, read and taught it in Rome.

Priscilla and Aquila- **Acts 18:18-19, 26, 2 Tim 4:9**- Sometimes the other way round (first one named is the leader/head culturally)- *Andreas Kostenburger in God, Marriage and Family* (I disagree with most of his conclusions apart from this)- only example of marriage in the NT, appears Priscilla was the leader for some reason (education, wealth, been saved longer). Named first, but some mutuality in the way it is not always the case.

Patrons, and church leaders- **Chloe**- **1 Cor 1:11.**

Prophets- **Acts 21:9**- Philip's daughters

Apostles: **Acts 16:17**- Junia.

1 Corinthians 11:3- Headship, the Trinity and Husband and wife.

Early Church avoided heresy of subordinationism, whereby the Son is subordinate to the Father rendering him unequal to the Father.

Complementarians fall into this trap. There are different roles within the Trinity (eternal operations), yet they are one and co-equal. These roles are internal to the Trinity; The Father is unbegotten and unsent, he sends the Son and the Spirit, The Son is the only eternally begotten one sent from the Father, the Spirit is sent from the Father (and the Son) and is eternally present and poured out. However, they are one in presence and activity for example the Father and the Spirit suffer in and through the son on the cross."

This is the model for marriage- mutuality, not authoritarian hierarchy, or a strange “complementarity” where equality means that women are unable to lead or make certain decisions, take certain roles. However, there is differentiation, and how this is outworked will be different within different cultures and will require different household codes.

1 Corinthians 7:4. Men and women, husbands and wives belong to one another equally. Paul pushing away from patriarchy (male domination) towards mutuality. You can see this develop further in the earliest churches.

The Household Codes.

Context

Underlying biblical principles which the earliest churches were struggling to apply both within the new reality of gentile inclusion into the people of God. This had both theological and social ramifications.

Acts 15: 1-29, Galatians, Antioch, and the Jerusalem council.

2 separate issues. Firstly, circumcision and the work of the Spirit, Jews and Gentiles and secondly eating together around the table, the foundation of their life. In Jerusalem they settled the circumcision issue but remained consistent on the food issue **15:29**.

Corinth and Rome – Pragmatism, contextualised outworking.

Here Paul practically outworked this issue in a different way with an emphasis on maintaining a good witness, not leading believers astray, honouring the conscience of the “weak” (in this context those still living under the food laws- See Reading Romans Backwards- Scot McKnight), keeping unity in the church, and helping Jews and Gentiles understand that everybody is “in the same boat” as far as salvation is concerned (**I Cor 10: 25-31, Rom 14**).

1 Cor 7:10-12

“Not I but the Lord, I not the lord.” There are some things Jesus stated clearly and the church built on them, there are other areas where there were issues Paul takes a view on. Some of these are timeless principles and others are heavily contextual (food laws) but have principles (weaker brother) behind them.

The Codes: Eph 5: 2-9, Col 3 :18-25.

- **Christ Communities:** As the Church spread there were Christ communities throughout the Roman world. These were more like “associations” than house churches. They often met in homes, which varied from the tenements of Rome to Greek style houses of a larger nature owned by patrons. As such these groups ranged from 20-30 to a maximum of under 100 (a rich family and their entire entourage of slaves, wider family etc).
- **Associations/Societies:** These associations were everything from the synagogue, philosophical societies, trade guilds, local community groups, burial societies etc. They met around a meal and there were many social conventions around their make-up which the early church changed.
- **Context:** Some of these churches took over existing societies (was the Thessalonian church borne out of a leatherworker’s guild?) and other met in the homes of influential individuals who were not believers (Caesar’s household, and people who eventually became believers, but who were not initially e.g. Stephanus- **1 Cor 1:16, 1 Cor 16:15-17**).

In the light of this Paul’s evangelistic and church planting strategy is best described by **1 Cor 9:19-23**, and this is how he wanted his churches to behave. If he was starting from scratch and in a different culture, it would be fair to say that Paul would not have started with these codes as they are a response specifically to the Greco-Roman culture the church found itself in.

The role of household codes today- “We have no other practice in the churches of God.” **1 Cor 11: 16.**

Discuss- 10 minutes: Are there particular issues of our time which churches need to develop household codes around them? If so which ones and what might be our options?

The NT Codes codes include instructions to:

- Wives and husbands, husbands, and wives
- Parents and children, children, and parents.
- Slaves and masters, masters, and slaves.

Mutual Submission.

The context for the church is the same in Antioch, Corinth, Ephesus, and Colossae. Mutual submission- **Gal 3:26, Eph 5:21, 1 Cor 12:13, Col 3:11.**
Interdependence- **1 Cor 11: 11-12.**

Paul's approach runs the line between pushing against the flow of the culture (slavery, the oppression of women) whilst not alienating hosts that were often imbibed in that culture which was heavily patriarchal.

So, Paul goes with a kind of "soft patriarchy" (submission as service or being in right order -Martin Goldsmith and the meaning of submission) but mutual submission and interdependence being at the core, so in effect patriarchal hierarchy is set aside. He deals with slavery in the same way in Philemon.

He includes cheeky little passages in like **Eph 5:26** where he puts Christ and the husband literally using words that in the Greek are synonymous with women's tasks like "cleaning the laundry" in the service to the wife or the church by way of looking after them.

Discuss- 10 minutes:

When headship is viewed through the lens of the Trinity, what values does that impart into the context of marriage?

How does the view of headship proposed here impact male female roles and cultural stereotypes within marriage?

What message does Paul's household codes have to contemporary society, with toxic masculinity on one side and increasingly feminist male hatred on the other. How could mutual submission, interdependence, and the recognition that it is only together that women and men reflect the image of God change things?

In the light of this what prophetic, alternative and life affirming models of male female relationships could the church offer to contemporary society?

Conclusion:

Feedback- takeaways from the session.