

Re-reading Ephesians 5: 22-25 in the context of Christian marriage in
Osun State Nigeria

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Abstract

*This study examined the marriage relationships in Ephesians 5:22-25 in the context of Christian marriage in Osun State, Nigeria. The aim is to address the unpleasant situations observed in Yoruba land especially among Christian couples in the State. Data for this study were collected through both primary and secondary sources. The primary source included a close reading of the text and interpretation of Eph 5:22-25. Theological exegesis was adopted to explore and interpret the pericope. The exegesis included a close reading of the Greek text of the passage. The text was analysed into key words, phrases and sentences for detail study. In addition, unstructured interview and Focus Group Discussion (FGD) were conducted among ministers of God and Christian couples within the State. The secondary source includes archival materials, dictionaries, encyclopedia, book, journal articles and internet materials. Data collected were subjected to content analysis and contextual hermeneutics. The study revealed that the author of Eph 5:22-25 emphasised *Haustafe In* (family code) which included love, headship and mutual submission, with regard to marriage relationship between husbands and wives. It also discovered that Yoruba society which was patriarchal, with the misconception of the current movement of social groups on gender equity, had made the interpretation and practices of love, headship and submission as exemplified in Eph 5:22-25, a difficult task among Christian couples in Yoruba land. Therefore, the study highlighted various recommendations to foster peaceful co-existence among couples in Osun State, Yoruba land and in Nigeria.*

Key words: Christian Marriage, *Haustafeln*, love, submission, headship

Introduction

Marriage is the most intimate of unions into which, by personal consent, one man and woman enter on the basis of mutual love and fidelity.¹ Jack and Carole May-Hall collectively define marriage as a special gift upon which the family rests.² They emphasise that God was enormously satisfied when he created the first man and woman and joined them together. This corroborates the definition of marriage given by the Church of Nigeria (Anglican Communion) seeing marriage as a gift of God in creation and a means of his grace, a holy mystery in

¹ C.F. Pfeiffer *et al* (eds.), *Wycliffe Bible Dictionary* (Peabody: Hendrickson. 1999), 1079

² Jack and Carole May-Hall, *Marriage Takes More than Love* (Colorado: NAV, 1982), 15.



which man and woman become one flesh.³ Marriage is sometimes a social union and at other times a legal contract between people that create kinship. It is an institution in which interpersonal relationship; usually intimate and sexual are acknowledged in a variety of ways, depending on the culture or subculture in which it is found. Such a union is often formalised via a wedding ceremony may also be called matrimony. This is the perspective of Abdulmalik, when he looked at the legal aspect of what he called a "Double Decker marriage." Although he was examining the rules that guide marriage, he described marriage as a universal institution which is recognised and respected all over the world as a social institution. According to him, marriage is founded on, and governed by social, legal and religious norms of the society.⁴

Igenzoza states that in England from where the Anglican Communion emanated, the acceptable definition of marriage is the voluntary union for life of one man and one woman to the exclusion of all others⁵. Onekpe, considering the rubrics and exhortation at the beginning of the marriage service in Anglican Church world-wide, defines marriage as a divine institution and a lifelong and exclusive union and relationship between one man and one woman.⁶ Also that Jesus Christ himself blessed this way of life by being a guest and performing His first miracle of changing water into wine during a marriage ceremony at Cana of Galilee. This was in support of Douglas, who describes Christian marriage as the divine union between a man and a woman that is recognised by society and has intended permanency,⁷ although he states that marriage can also be a state in which men and women can live together in sexual relationship with the approval of their social group. With this definition he intended to show that polygamy is not immoral in Old Testament. There is room for divorce and levirate marriage. Although, this marital life may constitute a recognised married state, they are generally shown to be inexpedient. While citing other authors, M.O. Ogunsola in his thesis, summarises marriage thus:

Although many people are in marriage, different people and some cultures have their perceptions, values, practices and about it⁸.

Considering all these definitions, it is therefore worrisome to note that Christian marriage is not what it meant to be from the inception.

The observation of the adverse effect of unhealthy marital relationship on the individual and society in Yoruba land especially in Osun State has become an

³ *The Book of Common Prayer* (Anglican Communion) Church of Nigeria, 2007, 24

⁴ S. M. Abdulmalik, *Double-Decker Marriage under the Nigerian Law*, LCUJ 1, (2008), 1:83-88

⁵ A.O. Igenzoza, *Polygamy and the African Churches: A Biblical Appraisal of African Marriage System* (Ibadan: African Association for the Study of Religion, Nigerian Publicities Bureau, 2007), 7

⁶ P.I. Onekpe, *Christian Marriage Preparation* (Lagos: CSS, 2005), 11

⁷ S. S. Smalley, "Marriage," *NBD*, (ed. J.D. Douglas; Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 1993), 742

⁸ M.O. Ogunsola, "Marriage Counseling and its Ethical Implication to the Africa Marriage: Yoruba as a Case Study" (Ph.D. Dissertation, Department of Guidance and Counseling, University of Ibadan, 2010), 11

issue that cannot be overlooked. It is worrisome to see that couples, especially Christians who had experienced pleasant moment at the beginning of their marriage some years ago can no more stand the presence of each other. The problematic issues in marriage observed in Yoruba Christian marriage today include domestic violence, fighting, quarrelling, poor funding of family, infidelity, inlaw intrusion, unfaithfulness among others. This leads to situation where one partner endures instead of enjoying the marriage while some others have broken families, have their marriage dissolved or marry another wife as the case observed in Osun State. These developments have led many marriages into crisis, broken homes and divorce. The attendant effect is the increase in social vices and the series of anomalies in society today. Because marriage is seen as the bedrock of society, this article is therefore birthed as it employs Eph 5:21-33 to interpret what marriage should be among Yoruba Christians in a patriarchal society using Osun State in Nigeria as a case study.

Research Methodology

In carrying out this research work, various methods were employed to collect necessary information. The study employed both primary and secondary sources of data collection. The primary source included a close reading of the interpretation of Eph 5:21-33. As a study in the New Testament, the exegesis was adopted to explore and interpret the data collected. The exegesis included a close reading of the Greek text of the passage. The text was analyzed into key words, phrases and sentences for detail study. It also included unstructured interview and Focus Group Discussion (FGD).

The author interviewed 8 Ministers of God across denominations purposively selected in different towns in Osun State. The questions asked concern the various challenges facing marriage of members in the Church, the influences of African culture and Yoruba beliefs over marriage, and what should be the level of submission between husbands and wives. Also 18 Christian couples who were purposively selected from 13 Yoruba towns in Osun State such as Osogbo, Ilesa, Odeomu, Gbongan, Ora, Igbomina, Iwo, Ikirun, Ifon Osun, Ifewara, Ipetumodu, Ilobu, Ife and Ipetu-Ijesa were interviewed at different occasions adopting Focus Group Discussion (FGD), to know the situation of marriage. The researcher selected the couples, whose marriages had lasted for about 15 years and above. In order to achieve a sincere and accurate result, eighteen wives were gathered separately from their husbands as focus groups on three occasions. Their husbands were also organised into three groups at different locations. Some of the questions responded to by the wives included the commonest challenges confronting the families in the Church, the responsibilities of wives to their husbands, the role of husbands to their wives to promote family relationship and evaluation of submission of wives in the Church to their husbands in marriage. Also the meaning of 'submission' was included in the interview. In addition, the respondents were asked if wives should submit to their husbands at all times and in all situations, and what are the outcomes of wives' total submission to their husbands. To conclude the interview with wives, general pieces of advice were given on wives' submission to their husbands.

Secondary data was sourced from books such as Bible commentaries, Bible dictionaries, literature written by scholars, academic journal articles and the Internet resources. The research findings were further scrutinized and subjected to content analysis to ascertain or negate their suitability to the current terrain. The data collected were analysed using contextual hermeneutics

Paul's View of Christian Marriage in Ephesians 5:22-25

The command to the wife: Eph 5: 22-24

²² Αἱ γυναῖκες τοῖς ἰδίοις ἀνδράσιν ὡς τῷ κυρίῳ, ²³ ὅτι ἀνὴρ ἐστὶν κεφαλὴ τῆς ἐκκλησίας, αὐτὸς σωτὴρ τοῦ σώματος. ²⁴ ἀλλὰ ὡς ἡ ἐκκλησία ὑποτάσσεται τῷ Χριστῷ, οὕτως καὶ αἱ γυναῖκες τοῖς ἀνδράσιν ἐν παντί.

²² Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord. ²³ For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. ²⁴ Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.

Analysis of the Pericope

Within the marriage relationship the wife is addressed first. She is urged to submit to her husband as to the Lord in vv. 22-23. Although v. 22 does not contain any verb, the participle, “submitting” can be carried over from v. 21, with imperatival force.⁹ While the Greek word, γυναῖκες may suggest that the author is not addressing wives but women, the mention of ἀνδράσιν which translates males and the address to children, τέκνα, to obey their parents, γονευσιν (6:1ff) suggest reference to family relationship in the passage.¹⁰ The verb ὑποτασσόμενοι (5:21) is dative of direct object, ἀλλήλοις. The adjective usually takes a reflective or possessive sense.¹¹ The exercise of this submission must be compatible with reference to Christ which concludes the verse ὡς τῷ κυρίῳ (“as to the Lord”) - which is a dative of direct object. Lord here refers to Jesus.

Why did the author tell wives to ‘submit’ and husbands to ‘love’? Those who believed that Paul wrote the epistle thought that perhaps Christian women, newly freed in Christ, found submission difficult; perhaps Christian men, used to the Roman custom of giving unlimited power to the head of the family, were not used to treating their wives with respect and love. In Bible time, women were to completely submit to their husband their whole life. The writer however emphasised the equality of all believers in Christ, but he did not suggest overthrowing Roman society to achieve it, but instead, he counseled all

⁹Peter T. O'Brian, *The Letter to the Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 405

¹⁰ W.J. Larking Jr., *Cultural and Biblical Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1988), 109

¹¹ Larking Jr., *Cultural and Biblical Hermeneutics*, 109

believers to submit to one another by choice. Wives to be submissive to the husband and husband to love as rightly mentioned.¹²

At the heart of this submission is the motive of 'order'. God has established certain and authority rules within the family, and submission is a humble recognition of that divine ordering. The author is not urging every woman to submit to every man, but wives to their husbands. Certainly the wives subjection to their husbands is not unconditional, as is their subjection to the Lord; it is conditioned by the fact that he, unlike Christ, is a sinful and fallible human being like herself.¹³ It may be noted that the author assumes that both husband and wife are Christians. Wives were to be subject to their husbands not because that was a part of the natural order, but because submission is the style of all Christians. However if a wife marries an unbeliever¹⁴ the injunction is not rejected, the Christian still need to be subject with the motive and hope that the husband may be won by "the reverent and chaste behavior of his Christian wife".

Although the author encourages Christians to develop the attitude of mutual submission among themselves such an attitude does not free a wife from performing her duty or obligation to her husband.¹⁵ The wife is the husband's absolute possession and he has the first and only claim over her. The husband is the wife's absolute possession, and she, too, has a mutual claim over him. Each one must receive each other as God's gift to the other, the author is however thinking that in a Christian marriage the wife must subject herself to her husband. She must not lord herself over her husband. Her submission to her husband should be analogous to the submission of Christians to Christ; their Lord. Primary submission is an inheritable duty of a wife in the home although the husband himself is expected to make a corresponding submission to his wife.¹⁶

Two reasons are given, or at least implied, for the wife's submission to her husband. The first is drawn from creation and concerns the husband's 'headship' of his wife, while the second is drawn from redemption and concerns Christ's 'headship' of the church.¹⁷ The husband's headship is both stated as a fact and made the ground of his wife's submission, but the man's headship especially the husband's headship is not a natural application of a principle; it is foundation principle itself. The fact that a teaching is not popular is no reason to discard it. The man is the spiritual head of a family, and his wife should acknowledge his leadership.

¹² Francis W. Beare, "The Epistle to the Ephesians," *The Interpreter's Bible* (eds. G.A. Buttrick et al; Nashville: Abingdon, 1981), 719

¹³ Lloyd J. Ogilvie (ed), *The Communicator's Commentary* (Texas: Word Books, 1982), 139

¹⁴ S.T.O. Akande, *The Epistle of Paul to the Ephesians* (Ibadan: Daystar, 1987),

¹⁵ Akande, *The Epistle of Paul to the Ephesians*, 61

¹⁶ John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Ephesians* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 1989), 220

¹⁷ Stott, *The Message of Ephesians*, 220

The command to the Husbands: Eph 5: 22-24

²⁵ Οἱ ἄνδρες, ἀγαπᾶτε τὰς γυναῖκας, καθὼς καὶ ὁ Χριστὸς ἠγάπησεν τὴν ἐκκλησίαν καὶ ἑαυτὸν παρέδωκεν ὑπὲρ αὐτῆς

²⁵ Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her

Analysis of the Pericope

This command to husbands begins the second main section of the household code '*Haustafeln*' (Household code).¹⁸ Husbands are commanded to love their wives as Christ loved the church. If the word which characterises the wife's duty is 'submit', the word characterising the husband's duty is love,¹⁹ in other words, the wife's subordination to her husband has its counterpart in the husband duty to love his wife. The ἀγαπᾶτε used in the section is verb imperative present active 2nd person plural of ἀγαπᾶω indicating ongoing action, that which the wife is to 'submit' to is now laid on the husband to reciprocate with self sacrificial compassion which Christ has demonstrated for the church, καθὼς καὶ 'just as also' (a comparative and casual force).²⁰ The character and description of that love was well amplified by Stott, who notes that author uses five verbs to indicate the unfolding stages of Christ commitment to his bride; the church, namely 'loved' ἠγάπησεν 'gave himself' παρέδωκεν, 'sanctify' ἁγιάσῃ, 'cleansed' καθαρίσας and 'present' παραστήσῃ.²¹ These he claims, trace Christ's care for his church from a past to a future eternity. Again the verb 'gave over' together with the reflexive pronoun 'himself' ἑαυτῶν, stresses the 'over to death' (Eph. 5:1, 2). He went to the cross as the willing victim, and this action on behalf of his people was the supreme demonstration of his love for them.²² Such self sacrificial love provided the basis for the exhortation to husband to sacrifice their own interests for the welfare of their wives. Their love, which is modeled on Christ's love for the church, means they will be willing to make even the ultimate sacrifice of life itself. Nevertheless the word, ἀγαπᾶω used for love in the passage means to value, to esteem, to feel or show a generous concern for, according to Akande.²³ The same word also means to be faithful towards the one who is loved.

Literary Context of the Passage

In this teaching on marriage, the author of Ephesians has not only combined the theological and ethical concerns of the letter as a whole,²⁴ as he presents the typological relationship between Christ and the Church and Christian husbands and wives. He also develops what he had written earlier in the Epistle about Christ's relationship to the church, that is, as head he loves and gives himself for

¹⁸ O'Brian, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, 418

¹⁹ Stott, *The Message of Ephesians*, 226

²⁰ O'Brian, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, 419

²¹ Stott, *The Message of Ephesians*, 226; Thayer, 464

²² O'Brian, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, 419

²³ Akande, *The Epistle of Paul to the Ephesians*, 62

²⁴ O'Brian, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, 438; R.F. Wilson, *Headship (kephalē) and Submission (Huppotassomai) in Ephesians 5:21-33*, n.p. [cited 12 December 2022]. Online: www.joyfulheart.com

believers, brings the church into being through his saving death, nourishes and cherishes the church, sanctifies her, and is concerned for his bride's glory and purity.

The role of the husband in verse 25 suggests that husbands' authority is exercised in loving, self-giving sacrifice for the church just as Christ; let theirs be the same for their wives. The husbands' obligations are stressed to love their wives as their own bodies. The authority of the husband is defined in terms of loving responsibility.²⁵ The word 'authority' suggests power, dominion and even oppression. The authoritative husband is pictured as a domineering figure that makes all the decisions himself, issues commands and expects obedience, inhibits and suppresses his wife, and so prevents her from growing into a mature or fulfilled person. But this is not at all the kind of 'headship' and 'authority' the author is describing, whose model is Jesus Christ. Certainly, 'headship' implies a degree of leadership and initiative, as when Christ came to woo and to win his bride. But more specifically it implies sacrifice, self-giving for the sake of the beloved as when Christ gave himself for his bride. If 'headship' and 'authority' means power in any sense, then it is power to care not crush, power to serve not to dominate, power to facilitate self-fulfillment, not to frustrate or destroy it. And in all this the standard of the husband's love is to be the cross of Christ, on which he surrendered himself even to death in his selfless love for his bride.

Christian Marriage's Situation in Osun State

While they were responding to the commonest challenges confronting Christian families in Osun State, some Church leaders mentioned economic recession, unfaithfulness, barrenness, incessant disagreement, wrong notion of headship of husband and total submission of wives cum today's movement of gender equality. They also held the position that the patriarchal society of Africans affected negatively the way a man would interpret headship over his wife and submission of wife to her husband. Some Christian men still assumed that being 'head' means taking total control of the general affairs of the marriage relationship, thus relegating women to the maximum background. Some men also regarded their wives, not as a person but as one of her properties which needs to be tamed. As a result, some men beat their wives at the slightest provocation and starve them sexually or financially to make them submissive. One of the Church leaders, narrated a case of a husband who starved his wife sexually because he wanted her to quit her job, the wife was adamant and consequently the wife started having extra marital affairs.

Evaluating the submission of wives to their husbands, the group of wives interviewed during Focus Group Discussion (FGD) compared the submission of the women in the primitive society to the current terrain. In Yoruba tradition, submission of the wives is total, especially, the Yoruba tradition which is predominantly patriarchal negates the equality of men and women, hence the ancient women were submitting their will, plans and ideas to their husbands. Even when they had a better plan, they still submitted to the plans of their

²⁵ Stott, *The Message of Ephesians*, 232; "Husbands and Wives as analogue of Christ and the Church," n.p. [cited 12 January 2013]. Online: www.bible.org

husbands. They further explained that when the husband was willing to take another wife, she could not go against it, even when she was not pleased with it. A wife could not embark on a journey or a business without informing her husband. The level of submission then was total. But today the western culture and the wrong understanding of the scripture on gender equity has made such total submission a thing of the past. It is maintained that submission as explained in the scripture is no more possible.

The wives interviewed also explained that submission of wives to some extent may be difficult, irrespective of religious teachings and affiliations in a situation where there was unfaithfulness of both parties and maltreatment of the wife. Some cited a case where a Christian brother kept mistresses (concubines) and after he had passed on, the other women with their children came to the man's family to declare and demand their right. Hence, submission of wife in a case of joint account, or doing project together was difficult today, with the fear that somebody might come one day and inherits what they had both labored for. In addition, the influence of extended family has made submission of wives reduced. In a situation where the woman is barren and the Yoruba tradition lays much emphasis on children, extended family members sometimes put pressure on the Yoruba Christian husband to have a second wife or secretly impregnate another woman; Christian men sometimes yield to the pressure at the long run. Some of the respondents emphasised that in this case some women had lost respect for their husbands; hence the level of submission had reduced among Christian couples. Although the respondents maintained that some wives still submit to their husbands irrespective of any circumstances. Few of the respondents cited an example of some wives in the same Church, who were still submissive to their husbands in spite of their promiscuous lifestyle. Although most of the respondents contended that it was a dangerous submission, of which some of them agreed that the submission taught by Ephesians required that wife should submit willingly in spite of the man's shortcomings.

From the interview, it was discovered that majority of the respondents said that it was not possible for a wife to submit to her husband at all times and in whatever situation. About 13 out of the 18 wives interviewed agreed that with the situation of things in today's Christian marriage, it was not possible that a wife submit at all times and in whatever situation. The reasons given are :-

- i. that in the case of unfaithfulness which is rampant among couples of today,
- ii. that the idea of women being informed of their freedom in Christ and in the current debate of gender equity and equality has been misconceived.

The interview with the husbands revealed that, it is biblical that husbands should submit to their wives through love. They explained that unconditional love was a way a man could show submission. However, the submission of husbands was not as required as of wives. Submission of man in Yoruba context requires that the husband respects his wife and her opinions, not in totality, but to some extent. Also it involves the recognition of some of her rights as a wife. Ultimately the husband should love his wife. Few of the respondent ascertained that love could be demonstrated through expression, gift and

helping the wife in the house chore whereas most of the husbands interviewed disagreed with the latter. They explained that, although it is biblical, the African Traditions sometimes prevent husbands from demonstrating their love. The family may think he had been charmed by his wife. Also it may be difficult for a polygamist to love equally all his wives. However, they all agreed that not all the husbands submit to their wives, but some who understand fully the scripture and who had freed themselves from traditional beliefs are submissive to their wives through the demonstration of agape love. The interview showed that few husbands demonstrated love to their wives. Some of the respondents explained that they did love their wives but because some women took things for granted and misused opportunity granted them, they decided not to show it. They explained it that if husband helped his wife in the house chores once; she might be expecting such to continue. They further explained that the non-challant attitude of some wives had prevented their husbands from demonstrating their love to them.

Explaining what love is, all the husbands that responded to the interview agreed that love is crucial in every marriage, because it is a foundation of every marriage; it is a thing of mind and should be practically demonstrated. It is both in word and action. Any man cannot show love to his wife on a whim. It is about doing things that the wife will enjoy such as wining and dining with her, taking her out for mini-vacation, being romantic, cooking her favorite food sometimes, touching, hugging and coddling without the pressure of sex. Most importantly, a man can show his love to her wife through acceptance and validation. All the husbands that responded to the interview agreed that love cannot be replaced with money or gift. Although women appreciate money and gifts, they desire most the physical and emotional demonstration of love through the aforementioned. Most respondents confirmed that some influential women in the society engaged in extra marital affairs because their husbands were unable to satisfy their materials needs, but failed in the area of fulfilling emotional obligation.

Summarily, through interview, it was discovered that the situation of marriage among Yoruba Christians in Osun State in Nigeria is faced by many challenges. The marriage counselors, who were among the couple interviewed, confirmed that some marriages were at the verge of breaking, while some couples were just patching up things and striving to make the marriage work. This is due to lack of understanding of mutual submission in marriage, misinterpretation of headship of man characterised by egocentric mentality of an African man and the recent movement of feminism today for gender equality which have made the interpretation of 'mutual submission' and 'love' a difficult task in Yoruba marriage. Also, he challenges of wrong interpretation of headship and submission among couples as a result of patriarchal society which the society falls within, contribute to the difficulties in marriage. These have in turn made most marriages to be in chaos and some at the verge of divorce. Some marriages within Yoruba Christians have gone out of the concepts of marriage in Eph 5:22-25. Hence it is worthy to draw attention of scholars and the general public once again to this passage to contextualise it to Christian marriages in Yoruba land in particular and Africa in general.

Application and Recommendations

In explaining what “submission” is in the context of Christian Yoruba marriage, It is explained that according to the scripture, it is the demonstration of respect towards the husband and putting oneself under the authority of the husband in the fear of the Lord. It is further explained that the husband is the head and wife should submit to him. Also, submission of a wife to her husband must be to a greater extent. If she fails in submission she fails in everything. However submission requires obedience, but the obedience should have a limit. Obedience on the issues of faith requires total submission in all things lawful of which circumstances may warrant that a woman disobey her husband when his instruction can jeopardise her spiritual welfare. She should usually obey the opinions of her husband totally. In Yoruba context submission is called “*Iteriba*”. Wives should bow to their spouses’ decisions even when she has a better idea.

The marriage relationship in Eph 5:22-25 is therefore summarised in the following five points and as such upon recommendations for the Christian couples in Yoruba land are premised,

- i) That the requirement of submission is a particular example of a general Christian duty, this injunction “wives submit” v. 22, is preceded by the requirement that Christians are to “submit” to one another. If therefore, it is the wife’s duty to submit to her husband, it is also the husband’s duty to submit to his wife through love.
- ii) That the wife’s submission is to a lover not a monster. This is Christian ideal, not to hideous deviations from it, hence husbands should not be cruel towards their wives, or think all things that they please to be permissible and lawful for their authority should rather be a companionship than a kingship.
- iii) That the husband is to love like Christ. This is not that he loves her with the romantic, sentimental, and even aggressive passion which frequently passes for genuine love today; instead, he is to love her with the love of Christ.
- iv) That the husband’s love like Christ’s, sacrifices in order to serve. The five verbs earlier mentioned are considered here. Christ ‘love’ the church, and ‘gave himself’ for her, in order to ‘cleanse’ her, ‘sanctify her, and ultimately ‘present’ her to himself in full splendor and without any defect. In other words the husbands love and self-sacrifice are not to be idle but purposeful.
- v) The wife submission is but another aspect of love. ‘Submission’ and ‘love’ are two aspects of the very same thing, namely of that selfless self-giving which is the foundation of an enduring and growing marriage. The essence of the author’s instruction is wives ‘submit’ and husband ‘love’. These words are different from one another since they recognized the headship which has been given to the husband. Yet trying to define the two verbs, it is not easy to distinguish clearly between them. To submit is to give oneself up to somebody, and to love is to give oneself up for somebody

Conclusion.

Christian marriage is presented as a sacred institution of holy covenant between a man and a woman, a commitment they give to each other in truth and honesty and with the serious intension of living together as man and wife in a permanent relationship.²⁶ They become bound together by solemn promises. Even polygamous or levirate marriage are bound with certain degrees of vows and promises.²⁷ Husbands and wives are expected to cohabit as man and wife and to give themselves unreservedly to each other in a way that consummates or completes the marriage. Marriage calls then for mutual respect and interest. It calls for constant and open communication between the husbands and wife, with each eager to listen to the other and prepared to speak freely about how he or she feels in relation to the issues that could divide them.²⁸ If the relationship is to develop properly there must be whole hearted effort on the part of both partners²⁹. Ultimately, the issue is a matter of loving each other and the author of Ephesians' advice about that is always relevant³⁰

Christian agape love is unique. It is not mere physical, emotional or erotic attraction but caring concern and caring action; an attitude of heart that transcends even antagonism and enmity and that works for the good of others. Christian love is a matter of the will and so is something couples are commanded to express.³¹ In marriage, mutual love is the duty of both partners and its model is the love of God. Love of this quality does not count up shortcomings or wrongs, its looks beyond traditional beliefs and patriarchal society and does not fight for gender equality.³² It creates and maintains a lasting bond between the partners and puts those who receive it under a constant obligation to be totally and exclusively faithful to the partner who gives it.³³

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²⁶ N. Shield, *Christian Ethics* (Bukuru: Africa Christian Text book, 2004), p. 205

²⁷ Shield, *Christian Ethics* p. 205

²⁸ John R. Rice, *God's Secret for a Successful Marriage* (Benin City: Maranatha Publication, 1991), pp. 115ff

²⁹ Rice, *God's Secret for a Successful Marriage*, p. 116

³⁰ William Nazareth, *How to Marry and Stay Happily Married* (Bangalore: St Paul's, 2001) p. 113

³¹ Shield, *Christian Ethics*, p. 205

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