

“Othering” in Ephesians 5:21-33: The Model of Christ’s Love and Relation to Women as the Interpretative Key for Single Mothers within Evangelical Church Winning All (ECWA)

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Abstract

The household codes in Ephesians present a model of a complete family during the Roman Empire with the husband, wife, children and slaves. With the role responsibilities shouldering on the man being the head of the household and having the ultimate power and authority. Given the historical position of the Roman Empire in New Testament times, it poses questions regarding how Roman imperialism could have influenced Paul and how he use the concept of “Othering” in the book of Ephesians. This study looks at the possibility of Paul being influenced by the socio-political, religious and cultural dynamics of his time. No reference is made about single mothers that existed during the Roman Empire where the text is located. This begs the question this research tends to answer: why did Paul decide to other the single mothers in the text? This paper uses the concepts of “Othering” within the postcolonial biblical criticism in addressing the place of single mothers during the Roman Empire and within the Evangelical Church Winning All (ECWA) in Nigeria. Using the concept of “Othering” to show how the text silenced the experiences of single mothers in the Roman Empire and how the interpretation is also not explicit. The research aims at hearing the voices of single mother’s right from Roman Empire and its implications to single mothers within ECWA by interpreting Christ’s love in the gospels to show how He relates with women that society tends to condemn.

Keywords: Othering, Single Mothers, Evangelical, Women

Introduction

The household is a social institution that shapes an individual identity when it comes to how culture, society, individual view who you are. The household codes of Ephesians 5:21-33 presented what this paper refers to “a perfect complete household” that comprises the husband, wife, children and slaves during the Roman Empire. Ephesians 5:21-33 is a very familiar passage to virtually all Christians in the globe. Paul’s teachings to wives and husbands are interpreted at most wedding ceremonies or marriage counselling. Joe Trull (2000:14) notes that the passage is mostly considered to mean an ideal Christian marriage pattern. These instructions are central to the debate over the place of women in the home, church, and society. This acquaintance means that interpreters approach this passage with preconceived expectations of what it says and mean both in the Roman Empire when Paul wrote and contemporary time.

However, this paper argues that the household code in the letter to the Ephesians has *other* the single mothers who are also having and heading various households in the Roman Empire. This article will show how single mothers¹ were treated right from the Biblical era down to church (Evangelical Church Winning All, ECWA) and its interpretation of Ephesians with regard to households and single mothers’ households. The household code is interpreted in this research with the single mothers in mind since the author of Ephesians either consciously or unconsciously decides to *Other* them from the letter (especially the household code section). The concept of *Othering* is used in this paper to mean the act of silencing the narratives or voices of single mothers within Ephesians 5:21-33. Using the concept to unearth Christ’s analogy being the head of the church and relates it with how Christ communicates with various women that

¹ Single mothers in this paper is inclusive of widows (those that give birth out of wedlock, divorced) since the bible did not use the word single mothers but uses widows in most occasions or not naming them at all. This study is also aware of single fathers but the choice of mothers is because men that are single fathers are rare to find and most of the time the woman carries the responsibilities of pregnancy and upbringing of the baby.

were considered sinners in the gospels to draw lessons for ECWA regarding single mothers. Arguing that the genre did not affirm their existence within the text and the plight they go through as a household that is led by a single mother and should still be referred to as a household.

Single Mothers in the Bible

The Old Testament discusses several categories of women including single mothers before the dawn of the Roman Empire even though the name single mother was not used. Reading the Old Testament, one will encounter occurrences of single mothers where the Bible used names such as widows, concubines to describe them. The first single mother this paper has considered is Hagar in Genesis 21:14 precisely where Abraham sent her away with her boy. Many Christians know the story of Abraham and Hagar in Genesis 21:1ff. David Zucker and Moshe Reiss (2009:2-3) note that several Christians celebrate Sarah and dislike Hagar because she had sexual intercourse with Abraham, Sarah's husband had a child "Ishmael". But there is need to celebrate Hagar for obeying her mistress by having sexual intercourse with Abraham. Considering that she was coerced into having sexual intimacy with Abraham by Sarah, perhaps it was their cultural norm for a master to have sexual intercourse with the servant girl, then and when she got pregnant Sarah resented Hagar. This act led to Hagar becoming pregnant creating more tension which led to Abram sending her away with the young child, making her a single mother.

As earlier stated, widows fall into the category of single mothers and are found in the Bible (Old and New Testaments). Widows in the Bible face several challenges because of the responsibility of providing for their children; widows have their households and families that they head. . Such challenges include financial struggles (2 Kings 4:11), they are portrayed as

helpless within the society (Deuteronomy 10:18, Isaiah 54:4), Even though there are some widows who remain unmarried while others remarried. For those widows that decided not to remarry, God made certain special provisions for them (Deuteronomy 25:5-6) while those that were barren from priestly families could return to their father's household and partake of the priestly food (Leviticus 22:13). Similarly, Naomi also makes the list of single mothers in the Bible because she falls under the category of widows that have children to look after. Naomi had two sons (both of whom had also been married but had died) and a husband who had died earlier. She was therefore a widow, who was also left behind with two daughters-in-law (Ruth and Orpha) who had been married to her deceased sons (Ruth 1:1ff).

In the New Testament Jesus, is also shown love and care for the single mothers (widows). The way and manner Jesus discussed the issue of widows in the gospels shows that God is concerned about single mothers. Luke 7:11-17, for instance, shows Jesus's ministry to the widow of Nain served as a model for Church response to single mothers that have children. Furthermore, Jesus' teaching which was passed down to the Apostles can be seen in Act 6:1ff where the disciples also took care of the widows (single mothers). The early church ministry accepted and welcomed single women/mothers) without discrimination, by showing them compassion and love since now they were in the household of God. The mandate of the church is to train all its members to fear the Lord and to live right irrespective of their social status in the society. This resonates with what James 1:27 says, "Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world..." James is recommending nothing new for the church but an old way of treating people; caring for orphans and single mothers should be the work of the church understanding that Jesus did not show discrimination.

More so, in the Roman Empire single mothers are part of the society because the Roman men were known to be warlike people and the Empire was believed to have been built on slavery as their major source of development (Ogidis, 2020:3-4). Women were also part of the Empire's citizenry and were categorised as: married, divorced, single, widows, single parents (intentional or unintentional). Some widows whose men had died at war happened to be single mothers. April Pudsey (2012:158) observed that

In Roman Egypt there are evidences from the ancient world for the position of widows and divorcees in the context of the household... A newly married women would join the parental household of her new husband and, in the event of divorce or of the husband's death, would have been expected to return to her natal family... the numbers of childless widowed or divorced women residing with their parents is largely hidden from the census record, since they would not have been recorded as such and would appear to us simply as unmarried adult women.

There were groups of women during the Roman Empire that were single, divorced, widows, separated from their husbands, and possibly living their parents or alone in their households, also evident in the Scripture as discussed above. Widows can also be classified as single mothers after left to take care of the children. In the words of Marguerite Johnson and Terry Ryan (2005:6) observed what marriage is like during the Graeco-Roman period looks like:

Many marriages were formed then broken on the basis of short and long-term political allegiances... While some are mentioned simply as marriage partners, others are presented as strong minded and liberated women who appear not to have been dictated to by the will of husbands or guardians... This oration reveals a world of freethinking, free moving and independent upper class women who took lovers at will and who frequented pleasure resorts such as Baiae in Campania.

Such marriages and sexual activities during the Graeco-Roman world lay a very good foundation to show the existence of single mothers. Marguerite & Terry (2005:7) further aver that "male citizens could visit brothels and have sex with slaves without breaking either the *Lex Julia* or the *Lex Scantinia*... Even so, husbands could seek either immediate sexual relief or a long-term sexual relationship outside marriage." This is based on Roman Law which gave men

more liberty to have sexual relations with other ladies outside their marriages, and this act often gave rise to unmarried single mothers.

In the Roman Empire, prostitution was considered a legal business his paper, however, will not use the word prostitution to mean the erotic services that women rendered to men. It is with reference to the owner of the women engaged in the act which is a household in Roman Empire headed by a woman. Johnson and Ryan (2005:7) argued that “in the Roman world, the legal practice of prostitution was placed under the jurisdiction of the Curule Aediles; prostitutes were required to register and, during the reign of Caligula, to pay tax.” The legalization of prostitution required the payment of taxes to the government. Furthermore, Plutarch affirms that Aspasia was highly esteemed by Pericles on account of her political wisdom stating how Socrates sometimes visited her with his pupils and his close friends, and severally brought their wives to listen to her, despite the fact that she presided over a business that was neither respectable nor honourable, but one in which she trained young girls (3) to become prostitutes (*Pericles* 24.5–11: Aspasia). This shows there were several women not living under the guardianship of a man but were still able to run the affairs of their households. Pudsey (2012:159) further observed that

Most of these women lived with their adult children or siblings in the household; younger widows and divorcees did not necessarily reside with other adult family members at all, and those in urban environments appear to have been more likely not to have resided with extended family members.

This was not something new in the Roman Empire households, that most women who were once married mostly remained alone and staying in their household or residing with adult children, or with their siblings. Additionally, Pudsey (2012:172) aver that during the Roman time, a guardian was still required for single mothers/widows; there were ways in which they could use this necessity to avoid getting married again and depend on male kin - , particularly

resident male kin, and thus enabling them to have their freedom. With this understanding the paper gets credence to argue that there were single mothers in the Empire. Furthermore, with the rate of sexual activities happening during the Roman Empire, one could not claim that the Empire was free of single mothers.

Household Codes in Graeco-Roman world and in Ephesians

Classical Greek philosophers such as Plato emphasized the importance of the state of proper household management as noted by Lincoln (1990:357). Plato's emphasis on a proper household management means there were households that were improper and could not be a standard for the society. The Greek household "was the fundamental social, political, religious and economic unit of ancient Greece" (Aristotle, *Politics* 1.2), though its precise link into larger political and economic structures changed regionally and over time (Gordon Fee, 2002). More so, Aristotle (*Politics I.1254b*) notes that "the male is by nature superior and the female inferior, the male ruler and the female subject." Furthermore, Gordon Fee (2002) gives a helpful description of the household during the Graeco-Roman world. Fee postulated that the household was a place of production, run by a man, wherein slaves, women, and children existed in hierarchal relationships that benefitted the male-dominated household business. By implication, family life before and during Paul's time appears not to be based on companionship, but existed for the purposes of businesses, bearing children and maintaining the household structure in accordance with the Graeco-Roman structure.

Howard Marshall (186) argues that the 'secular household tables directly addressed only the duties of the party in authority (not the subordinate wife, children, or slaves) and served only the interest of the patriarch.' Paul in one way appears to be writing against the Roman Empire's

secular household but ended up reaffirming the subordinate status of a wife with her submission in everything (Ephesians 5:25). Aristotle (Aristotle, *Pol.* 1.1253b) further notes:

Now that it is clear what the component parts of the state are, first of all to discuss household management; for every state is composed of households... The investigation of everything should begin with the smallest parts, and the primary and smallest parts of the household are master and slave, husband and wife, father and children.

This idea of the Greeks household/family was fully integrated with religion and politics; they believed stability in these aspects of life was based on honouring all of the deities, local and national, to ensure their own safety and prosperity. Consequently, Lincoln (1990:358) observed that “in Greco-Roman culture, wives, children and slaves were expected to accept the religion of the man who is head of the household, the *paterfamilias*, and so religious groups that attracted women and slaves were particularly seen as potentially subversive of societal stability.” That was why there were several religious cults in the Roman Empire and several households having their deities, where they worshipped with the Emperor as the head.

However, within the religious settings men and women were not considered equals and did not exist (majority) in loving marriage relationships as we understand them to be in the 21st century. Likewise, Lin Foxhall (729) notes that a Greek household (*oikos*) “included many non-kin members, of lower, non-citizen status.” Mark Golden (2011:135) concurs that the Greek *oikos* comprised the “house and the family members resident within it but also, property, including slaves.”

From Aristotle down through the era of the Roman Empire, from Stoicism to Hellenistic Judaism, the discussion of household codes followed a typical pattern: the man was intended by nature and divinely so, to rule over the woman, children, and slaves as husband, father, and master (Moses Iliya Ogidis, 2020:1-2). In the Graeco-Roman world, the family was viewed as the basis for the state stability, and this was important to this present study, because “proper”

household management was regarded as crucial to the social and political hierarchical order of the Roman Empire. Any change was considered a potential threat to the Empire (Lincoln, 1990:358). The foundational nature of the household management/code is further seen in the pattern it provided for the structure and definition of larger political institutions in the Roman Empire. Therefore, any change in the pattern of the ideal household hierarchy is detrimental to the stability of the state and Empire since the model was used to stabilize the state.

Thus, Paul's words to the believers at Ephesus, regarding household relationships address a specific context and culture quite different to our own; an interpreter needs to have great care when seeking to apply his instructions to our present circumstances (Fee, 2002), considering that in the wider society the household codes originally was designed to assist in preserving good order, the family being seen as a microcosm of society and as a basic unit in its structure, as noted by Best (1998:523). Most of the scholars and commentators of the household codes in Ephesians tended to focus on the ideal family during the Roman Empire without considering the single mothers. Does that mean such instruction of Paul in Ephesians 5:21-33 was not applicable to them? Or where do they fit-in within the context of Roman Empire? Or were they considered as a distortion to the societal order?

Any distortion of the ideal household therefore would destabilize the Roman Empire that is why Paul in Ephesians appears to have silenced the single mothers. This raises several questions in the mind of the researcher: was it intentional or unintentional that Paul only focuses on the ideal household and neglected the single mothers? Did he consider the single mothers as not complete household since they do not have a husband as the head? How are single mothers viewed in the Bible and during the Roman Empire? Less attention is given to the context of

single mothers within the text which appears they were been silenced by Paul as if they do not exist.

Single Mothers within ECWA

The Evangelical Church Winning All (ECWA) is one of the fastest-growing Christian denominations in Nigeria with over 10 million members globally. Currently, ECWA as of now is officially known as Association of Evangelical Churches of West Africa and later the Evangelical Church of West Africa. The denomination is built on the foundation of the Sudan Interior Mission (SIM), now Serving In Mission. The SIM came into being because of the vision of a godly woman and mother who had passion for the Gospel. These included Mrs Gowans through whom her son became the leader of the three pioneer missionaries to Nigeria (Mr Walter Gowans). The other missionaries were Messrs Thomas Kent and Rowland Bingham (Olatayo, 1999). Their passion and sacrifice for the Gospel gave birth to ECWA as a denomination in Nigeria which is spreading to other parts of the continents.

The ECWA minister's handbook (2012:76) states what the church upholds when it comes to marriage and family life: "marriage shall be recognized as a Holy estate and honorable in the sight of God. It shall not be entered into lightly of unadvisable (Ephesians 5:21-33)." This clearly shows how the household is viewed and the interpretation of Ephesians 5:21-33 within ECWA as a denomination giving prominence to the household with the husband, wife, and children and being silent when it comes to other forms of households. The traditional concept of family which is nuclear is made up of husband, wife and children appears to be facing challenges especially within the church and society that upholds the idea of a "complete home". The increase of alternative family, such as single mothers, widows, cohabitation, homosexual and lesbian, surrogate mothers among others, has posed a big challenge to ECWA which appear to view some

of them as sinners. ECWA minister's handbook (2012:77-78) buttresses that "any person or persons in ECWA not yet joined in holy matrimony, who engages in the act or acts of unchastely or incontinesces, shall be subjected to church discipline." This shows how the church (ECWA scholars, clergies and members alike) frowns at the act of sexual activities outside of marriage and prefers to be silent by only placing the individuals on church discipline.

To illustrate this, the ECWA women fellowship international Bible study book 3 states the experiences that parents especially mothers go through when their daughters become pregnant before marriage. The study (ECWA Women Fellowship International Bible study book 3, 19) states that

One of the most devastating experiences a mother can go through is having a daughter become pregnant out of wedlock. When this happens, unkind comforters mock, blame and accuse the mother of having failed to bring up their daughter properly. All these accusations make the parents angry and bitter towards their daughters. Sometimes, the daughter is thrown out of the house or she may lose her life in the process of terminating the pregnancy.

The church is not left out because it also constitutes the congregation and members either baptized or not, that came from the society. The ECWA minister's handbook (2012:78) also buttress that "no accredited ECWA minister shall join a couple when the bride to be is already pregnant, or when both have committed fornication. In like manner, disciplinary action shall be taken against any person or persons in ECWA." Several of the mainline churches (clergies, teachers and lay members) consider it a sin to even preach or teach about sex on pulpit because it is sacred even though people were doing it either "legally or illegally" (within marriage or outside). In most cases single mothers are considered as worst sinners just like the Pharisee in Luke 7:39 who called the woman "a sinner." When several of the clergy men and teachers within ECWA were asked about the place of single mothers within the church and interpretation of

Ephesians 5:21-33, majority argued that the text did not discuss about single mothers and any interpretation is considered heretic.²

Virtually single mothers within the church appear to be labelled, discriminated and stigmatised within ECWA. Such discrimination and stigmatisation is also found within the majority of churches where single mothers are given various kinds of punishment, penance and called various derogatory names. In most cases no programs are organized by the church clergy for single mothers, but programs for married couples, singles who are not single parents among others. Even though the church frowns and pays less attention when it comes to their spiritual nourishment for the single mothers, they go ahead to collect their offering and tithes, invites them for financial support. When it comes to acknowledging them in spiritual matters, they are classified as sinners.³ Discrimination and stigmatisation is said to come in various guises such as: name calling, parents disowning their girls, banishment, and denial. To illustrate such attitudes, Agunbiade *et al* (2009), listed some of the derogative words used by the Yoruba people in South-Western Nigeria to describe single mothers when they are pregnant. These words include: *oyun eleya/esin* (shameful or embarrassing pregnancy), *oyun ko yun* (unwarranted pregnancy) and *oyun ibanuje* (sorrowful pregnancy).

As stressed by Izugbara (2008), most Christians in Nigeria (not only within ECWA) believe that single motherhood is the most embarrassing of the negative outcomes associated with promiscuity and giving the family bad reputation just as stated in the ECWA women fellowship study book. Single women who become mothers when they are not married are considered to be wayward and the worst sinners within ECWA churches because they are the

² Clergy men council meeting at ECWA Lafia District Church Council held at Lafia on the 12/02/2021

³ Some single mothers discussion during Bible studies at ECWA Lafia District Church Council women fellowship conference February 2021 in Nigeria

type that goes about luring married men.⁴ The children are mostly considered as bastard and, irresponsible because the child is born out of wedlock. The mother is also considered irresponsible yet most people do not consider if it was rape case. Even when it was a rape case, most of the blame was on the lady and not the man, either the way she dresses among things.

The interpretation of Ephesians 5:21-33 therefore mainly focuses on the complete family which comprises of a husband, wife, and children. That is why the minister's handbook also states the same interpretation of the text to a complete home. This is due to what the article of practice states: "the sixty-six books of both Old and New Testaments are the inspired word of God, without error, in the words of the original writings, the complete revelation of God's will for the salvation of men and the divine and final authority for all Christian faith and practice..." Thus, any other mode of interpretation of the Bible especially Ephesians 5:21-33, is not welcome since the literal interpretation is silent about the current situation of family life. Being an evangelical as a denomination, a single mother household is perceived as not being a complete home because she is dangerous to the society as the single mothers within ECWA Lafia District Church Council. Their interpretation of the household codes in Ephesians 5:21-33 is also shaped by the ideology of a complete home where the single mothers also *other* themselves from the household.⁵ The idea of reading between the lines of the text is considered as heretic which shows that the single mothers have also accepted their position as sinners among other things they are experiencing. However, this paper aims at rereading the household codes to answer the main question of this paper which is: How re-interpreting Ephesians 5:21-33 helps single mothers reaffirm their position in Christ who is the head of the church from the text? Directly it

⁴ Some single mothers discussion during Bible studies at ECWA Lafia District Church Council women fellowship conference February 2021 in Nigeria

⁵ Ibid.

is noted that most ECWA churches are failing to be Christ in the world by failing to minister to, care for, encourage, and disciple the single mothers (ECWA Women Fellowship International Bible study Book 3, 19)**Interpreting Ephesians 5:22-33 through Christ Love and Relation to Women**

Using the analogy of Christ love for the church, it is important to note the teachings of Jesus and the redemptive history of God's work in interpreting the household codes in Ephesians 5:21-33 with regards to single mothers household. Christ as the head of the church and how He relates particularly with women that are considered sinners in the gospels as key to interpreting Ephesians 5:21-33 regarding single mothers. This is to show that Jesus Christ did not *other* people whom the society tags as sinners, particularly how Paul wrote within the context of Graeco-Roman ideology of household management that is complete of a man, woman, children, and slaves and nothing was said about single mothers whom this paper considered it as *othering* within Ephesians 5:21-33. This paper examines how Jesus' ministry addressed social relationships with women of low status in the Graeco-Roman society. The life and ministry of Jesus offers a better interpretation of Ephesians 5:21-33 a single mother's household as vital to interpreting what it means to be human and having a household where there is no male as head, and what it means to be created in the image of God in connection with God's love and other human beings (Lisa Baumert, 2011. 22).

The challenge when reading Ephesians 5 is that most interpreters/readers go with familiarity into the passages due to the fact that it has often been used in marriages, seminars and weddings and still continues to-date. Most scholars and interpreters do not pay attention to the silent voices within and outside the household (other form of households) in the Roman Empire and comparing them with the complex reality of the traditional African family in this case

Nigeria. The understanding of the significant relationships that has been forged within human culture and experiences, which may say something quite different from what Paul intended, is significant to this paper. These approaches give more insight to the text and shape the kinds of questions interpreters and readers ask of the text even before they begin reading it.

Ephesians 5:21-33 in this paper is interpreted only based on the household section but with the entire letter in mind noting that Paul was writing to the saints which single mothers are included, since they are also followers of Christ as noted above. Paul addresses the saints without breaks till the end of the letter. Timothy Gombis (2005:318) argued persuasively that the letter of “Ephesians focused more on the internal life of the new community rather than with relationships with outsiders.” When considered from such perspective then the single mothers that are Christians are included in this new community of faith and should not be judged like the secular world even though not all misjudged them. Gombis (2005:319) further notes that Paul in this passage “is laying out a policy for the new humanity within the household of God, painting in broad strokes a vision for how believers ought to conduct themselves in this new communities which Christ is the head.”

The structure of Ephesians 5:21–33 is simple but critical when it comes to interpreting with regard to single mothers because it unearths their silent voices that have been *other* within the text and the entire letter. Paul in chapter five begins with a governing imperatival participle structure. The participle is grammatically dependent on the imperatival construct found in Ephesians 5:18: “Do not be drunk (μεθύσκεσθε) with wine which is an imperative, and also follows with another imperative ‘but be filled (πληροῦσθε) with the Spirit’” (Lincoln, 1990:365). More so, Peter O’Brien (1999:386) stated that, “Be filled with the Spirit” is then developed with five present active participles of means, manner, or result: “speaking (λαλοῦντες) with one

another,” “singing and making music (ᾄδοντες καὶ ψάλλοντες),” “giving thanks (εὐχαριστοῦντες) always to God,” and “submitting (ὑποτασσόμενοι) to one another.” Such instruction by Paul is all inclusive of human being irrespective of social status, gender, race etc. Single mothers that are followers of Christ are part of such instruction that Paul is giving to the saints in Ephesus.

The emphasis of this paper is placed on Ephesians 5:25-28, it buttresses the work of Christ to the church. As Lincoln (1990:373-74) notes, the “Christological grounding and a further lengthy elaboration, in the course which the exhortation to love occurs twice more.” The love that Paul made reference to in this context is the *agape* and not *eros or philia*. Ephesians reinforces this by showing the radical extent of that love through its analogy with Christ’s love for the church (Lincoln, 1990:374). Using the analogy of Christ and the church within the context of the household has prompted the researcher to consider how Christ relates with women that are considered sinners in the gospels. For instance, in John 4:1ff, for instance, on the conversation between the Samaritan woman and Jesus at the well of Jacob. She had five husbands yet Jesus did not judge her. Rather, He was interested in her spiritual life and her making it right with God. Later on, in John 4:28-30, the woman became a missionary to her people, calling them to come see a man who told her everything she ever did. Could this be the Messiah? The woman can be equated to a single mother who was busy looking for a man to take care of her, then she meets with Jesus who changed her life and testimony.

Furthermore, the story in John 7:53-8:11 tells of how a woman was caught in the very act of adultery, but only the woman was brought, without the man she was committing the act with. The Pharisees' aim was to trap Jesus, but His attitude towards this sinful woman gave another impression of her. Jesus said in John 8:7b “let him who is without sin among you be the first to

throw a stone at her” (RSV). This is a true reflection of how Christians are to behave, not judging people because of the sin they commit, forgetting that all humanity have “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Roman 3:23 RSV). Jesus did not condemn her as her accusers did but treated her with love, compassion, and kindness, forgiving her sins and setting her free. Similarly, in Luke 7:36-43 we find a woman who anointed Jesus’ feet and the Pharisee called her a sinner as if she did not have a name. Still, Jesus treated her with grace and love.

Therefore, the Greek word “ἀγαπάω” (unconditional love) that is used in Ephesians 5:25 appear not to be the norm as used in Greco-Roman household Codes to describe a husband’s responsibility to his wife (Lincoln, 1990:374). This word has a strong sense of self-sacrifice rather than sexual. This is not only evidenced by the lexical force of the word, but by the surrounding context – to love as Christ loved (Amold, 2010:383). The extent of Christ’s love for the Church should not be compared with sexual. Human erotic love, which is not up to the level of self-sacrifice and in giving up one’s life. The word “ἀγαπάω” (unconditional love) does not imply a love which is intense, pleasurable, and ecstatic. Therefore, since the love is not sexual, it includes single mothers that are followers of Christ Jesus as also shown how Christ relates with women that are referred to as sinners. Christ can hence be equated to the head of single mothers’ households; they are to receive instructions and teaching from Christ, being the head of the body – the church, because Christ also showed *agape* love to them.

Giving the analogy of Christ and the church, Elizabeth Schussler (1983:266) avers that “the dividing wall of the Temple, which is here projected into the whole cosmos and into the structure of the universe, is broken down, and a new unified humanity has come into existence in the church.” The new humanity through which Christ broke down the dividing wall is also inclusive of single mothers that Paul silenced their voices within the households. They are to

love Christ, the head of the church, and head of their households, since they do not have a physical male as head of their families/households. ECWA church needs to understand that being a single mother is not something most of the ladies desire - some are rape cases, crises, among other circumstances that are beyond their control. There is need for acceptance through showing the love of Christ to them because they are also part of the Church He died for.

Implication for ECWA as a Denomination

ECWA as a denomination needs to fulfil its primary goal as stated in its constitution and By-Law (2019:2) which reads: “the singular goal of ECWA is to glorify God.” To glorify God means creating a safe space for everyone, specifically the single mothers within and outside the church. Since the single mothers are part of the ministry, God calls the Church to be involved in doing. The Church needs to fulfil this mandate through inclusive reading and interpretation of Ephesians 5:21-33 concerning single-mother households, because a household should not be defined by the presence of a male head. As long as the household has leadership, irrespective of gender, everyone deserve to be shown the love of God.

Therefore, ECWA should therefore learn from the life of Jesus Christ and how He treated the women that society called sinners. The church is to represent Christ on earth base on how He lived His life on earth and not as many Christians deem fit. The church needs to understand that single mothers, having repented from their sins, are also part of this community that Paul is referring to in the letter to the Ephesians. Even if they have not repented, it is the duty of the church to show them love and bring them back into the family of God if they think they have wandered away. Just like what Mercy Oduyoye (1993:36) observe that

The Bible speaks of God and God dealings with the universe and human beings realities. The Bible is the written source of theology, and it challenges, confirms, corrects, modifies, and reshapes the belief in God that informs Africa’s own religion, culture, politics, society and causes those who read it trying a fresh approach to God and Christian way of life. The Bible is considered within the African society as the Word that gives life.

The word of God aims at meeting every human being irrespective of their situation and challenges in life, to correct and reshape personalities including single mothers to His glory. It is the duty of the Church (ECWA) to know that discriminating and stigmatizing of single mothers is a sin, Jesus said in Luke 19:10 “for the Son of Man came to the universe to seek and save the lost” (the researcher paraphrased the verse). The ministry of the church should hence be focused on seeking and saving the lost sheep of God, which includes single mothers, if the church considered them to be lost. Taking after the attitude of Christ will give ECWA leadership (pastors, teachers and members) a better way of relating as Jesus did in bringing such people to God and not judging them. Reading and interpreting the household code of Ephesians 5:21-33 through the lenses of single mothers gives a better theological understanding of their place in the heart of God. Just as one of the Articles of faith and practice of ECWA (2012:2) as a denomination reads: “the Holy Spirit’s ministry is to glorify God in the life of the believers as He guides, instructs, empowers, and gives spiritual abilities for service.” This service includes reaching out to single mothers within and outside the church with the agape love of Jesus that welcomes everyone especially those that the church frowns at.

In the words of Dinah Abbey-Mensah (1997:180), “the clergy and the laity that are involved in preaching the gospel should use the pulpit to speak on issues which concern the gathered religious community and relate these to their faith and tradition.” ECWA as a denomination through the clergies and teachers needs to teach Biblical beliefs and spirituality as crucial elements in the overall health of every living soul, and single mothers also need this spiritual nourishment for their growth. The full development of an individual’s spiritual potential takes place in the context of warm human relationships in the congregation. The household is vital when it comes to the acceptance of single mothers within the family, hence the church,

which is to be modelled after the lifestyle of Jesus Christ love. Their acceptance within the household also contributes to the way and manner the church welcomes the single mother.

When ECWA clergies and teachers cannot find effective ways to minister to diverse families, and non-traditional families partners as Jesus did, then they are failing the sheep that Christ placed under their care. ECWA as a denomination needs to re-evaluate how the clergies and members conceive single-mother households because they are doing a disservice to families that are lacking pastoral care; churches' numbers will dwindle if they only focus on reaching traditional nuclear families. ECWA churches need single-mother households as much as a full household needs the support of churches (Townes Stephanie, 2017). Such theology from the household codes in Ephesians for single mothers is more of biblical and practical theology which the church needs in order for them to thrive and survive in the 21st century family dynamics.

Conclusion

The household code in Ephesians 5:21-33 when interpreted from the analogy that Paul noted of Christ and the church, an interpreter discover that the church is all inclusive of single mothers. This paper was able to show that when the model of Christ and how He relates with women in the gospels is used to interpret the household code, it will show a different interpretation where single mothers are included. This paper also shows that during the Old and New Testament there were various categories of single mothers including during the Graeco-Roman period when the letter is located. Therefore, ECWA needs to follow the model of Christ's sacrificial love, and show it show to single mothers and stop viewing them as the worst sinners. Christ is the head of the single mother's' households and they can receive instructions directly without having a male head in the home. When single mothers are fully included as part of the

Church which Jesus Christ loved and died to redeem for the Kingdom of God, then ECWA will be able to transform the society. ECWA needs to include such interpretation of Ephesians 5:21-33 because single mothers are also a household irrespective of the categories they fall under. The churches are to be activists for single mothers, teaching the dignity of human beings, and all are created in the image and likeness of God. Churches are to be a catalyst for societal transformation. The interpretation of Ephesians 5:21-33 should actively work towards making single mothers part of the household of God and the church should focus on transforming and supporting single mothers in every way possible.

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