

Ephesians 5: 21-33 and Gender Equity: Towards a Mutual, Egalitarian and Gender-Balanced Church Leadership

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to assess some selected readings of Ephesians 5:21-33 household code, which favours male authority and control over women. Such interpretations have been informed by the Graeco-Roman and Jewish male-dominated household management but they cause exclusion and alienation of women from church leadership. These interpretations are accepted in the African context, wherein patriarchal leanings are by the least undeniable. The African patriarchal setting assents to male supremacy and female inferiority, yet women are recognized as household managers. In contrast, Ephesians 5:21-33 transforms Graeco-Roman and Jewish household management by endorsing mutual submission between husband and wife based on love and respect. The text does not exclude women from church leadership but it rather reveals that Christian gender relations must be distinct from those of non-Christians. Men and women must lead so as to unfold God's redeeming activity through Jesus Christ.

Key Words: *Gender Equity, Mutual, Egalitarian, Gender-Balanced leadership, Household Codes, Household Management, Church Leadership.*

Introduction

Women have been excluded and alienated from church leadership unremittingly such that it seems as if the principal role of men is leadership while that of women is submission (CBE, 2010, pp. 33–36; Groothuis, 2005, p. 302; Chakkuvarackal, n.d.). Ephesians 5: 21-33 has been read through a patriarchal lens and as a result, the text has been used to exclude and alienate women from church leadership. This paper uses the hermeneutics of suspicion to reject the idea that women cannot and are never meant to lead in family, church and society. The paper first explains the hermeneutics of suspicion. It secondly analyses Graeco-Roman and Jewish household management, which form the background of Ephesians 5: 21–6:4 household codes. It then explains the management of the household in the African context where Ephesians 5: 21-33 has been appropriated and interpreted to favour male leadership in church and to reinforce women submission. Thirdly, the paper re-reads Ephesians 5: 21-33 to demonstrate that the text does not exclude or alienate women from church leadership. Rather, it alters former biased gender relations, replacing them with equity, mutual and egalitarian gender relations. Fourthly, the paper briefly explains the role of the family in the formation of leaders. Finally, it concludes that the teaching of Ephesians 5:21-33 is that men and women must lead side by side so as to unfold the redeeming activity of God through Christ.

Theoretical Framework: The hermeneutics of Suspicion

The hermeneutics of suspicion holds that the literal or surface-level meaning of a text is an effort to hide the partisan or unjust interests that the interpretation of the text preserves (Ricour, 1970, pp. 32-35). Therefore, it approaches both the text's insinuations and interpretative history with suspicion (Martin, 2015. p. 38; Dube, 2012, pp. 1-4; Green, 2003, pp. 973, 984).

It also exposes the disguised, partisan or unjust interests and lopsided claims interpreters make and as a tool for distanciation, it expedites an objective interpretation (see Bryan, 2014, pp. 25-39; Scott-Baumann, 2011. pp. 59-78). Also, it demands for a critical investigation of the commonly held meaning of a text so as to reveal or create a new layer of understanding. It does so by searching what is beneath the surface so as to reveal a more authentic and biblical angle of a text's meaning. In other words, it seeks to bring the text to the "world in front of the text, a world that opens up new possibilities of being" (Stewart, 1989, p. 306).

The method also seeks to discourage the interpreter's pre-understandings from veiling objectivity (Robinson, 1995). It invites the interpreter to be suspicious of his or her biases so as to avoid imposing a meaning foreign to the text. This helps to verify whether the text is saying what it seems to be saying (Ben-Menahem, 2005, p. 14). The method allows the reader to problematize the interpretations of biblical texts that may have been laden with the interpreter's pre-understanding so as to decode meaning beyond them. This is crucial because when reading a text, especially the familiar one, it is possible to reedit casually and finally freeze its meaning. Thus, to approach a text with suspicion is to ask whether what it seems to say is genuine (Robinson, 1995).

From the aforesaid, the hermeneutics of suspicion is suitable to the study of Ephesians 5:21-33. It inspires suspicion about whether the text endorses exclusion and alienation of women from church leadership. This doubt is based on the fact that women were leaders in some New Testament churches (Wells, 2017. p. 179; Tamez, 2012, p. 77). It is therefore important to know why women are now excluded from church leadership. It is also crucial to verify whether Ephesians 5:21-33 permits male superiority and female inferiority and what informs readings against a mutual, egalitarian and gender-balanced church leadership.

But it is crucial to first examine the management of households in the Graeco-Roman, Jewish and African context. This helps to confirm whether they may have inspired reading Ephesians 5:21-23 in favour of male superiority, which leads to the exclusion of women from church leadership.

Household management in Graeco-Roman, Jewish and African context

The management of the Graeco-Roman household, which was seen as the microcosm social unit whose structure was to be reflected in the larger society and in nature, was male dominated. According to Aristotle (*Politics* 1.1253b), proper management of the household was highly esteemed since the analysis of everything had to begin with its smallest part. The smallest parts of the household were the master and slave, husband and wife, father and children, but the household codes affixed limits to their partnership. The city-state comprised of households and the partnership between master and slave, husband and wife, father and children was vital for a well-managed city-state. The relations between citizens were typified by the relationship between sons in a household. This made citizens to care for each other and for their city-state. If the city-state was to have unity, harmony had to exist in the family. Yet according to Plato (*Republic* II.369B, D; III.414D; 415A-D; IV.431C) and Aristotle (*Politics* 1.1253b, 1254a 8-24; 1259b 25-35), unity in the family was only achieved if slaves, children and wife submitted to the authority of the family head, also known as *pater familias*. Submission was maintained by differentiating between political and domestic justice. Domestic justice was hierarchical where the husband was higher than the wife hence the wife was to submit and be ruled. But the relationship between husband and wife was not like that of slaves and children.

The father was an absolute ruler, but who was to rule the slaves with mercy, the children by right of affection and seniority and the wife as a free member of the society (see Plato, *Republic* II.369B, D; III.414D; 415A-D; IV.431C; Aristotle, *Politics* 1254a 8-24; 1259b 25-35; Aristotle, *Ethics*. I.8: V.5-V10). Therefore, the male leader, who executed the roles of master, husband and father, also had complete control and authority over his wife, children and slaves. These were his servants for the good of the household (Plutarch, *Crasus*, 2.6-7). The wife was legally inferior to her husband and laws that outlawed women from adultery and politics were not required for their husbands (Winter, 2003, pp. 44, 51-52; Bauman, 1994, pp. 105-109). This nurtured patriarchy where the male family leader enjoyed ultimate and unlimited power over the other members of the household (Alföldy, 1988, p. 5).

The male dominated household prevailed among the Jews, but it demoted wives into servants. Philo (*Apology* 7.3) notes that wives were to serve their husbands, though not being insulted by them, but in the spirit of reasonable obedience in all things. Also, parents were to rule their children for their benefit. Josephus (*Against Apion* 2.25.201) held that scripture deemed women as inferior and submissive.

For saith the Scripture, “A woman is inferior to her husband in all things”. Let her; therefore, be obedient to him; not so that he should abuse her, but that she may acknowledge her duty to her husband; for God has given the authority to the husband.

However, the scripture that Josephus mentions does not exist in the Old Testament. Perhaps this explains the reason why he (*Ant.* 5.2.200–6.1.210) recognized Deborah as a prophetess but ignored all reference pointing to her popularity as a judge (Jdg 4–5). Josephus, as it is evident from his writings (*Antiquities* 4.15.219), did not allow women to testify before a judge leave alone imagining a woman being a judge.

However, Philo (*The Special Laws* III, XXXI.170-1717.3) recognized leadership of men and women, but men's leadership was greater.

There are two kinds of state, the greater and the smaller. And the larger ones are called really cities, but the smaller ones are called houses. And the superintendence management of these is allotted to the two sexes separately; the men having the government of the greater, which government is called polity; and the women that of the smaller, which is called oeconomy. Therefore let no woman busy herself about things which are beyond the province of oeconomy, but let her cultivate solitude, and not be seen to be going about like a woman who walks the streets in the sight of other men, except when it is necessary for her to go to the temple, if she has any proper regard for herself, and even then let her not go at noon when the market is full, but after the greater part of the people have returned home; like a well-born woman, a real and true citizen, performing her vows and sacrifice in tranquillity, so as to avert evils and to receive blessing.

Of course, women were not to go to the temple as leaders but as those who, if possible not to be seen, and if seen, not to be heard. Philo (*The Special Laws* III, XXXI.169) discloses that market places, council chambers, courts of justice, large companies and assemblies of many clouds as well as life in the open air full of disputes and actions relating to war and peace were suited to men. But taking care of the house and staying at the house were proper duties of women and who could not go beyond the vestibule and outer court.

Philo (*On Abraham*, XX.109, 116) and Josephus (*Against Apion*, 2.18.174) were defining the perfect and decent woman who could fit into the Jewish idea of a well-managed household. Nobody in such a household, where the leader is a man described as wise, would be slow in performing his or her duties, especially hospitality. But in the performance of their duties, everyone should perform them in obedience to their master as the sailors obey their captain. The values placed on the male head of the family were decisive in the formation and grounding of children. The authority of the father as the master of the house was based on the law.

The above raises a question on whether the household of the early church Christians were in harmony with the Graeco-Roman and Jewish idea of household management. During the early church, family and church leaders were mainly male. There were sharp polemics against women usurping the role of men and New Testament household codes were cited to keep women in a docile position (Davidson & Dowley 2005, p. 306). However, Clarke (2008, p. 137) notes that early Christian households' settings gave the model for church leadership where heads of the households became overseers of the house-churches. Yet it is obvious that the leaders of the house-churches were not necessarily men. Women such as Chloe (1 Cor 11: 11), Phoebe (Rom 16: 1), Priscilla with her husband Aquila (1 Cor 16: 19) and Nympha (Col. 4: 15) were house-church leaders (Wood, 2011; Amadi-Azuougu, 2007, p. 98). Conceivably, the sharp polemics against women leadership was induced by the Graeco-Roman and Jewish household management, but which was not informed by biblical teachings. But as illustrated below, the early church was at odds with the ways things were done in its Graeco-Roman and Jewish background.

Since Ephesians 5:21-33 has been received and read in the African context, it is only fair to probe how African households are managed. But as wa Gatumu (2008, pp. 8-11) notes, Africa is a vast continent with different cultural shades though it offers pictures of diversity, unity and variety. So, the African context combines rich and diverse, but related cultures and worldviews. Yet there are indications that allow for the generalisation of sub-Sahara African cultures and worldviews. What ensues in one culture may be familiar and identifiable to other cultures. As such, Mwaniki and Mouton (2015, pp. 361-362) observe that the interpretation of the Ephesians household code through the often unquestionable patriarchal assumptions has continued to marginalize, oppress and brutalize God's people, especially in Africa.

Interestingly, household management in most African cultures is an affair of women despite that traditional household management system is patriarchy. But the African culture dictates on the position and role of women and men. Women are supposed to totally submit to their husbands' leadership, which is extended to every male in the society (see Mwaniki& Mouton, 2015, pp. 347-349). As such, the idea of male superiority and women inferiority has permeated and captured not only the mind-set of the non-Christian African, but also of African Christians. The language of wives submitting to their husbands is taken literary and readings that seem to exclude women from leadership are very popular. Regrettably, such readings not only falsify Scripture, but also lead to abusive practices, which are easily mistaken as scriptural (Maisiri, 2016, pp. 7, 19-31, 33, 46-66; Achiro, 2014, p. 9; Omara, 2005, p. 150).

Yet women play a key role in household management, although patriarchal leadership is forceful (Wright, 2015, p. 243; Vaughan, 2005, p. 354). The message that women get from almost all spheres of life is that they are inferior. Kaabwe (2003, p. 210) notes a strong male-controlled culture in households, communities and schools where little or no confidence is given to women.

Men have greater honour as authority figures appropriate for leadership but women are consigned to situations that need patience, openness and sympathy like at home. Ande (2010, p. 124) notes that the images of “family” and “father” are exploited to establish male authority. They have also been understood as the manipulative tool for misuse of power and authority. As such, women continue to experience patriarchal autocracy that ensures unequal control and distribution of resources between men and women. In spite of this, women are expected to be responsible for the management of the household yet they do not have a voice when it comes to the allocation of household funds (Wells, 2006, p. 88; Daines & Seddon, 1993, p. 15). So, while women manage the household, they do it on behalf of their husbands, who remain as the heads of the household. Women are thus used like men’s remote control through which they manage the household. They are relegated to an inferior status and are excluded from leadership roles beyond household management (Wasike, 2001, p. 179).

According to Makama (2013, pp. 116-117), patriarchy in the Nigerian context (but which is related to almost every African context) trains men for leadership activities but it trains women for domestic activities and for roles ascribed to them by culture. This affects women later in life, making them to lose self-confidence and worth and to have low self-esteem. She avers that gender inequality and bias that excludes women from governance and politics are dangerous for national cohesion, progress and development. Yet patriarchy boosts acceptance of readings that exclude and alienate women from church leadership. It not only dictates gender relations, but also creates male control in structure of human existence. It justifies downgrading women in education, economy, labour market, politics, business and family. This makes women suffer from issues such as domestic violence and exclusion from family-based inheritance. It has also made women not to lead side by side with men. As such, gender equity has been of lesser concern despite the constitutional obligation for affirmative action in some African countries such as Kenya and South Africa (Wells, 2006, pp. 86-88).

Therefore, although women are the ostensible household managers, this has been a barrier to their getting management and leadership roles in the family, church and society. Apparently, patriarchy and the male-dominated household management arising from Aristotelian politics may have influenced readings of Ephesians 5: 21-33 that favour male dominion and women submission.

Ephesians 5: 21-33 and Women Leadership

The New Testament household codes have been forceful in defining male leadership. MacDonald (2004, pp. 105) notes that household codes have not only been used to endorse church leaders, but also to deny women church leadership. She also notes that Ephesians and Colossians household codes have been identified as those which re-establish male superiority and women inferiority. Mwaniki and Mouton (2015, p. 347-359) note that the exclusion of women from church leadership rose from missionaries' theology on womanhood. This caused literal receipt of gender-biased biblical texts in Christian tradition. Kenyans appropriated the Pauline texts as a divine approval reinforcing women's subjection into patriarchal structures. According to Polaski (2005, p. 97), women's exclusion from church leadership arises because household codes have been read in the light of the Graeco-Roman literature and in a context of hierarchy and inequality. They have been read to buttress a hierarchical and androcentric social order where husband, father or master has formidable control of their wives, children and slaves. Berry (2016, pp. 12-15) notes that the habit to exclude women from leadership dates back to the age of Greek classical philosophy. During this era household harmony, as noted above, related to the city-state harmony. This swayed the readings of New Testament household codes.

According to Poythreas (n.d.), church leadership was destined for men and not for women.

He asserts,

Just as husbands and fathers ought to exercise godly leadership in their human families, so wise and mature men ought to be appointed as fatherly leaders in the church ... Men and not women are called on to exercise the decisive fatherly leadership as elders (Poythreas, n.d.).

He also argues that the theme of family relations in Ephesians, Colossians and 1 Timothy 3: 1-7 endorses men leadership and annuls that of women. He refers to the household analogy as a basic element in articulating the nature of Christian church order and its inferences indicate controlling church leadership. He holds that Ephesians 5:22-33 teaching on family leadership is vested in the husband and father. So, church leadership is for men who have already shown their abilities to lead in their families. Also, women must not be placed in authority in church as this is not in keeping with the general relations between men and women in marriage. He concludes that the difference between men and women in the context of marriage and family is indicative to different roles men and women may assume in church (Poythreas, n.d.).

Clearly, Poythreas does not regard Ephesians 5: 21, which requires mutual submission between husband and wife as a key element of the Ephesians household codes. His analysis is an example of how Ephesians 5: 22-33 has been read to silence women and to claim that men have absolute privileges over women (Seesengood, 2014, p. 531; Miller-McLemore, 2012, p. 247; Pieterse, 2009, p. 97; MacDonald, 2000, p. 146; Blomberg, n.d.). This makes gender roles to look as if they are God-ordained, notably on man's authority and woman's inferior domesticity (Groothius, 1997, p. 121).

However, the New Testament church did not follow the way things were done in its Graeco-Roman and Jewish milieu. Darden (2015, p. 196) argues that Jesus' dialogue with the Samaritan woman symbolizes the reversal of the "this world" social political order. It is an affirmation of the Johannine community's conflict with the then social order as it welcomed women's leadership. Weber (n.d.) avers that Christians during the New Testament era were at odds with both the culture and the law as they came to terms with what it meant to follow Christ. They were part of a "new humanity" where divisions of race and gender had been dissolved in mutual love for Christ and each other. Apparently, the New Testament denotes a radical deviation from the way things were done in the Graeco-Roman world (Finlan, 2013. P. 138).

Ephesians 5:21-31 shows that wives held a positive position and enjoyed unlimited freedom in Christian homes. Celsus even attacked Christianity for giving extreme freedom to women and children (Origen, *Contra Celsum* 3.55). So, even though Ephesians 5: 21-33 has been read through androcentric hierarchy and inequality to side-line women, it defies Graeco-Roman and Jewish hierarchical structures and nurtures the status of women (Berry, 2016, pp. 12-15). While it has ostensible subduing features, it has authentic liberating features such as mutuality of subjection, self-emptying of the husband and interdependence of head and body. Polaski (2005, pp. 101) asserts that the husband's sacrificial love to the wife cannot abide in a hierarchical setup.

Ephesians 5:21-33 directly challenged the social structures that allowed control and gagging of women, children and slaves from the context it emerged. It radically transformed social and gender relations in the family (Girard, 2000, p. 138).

As such, it gives the church of all times some moral integrity through which women and men can find newness from the mystery of the marriage between Christ and the church. Girard notes that this newness is based on a man leaving his father and mother to be attached to his wife. It is epitomized by Christ who left His Father's house to contract a relationship with people. This was founded on absolute self-giving, but which led Christ to the cross (Girard, 2000, p. 141). Thus, the relationship between husband and wife in Ephesians 5:21-33 had no parallel in the Graeco-Roman and Jewish cultures.

The image corresponds to what Paul refers to as the new creation (see Gal 6: 12-16; 2 Cor 5: 14-19; Col 3: 1-11), which is salvific and entails mutual relations between men and women. The new creation means a return to the original creation where God created male and female in his image and likeness. The new creation is not similar to the imperial ideology that stated that Caesar had inaugurated a new world (Jackson, 2016, pp. 38, 168). The implication of the new creation is that all human relations must be mutual and egalitarian since gender inequity has been broken (Slater, 2012, p. 121; Mwaura, 2012, p. 272; Kugler, 2012, p. 25; Kater, 1991, p. 47). However, the church, as a community founded on the concept of the new creation, has not embraced the fundamentals of the new creation.

The exclusion of women from church leadership, although being the majority, has been vibrant in church history (Mwaniki & Mouton, 2015, pp. 349-351; wa Gatumu, 2013, p. 66; Phiri, 2012, p. 225; Lux-Sterritt & Sorin 2012, pp. 1-4; Ndeda, n.d.; Kreider, 1995. P. 16; Grenz & Kjesbo, 1995, p. 42; Hsia; 1988, p. 145). Even during the present time, some denominations do not practice gender equity in leadership but instead they teach on the submission of women (Wilcox, 2013, p. 222; O'Reilly, 2012, p. 252; Hutchison, 2011, p. 197; Lucas, 2010, pp. 125, 142; Webb, 1999, p. 125).

But women's submission is not the fundamental idea in Ephesians 5: 21-33, where submission radically differs to that practiced in Graeco-Roman and Jewish households. In Ephesians, submission is captured through the Greek middle voice, whose inference is that the subject of the verb does the action for his or her own benefit (Porter, 1995, p. 67; Wallace, 1996, pp. 414-415). It calls for voluntary subjection to another but for the benefit of the one who submits. This is not similar to forcing an absolute hierarchy on husbands and wives because the point Paul is making is that no believer is inherently superior to any other believer, whether male or female (George, 2011, p. 107; MacArthur, 2005, p. 1701). Rather, it teaches them on how to retain the integrity of their newly redeemed relationship in a hostile but socially inevitable patriarchal context.

As Yonder notes, the proviso to submit or obey is always directed first to the one at the bottom side of the social ladder, the idea being that they have heard and comprehended a message that questions the subjection that they had been unable to challenge (Yonder, 1972, p. 178). Similarly, Girard avers that ὑποτασσόμενοι does not mean blind obedience either in civil society or church. It does not have a strong sense of control in human relationships. So, women and men must not find it shameful to be "subject" to one another due to social status or sex. The wife's subjection and fear of the husband must be seen as respect and adoration in a relationship absolutely renewed and deepened by the experience of faith in Christ (Girard, 2000, pp. 144-146). According to Padgett (2011, p. xvi), mutual submission and servant leadership resemble. Husbands are to behave like Jesus who submitted to wash his disciples' feet despite being their master. Mutual submission between husbands and wives is to take the role of a servant in the service of each other.

Unlike the Graeco-Roman Jewish and African households that demanded submission of women to the male head of the family, Ephesians 5: 21 demands mutual submission for husband and wife. Submission is not only for women but also for men hence “be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ” (Westfall, 2013, p. 577). The mutual submission, which results from being filled with the Holy Spirit (Eph 5: 28), is an admission that husband and wife are equal before God. Therefore, the relationship between men and women should be different from those of non-Christians and the patriarchal hierarchy that dominated the first century world (Rausch & Clifford 2003). The Graeco-Roman culture not only forced women to submit to their husbands, but also made it complicated for men to show emotions of love. It was derisive for a husband to express love emotions to his wife (Coontz, 2005, p. 77; Lindholm, 1997, p. 63; Burns, 1986, p. 286; Heaster, n.d.; Sharrock, n.d.).

On the contrary, Ephesians 5:21-33 obligates men to love, care and value their wives. Verse 28 implies a sense of duty since the inference of present indicative active third person plural verb $\phi\epsilon\acute{\iota}\lambda\omicron\upsilon\sigma\iota\varsigma$ is that a husband is to love his wife habitually, as the second person present active plural imperative $\acute{\alpha}\gamma\alpha\pi\tilde{\alpha}\tau\epsilon$ implies (Friberg, Bibleworks, *Version* 10.0.4.114; Gingrich, *Bibleworks Version* 10.0.4.114). This is fortified by the comment in Ephesians 5: 28-29), “he who loves his wife loves himself. For no man ever hates his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, as Christ does the church” (Reynolds, 2016, p. 63; Payne, 2015; Spencer, Tracy & Tracy, 2009, pp. 72-76). As such, Ephesians 5:21-33 is a paradigm shift to the social structure that excluded women from fully participating in day-to-day activities, including leadership (Lu, 2016, p. 9). It demands empowering women so that they can lead side by side with men. This is fortified by Romans 16: 1-16 and Philipians 4: 2-3, which typifies Paul’s famous statement in Galatians 3: 28 that in Christ there is neither male nor female but all are one in Christ (Johnson, 2012, p. 578).

Ephesians 5:21-33 not only upholds an egalitarian view of church leadership, but also an affirmative attitude to women leadership. It does not demand women to be led due to the comparison of husband-wife relations to that of Christ headship of the church (Lu, 2016, p. 9). Girard notes that Paul followed the Midrash tradition where “head” implies the idea of first place hence it does not have any idea of primacy, domination or honour but refers to chronological priority. He maintains that in Genesis 2, man is created before the woman in the first place hence Paul was using poetical dramatization to reveal that women and men are equal (Girard, 2000, p. 129). So, Ephesians 5: 21-33 is not about the husband’s headship but about the husband’s sacrificial and nurturing love.

As such, the husband-wife relationship is like that of Christ and the church. Logically, “husband is the head of the wife” has salvific implication when related to “Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Saviour” (Eph. 5:23). So, the husband’s headship must not be linked to control but to sacrificial and nurturing love to the wife. The husband is to love the wife as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for the church’s sanctification. A husband must care for his wife as he cares for his own flesh (see Gorard, 2000, pp. 125-152). Therefore, Ephesians 5:21-33 neither epitomizes a patriarchal structure of marriage nor offers a blueprint to exclude women in church leadership (Padgett, 2011 p. xvi; Hoehner, 2002, p. 2002). Rather, it nurtures a gender-balanced, mutual and egalitarian church leadership. The ostensible hierarchical structure does not give compelling powers like those given by Graeco-Roman and Jewish household codes to the male head (Hoehner, 2002, pp. 728-729). Both men and women can lead together on equal terms because they are equal before God (wa Gatumu, 2016, pp. 42-55).

The problem is that many women continue to experience resilient and real existential hitches in their effort to access leadership despite the many teachings and avowals on equity, equality, equal rights and opportunities (Mwaniki& Mouton, 2015, pp. 350-351; Painter-Morland, 2011, pp. 441-472). Yet the thought of Ephesians 5:21-33 is not to deny women leadership in church but it is on the unity of husband and wife (Bird, 2013, pp. 74-109). It calls men and women to biblical egalitarianism that leads to mutual and gender-balanced church leadership, which is not based on the hierarchy of roles (Pierce & Groothuis, 2012). Unlike in the Graeco-Roman, Jewish and African households where the husband controlled the wife, Ephesians 5:21-33 seeks to nurture women and men into a Christ-like maturity. It does not instruct husbands to control their wives but it foresees the actualization of a new humanity filled with the Holy Spirit and nurtured in Christ (Payne, 2015). It inspires men and women to mutually submit to each other as they submit to Christ in their social structures. This begs the question on why some churches exclude women from church leadership. Could this be as a result of the role the family plays in the formation of leaders?

The role of the family in the formation of leaders

The family is vital in the formation of leaders since the type of leadership practiced in the household largely determines how leadership in the church and the family is modelled. The leadership of the household also significantly contribute to the development of leadership identity (Ricks-Stott, H. I. et al., 2017, p. 283). If a household leadership is male dominated, this will lead to a quest of having a male dominated church leadership. In contrast, in a household where leadership is shared between men and women, then a church leadership that is mutual and egalitarian emerges.

Women and men have no problem to lead side by side. Yet a family can also copy the society from which it comes, though not really representing it. A community that excludes and alienates women from leadership may offer pressure to a family to adopt the community's leadership design (Wright, 2012, pp. 2-3). The church therefore, may have conformed to the design of leadership from the environment wherein she finds herself. But as a result of the new creation concept, the church must become a transformative community that helps families within her to value women as people created in the image and likeness of God and who have been redeemed through faith in Jesus Christ just like men. This will bring opportunities where men and women can lead side by side. This seems to be what Paul wanted to achieve through Ephesians 5:31-33.

Conclusion

Ephesians 5:21-33 does not exclude or alienate women from church leadership but it gives liberty to women without subjecting them to male control. It implies that leadership does not belong to particular gender. It is about shaping a situation that enables humanity to participate in leadership despite their gender. It also implies that leadership is about enabling both women and men to understand God's will and concern for humanity. It is an eye-opener to the fact that God calls men and women to leadership roles. As such, using any scripture to deny women the opportunity to lead is not only against humanity, but also ungodly. Men and women must lead side by side so as to unfold the redeeming activity of God through Christ.

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