

PROLEGOMENA FOR MEN AND WOMEN IN CHRIST

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Précis Neglected or misunderstood factors complicate any endeavor, including the interaction between men and women in the home, the church, and society. An unnecessary “edge” gets into discussions on this matter because of unconscious preconceptions about (a) the bases for self-esteem, (b) the nature of leaders and led and their interaction, and (c) the impact that love has on all interpersonal processes formal or natural.

Introduction

“Prolegomena” refers to ideas already in place before approaching a subject. They include what Paul references in Colossians 2:8, 28 as “*rudiments of the world*,” which probably refers to the all-pervasive notion of ontic dualism among Gentiles together with spin-offs like secret knowledge, “salvation,” and behavioral implications. In Galatians 4:3, 9, the expression evidently highlights the Judaizers’ belief that Paul is countering: the permanence of Mosaism and the placement of Messianism within it. In our own day, biological general evolution provides the starting point for scientific understanding. Viewpoints that counter that assumption create about the same response as Paul’s reference to resurrection did after his Areopagus speech (Acts 17:32). Until prolegomena get identified, addressed, and resolved, not much progress occurs.

Prolegomena are what “everybody” already thinks, so examining them does not happen. The situation becomes more difficult when people are not even aware of their assumptions. Attempts to investigate subsequent matters foment resentment, frustration, exaggeration, misrepresentation, even anger and division because advocates of opposing viewpoints do not make sense to each other. The disputants may suppose that the other positions must come from inappropriate motives, sheer ignorance, baseless emotion, arrogance, and the like. There is little interest in re-examining the subject because no conceivable reason exists for an alternate belief.

Figuring Self-Esteem

The First Prolegomenon. People’s sense of worth informs their attitudes and behavior toward other people. The conviction in this topic is that people typically base their self-esteem on success in competition with other people, on being “better than”: knowing more than, being smarter than, more athletic than, stronger than, better looking than, more famous than, of higher rank than, more successful than . . . , and they do not even realize they are doing it.

It shows itself in behaviors like trying to “take charge,” striving for the highest place in the “pecking order,” having to be the center of attention, insisting on some viewpoint they want to promote. It explains bullying, abusive behavior, mean-spiritedness, snobbishness, and practically

every negative behavior from interactions between individuals to relations between nations. People are unwilling to listen because, by changing their minds, they admit their opponent is “better than.” Competition as a basis for self-esteem exhibits the self-centeredness and selfishness that contrast to self-giving for the joy of others, that is, what love in the Golden Rule represents.

The whole competition endeavor is doomed because it works only for a minority since being best leaves out the majority. Besides, the ones presently better will lose status by aging. The style of living leads to a literal dead end. Additionally, it creates the adverse effect by fomenting division with other people who are apt to be operating in the same self-defeating manner.

Instead of competition with other people outside the self (pride), self-esteem comes from factors within the self, that is, (a) between responsibility assigned to “me” and fulfillment achieved by “me.” It comes also from (b) being loved by other people, especially by those whom “I” have first loved and experience the “love echo” from. (c) Helping other people brings its own satisfaction and fulfillment. It is part of the outward-directed life, which replaces the self-centeredness that competition expresses. That all derives from (d) being created in the image of God, which centers around the interpersonal capacity summed up in love.

This construction brings in a sliding-scale basis for self-esteem that eliminates differences in ability, personality, opportunity, environment, available help, and other factors beyond a person’s control. “Career” does not take precedence over family roles. The importance of providing and protecting does not get compared with nurturing. Who can even say which is the more important necessity in the whole? Everyone ends up fair and equal in their sense of worth; and even if they are not equally significant objectively, it does not matter to them subjectively. Neither jealousy nor pride arise. Egalitarianism and equalitarianism are too simplistic to provide the final word in figuring personal worth.

Leadership and Cooperation

The Second Prolegomenon. Too often, leadership is thought of in terms of authority, rank, power. That displaces attention onto controlling other people and slides back into competition behavior. It implies “putdown” to those not in charge, which grates against the self-esteem they naturally crave as well. A *National Geographic* issue illustrates the point by choosing “dominance” for household headship (April 2023, pp. 15-18) under patriarchy. That implies “submissiveness” as its correlate, together with its negative connotation. It suggests that if you are not in charge or do not have the opportunity to be in charge, you are not worth as much.

So, the second prolegomenon requires a corrected understanding of leading. Leadership is responsibility, not rank and control; authority only reinforces assigned responsibility for other people’s awareness. No responsibility, no authority, and nobody “in charge.” The proper perspective puts emphasis on accomplishing purpose. Being head is not a perk; it is an onus. It is not for stroking ego, but for getting the job done. “Servant leader” becomes the descriptor: servant to the goal and leader in responsibility for achieving it.

Those who work alongside the one held responsible show respect by acknowledging the other’s responsibility. As leadership fulfills responsibility; deference expresses cooperation. The

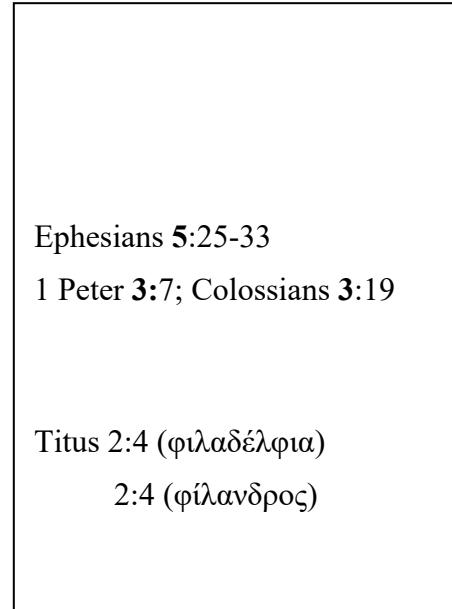
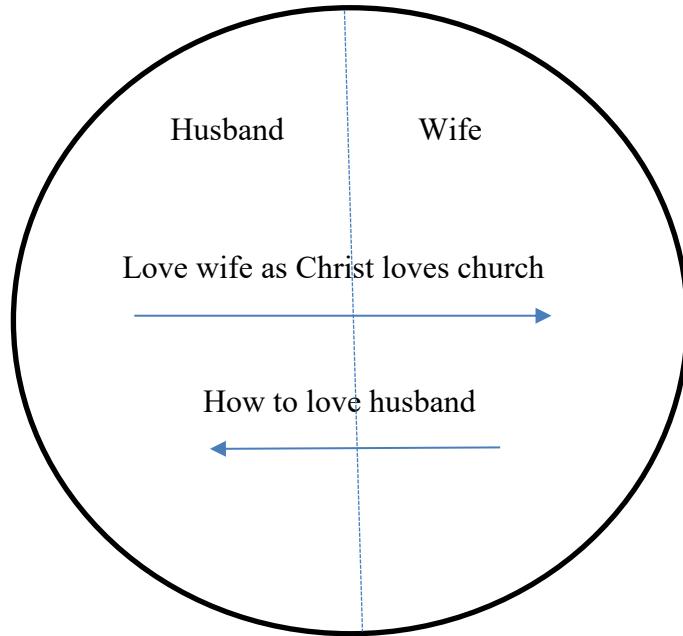
two aspects are defined together and operate in complementary fashion. So, the rest of the group does not stand in the way, challenge, argue with, clamor for their preferences, threaten to quit, try to overthrow, or “be difficult.” Suggestions are welcome, on the one hand, and willingness to listen exists, on the other hand. Truth is, the one leading does not always know what is best. Assigned responsibility avoids competition to establish dominance and the negatives that come with it. The “head” realizes that lasting success depends on influence anyway, regardless of what authority his “office” possesses. Without influence, authority will not accomplish much. As a practical fact anyway, most of what gets done in a healthy group occurs without much conscious appeal to authority flow. Some kind of division of labor evolves, the full range of activities gets covered, and a sense of freedom is “had by all.” Complementarianism describes the circumstance.

What happens in a family or church compares with how a college faculty operates in a university. A department head and the faculty members do not proceed on the assumption that the department head is the smartest, most educated, the best teacher, the one with the most seniority, the one that tells and does not listen. Everyone understands that the role calls for establishing a line schedule, choosing class offerings, assigning classes to various professors, and so on so everything gets covered. For that to succeed, the department head confers with professors about courses, time of day, what days, and the like. After all, the department head answers to a higher rank for the department’s quality of education. Otherwise, morale weakens, and efficiency and quality wane.

So, it is to everyone’s benefit to prioritize interpersonal factors. As in a college, so in a family and church. Not being leader is not a putdown, and being leader is not a perk.

The Love Context

The Third Prolegomenon. We have already referenced Jesus’ presentation about love in the form of the Golden Rule. To understand and appreciate parts and their interaction, we need to see the complete picture. Since love is most basic to all positive social interaction, it is likewise most basic to marriage and family function. The nature of the whole and the arrangement of its parts have a qualifying effect on how they work together. The diagram below combines the functioning of “Men and Women in Christ.” Although love sets the nature of all interpersonal operations, it does not always receive the attention it deserves in our topic. Besides getting rid of abuses that Peter and Paul warn against in their household teachings, love is the great equalizer, so competition does not reign, and sameness does not become the ideal. Love avoids exaggeration of difference, denial of relative gifting, and any division of labor that may stem from them. Love can allow for variance in applying the system and bail out some misunderstanding. This diagram pictures the situation, and then the subsequent observations wrap up the discussion.



The Second Great Commandment (Matthew 23:39-40) and Royal Law (James 2:8) as recast in the Golden Rule (Matthew 7:12) set the context for family, church, and all social operations. The Golden Rule calls for looking at the situation through the eyes of the other, not just (1) for following some rule we think the scripture teaches or (b) for doing what we want done to us; there is someone else involved here. It calls for projecting consciousness over behind the eyes of the other so we can go beyond the way we want to be treated, period, to the way we want to be treated in that person's different circumstance. That is a valuable point between men and women, and between leaders and led simultaneously. Moreover, love finds demonstration in the life of our Lord himself relative to his church. We are obliged to do no less with each other than he does with us. Without love, no pattern of organization eliminates the negatives that can creep into Christian living.

Epilogue

Identifying prolegomena creates the context for “Men and Women in Christ”: (1) understanding New Testament passages together with (2) identifying custom and culture originally and now. The hermeneutics between (1) and (2) involves decisions about (a) implied cultural limitation and (b) the advice-commandment distinction.