

A Third Look at Male Headship

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I recently listened to the sermon, "[A Second Look at Male Headship](#)" presented by a well-known Seventh-day Adventist pastor in which the point was made that biblically mandated male headship in the church has been superseded by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon women, empowering them to fulfill headship responsibilities.

The hermeneutic he is being guided by in his conclusion is: "A previous divine principle can be expanded or even superseded by a subsequent divine practice."

It is true that a previous divinely initiated practice can be superseded by a new divine practice. As the speaker points out, the Passover was superseded by the Lord's Supper. However, when this is done it is always communicated to us through a prophet of God and recorded in His Word.

We would need to be careful with this hermeneutic. For instance, if we saw what was perceived as Holy Spirit evidence (miracles, fire from heaven, etc.) that God was sanctioning Sunday as the new day of rest, could the previous divine principle of the seventh-day memorial of creation be set aside? Will the Holy Spirit, through divine practice, ever lead to actions that supersede or set aside the written Word? The answer

to this question is no, and it is most essential for us to understand this answer if we desire to be preserved from deception.

In the sermon, an attempt is made to support the cessation of male only headship with four exhibits from the Bible that are believed to demonstrate this new hermeneutic. Let's examine each in more detail:

Exhibit number one for this theory is the instruction that God gave to Moses found in Exodus 21:23, 24, "And if any mischief follow, then thou shalt give life for life, Eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot. . ."

The pastor shows how Jesus superseded this divine principle with a new divine practice:

Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also (Matthew 5:38, 39).

There is a problem with this first exhibit. The Sermon on the Mount from which this passage is taken deals with righteous personal conduct. In this passage, Christ is clearing up a confusion that had led people to think that conduct proper for the civil government--that is, taking vengeance--was also proper for an individual.

Even the choice of words used by Christ indicates that He was addressing a confusion, or a distortion, that was commonplace. Several times in the rest of the Sermon on the Mount Christ used this same "you have heard it said" figure of speech in connection with clarifying or intensifying various biblical teachings.

The reference to "an eye for an eye," taken from Exodus 21:24, 25, deals with how the magistrate must deal with a crime. Namely, the punishment must fit the crime. The religious leaders of Christ's day had twisted a passage that applied to the government and misused it as a principle of personal revenge.

With sadness Jesus looks into the upturned faces before Him. He notes the spirit of revenge that has stamped its evil imprint upon them, and knows how bitterly the people long for power to crush their oppressors. Mournfully He bids them, 'Resist not him that is evil: but whosoever smiteth thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also' (Matthew 5:39).

These words were but a reiteration of the teaching of the Old Testament. It is true that the rule, 'Eye for eye, tooth for tooth' (Leviticus 24:20), was a provision in the laws given through Moses; but it was a civil statute. None were justified in avenging themselves, for they had the words of the Lord: 'Say not thou, I will recompense evil.' 'Say not, I will do so to him as he hath done to me.' 'Rejoice not when thine enemy falleth.' 'If he that hateth thee be hungry, give him bread to eat; and if he be thirsty, give him water to drink.' Proverbs 20:22; 24:29, 17; 25:21, 22, R.V., margin (*Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 70, emphasis added).

Matthew 5:39 is not a new teaching, presenting a principle of action that is higher and holier than what is found in the Old Testament. Ellen White clarifies this for us, reminding us that "These words were but a reiteration of the teaching of the Old Testament." Nothing new here. The provisions for the punishment of the evildoer by the state still stand. She lets us know that Jesus is teaching us in this text that we must not harbor a spirit of revenge towards those who treat us unjustly. Avenging oneself versus just civil retribution--these are distinctly different from each other. One is prohibited and the other is commanded.

Exhibit number two: Moabites and Ammonites were not to enter into the congregation of the Lord forever (Deuteronomy 23:3). And because Ruth was a Moabite and married Boaz this proves that "a previous divine principle can be expanded or even superseded by a subsequent divine practice."

No principle or command of God was superseded by Ruth becoming a part of the Israelite nation. All who were willing to turn to God were accepted. True, because she was a Moabite, she was forbidden to enter into the congregation of the Lord, but so

were illegitimate children and men who had specific injuries, according to the two verses that precede Deuteronomy 23:3. Not being allowed to enter into the congregation of the Lord does not prevent a person from becoming a follower of God as a proselyte from another religion as Ruth did.

Exhibit number three: The pastor points out that the Passover was to be observed forever according to Exodus 12:24. Then he points out that the Passover was not observed forever, but it came to an end and was superseded by the Lord's Supper.

This is actually a good illustration for the hermeneutic under consideration. Yes, the Passover was superseded by the Lord's Supper. The Passover not only commemorated the deliverance from Egypt, but also looked forward to the deliverance from sin that the Messiah would provide. This happened when type met antitype in the death of the Son of God. Furthermore, in many biblical instances the word "forever" means until fulfillment or completion.

We would do well to note, however, that this change from Passover to the Lord's Supper was documented in the sacred canon when Christ told his disciples to do this in remembrance of Him.

The pastor's fourth and last exhibit has to do with the ending of the requirement of circumcision. The point is made that the previous divine principle and command (which differentiated Jews and Gentiles on the basis of circumcision) was no longer in force since the Holy Spirit was poured out on the Gentiles and Jews alike. The pastor believes that Peter in Acts 15 is teaching that a previous divine principle/command has been superseded by a subsequent divine practice, namely the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on uncircumcised Gentiles.

This begs the question--“Was the outpouring of the Holy Spirit ever restricted only to those who were circumcised?” Obviously the answer is no when we consider that the practice of circumcision was given simply as a sign of righteousness by faith. Abraham was given this covenant sign subsequent to his conversion. It was given to differentiate between those who served God and those who served Him not, whether they were Jew or Gentile. The disciples were slow to understand that God never intended that there be a wall of separation between Jew and Gentile. After the Holy Spirit was poured out on the Gentiles, Peter finally “gets it”--“Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him” (Acts 10:34, 35).

Is exhibit number four an example of this new hermeneutic? I fail to see how so. The practice of circumcision as a covenant sign was simply followed by the cessation of circumcision. When the Jewish nation’s probation ended in AD 34, so did this covenant sign of circumcision and this change was directed by the Holy Spirit in the Jerusalem Council, the modern day equivalent of the General Conference in session and recorded in the scriptures by a prophet of God. Circumcision was not superseded by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit as taught in the sermon.

At the conclusion of exhibit number four, this question is asked by the pastor: “Could it be that the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in these end-times is just as much a sign today that the previous divine principle of spiritual authority residing in male headship has been superseded by the subsequent divine practice of the Holy Spirit’s gifting of both genders?”

He believes we see compelling evidence that the gifts of the Holy Spirit are being poured out upon both men and women as elders and pastors, just as was prophesied in Joel 2 and Acts 2. He concludes,

that the day is coming--indeed is surely almost here--when the previous divine principle of ecclesiastical male headship will be superseded by the mighty and subsequent divine practice of the Holy Spirit's gifting of the second most authoritative gift in the church (see 1 Corinthians 12:28) upon both genders."

<http://media.pmchurch.org/media/2012-10-06.pdf>

Did functional male headship in the home or in the church come to an end at the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost? No, it was still taught in Paul's day. Did it come to an end in the time of the end when God established the Seventh-day Adventist Church? No, it was still taught by Ellen White. And in all these time periods, we see the Holy Spirit being poured out on both men and women. And both men and women prophesied as predicted by Joel. Should we expect that God will do away with male headship in our day? I see no reason from Scripture to believe this; rather I see God's original plan for male headship still in its place--clearly revealed in His Holy Word.

Three out of the four exhibits do not demonstrate the hermeneutic: "A previous divine principle can be expanded or even superseded by a subsequent divine practice." The only one that has merit is exhibit number three with regard to the Passover being superseded by the Lord's Supper. However it must be noted that this change happened within the boundaries of God's Word. We have a clear "Thus saith the Lord" as evidence.

Contrary to what this pastor taught, male headship in the home or in the church as taught in the Word of God cannot be changed just because we are impressed that the Spirit of God is indicating a change and/or that the Bible, in our opinion, predicts that such a change will happen in the last days. We must not trust the evidences of our senses and what we perceive to be the Holy Spirit's leading. Rather, we would do well to heed the counsel given in Isaiah 8:20, "To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them."

In conclusion, I hope we can see how dangerous this concept is that teaches us that we can supersede what is written with what we may perceive as the Holy Spirit's directing. With this idea Satan could take us down any path he chose to. I see this hermeneutic, as taught in this pastor's sermon, is just what is needed in order for Satan to get people to accept Sunday worship. With this teaching I can see a path that many could take that will cause them to exchange what is written for a new teaching because of a powerful display of "Holy Spirit" activity.

In the Contemplative movement that is coming into the churches of our land, including our own, people are being taught how to hear God speak directly to them. This sermon taught that God is speaking directly to us and is overturning what He directed the prophets to write in the Bible.

The Catholic Church understands that the Bible says something different from what they are teaching but they believe that "Holy Spirit" has a right to direct his church apart from the written Word and who can argue with the authority of the "Holy Spirit" if he is now instructing them to worship Mary or to keep Sunday holy.

We must not go down this path. We have something more sure than even a voice that comes down from heaven that we must take heed to, over and above the evidences of our senses:

And this voice which came from heaven we heard, when we were with him in the holy mount. We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts: Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost (2 Peter 1:18-21).

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE: John and Sharon Witcombe have ministered in churches in Washington and Oregon. John began to serve as a pastor in 1994. Presently they serve in Southern Oregon. Their daughter has recently blessed them with a grandchild.