


The New Ecumenism and God's Institutions


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Instructor: This corresponds to the handout and slides with the same name.

Introduction: We are studying Colossians 3:16-4:1 and its corresponding message in Ephesians 5:20-6:9. These verses lay down the basics for obedient believers who want to function within God's institutions regarding our marriages, our families, and our vocational *relationships*.¹ We also understand that these (and other) divinely ordained institutions of God have always been under attack. We are now experiencing this "like gangbusters" in our post-Christian culture. What many Christians do not understand is the broad ecumenical context in which this conflict occurs. We need to understand thoroughly what the institutions of God are, and why Satan so hates them. We'll use the so-called Socratic or interrogatory method in our teaching today by asking ourselves questions. Only when we have answered the questions the big picture will become clearer in our minds.



Q 1. What do we mean by the term "institutions of God?" An institution is an established law, practice, or custom (often embodied in an organization). In biblical terms an institution is a *relational* framework by which we can respect both the order (the arrangement and disposition) and the plan (the will) of God. Institutions have to do with God's divinely imposed order on His creation. **Institutions are not arbitrarily imposed by God. Rather, institutions reflect the character of God Himself and His own relationship with Himself within the triune Godhead.**



Q 2. Why do we embrace God's institutions? Looking beyond all those practical reasons for obeying God, there is one overriding purpose which we must not miss. Colossians 3:12 is the pivotal verse which separates the so-called doctrinal portion of Colossians from the so-called practical half of the book: "*Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering;*" **As Paul begins discussing relationships in general and specific institutional relationships, he reminds us that we do what we do in order to reflect or adorn our positions as the elect of God.** Is God holy? Is God merciful, kind, humble, meek and longsuffering? These traits are reflecting of the whole trinity and are fleshed out for us in the person of Christ.

As God's elect we seek, at every point in our lives to reflect the character and nature of God, especially as it is revealed in Christ. This is what we call "adorning the doctrine of God," a rich study in itself. This is not a truism or a cliché. This is our life passion as God's elect. It is our starting point. This is why we change our spiritual clothes (putting off and putting on) and even our physical clothes as believers. We want to model or reflect the person and character of the great Designer.



Q 3. In what way then do these institutions reflect God? All of God's institutions model the character and nature of God. Further, they all model God's own relationship within Himself.

- All of God's institutions reflect order. God does not merely impose order on His creation, He is orderly *within Himself*.
- All of God's institutions reflect divine order *within Himself* through hierarchy (the systematic application of authority in order to impose order). Notice that the persons of the trinity respect a hierarchy among themselves with each implementing certain aspects of God's plan and program. While their roles are unique, their work is conjunctive. All of God does all that God does and all take equal credit for it.
- All of God's institutions reflect all of God's own character. For example, the closer we examine them the more we see God's holiness, justice, compassion and mercy reflected in them.

- Now, here is the most important point of the study. All of the institutions within His creation begin and end with Jesus Christ, the Logos of God. Jesus Christ is the subordinate, Servant Son who executes the Father's will. He is not only the agent through which God created the heavens and the earth, He is the agent through which God carries out His program. God's institutions are really Christ's. **All of Christ's institutions carry the imprimatur of the Father, they all reflect the Person of the Servant Son and as such, are anchored in servanthood of Christ!** Servanthood is not merely about baking a pie for a friend in need, it is about *all of us* ranking ourselves under *all of us* in the same manner in which Christ did! (Ephesians 5:21, Philippians 2:1-10,ff). The theme of *servanthood* is the backdrop for all relational commands in the New Testament, not just marriage.²



Q 4. How does the institution of marriage reflect the Servant Christ? Unbelieving men have never solved the issues of relationships because they have *rejected the knowledge of God*, the starting point for all relational discussions.³ When we take a close look at marriage we find that three models are clearly set forth in the Word of God. They are:

1. The Egalitarian (equality) model.

Genesis 1:27, 28; 2:7, Genesis 2:21-25

Both are created by God.

Both are made in the image of God.

Both are given dominion over the creation.

Both are (bone of bone and flesh of flesh) Adam.

Both are to be fruitful and multiply.

None of this has been rescinded.

Equality is foundational to all marriages. Men and women are absolutely equal. However, the equality model cannot and never did stand alone as the basis of marriage. It offers no governing principles for assuring equality in institutional relationships. Our culture is testing this today in all of our institutions.



2. The Complementary (help meet) model.

Genesis 2:18, Mark 10:2-9

Genesis 3:16

The complementary model was in place before the fall. Equality is never in question. Though Adam and Eve were equal she was, of course, created to be a help-meet to Adam. Initially, Adam was Eve's head as primogeniture – thus insuring order inside marriage, 1 Tim. 2:12. Eve was further subjected to Adam's headship because of the fall and Adam's headship duties were extended, 1 Tim. 2:13. As a result of the fall, Eve's desire was to be unto Adam, a truth which requires discussion at another time.



These two models (egalitarian and complementary) formed the basis for marriage in the Old Testament. Both models are fully in place today, but they are *overshadowed* by yet a third model.

As important and helpful as these earlier models are, they leave *no point of reference outside the marriage* for adjusting our relationship (outside of the now rescinded Mosaic law). The husband and wife were each responsible for determining if they are fulfilling their role.

Marriage still requires an objective, external, third point of reference in order to navigate the marital seas. Many Bible students fail to understand that the Christological model which we know and love was *not in place* in the Old Testament. As a result, we are tempted to impose judgmental expectations on Old Testament marriages which are not fair. In addition, has often been in vogue stress the complementarian model at the expense of the Christological model of the New Testament. A man who sees his wife as his rib needs to be exposed to the third model:

3. The Christological model.

Ephesians 5:21-33



This is not heresy: Christ, the man, and his wife are now one by virtue of both the old and the new creation. This is new truth.

Notice that the original “flesh and bones”, and “one flesh” statements regarding marriage remain true but they are now enhanced. While each member reflects a different aspect of Christ, both wife and husband are now members of “his body”. We are not talking about a physical marital union, but we are talking about a real union, nonetheless. The wife is now a unique member and Christ, not her husband is her priest. She submits to her husband *as she would Christ* (just as the employee does in the later admonition.) She submits to her husband by virtue of her submission to Christ, not vice versa.

We are to submit ourselves one to another in the fear of God. The wife is to submit herself to *her own* husband. The submission principle is clarified inside marriage. She is to submit to him in the same way we are all to submit unto the Lord. When she submits to him, she submits unto the Lord.

The husband is the head of the wife in the same manner in which Christ is the head of the church. The husband is to love his wife and seek her spiritual edification in the same way in which Christ loves and edifies church.

Q 5. How does the institution of the family reflect the Servant Christ?

Under the Old Covenant all of Israel was under the tutorship of the law. In the family, the child’s first duties were to *honor* and *obey* his parents who instructed him in the law (Exodus 20:12, Deut 11:18-21). Old Testament families were accountable directly to God, the Royal Law, the Mosaic Law. The mature child was then given sonship privileges.

The New Covenant Family Model is about a richer kind of submission, Colossians 3:20-21. Children learn submission through the example of Christ as they witness the examples of their parents who submit to Christ and to one another, (Compare Ephesians 5:1 with Ephesians 6:1). While the law provides teaching examples, **Christ Himself is the learning example for the child who obeys his parents in the Lord, not the law.** The servant Christ is the focus of the parent/child relationship. Obedience is expected just as Christ obeyed His Father.



Q 6. How does the employer/employee relationship reflect the Servant Christ?

Under the Old Covenant the servant was to obey his master explicitly and the master was to provide the servant with his due. The details were, of course fleshed out in the law. The master’s primary accountability was to obey the law and, in so doing he obeyed God.

New Testament servanthood elevates the employer and the employee by making them *both* accountable the servanthood modeled by Christ (Ephesians 3:22-4:1). While the servant is accountable to his master and the master is accountable to the servant, both measure their performance by their personal accountability to Christ and both have recourse to Christ. Christ is our ultimate supervisor. Servants obey their masters as though the commands come directly from their Master.

Q 7. How then does the New Ecumenism relate to God and His institutions?



While this merits its own rich discussion, the short of it is that Satan must destroy God's institutions in order to impose his own.

- **Ecumenism is about Satan's plan to unite heaven and earth under his own rule which reflects his own character. We weaken the cause of Christ and enhance Satan's program when we step outside of God's institutional plan.**
- **However, for all our talk of a one world dominion controlled by Satan, please understand that his rise to prominence will be so short-lived as to represent a fly spec on the tome of history. In the end, Satan's own character traits will destroy Satan's own counterfeit reign.**

When embrace God's institutions we embrace the plan and program of God.

"Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet." 1 Corinthians 15:24,25

End (for now).

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¹ We'll leave the discussions of other institutions such as the church and government for another time.

² By the way, this does away with the silly notions that wives are not required to love their husbands and husbands are not required to submit to their wives. Those commands have already been given to us all and they are implicit. These immediate commands to submit and love which are found in our text have to do with how we are to order ourselves *within God's institution* . This divine order, by the way, nurtures love *and* submission in *both* parties.

³ When the world rejects something within God's institutions it reflects their rejection of God Himself. All of God's commands are reflections of His own Person. To reject a command of God is to reject the knowledge of God.