

## The Glory of Submission and Sacrifice

Ephesians 5:15-33, Genesis 2:18-25, Matt. 19:1-12

### Introduction

The form of Ephesians 5:22-6:9 is what Luther called *Haustafeln*, or ‘house tables.’ It was a common form used in the ancient world to describe how a household should be ordered. Significantly, household codes were always a reflection of the character and values of the state in the Greco-Roman world. They were inseparably related to a people’s political identity and manifested the ideals of the state. Scholars have noted that the Pauline household codes lack this obvious political connection, but that’s not because they are apolitical. A deeper look shows us just how subversively political they are, because they built upon the character of a crucified and resurrected King (Philippians 3:21-22, Matthew 6:9-13).

Take one example: Ancient household codes were concerned with matters of subordination and authority. In typical fashion, they focused on the authoritative figures: Husbands, parents, and masters and on the importance of exerting power over wives, children and slaves. Subordinates, in fact, were rarely addressed at all. But Paul’s household instructions are addressed to husbands *and* wives, parents *and* children, masters *and* slaves. And though the relationships are clearly hierarchal, something is dramatically different: They are all treated as equals.

### The Power for Submission

In 5:18 Paul says “And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit.” What does it mean to be filled with the Spirit? Unfortunately, our English translations make it seem like Paul sees the Spirit as the content. I think a better translation of the Greek is rendered “be filled *by* the Spirit.” Rather than being the content of the filling, the Spirit is the *instrument* by which we are filled. Suddenly, this brings the other passages about “filling” in Ephesians into sharp focus (Ephesians 3:14-17). This is the goal to which the Spirit drives every Christian: *to be filled up with the glory, beauty and love of Christ’s own divine life*. To be filled *by* the Spirit means that our lives and relationships assume the character of His life and the way he relates to us. How does this inform the relationship between husbands and wives?

### Leadership and Submission

One of the central things husbands must realize about their role in marriage is that they are the head of their homes. According to Paul, a husband’s headship of his wife is not an imperative, it is rather an indicative: He doesn’t become a head, he *is the head of his wife* (vs. 23). This means that the only options are for him to be a good head or a bad head. He will either lead badly or he will lead well, but he will always be the one providing leadership. Now, similarly, a wife is to follow the lead of her husband by submitting to His leadership. That is her created role as his helper. She cannot escape that role any more than he can escape his. So, the husband is the head of his wife, but notice that that even here his leadership is essentially connected to submission as well. Notice how Paul puts this in 1 Cor. 11:3: “But I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ, the head of a wife is her husband, and the head of Christ is God.”

Husbands, understand that headship does not mean fundamentally that you are the one in charge and everyone in your home has to do what you say. According to Paul, headship fundamentally means that you are to lead your family in demonstrating what it means to *have a head*. Christ is your head and you are to lead your family in showing them what true submission looks like by your

submission to Him. This means that the only kind of leadership in the kingdom of God is leadership that leads *by following*. “Be imitators (followers) of me, as I am of Christ.” 1 Cor. 11:1

### **Leadership by Love and Sacrifice**

In following Christ, what is the chief way a husband is to exercise his headship? Vs. 25 tells us plainly: “Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.” Husbands are to love their wives by means of sacrificing themselves. Love leads to sacrifice. Earlier in 5:1, Paul already explained this relationship: “Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, *as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us*, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.” Notice the sacrificial language: Christ gave himself as a sacrifice and as a pattern of sacrificial living. Now look at how Paul describes what Christ’s sacrificial headship does to his bride (vs. 26-27): “that he might *sanctify her*, having *cleansed her* by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, *without spot or wrinkle* or any such thing, that she might *be holy and without blemish*.”

### **Satanic Leadership: Tyranny or Apathy**

But here is the problem: Husbands, one of the things your wife needs to be protected from is your own sinful heart. This means that sacrificial love does call a man to go forth to battle, to be strong and courageous, but often that battle is not what a man has in mind. The greatest threat to your home isn’t going to break in while you are all asleep. It’s already inside your home. It’s already inside your heart. It’s you. The terrifying thing about being the head of your home is that you are the one who can do the most damage to your wife and children. If you are a destructive head, they suffer the consequences. When marriages and families fall apart, it is normally because, first of all, a husband has used his headship to serve himself. There are two ways a man does this:

- **Tyranny:** Rather than using his authority to serve his wife and children, he uses it to make sure they serve him. He isn’t interested in their desires, feelings, needs, or problems. He is interested in getting what he wants from them. Such men are always sensitive to how they are being treated.
- **Apathy:** In our time, it is very fashionable for a man to demonstrate his caring, thoughtful leadership by simply checking out. He’s not a bully. Quite the contrary, he’s a “nice guy.” But he’s also serving himself. He’s not willing to do the hard work of being a sacrificial head. One of the central characteristics of Christ’s love is the way it always initiates. It seeks us out, it calls us to Himself, it goes after us when we are far from Him. It doesn’t wait to sacrifice until all the other options are exhausted, it willingly and joyfully takes up our burdens and carries them. This kind of love requires true strength. Prov. 13:24: “Whoever spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is diligent to discipline him.”

### **The Great Test**

Paul’s point is that just as Christ’s loving sacrifice results in a glorious bride, so a Husband’s sacrificial love will be efficacious in glorifying his wife. In other words, he can know how he’s doing by looking at her. What kind of grade would she give you? Is your leadership a delight or a burden? Is your presence a comfort and a delight? Does she look at you the way the Church looks at Christ, with gratitude and thanksgiving? Do you make her calling to submit to you a joy and not a burden? Men, you have a Head to follow who has provided everything you need to be this kind of husband. He’s even provided for all of your mistakes and failures. What you must do is come to Him with a sincere heart and ask Him for the grace to follow His lead.