

MBC - 1/7/2018 - Pastor Doug Thompson
"Lordship and Submission"
Ephesians 5:21

It's been a few weeks since we've been in Ephesians, so let's back up to—

- Ephesians 5:15-21 ¹⁵Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, ¹⁶making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. ¹⁷Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. ¹⁸And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, ¹⁹addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, ²⁰giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.

(pray for submissive hearts . . . to yield ourselves to God and His Word without question because He is God . . .)

This morning we're just going to look at v.21, and I want you to see how it sets the stage for understanding everything Paul is going to say about marriage and family: "*submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.*" And that last phrase is the heart of this verse.

Intro: "in the fear of Christ."

"Out of reverence for Christ" is literally, "*in the fear of Christ.*" The Gk. word is *phobos*, we see it in our word, *phobia*. And you know that for a Christian, it does *not* mean that we are afraid of Jesus! He loved us and shed His blood to bring us to God, and to take away all fear of judgment and condemnation. Perfect love casts out 'being afraid.' *But* when we understand that Jesus our Savior is also Holy God, and Lord and Creator of the universe, we should *tremble*. Our Jesus is a consuming fire. Everything in us should bow to His majesty and yearn for His honor and glory. Everything in us should cry out, "Not my will, but Your will be done, Lord!" *To fear Christ means that His smile is our greatest joy and His frown is our greatest sorrow.*

Now look at v.21 again: "*submitting to one another, in the fear of Christ.*" Doesn't that put it in a whole new light? We submit to one another because we have first submitted ourselves to Christ! We submit to others because *Jesus is Lord.*

Before we look at this passage, I want you to search your own heart and ask yourself if Jesus occupies that position in your heart? Do you live "in the fear of Christ?" Is He Lord of all? Or is He something you sprinkle on top of your already full life and already made plans? 1 Peter 3:15 says that we are to sanctify = make holy Jesus as Lord in our hearts. That means that He is #1, preeminent = *nothing and no one is higher or more important than Jesus!*

This is the central issue in the life of every person. It will determine where you spend eternity. And it will determine your happiness in this life. Let me read you something. Just listen:

- Jesus is precious because he removes our guilt. He is precious because he gives us eternal life. And he is precious because through him we become authentic. Jesus Christ is the most important man that ever lived. To know him is more valuable than knowing all the most famous and powerful people of history. To be known and loved by him is a greater honor than if all the heads of state were to bow in your presence. When this world is over and we all stand before the judgment seat of God, many of you will look back with shame and dismay at how small was the place granted to the

Son of God in your daily lives: how seldom you spoke to him, how little of his Word you learned, how half-hearted your resolve to obey, how narrow the sphere of life in which you eagerly sought his lordship. And on that day you will wonder no more why you were so unhappy in this life: unhappy at work, unhappy in school, unhappy at church, unhappy at home. It will all come clear: half-hearted allegiance to the lordship of Christ in the practical affairs of everyday life not only robs Jesus of the honor we owe him, but also robs us of joy and purpose.

I have prayed that all of you would find true joy and purpose by living in the fear of Christ!

So in this next section in Ephesians, Paul is going to talk about *submission*, but understand that it begins and ends with our submission to the lordship of Christ. That is the foundation for happiness and fulfillment in our families. This is such important teaching on marriage and family! You couldn't count the number of books that have been written on this section in Ephesians 5. I've preached it in churches, retreats and conferences - even over in Uganda! But it's often taken out of its context. So before we see just what it means I want to show you that the context of all submission is the Spirit's filling and the lordship of Jesus. So hang with me as we understand Paul's argument here—

I. The context of submission: the Spirit's filling and the lordship of Jesus.

We have to start back in v.15 again—

- Ephesians 5:15-18 ¹⁵Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, ¹⁶making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. ¹⁷Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. ¹⁸And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit.

And then he gives a series of phrases that describe how we live when the Spirit controls our lives—

We speak to one another! V.19. We sing God's praises from our hearts, with one another and to one another. We give thanks to God always and for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ - v.20. *And* we subject ourselves, one to another, in the fear of Christ. Verse 21 isn't a new sentence, it's one more fruit of the Spirit in our lives. Yes, it's a command, something we are to do, but it's also what we will do when Holy Spirit has the reins in our lives.

- *So get this, before we go on to see what God says about how to be a Christian husband, or wife, or how to parent your children, or how to be a Christian at work: this is all the work of the Holy Spirit. "Husbands love your wives, wives submit to your husbands, children obey your parents," does that sound hard? Let me tell you, it's impossible! You and I can't do any of this in our flesh. We are *powerless*. These are fruit of the Holy Spirit, overcoming our flesh and giving us the will and the power to obey God's will. So the question is: Are you walking in the Spirit? Are you filled with Him so that He permeates and seeps into every area of your life? His will is your will? Are you seeking never to grieve His Person or quench His power? You could call this whole next section: "the Spirit-Filled Family."

And when you are filled with the Spirit, you will live "*in the fear of Christ*," because, everything the Spirit does, He does to exalt Christ, display His glory, and bring every person He fills under the lordship of Jesus! Jesus said about the Spirit, "He will glorify Me!" Right?

- So at the end of v.17, we are to "*understand the will of the Lord*," that's Jesus.

- At the end of v.19, we sing “*to the Lord.*”
- In v.20, we give thanks to God the Father “*in the name of our Lord Jesus.*”
- In v.21, the Spirit produces submission “*in the fear of Christ.*”
- In v.22, wives submit to their husbands “*as to the Lord,*”
- In vv.23 & 25, husbands are to love their wives the way *Christ* loves His church.
- In v.32, Paul says that marriage is a picture of *Christ* and His church.

And we could keep going!—

- In 6:1, children are to obey their parents “*in the Lord.*”
- In 6:4, Fathers are to bring up their kids “*in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.*”
- And when the Spirit fills Christian servants, they serve their masters “*as they would Christ. . . as bondservants of Christ. . . rendering service as to Christ. . . expecting their reward from the Lord.*”
- And Christian masters must remember that they are accountable *to the same Lord and Master - Jesus.*

Wow! The Spirit-filled family will be a Christ-saturated family. And those aren’t just words: When the Spirit controls, our eyes will be on Jesus constantly in our homes. In the way we talk to each other, in the decisions we make, the stuff we watch on our TV’s and computers. Jesus won’t be something we sprinkle on top of our families. He will be the Foundation, on which we build our marriages, and our families. And He will be Lord.

So when we read v.21 as it transitions into marriage and family, realize that it’s the fruit of the Spirit which leads to the lordship of Christ over our lives.

- And when Jesus is Lord, we will “*submit to one another.*” And submission is the controlling idea for what follows: It’s like Paul doesn’t even take a breath between v.21 and v.22: “*wives to their husbands, children to their parents, slaves to their masters.*” As a matter of fact, in v.22, the word for “submit” isn’t even there in the Gk. And wives everywhere shout “Hallelujah!” No, it’s not there because it carries right over from v.21: “*Submitting to one another in the fear of Christ, wives, to your own husbands.*”

Church to Christ, children to parents, slaves to masters - it’s all about submitting to others according to the authority and order established by God, and we do it as an *expression* of our submission to Jesus Christ as Lord. Got it? Got it.

II. The misunderstanding about submission.

*But think with me: What does “submitting to one another” really mean? If we all submit to each other, in the same way, then doesn’t that cancel out some of us submitting to others in a different way? So my wife is to submit to me, but I’m also to submit to her, so it’s a draw. *Mutual submission* would seem to nullify any submission to authority. God help us if our kids get a hold of this passage, right?

But that’s not what v.21 *means* when it says “submitting to one another.” It is not talking about mutual submission, it’s talking about each of us submitting to whatever God-instituted authority we are under - and Paul goes on to break it down: wives to husbands, children to parents, slaves to masters. In Romans 13 and 1 Peter Paul and Peter would add: submission to government, and submission to your church elders. The Holy Spirit produces this submission in those He fills, as an expression of our submission to Jesus’ lordship over our lives.

But that's not the way most Christians understand v.21. Now I've had to change my own mind about this passage, and maybe you need to change yours - and that's a test of Jesus' lordship too, isn't it? We have to let Him speak in His own Word and say what *He* intends to say, not what we would like Him to say. So I'm going to take some time to show you what He is saying to His church in this passage. But first, I need to tell you what it doesn't mean—

A. The right teaching from the wrong verse.

Sometimes we can read a biblical truth from a passage that isn't actually teaching that truth. That's not a bad mistake, but it's still a mistake. I think that most Christians, myself included, have read this passage and lumped it in with all the other 'one another' passages we read in the New Testament: it's saying that we should all submit to each other, just like we all are to love one another. It means that we all put one another's needs ahead of our own. We wash each other's feet. We serve one another. And a husband does that by loving and leading his wife, a wife does that by submitting to her husband's authority. Children do that by submitting to their parents, parents do that by disciplining and bringing up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. Now all of this is good and true! But I don't believe that's what Paul is saying *here*, when he says, "*submitting to one another.*" And I'll show you why in just a minute.

B. The feminist perversion of this passage.

For about 2,000 years, Christians believed that Scripture teaches that yes, we are all equal as persons and image-bearers in Christ, but within our equality as image-bearers, God has designed functional roles of authority and submission. And there is no contradiction in that.

- We see it in the Trinity, right? There is one God consisting of three Persons who are all co-eternal and co-equal: the Father is God, the Son is God, the Spirit is God, but within this equality, there is a differentiation of roles. . . The same thing is true between a husband and wife who are absolutely equal as persons before God, but the wife still submits to the husband's authority.

But several decades ago, so-called "biblical feminists" began to use verse 21 to say that we all submit to each other, therefore, this mutual submission has to cancel out any and all submission to authority. They say that Adam and Eve were created as equals, but when sin entered the universe, Adam ruled over his wife - and that was part of the curse. Now, in Christ, that's all done away with. There are no longer to be different roles between men and women. One male feminist scholar said, "By definition, mutual submission rules out higher hierarchical differences. . . Wives are never commanded to obey their husbands or to submit to the authority of their husbands."

Wow! But what about the very next verse that says: "wives submit to your own husbands?" Well they say that was just temporary because Paul didn't want Christians offending the patriarchal Roman culture of that day - but it doesn't apply anymore. Or, they just say that in v. 21 Paul is right, and the following verses he is wrong!

- I.e., They make the Bible say what they want it to say, and they use the Bible - to justify it! That is the height of arrogance and hypocrisy - to use Scripture against Scripture! The Book of Revelation curses those who add to or take away from God's Word.

*As your pastor, I'm warning you that you are going to hear people twist this passage and others to justify *egalitarianism* - the idea that men and women, husbands and wives are equal, therefore they cannot have different roles. When everyone has to submit to everyone else, in reality, no one submits to anyone. Therefore: wives don't have to submit to their husbands;

women can preach in the church, etc. And they will pull out this Scripture to justify what they are saying! They are wrong. So beware when you hear people talk about “*mutual submission*.” I don’t believe that Eph.5:21 is talking about “mutual submission” - now let me explain—

III. The meaning of submission.

So if Paul doesn’t mean that we all submit to each other in this verse, what does he mean? *He is talking specifically about submitting to others in the authority/submission relationships established by God, and we do it as an expression of our submission to Jesus Christ as Lord.*

And let give you three reasons why I believe this is what Paul means here:

1.) *He goes on to spell it out exactly what he means.*

Doesn’t he? Right after v.21: Wives are subject to their own husbands. Children are subject to their parents. Slaves are subject to their masters. Notice that he never reverses the order and says, “and of course, you husbands also submit to your wives, you parents also submit to your children.” He never says that - nowhere in Scripture does it ever say anything like that. When Peter taught on submission to authority in 1 Peter, he never said that. If Paul really was teaching *mutual submission* here, wouldn’t he have explained that - somewhere? And if he really meant that husbands also submit to their wives, that would have been a bombshell in that day and in that culture. And he would have had to spell it out clearly, otherwise none of those early Christians would have assumed it. But he never did.

Now in each case, he has also instruction for those in authority as to how they exercise that authority - in sacrificial love, kindness, fairness - but he never calls that a form of *submission*.

2.) *The word “submit” is always used for submission to authority.*

Our egalitarian friends say that “*submitting to one another*” here means to serve each other, be thoughtful, humble, sacrificial, etc. But the Gk. word used here, *never* means that! The word is *hupotasso* - it was a military term which meant “to arrange yourself under,” line up behind. It *always* means submission to an authority, and it’s always a one-way submission. It’s not reciprocal—

- Luke 2:51 Jesus was *submissive* to His parents, Mary and Joseph. They weren’t submissive to Him! At least not yet!
- Luke 10:17 The demons were *subject* to the Disciples in Jesus’ name. It doesn’t mean that the demons served the Disciples and were thoughtful toward them! They were subject to their authority, and it wasn’t mutual!
- Romans 13:1, Titus 3:1, 1 Pet.2:13 - citizens are *subject* to their governing authorities.
- 1 Cor.15:27 - the entire universe is *subject* to Christ.
- 1 Pet.3:22 says that angels and powers have been *subjected* to Christ.
- 1 Pet.5:5 - church members are to be *subject* to their elders.
- Eph.5:24 - the church *submits* to Christ. And that is *not* a mutual submission! Jesus doesn’t also submit to us! But it *is* the same kind of submission that a wife gives to her husband and it is submission to *authority*.

Now don't misunderstand me: yes, we all love and serve each other. And yes, we all humble ourselves and put others ahead of ourselves - but that's not what Paul is talking about in Eph. 5:21. He is talking about *submitting to those God has placed in authority over us*.

3.) *The meaning of "one another."*

You say, but it does say "to one another," so maybe Ephesians 5:21 is an exception to all of those other verses. Maybe *here* it does mean mutual submission because, after all, it says that we all are to be in submission to *one another*."

Yes it does, but the word translated as "one another," *alle_lous*, can have different meanings. Sometimes it does mean everyone to everyone, *reciprocally*: Jn13.34: Jesus said, "a new commandment I give to you, that you *love one another*." That's all of us, right? You love me, I love you. It's two-way. It's reciprocal. But sometimes "one another" means "one to another," and it's one-way. Let me help you to see this by giving you some examples—

- Galatians 6:2 ²*Bear one another's burdens*. Now obviously this doesn't mean that we switch burdens with each other! It means that those who have the resources help those who don't.
- 1 Corinthians 11:33 ³³*So then, my brothers, when you come together to eat, wait for one another*— This doesn't mean that those who are early wait for those who are late and those who are late wait for those who are early! No, it means that some wait for others.
- Revelation 6:4 ⁴*And out came another horse, bright red. Its rider was permitted to take peace from the earth, so that people should slay one another*. This doesn't mean that some people killed other people, and then those people came back to life to kill those who killed them! No, it means that some killed others! We get that.

So when Paul says "submitting to one another" actually the KJV says "one to another," he doesn't mean that we all submit to each other - because the word 'submit' is never used reciprocally - it means that each of us are to be in submission to those whom God has placed over us. One to another.

So what?

And you say, "I don't really like that. I wish it meant something else." Which is why we all need to be hear God's Word, right? We all need to constantly submit our own hearts and desires to the Lordship of Jesus Christ until we can say, "Not my will, but Your will be done!"

As we go on in this passage, we need to remember that it isn't just a section of Scripture on tips for a happy marriage and family. It's rooted in Gospel truths, and your own walk with God. So before we look at the roles God has designed for husbands and wives, and parents and children, and servants and masters we each need to ask ourselves two questions:

- 1.) Am I filled with the Holy Spirit? And
- 2.) Am I submitted to the lordship of Jesus Christ in every area of my life?

All of us are called by Christ to submit to human authorities - I am too! And our submission is meant to be a liberating blessing from God, not a burden. But if you are chafing against Jesus' lordship over your life, believe me, you will chafe against the whole idea of submission.

I want to give you a peek behind the curtain of the universe: Why is it that God has woven this principle of authority and submission into the fabric of our lives on so many different levels? A: To school us and teach the two great spiritual principles of the universe—

- 1.) There is a God.
- 2.) You are not Him.

That's true! Ultimately, the purpose of earthly authority and submission is to lead all of us to submit to the ultimate authority of the universe - God. All sin is rebellion against God's authority. It started with Satan wanting to take the place of God - then it showed up in the Garden with Eve and Adam wanting to be like God.

But we as God's people have ceased our rebellion against Him! He has conquered our hearts and our rebellion is over. Jesus is our Lord now, and when we submit ourselves to human authority in the fear of Christ, we are illustrating to unbelievers that the Gospel has conquered our rebellion against God and has brought us into joyful submission to Him.

- Tell yourself that the next time you get pulled over for speeding!

But seriously, submission to authority is one of the most powerful witnesses we have for the Gospel.

I'm saying that what we are going to be studying for the next few weeks is good news. It's meant for our happiness. And if you are still nervous - especially you ladies - remember that submission to human authority is *never* absolute. You only have one absolute Master, and that's Jesus. Our submission is always limited by the lordship of Christ, but it is also an *expression* of our submission to His lordship. When you say yes to human authority it is saying yes to Christ. And if we have to say no to human authority it's also because we are saying yes to Christ our Lord.