

Husbands and Wives – Part 3

Introduction

a. objectives

1. subject – Paul outlines what it means to be mutually submissive as husbands and wives
2. aim – to cause us to pursue submissiveness in every area of our lives as followers of Christ
3. passage – Ephesians 5:22-33

b. outline

1. The Sacredness of Marriage
2. The Submission of Wives (Ephesians 5:22-24)
3. The Self-Sacrifice of Husbands (Ephesians 5:25-33)

c. opening

1. the **difficulty** of this passage in general (**use of commentary**)
 - a. because it is *misunderstood* by unbelievers (**i.e.** as patriarchal or female-diminishing)
 - b. because it is *misapplied* by preachers (**i.e.** as a form of legalism over family structures)
 - c. because it is *mistaken* by readers of the letter (**i.e.** as taken out of its context, **see below**)
2. the **location** of this passage in Ephesians
 - a. **chaps. 1-3** – the relationship of believers *to God* (**vertically**): his work to carve out for himself a people to call his own, declaring them to be his children, drawing them to himself in faith, and establishing them together as his own family under their elder brother, Jesus Christ
 - b. **chaps. 4-5a** = the relationship of believers *to one another* (**horizontally**): the reality of our love for one another having been transformed into the **children** of God, walking side-by-side in unity as those in a common **family**, no longer acting like those outside of that **family**
 - c. **chaps. 5b-6 (updated)** = the relationship of believers *to others* (**connectedly**): the reach of our love for Christ as it permeates all other “classes” of human relationship; *the flow of our unity with one another in the church to everyone that we encounter in life*
 1. *marriage; the nuclear family; economic relationships; our connection with the world*
3. the **mutual submission** at the core of this passage
 - a. grammatically, **vv. 21-22** are actually at the end of a sentence that begins in **v. 18**
 1. a series of **participles** [verb as adjective] which modify the phrase “*be filled with the Spirit*”
 - a. *addressing* one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs,
 - b. *singing* and making melody in your heart,
 - c. *giving thanks* always for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God,
 - d. *submitting* to each other out of reverence [fear] of Christ
 - e. a series of “ways” by which we demonstrate what it means to be filled with the Spirit
 1. **or, what the life of the Spirit-filled (regenerated) person looks like**
 2. the *final* participle (submit) is used by Paul to advance his point forward
 - a. the concept of *submission* is brought forward in all of the various components of human relationship (**i.e.** wives and husbands, children and parents, slaves and masters)
 - b. thus, **vv. 21-22** should be translated “*submitting to one another in the fear of Christ, wives to your own husbands as to the Lord*”
 - c. the word “*submit*” is not actually in **v. 22**; it is implied from the statement in **v. 21** and is only carried into **v. 22** in English as the translators start a new sentence
 - d. **IOW**: the concept of wifely submission is *entirely* within the framework of what *churchly* submission looks like – Paul’s intention is *not* to “hammer” the idea of wives being submissive, but to use marriage **as a picture of what mutual submission looks like**

II. The Submission of Wives (Ephesians 5:22-24)

Content

a. the definition of submission

1. “*submit*” (*hypotasso*) = to be subordinate to; to obey; to bring under the control or direction of another
2. **Romans 13:1** – “*Let every person be subject to the governing authorities*”
3. **Romans 8:7** – “*the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God’s law*”
4. **Luke 2:51** – “*he [Jesus] went down with them [his parents] ... and was submissive to them*”

5. **Ephesians 1:22** – “[the Father] *put* all things under [Jesus’] feet and gave him as head over all things”
 - a. **a key verse here:** the position of Jesus as the head of the body implies that the body (*i.e.* all believers) are subject to him; they are to be submissive to him *and to one another*
 - b. **note:** the body imagery for the relation of Christ to the church is replete in this book – **see 1:23; 3:6; 4:4, 12, 16; 5:30** – *i.e.* as the body is always in submission to the will of the head, so the church is always in submission to the will of Christ, *its* head, to its *leadership*, and to *itself*
- b. the rejection of submission**
1. the *natural* rejection of submission – the natural tendency of the human heart to strive for *utter independence*, not beholden to any authority figure or that which would “hold us back”
 - a. *i.e.* the sense of “selfishness” that entered the race by virtue of Eve’s self-desire (**see Gen. 3:6**)
 2. the *feminist* rejection of submission – the belief that “submission” entails second-class citizenry or nature, a loss of personal value (as a woman), a lack of “equality,” or a lack of opportunity
 - a. *i.e.* the assumption of the radical feminist to **v. 21** is that Christians believe that women are to be treated as chattel slaves behind their tyrant husbands (**a straw-man, e.g.** like the erroneous views of Calvinists and evangelism)
 3. the *Christian* rejection of submission – the understanding that “salvation” is simply the *positive* step of embracing belief in Christ *without* having to radically submit oneself to his Lordship (as owner)
 - a. *i.e.* why do you call me “Lord” and yet not do what I say?
- c. the nature of submission (as mutual)**
1. what **mutual submission** in the church looks like:
 - a. **my definition:** the *symbiotic* relationship that exists between members in the church as they seek to lead one another into greater faith *and* submit to one another in the furthering of that quest
 1. **e.g.** the symbiotic relationship between elders (pastors) and the congregation
 2. **e.g.** the symbiotic relationship between accountability and fellowship
 2. what *mutual submission* looks like using the imagery of the submission of a wife to her husband
 - a. **Paul is assuming (from his worldview re: marriage) that the voluntary submission of a wife to her husband is an image of what the believer does in this symbiotic relationship within the church**
 - b. **note:** because the verb “submit” is not actually in the phrase, Paul is *assuming* that believing wives will have a *naturally* submissive state to their husbands: he is not (actually) commanding it
 1. yes, it *can* be presumed that Paul expects wives to demonstrate submission to their husbands
 - a. the sentence structure of **v. 21** has no imperative, but it is clearly implied (thus the ESV)
 - b. and, Paul states the fact more directly in **v. 24** to make clear what he means
 2. but, the *point* is not to “berate” women into being submissive; rather, it is to demonstrate how *everyone* in the church should be showing this sense of deference to everyone else
 - a. **e.g.** the amount of *space* dedicated to wives is significantly less than to husbands – and most of what Paul says to *them* is related to how Christ himself relates to the church
 3. true, Paul expects submissive wives and self-sacrificial husbands, but he is not writing a treatise on marriage here – all of this flows from his *already established worldview*
- d. the origin of submission (in creation)**
1. “for the husband is the head of the wife” (**v. 23a**) – from the *creation ordinance (mandate)*
 - a. in the order of creation, in the “extended” nature of the woman being formed *from the man*
 - b. *i.e.* the women created to be a “helper” to the man in his condition of being “alone” (**Gen. 2:18**)
 1. so that the man might experience true *relationship* from the *Imago Dei* within him
 2. so that the man might complete the creation ordinance (to be fruitful and fill the earth)
 - c. Paul roots his view of wifely submission to the way in which God created humanity
 1. he is *unapologetic* for the order established by God for the success of the human race
 2. “even as Christ is the head of the church” (**v. 23b**) – again, from the *creation ordinance (mandate)*
 - a. God intends (in his divine decree) to gather a people from the entirety of his creation
 1. redemptive history is the work of God in and through his creation to draw a people to himself
 2. it is a picture of *reproduction* (multiplication) as the gospel goes out to make new believers
 - b. *i.e.* the church was created to be the instrument of this multiplication under Christ
 1. as the repository of the message of Christ (**1 Tim. 3:15** – “a pillar and buttress of the truth”)
 2. as the instrument of the transmittal of the message of Christ which creates new members
- e. the importance of submission (to the church)**
1. **question #1:** why are wives to be submissive to their husbands?
 - a. “as to the Lord” (**v. 22b**) – because it testifies to what it means to be submissive to Jesus
 1. *i.e.* how you treat your husband is a *direct reflection* of how you treat the Lord

- b. **principle: a godly wife, who gives honor and deference to her husband, testifies to what genuine saving faith is through that submission, to a world that does not understand it**
- c. true, this is difficult (especially to “hard” husbands; **see below**), but it is essential to the overarching picture of what *faith* is all about – to ignore this as “patriarchal” is to say that submission to Jesus is also unnecessary (**e.g.** the exact failure of Christian liberalism in regards to women)
- 2. **question #2:** why are Christians to be submissive to one another as to the Lord?
 - a. because it is a demonstration of what it means to be “filled with the Spirit” (**v. 18**)
 - 1. there is no room in the regenerate, Spirit-filled heart for “power” or “prestige” or “position”
 - 2. all power, prestige and position belongs to *Christ* – we are to submit ourselves *entirely* to him, and then mutually live in submission to one another *under his absolute headship*