

EPHESIANS 5:21-33

INTRODUCTION

I finished last time at verse 20 and I did that deliberately. It was not that I ran out of time and left verse 21 out but I did it because this verse is very important for understanding the passage concerning the roles of wives and husbands within the married relationship. Verse 21 is another outworking of what it means to be filled with the Holy Spirit (v 18).

Being filled with the Spirit leads to rightful public worship and it leads to rightful giving of thanks but it also leads to proper submission to one another. It is only as we understand verse 21 that we can begin to see how wives submitting to their husbands and husbands loving their wives is an application of submitting to one another. So verse 21 is truly a link verse it is evidence that one is filled with the Spirit and it is also the key to family life.

For what we have from verse 22 is specific examples of how submitting to one another is worked out within the family unit.

1. A SPIRIT FILLED CHRISTIAN SUBMITS TO OTHERS (v 21)

Now before we get into this verse there is one textual point that I want to make. The Older versions of the Bible have the 'fear of God' as the motivating factor here whereas the more modern translations have "out of reverence of Christ" It literally reads 'fear of Christ.'

Well most scholars agree today that it should read 'fear of Christ' as the best manuscripts support this translation. Now it ultimately amounts to the same thing but the words 'fear of Christ' gives an added emphasis to the passage, as we will see in a minute.

Now having dealt with that let me also say that this statement "submit yourselves to one another" is in the present tense so it should probably read 'submitting yourself to one another out of fear for Christ.' But we must remember the context here. No one will be submitting himself or herself to others unless they are empowered by the Holy Spirit to do so. Therefore we all must seek day by day to be filled with the Spirit, to come under his control and influence more and more.

If that is the case then the clear evidence of that will be that of submitting ourselves to one another. That submission will then be worked out in our family relationships, where wives will submit to their husbands and where husbands as head of the home will love their wives with the love that Christ had for the church. Children who are filled with the Spirit and submitting to others will then obey their Parents and slaves will likewise obey their Masters. So I think I have said enough to show how this verse is the key verse to this whole section.

But what does it mean to submit to one another. How is it worked out in practise? I want to answer that by looking at one negative first before looking at the positives. In other words what it does not mean.

a) Being submissive means that we cannot be selfish and self-centred. Self-centred people only think of themselves they become thoughtless people whereas submissive people think clearly of others and their needs and desires. Because we are naturally selfish and self-centred when we are filled with the Holy Spirit He goes to work on our selfishness, it has to be daily repressed and dealt with. It can of course be a painful process but it is a necessary process if we are going to learn to be submissive to one another.

The problem with self-centredness is that it often shows itself in self-assertiveness. It asserts our views opinions on everyone else whether they are right or wrong. The self-centred person is

always right and everyone else by implication is wrong. Many a church is divided by people who are self centred and therefore self assertive often at the expense of other people's views. Such a person will have opinions that are always right and ultimately such people become dictatorial because they simply have to have their own way.

Well that is what submitting to one another does not mean so what does it mean? Well it simply means that:

(a) We will have a right opinion about ourselves. Unless we see ourselves as God sees us then our self centred and self-assertive nature will always raise its head in the church. But when filled with the Spirit we will realise just how wicked and vile our hearts are and just how prone we are to promoting self.

Therefore we will seek daily to put self down to think of others as better than ourselves (Philippians 2:3-4). We will also realise that whatever gifts we do possess are a gift given to us from God. Gifts are grace gifts they come to us as a result of the grace of God.

They do not make us any better than anyone else but we will realise that God has granted gifts perhaps different ones to other people within Christ's church. Therefore we will seek the welfare of others rather than our own welfare. We will seek the promoting of others rather than the promotion of self. We will think highly of others and seek their ultimate good.

If we are doing that then we must also remember that other Spirit filled Christians will be seeking our ultimate good and will seek to encourage the gifts and graces granted to us by Christ.

But look at Paul's motivation for this submission to one another is 'out of reverence or fear of Christ.' Now this fear is not dread but one of reverence and awe of Christ. We say that Jesus Christ is Lord. We claim that he is judge and he is the head of the church. Well says Paul if those things are true then we must submit to one another because it is showing his Lordship in our lives and in the life of His church.

To reverence someone is to give him his proper place to fear Christ is to give him his proper place in our lives. Self-centredness and self-assertion is actually showing our great lack of fear of Christ but submission is indeed the mark that we are giving Christ the place that he is so rightfully due in our lives. Now having looked at the key verse Paul highlights how this submission to one another is worked out within the family situation.

Each one has a role to fulfil and in fulfilling that role each one is showing his submission and reverence for Christ and his or her submission to one another.

2. SUBMISSION TO ONE ANOTHER WITHIN THE FAMILY

How is submission to one another within the family context worked out?

a) Wives submit to your husbands and Husbands be head of your family (v 22-24) – Now it must be said that in the marriage relationship God has certain structures that are given as duties and responsibilities within the married relationship. The wife's responsibility is to submit to her husband. Now this ought not to be difficult because if she is a Spirit filled Christian she will be submitting to every other Christian as well. So it is within this context that she is told to submit.

Now the way that the wife is to do this is as if she was submitting to the Lord. So just as she wants to obey her Lord and please him so in the same way the godly wife will want to obey and please her husband. In submitting to her husband in this way she will also be submitting to the Lord. The

reason for this is very clear. Just as Christ is head of the church so the Husband is head of his wife (v 23).

We say that Jesus is the head of the church that is we recognise no other authority except his in the church so in the family God has invested authority in the husband. He is in charge of the family and is accountable to God for how his family is run. So wives you must submit to your husbands but husbands you must take charge and exercise your headship in the house. Now there are many Christian wives who have resented this command down through the ages.

They do not like the idea of their husbands being the ultimate authority in their homes. So they have rebelled against this God given authority and have sought to overturn this command. But nowhere in the bible does it say that husbands are subject to their wives apart from the general sense of verse 21. To even try to reverse this God given role is to say that Christ is not head of the church.

It simply cannot be reversed, Christ is head over of the church and he always will be and husbands are head of their wives and always will be. To usurp that God given authority is to usurp God himself. Now the bible nowhere as far as I can see gives us detailed instructions about how this submissiveness and headship is worked out in practise. That's because as married couples we have to work it out depending upon the gifts and ability of each partner.

It certainty does not mean that the husband makes all the decisions and the wife simply meekly obeys. As head the husband wants to see his wife being all that God intends her to be.

So his headship must encourage those gifts that God has bestowed upon her and he will encourage her to make decisions etc. However and we must be clear about this the husband is ultimately responsible for how his home is run. He cannot blame it on his wife. If the children are unruly it's the husband's ultimate responsibility to discipline his children. If the home is chaotic it's the husband's ultimate responsibility to bring order.

He will of course take his responsibility seriously by encouraging and developing his wife in godly ways that will ultimately lead to a good ordered home and well behaved children. I like to picture this concept like a manager. A manager is ultimately responsible for all that are under his authority. He is responsible for seeing those things that need to be done are done. How does he do that? By getting the best out of his work force.

Well in the same way the husband seeks to encourage his wife to be the best she can be for God, but ultimately if the manager fails it his fault not his workforce. So Husbands take responsibility for your family, you are accountable to God but wives make the task easy for your husbands by being good, dutiful and submissive wives. If you do that then you will blossom and your true inner beauty will be seen by all.

b) Husbands love your wives (vs. 25-33) – Now wives it is easy to submit to husbands who love you. It is worth noting that this headship that husbands are granted by God is not authoritarian for if that was the case you would expect Paul to say Husbands rule your wives. But his commands are responsibilities just as wives are responsible for submitting to their husbands so husbands are responsible for loving their wives. But the word that Paul uses for 'love' is the word that is used of Christ's love for the church.

That is the very example Paul gives. Husbands love your wives with the same love that Christ loved the church. How did Christ love the church he gave himself up for her (v 25)? He died for her to make her what God intends the church to be holy and clean presentable and radiant (vs. 26-27). So husbands are to love their wives in such a way that they will be all that God intends them to be that they will reach their full potential and may be holy and radiant as Christian wives.

That will mean making sure men that your wife matures spiritually emotionally psychologically and in every other way so that she will be that woman of God that He desires her to be.

So husbands we must make sure that there is sufficient stimulus for our wives so that they develop in every way. This will be very important if she is at home looking after children all day. We must provide for her in every way so that she is not bored but is stimulated and encouraged and developed in all areas of life including the spiritual. Christian husbands do not neglect your wife's spiritual well being.

We tend to be good at providing for them in every other way do not expect the church to provide all that your wife needs for her spiritual growth. It is not the church's responsibility it is yours as her husband. You must provide it and you can only do so if you are spiritually mature. There are so many wives who spiritually speaking are miles ahead of their husbands and are often the ones who provide spiritual encouragement and leadership to their husbands.

That is obviously good but it is to our shame men that our wives are spiritually more mature than we are. What happened to us men for this to be the case? One reason is that we have failed to take our leadership in the home seriously otherwise we would be at very least as mature as our lovely wives.

This is further highlighted in verses 28-29. We love our own bodies and we show this by caring for them and feeding them. We never dream going a day without feeding our bodies we never think about going out without making sure that we are presentable. Well says Paul in the same way our love husbands for our wives is demonstrated by the way that you care for her and feed her. We are to provide for her, we are not only bread winners but we must make sure that she has **all** her needs met and it is our duty men to do this.

It is not the church's or the state's task but it is our duty our responsibility to make sure that our wives are cared for; it is simply one-way of showing our love for them. Now wives is it hard to submit to such a man who loves you with a self sacrificing love and cares for you and feeds you physically mentally and spiritually?

This is why we men leave our Parents home and marry our wives (v 31). We make a clean break from our Parents we now have responsibilities to our wives because we have become one. This is consummated in sexual union but husbands and wives are one. We are clearly united to our wives in the same way that the church is united to Jesus Christ. Now this is clearly the closest human relationship that anyone can know we talk about being soul mates well husbands and wives are soul mates for we are one.

There is a mystery here (v 32), and we must remember that the word mystery in the bible means things once hidden but now revealed. God has showed us the closeness of the married relationship; how many of us could work it out that two become one through marriage. Of course there are things that we do not fully understand but that intimate union is God ordained and therefore as husbands and wives the best way to demonstrate to our world the union and value of marriage is to fulfil our God given roles in marriage. Wives submit; husbands love care and feed our wives. That's why Paul summarises it here in verse 33. He brings us back to the heart of the matter. Husbands love your wives as we love ourselves and wives respect your husband or submit to them for it is the same Greek word.

Now I have been involved sadly in counselling a few couples who were having some real difficulties. In those marriages I can say that if these commands had of been heeded then all those marriages would have been saved. We thank God some of those couples are still together and but sadly some have separated or divorced. Problems in marriages can be very complicated but we can probably boil all the problems down to these two truths.

Husbands love your wives like Christ loved the church. If we husbands did that would our wives have cause to complain? Wives submit to your husbands. Would husbands be able to grumble that their wife wears the trousers in his home if wives submitted to their husbands?

It is possible that in this congregation there is a marriage that is going through the rocky seas at present. Well here is the answer love your wife with a selfless and sacrificial love and wives submit to your husbands just as you would submit to Christ.

For those here who have strong marriages continue to keep them strong by loving your wives and by submitting to your husbands? We cannot do that in our own strength we do not have the power to do so.

We are naturally self-centred and therefore we need to be filled with the Holy Spirit and empowered by him to love and submit like this. But whether we are married or not we are all to submit to one another and we are to do so out of reverence for Christ who is the head of his Church.

Amen