

The Beauty of Christian Marriage (Love & Respect)

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This morning's passage paints a beautiful picture of love and respect within a Christian Marriage. It presents a vision of how together, as one flesh, a husband and wife can magnify the beauty of Christ and His Church. Take a minute right now and read Ephesians 5:21-33¹ Love and respect. This is God's glorious design for the marriage relationship. It was His idea. Christian Marriage is something beautifully designed by God for the MUTUAL joy and benefit of a husband and wife. And, it also brings glory to God.

The last time we were in Ephesians together we were in 5:18-21 which taught us to "be filled with the Spirit" daily.² Right at the end, v. 21 introduces the topic of submission and leads us into 3 subcategories which will be a 3-week sermon series for us: husbands/wives, parents/children, and masters/servants. The topic of submission causes quite a few ripples in our modern-day society. Well, ok, let's be real, it has caused HUGE, crashing waves of concern and confusion. So, we need to talk about submission a bit. But, before we get totally immersed in this one word, let's step back and look at the broader, and frankly more important, context of Ephesians 5:21-6:9.

2,000 years ago, it was a very male-dominated society. The Roman world in which the Ephesians Christ-followers were living gave full authority to men to lead in a harsh, authoritarian, and iron-fisted way. But Paul, by stark contrast, is calling the male Christ-followers to a much higher standard of love and kindness than that which was found in the surrounding Graeco-Roman world.³ In Ephesians 5, Paul says to Christ-followers: "this is how you should behave in the midst of your non-Christian neighbors." In a society that unfairly favored men, one of the key messages in Ephesians 5:21-6:9 is for men to step up and become sacrificial, kind, and considerate leaders!

Paul calls out the MEN in particular, to be Christ-like; Christ-like husbands, Christ-like fathers, and Christ-like in their treatment of the slaves in their employment. They are challenged to embrace a Christian worldview where women, children, and slaves were worthy of dignity; each one a person created in the image of God; of great worth and of equal value.

Ironically, we've come to view this Ephesians 5 passage as somehow misogynistic or repressive. It's actually quite the opposite. Here the Apostle Paul, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, is writing to help relationships thrive and flourish. He puts forth a bold and strong challenge to the Christian men living in Roman society to use their positions of leadership to serve and to be kind to those who follow them. He calls them to be husbands, fathers, and bosses that live in reverent fear of their Master in Heaven. Men are given a godly vision of what it means to truly be the servant-leaders that God intends them to be. Ephesians 6:9 culminates this section with a strong reminder to men that God is their Master as well, and He will show them no favoritism just because they are male.

In the midst of a world that favored men, one of the key messages in Ephesians 5:21-6:9 is for men to step up and become sacrificial, kind, and considerate leaders! With this in mind, let's talk about submission for a while this morning. It's right here at the beginning of our text. Ephesians 5:21-22 says to, "Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord."

¹ Several present-day realities make today's Bible text potentially divisive but also much needed. Here are just 2 examples of what I mean. First of all, because historically women have been treated so poorly, many of them have felt the need to rise up and defend themselves. This has led to gatherings of women who have felt pressured into fighting back and demanding their rights. They've had enough. In our modern world, they are crying out in many ways and on many fronts for better treatment and greater dignity. And many of their concerns are valid and reasonable. There is much evidence to support their case and fuel their cause. Unfortunately, the pain of this negative track record toward women has created an environment where it is very difficult for them to respect men. In place of respect, we often find hatred and mistrust of men. So, this is one reason, we need to pay close attention to this Ephesians text about love/respect between husbands and wives.

Secondly, far too many men continue to treat the women around us harshly or to objectify them into sexual objects rather than loving them as fellow human beings. Some of us men have lost the art of chivalry and manhood that embraces an attitude of immense honor and respect toward women. It's still all too common to find men who abandon their role of loving their wives the way that God intends. We men tend to love ourselves more than the women around us. Some of us are failing to defend women with justice and to rescue them from sexual traffic and other abuses. There is an urgent need for more of us men to turn our eyes away from pornography and toward an attitude of absolute purity; toward matters of love, kindness, and protection of women. So, for this reason as well, we need to pay close attention to this text about love/respect between husbands and wives.

² This daily filling with God's Spirit results in positive behaviors as we are being empowered moment by moment. Paul listed 5 specific results through a series of participles in vv. 19-21. Being filled with the Spirit results in: 1. Speaking to one another w/ psalms, hymns, & songs from the Spirit. 2. Singing to the Lord. 3. Making music from our hearts. 4. Giving thanks to God. 5. Submitting to one another. And this is where we left off our study of Ephesians last year. Ephesians 5:21 says to, "Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ." V. 21 is a hinge verse. In one sense, v. 21 is clearly connected with the list of 5 participles back in vv. 19-21. But, in the Greek, v. 22 borrows its verb "submit" from v. 21, showing its close grammatical connection at the start of this entire long section, Ephesians 5:21-6:9. This is why translations have struggled with where to put the paragraph break. Several translations, including the NIV 2011, put v. 21 at the beginning of this new section. But several other translations, including the former NIV 1984 and the ESV put it back with vv. 19-21.

³ This is actually foreshadowed in other places like Ephesians 2 where Christians were reminded of the evil way they used to live before Christ but, now that they've been saved by grace, they are God's handiwork created to do good. And in Ephesians 4, Paul called them to put off their old way of life and put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness. Now, in chapter 5, Paul applies these same ideas to particular household relationships.

Biblical Submission is about embracing one's role in a healthy-functioning, God-honoring relationship structure.⁴ The word for submit in v. 21 is "ὑποτάσσω"⁵ in the Greek. It's a passive participle which means "to order oneself under" a leader... or to "submit oneself voluntarily."⁶ "The use of the middle voice of this verb emphasizes the voluntary character of the submission."⁷ Therefore, Biblical Submission is NOT a forced submission.

Submission is not about inferiority or a "2nd class" status at all; not even close! If we examine the approximately 40 occurrences of this verb in the NT, we find a pattern. It is intended that there be a healthy-functioning, God-honoring aspect to EVERY relationship structure.

In 1 Corinthians 15:28, we see Jesus the Son submitting to God the Father:

"When he has done this, then the Son himself will be made subject to him who put everything under him, so that God may be all in all." "Be made subject to" is the same Greek word we find in Ephesians 5, "ὑποτάσσω." So clearly this is not about inferiority or "2nd class" status. The doctrine of the Trinity clearly presents Father/Son/HS "existing in a loving unity of three equally divine Persons."⁸ Therefore, as Jesus submits to His Heavenly Father, it in no way suggests "that the Son is in any way inferior to the Father."⁹ Jesus' submission to God the Father demonstrates "a functional subordination without implying inferiority, or less honour and glory."¹⁰ Thus, having equal worth and distinctive roles is entirely possible.

In 1 Peter 2:13&17 we find citizens submitting themselves to the governing structure. Once again, it uses this same word, "ὑποτάσσω." "Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human authority... Show proper respect to everyone, love the family of believers, fear God, honor the emperor." Clearly, this is about the role and function that each one of us can enjoy as citizens living in a structured society that benefits from the orderly operation of various relationships. Biblical Submission is about embracing one's role in a healthy-functioning, God-honoring relationship structure.¹¹

In Ephesians 5:21-6:9, we once again find the exact same verb "ὑποτάσσω." We see a picture of various roles and functions in the orderly operation of household relationship structures: wives submitting to their husband's lead, children honoring and obeying their parents, and slaves obeying and working hard for their masters.¹² "Submission is a humble recognition of [God's] divine ordering."¹³ Each Christ-follower must choose whether to accept it or reject it. But, once we understand Biblical Submission, as the beautiful design of God, then we can gladly embrace it.

Let's recognize 2 important observations about Biblical Submission. 1. The attitudes and actions of submission are empowered by the HS. Grammatically, the participle "submit" in v. 21 is dependent on the earlier imperative from v. 18 "be filled with the HS." So, we could summarize this thought as "Be filled with the Spirit, so that you are empowered to submit to one another." We will not be able to practice submission in our relationships with one another apart from the reality of being filled with God's Holy Spirit.

2. The attitudes and actions of submission are motivated by reverence for Christ.¹⁴ Note v. 21 again. Biblical submission to one another begins and ends in an atmosphere of reverence for Christ and respect for His design in our relationships. Biblical submission has never been a manmade concept; it has always been intended as something prompted by respect for Jesus Christ.

Christian Marriage is designed to be like a dance where a husband leads and his wife follows and TOGETHER, in unison, they create something BEAUTIFUL. Rather than



⁴ NIV2011 Study Bible, Zondervan, p. 2106 note on 1 Peter 3:1

⁵ The full range of meaning includes: "to cause to be in a submissive relationship, to subject, to subordinate: 'subject oneself, be subjected or subordinated, obey...Of submission involving recognition of an ordered structure... to whom/which appropriate respect is shown.'" See Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., & Bauer, W. (2000). A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian literature (3rd ed., p. 1042). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

⁶ Peter T. O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, Eerdmans, 1999, p. 399, Note #156.

⁷ O'Brien, p. 411. And thus, "submit YOURSELVES."

⁸ EFCA 10-point Statement of Faith, Article 1

⁹ NIV2011 Study Bible, p. 1946 note on 1 Corinthians 15:28

¹⁰ O'Brien, p. 412.

¹¹ NIV2011 Study Bible, p. 2106 note on 1 Peter 3:1

¹² The v. 21 reference to submitting to ONE ANOTHER is not suggesting mutual submission in every relationship structure. This would render the very concept and range of meaning for submission irrelevant. (See O'Brien's discussion of this on p. 402) For example, v. 21 is not suggesting that even as children submit to their parents in Ephesians 6 that parents should then also mutually submit to their children. Nor are masters being urged to mutually submit to their slaves later on in Ephesians 6. They are however reminded that they also have a Master in heaven and that they should treat their slaves well in reverent fear of God.

Therefore, "the pronoun 'ONE ANOTHER' is not always fully reciprocal." (See O'Brien, p. 403) So when v. 21 says "ONE ANOTHER" it is saying that each Christ-follower should submit himself or herself appropriately in whatever relationship structure they find themselves: wives to husbands, children to parents, slaves to masters, and so on. We could just as easily include citizens to governing authorities. Autonomy and independence can be very good things, but we need to be aware of the danger of shedding all relationship structures. Many of these structures are God's good design and His loving provision for the people He has created. God created people to exist in relationships; to thrive in a social environment built on mutual respect and orderliness. The freedom and independence of the American psyche does not tend to embrace all the good aspects of God's plan for social interactions, peace, and harmony. And that's our loss; it's to our own detriment.

The above said, this should be held in check by our understanding of verses like Ephesians 4:2, "Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love." And, Phil. 2:3-5, "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others. In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus."

¹³ O'Brien, p. 411.

¹⁴ Ephesians 5:33 repeats this idea of reverence w/ the wife respecting her husband. Ephesians 6:5 repeats it with slaves respecting masters (See ESV rendering "with trembling"). Reverence carries the idea of deep respect that comes from a sense of awe of the One who is both present Lord and coming Judge. (See O'Brien p. 404.)

stepping on each other's toes or crashing into everyone else on the dance floor, they glide along together in an amazing blend of synergy and artistry. Take 2 minutes to go on your computer and watch this 1936 video of Fred Astaire/Ginger Rogers: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vlvp8PUnC2Y>

From the twirl of her dress to the tapping of his shoes, the music makes sense and brings them both great joy as they work TOGETHER toward something greater than their individual selves could have ever accomplished. We see here a glimpse of the wisdom and grandeur of God's plan at work. Christian Marriage is beautifully designed for the MUTUAL joy and benefit of husband and wife TOGETHER in this dance we call life. And when it's approached with love and respect, in MUTUAL reverence for Christ, it brings God great glory!

Christian Marriage is a beautiful relationship structure that is designed to bring God glory through 4 things...

1. ... the mutual support and building up of each other.

HUSBANDS: Easily 2/3 of the verses in Ephesians 5:21-33, are directed towards us. We would do well to pay attention to them this morning. God has put an amazing calling on the life of every husband to love their wife JUST AS Christ loved the church! We're called to make her holy, supporting and building her up. We husbands are to present her as someone radiant. Husbands are to love their wives as their own bodies; to provide and care for her JUST AS Christ does the church. Christ did not abuse or neglect His church, rather He took abuse and suffered neglect on her behalf! He took the physical, emotional, and mental pain upon Himself; He did not dole it out upon her. Christ did NOT use His power and position as something to be wielded over His Bride. He bore His power as a responsibility and a weight upon His shoulders to sacrificially serve in the church's best interests.¹⁵ And He did this gladly, out of love.

Submission is not a hammer to be used by husbands to force their wives to obey them. This would be directly opposite of the beauty and glory of what Christian marriage is intended to be. Husbands, we should never, ever abuse our wives! We should not physically strike her, verbally attack her, or emotionally abandon her. She is our bride as the Church is the Bride of Christ. Some of us might think we can get away with doing whatever and saying whatever we want to, in the privacy of your own home. But God sees right into your home and right into your heart. And He will hold you accountable. On the day of judgement, he will tell you to brace yourself like a man and answer for how you abused your wife. If you do not repent, and change your behavior now, you will find yourself suffering under the wrath of God. And women, if you or someone you know, is enduring an abusive relationship, get out! You are not expected to submit to that. That is NOT Biblical Submission. That is not what God's Word is teaching this morning. Our Loving God does not expect you to endure abuse!

WIVES: The other 1/3 of these verses are addressed to you. Your husband needs your respect. He needs you to build him up and support him. Your encouragement, your prayers, your mutual devotion means the world to him. I know this because I'm a guy and I've talked to lots of guys. We may not often show it, but we can be a little fragile at times. Genesis tells us that it wasn't good for man to be alone. Oh, there are a few of us who've been called to the single life, but most of us... we need a helpmate. We are sinful and imperfect men, but we are trying to be the godly head of our homes. As we husbands strive toward this calling, we need to know that you'll voluntarily follow us, that you'll stick by our side for better or worse, for richer or poorer, in sickness and in health.

A 2nd way that Christian Marriage brings God glory is through... 2. ... personal spiritual growth in men and women as followers of Christ. **HUSBANDS:** We take our cues directly from our Lord Jesus. A key point in our growth as Christ-followers is learning to die to ourselves every day. We must take up the art of learning to sacrificially love our wives by laying down our lives. As we learn to embrace this beautiful and challenging goal, we will find ourselves growing spiritually, by leaps and bounds, into the strong, godly man that God intends us to be.¹⁶

WIVES: embracing the teaching of Ephesians 5:22-24 becomes a key point of your personal spiritual growth as a Christ-follower. As you voluntarily choose to submit to your husband, you are, in that very act, submitting to Lordship of Christ in your life. Following your husband's leadership is "part and parcel of the way" you serve the Lord and grow into a mature woman of God.¹⁷

¹⁵ See John Piper's sermon from November 24, 2012, "God Created Man Male and Female" at <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/god-created-man-male-and-female-what-does-it-mean-to-be-complementarian>

¹⁶ In fact, the very effectiveness of a husband's prayers is impacted by the way he treats his wife. 1 Peter 3:7 teaches us, "Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers." We shouldn't even bother to ask God for anything until we've begun to show our wife the consideration and respect she deserves.

¹⁷ O'Brien, p. 412.

Another way that Christian Marriage brings God glory is through... 3. ... an effective witness to not yet believers.

HUSBANDS: There are so many men in our Bemidji community that have no idea what it means to truly love a woman. They are desperately in need of a stable relationship, but they have no idea how to even begin. And they are miserable, unhappy, and dissatisfied with life. They need our Christian example. They need to see what Christ-like chivalry looks like. They need to know that male chauvinism and harsh treatment of women is wrong; that women are NOT just objects to be used for our selfish pleasure. They need you to show them that the way to the heart of a woman is by first having a heart for the Lord.

WIVES: 1 Peter 3:1-2 says, "Wives, in the same way submit yourselves to your own husbands so that, if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without words by the behavior of their wives, when they see the purity and reverence of your lives."¹⁸ Unsaved spouses can be won over to the Lord by our Christian witness.

There are many women in our Bemidji community that have no idea what it means to live a pure and reverent life. The idea of submitting to their husbands out of reverence for Christ is a completely foreign idea to them. So many of them, are longing in their hearts for a meaningful relationship with a godly man, but they don't have the spiritual maturity to anchor their convictions. They need your Christian example. They need to see what Christ-like femininity looks like; to treasure the unfading beauty of their inner selves. You can help them break the painful cycle of trying to measure up, and then continually hitting a wall of rejection and disappointment. They need to know that their value comes from God, not from how they look on the outside.

One final way that Christian Marriage brings God glory is through... 4. ... modeling itself after Christ and His Church. Now, we've pretty much been talking about this all along. But let me state this succinctly:

HUSBANDS: Christ is your model for how to love your wife. As Christ laid down His life as Savior of the Church, so you must lay down your life for the sake of your wife. By loving your wife this way, you will bring God great glory.

WIVES: The Church's reverence for Christ is your model for how to respect your husband. Rather than resisting your husband's leadership, chose to voluntarily and joyfully submit to him as the head of your home.¹⁹ By respecting your husband this way, you will bring God great glory.

Christian Marriage is something beautifully designed by God for the MUTUAL joy and benefit of a husband and wife. Love and respect. No one said that marriage was going to be easy. But we have the assurance from God's Word that it is indeed His good gift.

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¹⁸ See 1 Peter 3:1-7 and also Titus 2:5

¹⁹ John R. W. Stott, *God's New Society: The Message of Ephesians*, IVP, 1979, p. 222.