

# **Focus on the Family**

## **The Necessary Foundation**

*Ephesians 5:21*

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# The Necessary Foundation

## Scripture

Today we are beginning a new sermon series in Ephesians 5:21-6:9 that I am calling, “Focus on the Family.”

In our previous study (of Ephesians 5:18-21) we saw that Paul gave two commands, one negative and one positive. Paul wrote in Ephesians 5:18: “And *do not get drunk with wine* [that is the negative command], for that is debauchery, but *be filled with the Spirit* [that is the positive command].” Then Paul gave four participles in verses 19-21, which are evidences of being filled with the Spirit: “...*addressing* one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs [that is fellowship], *singing* and making melody to the Lord with your heart [that is worship], *giving thanks* always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ [that is gratitude], *submitting* to one another out of reverence for Christ [that is submission].”

Sometimes a Greek participle was used as an imperative (command). That is what Paul was doing in verse 21, where he wrote, “...**submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.**” The Greek participle is, of course, “**submitting,**” but it really forms the transition and the command for what follows. The *New International Version* actually translates this verse as a command, “Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.” Moreover, there is no verb in verse 22 because the call for submission in verse 21 is intended to carry over into verse 22. The call for submission is in fact the necessary foundation for the three sets of relationships in Ephesians 5:22-6:9. John Stott puts it this way, “What is beyond question is that the three paragraphs which follow are given as examples of Christian

submission, and that the emphasis throughout is on submission. Thus, wives are addressed before their husbands and are told to *submit* to them (verse 22); children are mentioned before their parents and are told to *obey* them (6:1); and slaves are addressed before their masters and are told to *obey* them (6:5)."<sup>1</sup>

Let's read about the necessary foundation of Christian submission in Ephesians 5:21, although for the sake of context, I shall read verses 18-21:

<sup>18</sup> And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, <sup>19</sup> addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, <sup>20</sup> giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>21</sup> **submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.** (Ephesians 5:18b-21)

## Introduction

### A. *The Breaking Down of Society*

Let's begin by reflecting on the breaking down of society. I don't have to tell you that marriage and family have seen massive changes in just the last few years. Ten years ago, when President Obama took office, he affirmed that marriage should be only be between one man and one woman. During his presidency, the law changed to allow so-called "same sex marriage." And today people are promoting vigorously—and largely successfully—for all kinds of sexual and gender identities and family relationships.

The Biblical view of marriage and family is disappearing

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<sup>1</sup> John R. W. Stott, *God's New Society: The Message of Ephesians*, The Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1979), 215.

from our society. Christians who hold to a biblical view of marriage and family are being told that they are bigoted and are increasingly shunned for their views.

This break down of society is not new however. In the ancient world, disdain for women in particular was almost universal. Commentator William Barclay sums it up this way:

The Jews had a low view of women. In the Jewish form of morning prayer there was a sentence in which a Jewish man every morning gave thanks that God had not made him “a Gentile, a slave or a woman”.... In Jewish law a woman was not a person, but a thing. She had no legal rights whatsoever; she was absolutely in her husband’s possession to do with as he willed.... The position was worse in the Greek world.... The whole Greek way of life made companionship between man and wife next to impossible. The Greek expected his wife to run his home, to care for his legitimate children, but he found his pleasure and his companionship elsewhere.... In Greece, home and family life were near to being extinct, and fidelity was completely non-existent.... In Rome in Paul’s day the matter was still worse.... The degeneracy of Rome was tragic.... It is not too much to say that the whole atmosphere of the ancient world was adulterous.... The marriage bond was on the way to complete breakdown.<sup>2</sup>

We will continue to see a breaking down of society in our day. That is why the proclamation of the gospel is so urgent.

*B. The Building Up of Society*

God calls his people to the building up of society.

John Stott’s commentary on Paul’s letter to the Ephesians

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<sup>2</sup> William Barclay, *The Letters to the Galatians and Ephesians in the Daily Study Bible* (The Saint Andrew Press, 1954. 2nd edition, 1958), 199-203.

is titled, *God's New Society: The Message of Ephesians*.<sup>3</sup> Stott argues (persuasively, I would say) that Paul's "letter focuses on what God did through the historical work of Jesus Christ and does through his Spirit today, in order to build his new society in the midst of the old."<sup>4</sup> By God's grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone God has been and still is saving sinners. "As a result, through Christ and in Christ, we are nothing less than God's new society, the single new humanity which he is creating and which includes Jews and Gentiles on equal terms. We are the family of God the Father, the body of Jesus Christ his Son and the temple or dwelling place of the Holy Spirit."<sup>5</sup>

In his letter, the Apostle Paul has been outlining the new standards that God expects of his new society. He has set down doctrinal principles and fleshed them out in practical duties. Paul now moves on to the new relationships that God has established for his people. And the necessary foundation of these new relationships is submission. And it is a submission by Christians because it is done out of reverence for Christ.

## Lesson

The analysis of the concept of submission in Ephesians 5:21 teaches us what God expects of his new society.

Let's use the following outline:

1. The Explanation of Submission
2. The Example of Submission
3. The Examination of Submission

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<sup>3</sup> John R. W. Stott, *God's New Society: The Message of Ephesians*, The Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1979).

<sup>4</sup> John R. W. Stott, *God's New Society: The Message of Ephesians*, 24.

<sup>5</sup> John R. W. Stott, *God's New Society: The Message of Ephesians*, 25.

## I. The Explanation of Submission

First, let's look at the explanation of submission.

As I said earlier, Paul's command is in verse 18 where he commanded Christians to "be filled with the Spirit." Then he gave four evidences of being filled with the Spirit, which are fellowship, worship, gratitude, and submission. These four evidences are seen in a vibrant, vital, Spirit-filled church.

Our focus in this series is on the last of the four evidences, which governs the next three paragraphs. It is a summary statement calling Christians to submission, when Paul wrote in verse 21, **"...submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ."**

The brother of the Lord Jesus Christ, James, asks in James 4:1, "What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you?" Quarrels and conflicts and church fights happen when people want to get their own way, they want their voice to be obeyed, and they want to push their way to the top. "But," as John MacArthur says, "someone who is Spirit-filled doesn't fight for the top; he fights for the bottom."<sup>6</sup>

The theme of submission runs throughout God's Word. Paul wrote to Christians in Corinth in 1 Corinthians 16:16 and said, "...be subject to such as these, and to every fellow worker and laborer."

Peter wrote to Christians in the Diaspora in 1 Peter 2:13a, "Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution."

And again he said in 1 Peter 5:5, "Likewise, you who are younger, be subject to the elders. Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for 'God opposes the proud

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<sup>6</sup> John F. MacArthur Jr., *The Fulfilled Family* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1981), n.p.

but gives grace to the humble.’ ”

And the writer to the Hebrews wrote to Christians and said in Hebrews 13:17, “Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.”

The Greek word for **“submitting”** (*hypotasso*) means “to place in order. To place under in an orderly fashion.”<sup>7</sup> This submission about which Paul speaks is not haphazard or random or accidental. In the new society of God, submission is ordered, and it takes place when Christians “do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than [themselves]” (Philippians 2:3). As MacArthur says, “The whole mentality of the Christian life as we relate to each other is one of humility and submissiveness.”<sup>8</sup>

## II. The Example of Submission

Second, let’s notice the example of submission.

The supreme example of submission is of course our Lord Jesus Christ. He left the glory of heaven, set aside the prerogatives of deity, and came to earth to live and suffer and die at the hands of those whom he created. Paul put it this way in Philippians 2:4–8, “Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being

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<sup>7</sup> Spiros Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament* (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 2000).

<sup>8</sup> John F. MacArthur Jr., *The Fulfilled Family* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1981), n.p.

found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.”

## II. The Examination of Submission

And third, let's do an examination of submission.

When Paul said in verse 21, “...submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ,” he was setting down a general principle that all Christians must follow, namely, that in our relationships we must submit to one another. MacArthur clarifies and says, “Now, in terms of structure and function, there is to be authority and submission [and we shall look at that next]; but in terms of interpersonal relationships, there is to be mutual submission.”<sup>9</sup>

Paul set down three key sets of relationships: wives and husbands, children and parents, and slaves and masters (whom I shall call employees and employers). Throughout the ages, and even in our day, there has been mistreatment of women, children, and employees. Women have been exploited, being treated like servants by their husbands. Children have been suppressed and abused. And employees have been unjustly treated, with insufficient income and poor working conditions.

In Jesus' day, these conditions were the norm and were accepted by the culture as the standard. And so what Paul wrote about the Christian household was radical and different and countercultural. But, where did Paul get his theology of the family and household? Where did he learn about true, Biblical liberation? Why, he learned it from Jesus, of course. It was Jesus who treated women with dignity and courtesy and honor in an age where they were often despised. It was Jesus who said, “Let the little children come to me” (Matthew 19:14) in a

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<sup>9</sup> John F. MacArthur Jr., *The Fulfilled Family* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1981), n.p.

time when unwanted children were left at the local rubbish dump (not unlike babies killed in abortions). And it was Jesus who dignified manual labor by working as a carpenter for many years, and who served as a servant by washing the feet of his disciples and saying, “But I am among you as the one who serves” (Luke 22:27).

So, when we come to the three sets of relationships that Paul will talk about (and about which we will study), he is not contradicting Jesus. Nor is Paul contradicting himself, as some try to argue. No, in Paul’s focus on the family in Ephesians 5:21-6:9, he is fleshing out what he has been describing as God’s new society throughout his letter. Paul has been teaching about our new unity in Jesus Christ. But he is not now destroying his own teaching by saying that there are no distinctions in the family. Thus, John Stott writes, “In the light of the teaching of Jesus and his apostles, we may confidently and repeatedly affirm at least three relevant truths: first, the *dignity* of womanhood, childhood and servanthood; secondly, the *equality* before God of all human beings, irrespective of their race, rank, class, culture, sex or age, because all are made in his image; and the even deeper *unity* of all Christian believers, as fellow-members of God’s family and of Christ’s body.”<sup>10</sup>

We must be very clear that when Paul calls wives, children, and employees to submission, that is not another word for inferiority. On the other hand, the Scripture is very clear that there is a distinction between *persons* and *roles*. The Reformer Martin Luther put it this way, “I have often said that we must sharply distinguish between these two, the office and the person. The man who is called Hans or Martin is a man quite different from the one who is called elector or doctor or

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<sup>10</sup> John R. W. Stott, *God’s New Society: The Message of Ephesians*, 217.

preacher. Here we have two different persons in one man. The one is that in which we are created and born, according to which we are all alike—man or woman or child, young or old. But once we are born, God adorns and dresses you up as another person. He makes you a child and me a father, one a master and another a servant, one a prince and another a citizen.”<sup>11</sup>

God has ordained different roles to maintain an ordered society. And that is particularly true in the new society of the church. There are clearly delineated roles of wives and husbands, children and parents, and employees and employers. Nevertheless, every individual person has equal dignity, value, and worth to God.

So, in God’s new society there is a mutual submission. Remember that the Greek word for **“submitting”** means “to place under in an orderly fashion.” Husbands, parents, and employers submit to wives, children, and employees by relating to them in terms of loving responsibility and not by harsh rule. John MacArthur puts it this way, “A husband is to submit to his wife, not in the sense of abdicating his responsibility of leadership, but in the sense of getting under her to bear her burdens, carry her cares, meet her needs, and sacrifice his own desires to fulfill her needs.... Parents are to submit to their children in the sense that they are not to provoke them to wrath but instead ‘bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.’... A servant needs to submit to his master (vv. 5–8), but a master needs to submit by never doing wrong to that servant (v. 9). We all have to submit. Every relationship in the family illustrates mutual submissiveness.”<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> From his exposition of ‘Blessed are the meek’ (Mt. 5:5) in *The Sermon on the Mount, Luther’s Works*, Vol. 21 (Concordia, 1956), 23.

<sup>12</sup> John F. MacArthur Jr., *The Fulfilled Family* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1981), n.p.

While Paul enjoins mutual submission, he also teaches that there must be authority at the same time. No ordered society is able to function without authority. We see this demonstrated in the Trinity. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are equal *persons* but they have different *roles*. The Father elected sinners for salvation. Then he sent the Son to save those elect sinners by dying on the cross for them. And the Father and the Son together send the Holy Spirit to apply the work of redemption to those elect for whom Christ died.

### Conclusion

Therefore, having analyzed the concept of submission in Ephesians 5:21, let us submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.

Let me close with a comment from John MacArthur, “The Bible has two important things to say about having a meaningful relationship: (1) we are all to mutually submit to each other; and (2) functionally, we must have authority and submission. When we learn the meaning of those two dimensions of truth, our families will be what God wants them to be.”<sup>13</sup>

May God help us to focus on the family in these coming weeks so that we may submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. Amen.

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<sup>13</sup> John F. MacArthur Jr., *The Fulfilled Family* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1981), n.p.

# Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church  
is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ  
and membership in his church family,  
develop them to Christlike maturity,  
equip them for their ministry in the church  
and life mission in the world,  
in order to magnify God's name.*

## Sermons by Rev. Freddy Fritz

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