

Introduction: Submitting to One Another (5:21)

Paul has just said that we are to pay attention to how we walk:

we are to walk in a manner worthy of our calling (4:1),
we must not walk as the Gentiles do (4:17),
we are to walk in love, as Christ loved us (5:2),
we are to walk as children of light (5:8),
and we are to look carefully how we walk – not as unwise, but as wise (5:15).

And in verses 18-21 Paul has laid out a series of participles that describe how we are to be filled with the Spirit.

As we saw last time this is a most interesting command.

“Be filled with the Spirit”

What can you do about it?

How can you obey Paul’s command?

You cannot fill yourself with God’s Spirit!

But you can be filled with the Spirit!

In Greek, when a participle follows an imperative, the participle often carries something of the force of the imperative.

(The same thing happens in English as well.

You can hear this in verses 18-21.

As you listen to these verses, ask yourself,
is Paul saying that verses 19-21 are optional?)

*Do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit,
19 addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs,
singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart,
20 giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father
in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,
21 submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.*

These participles:

addressing, singing, making melody, giving thanks, submitting,
are not optional.

They are part of the command.

This is what it means to be filled with the Spirit.

Of course, someone could go through the motions without being filled with the Spirit,
but these are the fruits and evidences of a Spirit-filled life.

This also makes it clear that *everyone* in the church is supposed to submit to one another.

Jerome wisely comments on this verse,

“Let bishops hear this, let priests hear, let every rank of learning get this clear:

In the church, leaders are servants.

Let them imitate the apostle...

The difference between secular rulers and Christian leaders
is that the former love to boss their subordinates
whereas the latter serve them.”

In the church, leaders are servants.

The reason for our mutual submission in the church

is because Jesus, our King, came to serve us.

Therefore, *no one* in the church is exempt from the call to service –
the call to submission.

H. L. Mencken once said that an “archbishop” was an ecclesiastic
who had attained a position higher than that of Christ.

But anyone who refuses to submit to one another
is *in fact* claiming a position higher than that of Christ!

Because Christ himself learned obedience through what he suffered.

Indeed, the PCA has considered this point so important

that it has made it into our membership vows that all of us have taken before God:

“Do you submit yourselves to the government and discipline of the Church,
and promise to study its purity and peace?”

And we have included it as well in our ordination vows for officers:

“Do you promise subjection to your brethren in the Lord?”

So no one is exempt from the call to submit to one another in the fear of Christ.

But whereas in the ESV (and most English translations)

verse 22 begins a new sentence,

it is not possible to think of verse 22 apart from verse 21.

Let me give you a literal translation of the two verses,

“submitting to one another in the fear of Christ,
the wives to their own husbands as to the Lord,”

In other words, there is no verb in verse 22 – not even a participle.

It depends entirely on verse 21.

In other words, verses 18-24 are actually all one sentence.

And so while most translations begin a new section,
perhaps entitled something like “Wives and Husbands,”
Paul simply continues his thought about how the church is supposed to
“look carefully then how you walk.”

The Spirit-filled life takes the same sort of shape in the home that it does in the church:
submitting to one another in the fear of Christ.

I know.

Your translation says “reverence” – which is accurate enough –
but given the wisdom context set by verse 15,
we should hear echoes of Proverbs 9:

“the fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom.”

And especially as we turn now to the marriage relation,
we need to remember the importance of the “excellent wife” in Proverbs
and the great priority that the Father gives to “finding wisdom”
and clinging to wisdom, spending your life with wisdom!

1. “Wives, Submit to Your Own Husbands” (5:22-24)

22 Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord.

Notice that Paul does not say “women submit to men.”

In Paul’s day there would have been many man who had to submit to women.

When Paul tells slaves to obey their masters,
that would include many slaves whose masters were women
(and of course the wife of your master is your mistress!).

In a hierarchical society, any man of a lower rank
must submit to a woman in a higher rank.

Rather, Paul says “wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord.”

Why?

*23 For the husband is the head of the wife
even as Christ is the head of the church, his body,
and is himself its Savior.*

Paul has already spoken at great length in Ephesians about the importance of the body.

1:23 – Christ is head over all things to the church

“which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.”

2:16 – Christ has reconciled “us both to God in one body through the cross.”

3:6 – Gentiles are now “fellow heirs, members of the same body” as Jews.

4:4 – There is now “one body and one Spirit”

4:12 – pastors and teachers are given by Christ to the church among other things,

“for building up the body” until we grow up into Christ, the head

4:16 – “from whom the whole body,

joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped,
when each part is working properly,
makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.”

Now Paul says that the relationship between husband and wife
is parallel to that of Christ and the church.
Christ and his body, the church,
are reflected in husband and wife.

This strengthens the case that I suggested a few weeks ago
for seeing the “Church as body” language in Ephesians
as a female body – the bride of Christ.

*24 Now as the church submits to Christ,
so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands.*

Wives, you can take some comfort in this.
After all, look around you!

The church does a pretty lousy job of submitting to Christ!
So the expectations here are pretty low!
I say that in jest,
but (like most forms of humor)
it is intended to cut both ways!

We need to do a better job of submitting to Christ!
And even so, wives need to do a better job of submitting to their husbands!

Fulgentius (a sixth century north African commentator) said that
“Any soul that cleaves faithfully to Christ is like a wife living faithfully with her husband.
Even in chaste wedlock she may grieve the mind of her husband.
But she preserves the faith of the marriage bed with chaste purity.
Prudently and temperately she orders the husband’s household.
Even while she falls short of meeting his needs
she lives chastely and faithfully with him.
Though human infirmity often causes her to transgress against him,
conjugal chastity makes her cleave with pleasure to her husband.”

Though we fail to submit to Christ, time and time again,
yet we cry out with the disciples,
“Lord, to whom shall we go, you have the words of eternal life!”
We are imperfect disciples,
too often bent towards our own selfish ways.
Yet the church confesses that we have no other hope but Jesus.

Even so, wives, as you are called to submit to your husbands,
you will fail –
but do not let your failures prevent you from continuing to walk in the path!

What does it mean to submit to your husband as the church submits to Christ?
Remember that we are still in the same sentence that began in verse 18.

A Spirit-filled wife speaks to her husband in psalms, hymns and songs of the Spirit,
singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord.
There is nothing that gives your husband more delight
than seeing you thriving in your love for God.
If you would submit to your husband,
then you must first “give thanks always and for everything to God the Father
in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

In other words, if you demonstrate love for God and a heart of thanksgiving toward him,
then you will be ready to submit to your husband.

Because of course, you have no control over him.
He may love you.
But your attitude toward him is not determined by who he is.
Your attitude toward your husband is determined by who Christ is.

Notice that Paul makes no comment here about what sort of man your husband should be.
He only reminds you who Christ is!

The reason why you submit to your husband is *not* because of anything in your husband!
The reason why you submit to your husband is because *you* are in Christ.
And because you love Christ – because you give thanks to the Father
in the name of the Lord Jesus –
therefore you submit to your husband.

I hope your husband makes it easy for you to submit,
but your calling from God is to submit to your husband.

But then Paul turns to the husbands:

2. “Husbands, Love Your Wives” (5:25-32)

*25 Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her,
26 that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word,
27 so that he might present the church to himself in splendor,
without spot or wrinkle or any such thing,
that she might be holy and without blemish.*

This, brothers, is what you are called to!

Not that you can do exactly what Christ did!

But you are to imitate him.

You are to love your wife the way that Christ loved the church.

And how did Christ love the church?

He gave himself up for her.

Some husbands seem to think that they are to imitate Christ in his exaltation.

As kings, they insist that everything has to be done exactly the way they wish.

As prophets, they instruct their wives in all things.

As priests, hmmm, this is where it all begins to break down...

But that is where Paul starts!

He starts with the priestly work of Christ,
not in his exaltation, but in his humiliation.

Christ's own humiliation – his sacrifice –

was so that he might sanctify his bride.

And he has cleansed her by the washing of water with the word –

Paul is speaking here of baptism,
not merely the outward sign (water)
but also the inward reality (with the word),
because in baptism we are cleansed, we are washed,
we are sanctified (consecrated) into our priestly service:

*27 so that he might present the church to himself in splendor,
without spot or wrinkle or any such thing,
that she might be holy and without blemish.*

Verse 27 is loaded with sacrificial language.

Through the death and resurrection of Jesus
he has presented the church to himself as a holy and radiant bride.

Or should we say, a holy and blameless sacrifice –
so that she might share in his suffering,
and also in his glory.

Now, you might say,

“But pastor, you don't know my wife!

She's not very submissive.

She criticizes me, she nags, complains.

I don't think I can do this!”

John Chrysostom spoke to husbands 1600 years ago:

“If you take the premise that your wife should submit to you, as the church submits to Christ,
then you should also take the same kind of careful, sacrificial thought for her

that Christ takes for the church.
Even if you must offer your own life for her, you must not refuse.
Even if you must undergo countless struggles on her behalf
and have all kinds of things to endure and suffer, you must not refuse.
Even if you suffer all this, you have still done not as much as Christ has for the church.
For you are already married when you act this way,
whereas Christ is acting for one who has rejected and hated him.
So just as he, when she was rejecting, hating, spurning and nagging him,
brought her to trust him by his great solicitude,
not by threatening, lording it over her or intimidating her
or anything like that,
so must you also act toward your wife.
Even if you see her looking down on you, nagging and despising you,
you will be able to win her over with your great love and affection for her.”

How?

Because you love Christ.
I must take you back to the same place I took your wife.
If you are filled with the Spirit,
then you are to speak to her in psalms and hymns and songs of the Spirit,
and you are make music in your heart to God.
You are to be grateful to God the Father for all things –
even this difficult wife that God has given you!
After all, you don't love her because of anything in her.
You love her because you love God.
You love her because Christ laid down his life for you.
And now he has called you to lay down your life for her.

It doesn't really matter what she does.
She may continue to nag and complain.
Maybe you will never do anything right.

So what?

That's what the church does to Jesus all the time!

And let me remind you, brothers,
that it is not *your job* to make your wife submit.
That is her job.
You are commanded to love your wife.

As Paul continues in verse 28:

*28 In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies.
He who loves his wife loves himself.*

*29 For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it,
just as Christ does the church, 30 because we are members of his body.*

Why does Paul say that you should love your wife as your own body?

Because he wants you to understand the importance of the two becoming one flesh.

In our day we don't like this "one flesh" business.

And so we have come up with all sorts of ways of staying "two flesh."

There is the egalitarian model:

he has his life and she has her life, and never the twain shall meet
(except occasionally in the bedroom).

Don't talk about submission – and don't talk about self-sacrificing love!

Then there is the romantic model:

he for her and she for him, meeting each other halfway –
so long as you meet me halfway!

Oh, you're not going to meet me halfway...?

Well, forget this!!!

And so many evangelicals have thrown out these faulty models
and returned to the ancient paths.

At least, they think that it is the ancient path.

It certainly sounds better.

It was Milton who put it best,

"He for God, and she for God through him!"

They call it the "patriarchal" model.

The man is oriented to the task, and the woman is oriented to the man.

The most fundamental flaw with the modern patriarchal model
is that it is still essentially a two-flesh model.

It assumes that the man has his life, the woman has her life,
but her life is oriented around his life,
while his life goes on its merry way!

But in the beginning Adam said,

and two thousand years ago, Paul repeated:

*31 "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife,
and the two shall become one flesh."*

The modern patriarchal model is *not* the biblical model.

The biblical model is based on the relationship between Christ and the church.

32 This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.

Paul says that the whole mystery of marriage –
the two becoming one flesh –
is all about Christ and the church.

In other words, if you go back to the creation of Adam and Eve,
you see in their coming together as one flesh
the mystery of Christ and his bride.

As Adam lay down in sleep, God took from his side a woman.
She is flesh of his flesh and bone of his bone.
Even so, as Christ lay down in death, God took from his side a woman.
The church is flesh of his flesh and bone of his bone.

We are one flesh with Christ.

As Theodoret says,
“Just as the whole human race is born from Adam and his wife,
so the whole multitude of believers has been born of Christ and the church.”

And yes, that means that Christ’s agenda drives everything about the church!
And so, yes, that means that in some sense, the husband’s agenda drives the household.
But of course, the husband is a part of the bride! (the church)
The husband’s agenda has been reformed and remade.

You, men, cannot have the same self-centered attitude that you once did!
You understand something of what your wife must do,
because *you* must submit to Christ!

And must remember, husbands,
that your wife has to put up with a lot.

You are not nearly so kind and humble and gracious to your wife as Christ is to you!
So repent!
Do not be satisfied with your progress as a husband.
You may think at times that you are doing well.

But then look again at Jesus!

Conclusion: Love and Respect (5:33)

In conclusion, Paul provides one last exhortation:

*33 However, let each one of you love his wife as himself,
and let the wife see that she respects her husband.*

This is the heart and soul of a good marriage.

Husbands, love your wife as yourself.

What your wife needs is love.

Not stuff.

Not flowers.

Not a warm, comfortable home.

Those things are okay, but what she needs is love.

What do I mean?

If all you do is provide stuff, then she will wither and die.

Oh, she may remain tough and resilient on the outside,

but inside she will die.

But if you love her – if you lay down your life for her

(not just “for her” in doing all sorts of external things,

but “for her” the sense of setting aside your own things

in order to care for her) –

then you will be a good and faithful husband.

And let the wife see that she respects her husband.

I never realized how important this really was

until Ginger started working diligently on it.

Wives, your husband needs your respect.

First, you need to respect *him* for who he is.

God has put him as head over you.

If you grumble about that, then you are grumbling against God.

But you also need to respect what he does –

both in terms of his regular employment,

and also his work around the house,

and the way that he loves you.

And you must show this respect for him

both in public and in private –

both when he is there and when he is not.

If he is sinning, you may need to tell others in order to deal properly with it,

but that is a separate matter.

And again, it is not really about how “wonderful” he is.

You respect him because of who Jesus is.

Paul says that respect is the most important thing for a wife to remember.

And that love is the most important thing for a husband to remember.