

The Pearl of the Epistles – Ephesians

God's Design for Marriage, Part I

Ephesians 5:21-24

***Ephesians 5:21-33** Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God. **22** Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. **23** For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body. **24** Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing.*

Introduction

As we studied this book, we have noticed a shift in the narrative after chapter three. Like most of Paul's epistles, the first half of the book covers doctrine or teaching. Beginning in chapter four, Paul teaches how to live the Christian life as taught in chapters 1-3. He really focuses on the "duty" of the believer.

So far, the Apostle Paul's epistle was directed at the overall issues within church. These issues included both corporate and individual sins. He also included ways for the believer to live their lives in a way that God would find pleasing. This is not just a book of "do not's" but of "do's" as well.

The remaining section of this chapter focuses on the family, specifically wives and husbands.

The institution of marriage goes back thousands of years. The purpose and order for marriage has been handed down from God and is found in the first book of the Bible, Genesis.

***Genesis 1:27-28** So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them. **28** And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth.*

***Genesis 2:18** And the LORD God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him.*

Genesis 2:21-25 And the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept: and he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof; 22 And the rib, which the LORD God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man. 23 And Adam said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man. 24 Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh. 25 And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed.

Marriage is under attack today throughout the world. God set the organization of the family unit and He blessed it. There is purpose for the family that can only be obtained with the biblical ideal of the family.

Satan's anger is against anything that God holds dear. So it is, that Satan's first attack in the Bible, is on the family and its organization. The enemy of God has a great interest in destroying the family.

An article posted on the Focus On the Family website

“Family is the fundamental building block of all human civilizations, and marriage is the foundation of the family. The institution of marriage is unquestionably good for individuals and society, and the health of our culture is intimately linked to the health and well-being of marriage. Unfortunately, the standard of lifelong, traditional marriage as the foundation of family life in our nation is under attack.”¹

In the family, it is the woman who transforms a house into a home. Women are incredibly gifted by God, to pull individual members of the house, into a family. The woman is the glue that can keep the family together when the world pulls at it from all directions, and I have seen this demonstrated by both my mom and my wife. The many roles of the woman, including wife and mother, can be very taxing. This is why Satan focuses his attack on the family and more importantly on the wife and mother. He knows that by destroying the family unit, he destroys part of God's plan for man.

¹ <http://www.focusonthefamily.com/socialissues/social-issues/marriage.aspx>

The Purpose of Submission (vv. 21-22)

Ephesians 5:21-22 Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God.

Submitting yourselves one to another. This verse is a transition from the previous passage: He is continuing his thought on things that are wise and things that are unwise. Paul declares that it naturally follows that just as when “Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and make melody in your heart to the Lord” leads to “giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ”, that the vertical relationship with the Lord naturally is one of submission to the LORD.

Paul contends that in our horizontal relationships, submission is a natural response of our vertical relationship with God.

In this passage (Ephesians 5:22-6:9) Paul will clarify what submission should resemble in the Christian family concerning, 1) wives and husbands, 5:22–33, 2) children and parents, 6:1–4, and finally 3) between slaves and masters, 6:5–9. A parallel passage is Colossians 3:18–25.

What is the definition of the word “submit?” - The Greek word *hupotasso* is a translation of two Greek words meaning "to line up under." It usually reflects a military chain of command, "to rank lower than."

Submission is the method used to accomplish Paul’s exhortation to walk in wisdom (vv. 15–21). There is no way to “sugar coat” what submission requires. Paul says if you are going to walk in wisdom, then submit “one to another” and then gave examples using family relations (5:22–6:4).

Normally in today's world we are told to make every effort to rise to the top. Management and education push the individual to be "Number 1". This overshadows the biblical basis of submission. That is the world’s way, but when the believer is in the correct relationship with God, submitting to one another will be made easy and natural. Jesus Christ taught at the Sermon on the Mount;

Matthew 5:5 Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth.

And one-on-one with His disciples

Mark 9:35 And he sat down, and called the twelve, and saith unto them, If any man desire to be first, the same shall be last of all, and servant of all.

Jesus taught that having a servant's heart, is of a greater importance than being "Number 1." This theme was carried out through the early Christian Church. The Apostle Peter wrote:

1 Peter 2:13 Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme;

1 Peter 5:5 Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble.

The writer of the Book of Hebrews talks about the relationship between teachers and Christian

Hebrews 13:17 Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you.

Jesus didn't just talk about submission, His whole life was an exhibit of serving. He left the splendor of heaven to become a man destined to die; this is serving the will of the Father. In his epistle to the church at Philippi, Paul wrote:

Philippians 2:7-8 But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: 8 And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.

Remember, this command follows that believers are to be filled with the Holy Spirit in four different ways. The last of these is to submit one to another. When we are full of the Holy Spirit, wives, husbands, children, parents, slaves and masters will serve each other as if they are Jesus himself (Philippians 2:5-8). The whole family unit will only find joy and peace when they are filled with the Holy Spirit and deferring to one another.

...in the fear of God – notice with me that mutual submission is to be done *in the fear of God*. Christians are to show regard to the wishes of each another, as long as it is not against any of God's commandments.

Paul's first example is the importance of the wife being in submission to her husband.

Ephesians 5:22 Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord.

Wives – a woman, specifically a wife. Husband – a man. Marriage in the beginning (Genesis) and in the New Testament is always between a man and a woman. Always!

Sin entered the Garden of Eden as the serpent approached the woman first. In much the same pattern, Paul begins the discussion concerning “God’s Design for Marriage”, with the wife.

I enter into the discussion on this passage of scripture with considerable trepidation for several reasons.

First, the Bible teaches that God set the order in the marriage relationship. The word the Apostle Paul used in this relationship order is “submit,” which raises a whole laundry list of examples, both good and bad. Throw the word submit into a conversation today and immediately there are “lines drawn in the sand.” Discussions turn passionate, emotional and fierce. In today’s culture, “freedom” is the byword and submission is considered counter-intuitive to that principle and belief. Any talk about submission can turn to anger and panic. Submission is associated with words like “dominance,” “suppression,” or “control.”

Second, there has been a terrible misunderstanding in the church, of the principle of submission. I have personal experience where this precept is misinterpreted and misconstrued and therefore exploited by unscrupulous men.

Third, the reason that submission is such a hot topic is because it is the opposite of what we are taught. Today’s society “if it feels good, do it.” Every sports fan believes that his team is “Number 1.” Self-fulfillment is taught from elementary school. Kids today are taught that they are more important than the whole of society. Self-fulfillment is the “act or fact of fulfilling one’s ambitions, desires, etc., through one’s own efforts.”²

The view that the individual is more important than the whole has been assaulting the family for three generations. The Apostle Paul is defining, encouraging and exhorting the families to follow the Biblical order of the organization of the family unit.

Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands – Let me be very clear. This is not a license for husbands to be elevated to the same position as the Lord and the wives to be indentured into a life “do this and do it now.” Oh, no. This verse taken out of the context in which it is written, has caused many husbands to dominate and subjugate their wives causing many wives to live a life of bitterness and

² Random House Kernerman Webster’s College Dictionary, © 2010 K Dictionaries Ltd. Copyright 2005, 1997, 1991 “

rebellion. But let me be equally clear, it means a woman should submit herself to her husband. There is no getting around this point.

John Phillips in his fine commentary of Ephesians, says:

“Standing alone, this verse seems arbitrary and unfair. No verse of Scripture stands alone. This verse is preceded by the command that we submit ourselves one to another in the fear of God. What a pity that preachers so often ignore this context when beginning a topical series of messages on husband-wife relationships. The context includes not only the Holy Spirit’s instruction for mutual submission, but also His teaching about the Holy Spirit’s infilling – the blessed oil that makes the machinery of marriage run smoothly.”³

Note: In Ephesians 5:21-29, submit and love are the foundation stones of the marriage.

Throughout the Scriptures, the duty of submission of the wife to the husband is declared.

1 Corinthians 11:3 But I would have you know, that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God.

1 Peter 3:1 Likewise, ye wives, be in subjection to your own husbands; that, if any obey not the word, they also may without the word be won by the conversation of the wives;

Colossians 3:18 Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as it is fit in the Lord.

Titus 2:5 To be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed.

Albert Barnes comments on the limits of the husband authority over his wife;

In everything, except that which relates to *conscience* and *religion*, he has authority. But there his authority ceases. He has no right to require her to commit an act of dishonesty, to connive at wrong-doing, to visit a place of amusement which her conscience tells her is wrong, nor has he a right to interfere with the proper discharge of her religious duties. He has no right to forbid her to go to church at the proper and usual time, or to make a profession of religion when she pleases. He has no right to forbid her endeavouring to exercise a religious influence over her children, or to endeavour to lead them to God. She is bound to obey God, rather than any

³ John Phillips, *Exploring Ephesians and Philippians*, (Grand Rapids, Kregel, 1993) 159

man, and when even a husband interferes in such cases, and attempts to control her, he steps beyond his proper bounds, and invades the prerogative of God, and his authority ceases to be binding.⁴

...as unto the Lord – The wife should submit herself to her husband, just as she would to the Lord, because it is the Lord requires the wife to be submissive and He has given the husband authority.

The Validation for Submission (v. 23)

Ephesians 5:23 *For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body.*

It is very important that verse 23 be fully understood. The word “head” denotes; “master, ruler, and chief.” Here it refers to Christ, as “Ruler, Director, or Lord of the church and the Christian man.” The husband is to have no other fill Christ’s place in his life. This truth and life style was to be regarded in the husband’s actions of the heart and deeds.

The reason wives are to be submissive to their husbands is because Christ has appointed this same relationship between the husband and wife, as He has between Himself and the church. Submission is not a mere declaration from God, but is designed to build stronger relationships between husband and wife, and Christ and the church.

...he is the saviour of the body – “He” could be referring to Christ or the Husband. Either way as Christ exercises authority over the Church, 1) to save the church and 2) protect the church, implies that the husband is be a savour to the wife, being an ever watchful and judicious protector, guardian and deliverer of the wife by defending, encouraging, and being responsible for her life.

The Nature of Submission (v. 24)

Ephesians 5:24 *Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing.*

Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ – in conclusion, every believer knows that the head of the church is Christ. He is the head of the church and therefore all Christians, men and women, serve

⁴ Albert Barnes, Albert Barnes Notes on the Bible, SwordSearcher software, digital edition

Him with joyous hearts and minds. It is not a question if the Lord Jesus is to be lifted up and served...that is a given.

...so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing. – As the Christian wife is already submitting to Christ as the Head of the Church, to complete the order that God established for the family, she is to be submissive to her husband in his legitimate authority “in the Lord” in everything that is not contrary to the will of God (Colossians 3:18).

Conclusion

There is a hierarchical order in the universe and sin introduced chaos, and disorder. God created man first, then woman was created from man. Eve was subordinate to man but not subservient.

A Spirit-filled Christian (Ephesians 5:18) should desire to submit and serve, rather than to assert and rule.

The word "submit" is a translation of two Greek words meaning "to line up under." It usually reflects a military hierarchy, "to rank lower than." Our goal, therefore, should be to place others above ourselves and to be in submission to and in service of them.

The wife is required by the Holy Spirit to submit to her man – her husband – “as unto the Lord.” Submission then lifts the commandment of submission to a higher and holy calling.

A good example of how the husband and wife are to give to one another is

Luke 6:38 *Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again.*

Robert C. Crowder