

SUBMISSION

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“Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God.” Ephesians 5:21

The first half of this thought begins several verses before. It says, beginning with verse 18, “Be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess, but be filled with the Spirit, speaking to yourselves in psalms, in hymns, and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord, giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, submitting yourselves to one another in the fear of God.

We live in a generation in which no one wants to be told to submit themselves to anybody. We often meet with the word *stiff-necked* in scripture. The metaphor is that of an ox or a mule or some sort of working animal that is unaccustomed to a yoke; when the yoke is put on the animal, it stiffens up its neck, and doesn’t want to have any part of it. This is an accurate description of the heart of rebellious sinners. Every believer has this heart in his old nature. And yet no sinner shall enter into the kingdom of heaven without complete submission to Christ Jesus the Lord. Many profess to have submitted to him, and put on a fairly good show. But submission to the Lord involves more than just an outward pretense of submission and devotion. Submission is *from the heart*. It’s a broken and contrite spirit in the heart created by the power of the Lord, and quite frankly, an unregenerate person doesn’t even know what it is, what it looks like, or feels like, nor has he any resemblance to it.

The one who has submitted to the Lord from the heart is submissive to others, too. Not, *ought to be submissive*, but *is submissive*—to brethren, to those in positions of authority in government and home. And believers don’t need any other reason than this one right here—Christ is the authority. He is our Lord and our King. If we have submitted ourselves to him, then we will submit ourselves to one another in the fear of God. If we haven’t submitted ourselves to him, we’ll put on a pretense of submission, but there will be no reverence to God whatsoever.

Matthew Henry said, “Where there is this mutual condescension and submission, the duties of all relations will be the better performed.” One of the best illustrations that we have of submission is Christ’s marriage to and authority over his bride, the Church. The whole of what is given here in verses 22-33 concerns Christ and his bride. That’s what Paul tells us in verse 32 when he says, “This is great mystery” (the things he said before), “but I speak concerning Christ and the Church.” Robert Hawker said, “This might well be called a mystery, yea, a *great* mystery, for all the shadows of it sink to nothing in comparison of the substance.” And indeed, all the affections and relations of life between man and man are less than nothing when we look to our relationship in Christ.

It doesn’t matter whether you are married or if you’re single. That’s why I began with verse 21, “Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God.” If we understand what it is to submit ourselves to one another as believers and to those God has set in authority over us in this world, then we must understand that Christ is Lord. All authority is his. Submission to one another

begins with heart submission to him. Where there is no heart submission to him, there will be no submission to one another.

Now, let's see how Paul uses a husband and a wife to illustrate Christ's dominion, and the believer's submission to him. Let's begin at verse 22: "Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands." The title of this message is Submission. It's simply, Submission. That's a big enough word. We don't need any other words to go with it. We'll spend all our life learning what submission is. "Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the savior of the body. Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing."

Christ is the Head of the Church, and he is the Savior of the body. He was set up from everlasting as the Head and Husband of the church. There can be no head without a body, and there can be no husband without a bride. And the scriptures tell us, Prov. 8:23, "I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, or ever the earth was, and my delights were with the sons of men." Isaiah 54:5, "For thy Maker is thine husband; the LORD of hosts is his name; and thy Redeemer the Holy One of Israel; The God of the whole earth shall he be called." Everything that has come to pass, and everything that shall come to pass, is ordained by God, so that our Maker, our Husband, the Lord of a multitude, our Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel, the God of the whole earth, shall be glorified as such.

Our head is not just a hat rack; it governs our bodies if we're in our right minds. It governs our bodies, and it keeps the whole body safe from harm. So it is with Christ. He's the Head of the Church. He's the Savior of the body. The Church—you and I, believers—are in subjection to our Lord, to our King. He rules all things for his glory and for the good of his people. And knowing this, we can subject ourselves to him, and be subject to him, submit to him, to one another, and to the rulers and those he has placed in authority, because of who it is that rules us.

Ephesians 5:34 says, "Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ,"—here's the illustration—"Therefore as the Church is subject unto Christ," as believers who make up the body of Christ, "so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing." This bride respects him because he has proven himself faithful to her.

When I was starting out in marriage, a wise elder said to me, "Respect cannot be demanded. Respect comes as you prove yourself faithful." And that's how the Lord saves sinners. He said, "I have loved you with an everlasting love." Therefore, I DROVE you to submission. No, "Therefore, in loving-kindness I drew you unto myself." She was once the bride of Mr. Law. That was her husband, and he was a strict husband. He pulled out the white glove when he went through the house, the whole house, and he put his finger on everything in that house, and he picked up the least little bit of dirt. He brought it to her and said, "Look at this, woman! Don't you see this right here, how filthy this house is?" and he said nothing good, nothing loving, nothing merciful, nothing gracious to her, and never gave her any inclination that she could do anything to make him love her, because he was Mr. Law, and that's what Mr. Law does. He condemns, he doesn't show any love; he just condemns. But when she died in Christ Jesus the Lord, Mr. Law said, "My wife's gone," and he moved on to another bride, to another woman that

he could treat the same way. But now, through mercy and grace, she's free to be married to another, even our Lord Jesus Christ. And he's a loving Husband, he's merciful, and he's gracious, and he takes her in his arms and says, "I've done everything for you. I've provided everything for you so that you don't have to lift a finger." And she says, "I'll do whatever you tell me to do, because I love you." He proved himself faithful to her and didn't try to make her subject herself to him. He made her willing, *by his love*, to say, "I'll do whatever you want me to do. I love you."

Verse 25 says, "Husbands,"—now we come to husbands, and we'll spend more time here—"Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish."

"Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church." How did Christ love the Church? He loved her freely, everlastingly, and he manifested loving-kindness to her. Husbands sometimes need to be reminded—I know *I* do—Do you remember how you loved your wife the day you married her? Remember that? Mine could do no wrong; she couldn't do any wrong, nothing. I promised to love her—I vowed to God to love her in good times or bad times; for better or for worse, till death do us part. And I was glad to say it. I was happy to say it because, that's my bride! I love her; that's my bride! Do you love her the same today as you did then? "Well, I try to, but she's changed!" "Well, he's changed, you know. My husband's not like he was." "My wife's not like she was." I don't imagine we are the same hunk of burning love we were when they fell in love with us, either! Why do you love her? Why do you love him?

The Lord's bride changed. She changed from when he first loved her. She was chosen in Christ the Holy One before the world began, and she was as the King's daughter, all glorious within; her clothing was of wrought gold, because she was chosen in him. When Christ married his bride and took a vow to love her for better or for worse, before the foundation of the world, she was holy and without blame before him in love. He loved her because she was chosen in him, but she changed. When Adam came along and sinned in the garden and all mankind fell into total depravity, the bride changed.

Like Gomer, who was married to Hosea, she went to practicing harlotry and adultery and left her first love. She left him, and went after her lovers. And yet his love for his bride never changed. That's for better or for worse! His love for her wasn't based on anything in her. His love for her was based on his grace, his sovereign holiness—that's what his love was based on. Christ, your Husband, your Hosea, who loved you, his bride, so freely and so everlastingly that he sent the gospel unto you saying, "Plead with your mother, plead, for she's not my wife, neither am I her husband, let her therefore put away her whoredoms out of her sight and her adulteries from between her breasts."

Christ, our Husband, our Hosea, laid bread and water, and wool and flax, and oil and drink at our door, all the days when we played the harlot. But just like Gomer, we praised *ourselves* for these things saying, I'll go after my lovers that give me my bread and my water, my wool and my flax, my oil and my drink, Hosea 2:5. We said, as Gomer did, "These are my rewards that my lovers

have given me.” The Lord said, “She didn’t know that I gave her corn and wine and oil, and multiplied her silver and her gold, which they prepared for Baal,” verse 8.

And though his bride went from bad to worse, though she rebelled against him in the most shameful manner, Christ her Husband drew out his heart to her. “Go yet, love a woman, a woman beloved of her friend, yet an adulteress, according to the love of the LORD toward the children of Israel, who look to other gods, and love flagons of wine,” Hos. 3:1. And he says, “So I bought her to me for fifteen pieces of silver, and for an homer of barley, and an half homer of barley,” verse 2.

He loved her, and therefore he gave himself for his bride, the Church. He was willing, because he loved her, to do whatever it took to save her from this awful change that had come upon her. Even if it meant that he would have to be born of a woman, born into this sinful, wretched Egypt, this dry desert, this waste howling wilderness, and walk in it with everyone contrary to him; even if it meant he had to go to the cross and suffer the wrath of God in her room and stead, to buy her, purchase her, and robe her in that white garment again. He’d do anything for her, because he loved her. That’s what love does.

He submitted himself as a servant to the Father; he didn’t exalt himself, he didn’t go his own way—he submitted himself to his Father. And he came to where she was, and he saved her, by his own blood. By the very blood of his own veins, he poured out his blood and he saved her. Ephesians 5:26 says, “That he might sanctify and cleanse the church by the washing of water by the word, that he might present it to himself”—*to himself*—“a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing, but that it should be holy and without blemish.” And it came to her through this word. This is how he washed her, and this is how he cleansed her, and this is how he sanctified her. He comes to her like Hosea and reveals his great love, saying, “Thou shalt abide for me many days; thou shalt not play the harlot, and thou shalt not be for another man: so will I also be for thee.” I’m not going to leave you or forsake you. I’m not going to turn away from you to do you good. I’m the One who brought you the oil and the wine and the water. I provided for you all the days when you were going on in your rebellion. And not only that, but I provided for you when nobody else would have anything to do with you. And not only that, but I’m the One who brought the word to you to say, Now you’re mine! You’ll be for me. And she beheld him and said, ‘I’m yours.’ That’s how Christ loved the Church. That’s the freeness with which he loved the church.

But why? Why did he love the Church like this? Why was it he loved his bride like this? Why did he love her so when she was such an unfaithful wife and so full of rebellion? She was so stiff-necked and didn’t want to do what he said. Why did he love her like this? Look at Ephesians 5:29: “For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church. For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones. ... This is a great mystery,” Paul says, “but I speak concerning Christ and the Church.” Christ our Husband nourisheth and cherisheth the church, not because of what *she* could do for *him*. He did it because of sovereign grace; she is a member of his own body, of his flesh, and of his bones. Just as Eve was created from Adam’s rib, so too, every chosen child of God makes up the Church of God, and was created *in* Christ Jesus, *for* Christ Jesus, and is one with Christ Jesus, just as surely as my finger is a part of my body. Bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh, one with him; that’s

why he nourished and cherished her—for no man ever hated his own body. The Church is his body. Every member is his body, and he’s the Head of that body and he loves that body, and he gave himself for that body.

Verse 28 says, “So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself.” Verse 29, “For no man ever yet hated his own flesh.” ‘Well, that’s it, preacher, that’s the problem I have between me and my wife. I just don’t love myself.’ I’m deaf, but I can smell, and you can take that dung somewhere else. Because that’s self-righteous stink. The problem is not that a sinner doesn’t *love himself*, but that he loves himself *too much*. That’s the problem.

No one but a regenerated sinner loves his own body in a godly way. Everything the unregenerate or carnal man does, is harmful to his own body. Even though he loves it and relishes what he does, it’s harmful to his own body. He may say, “I’ll do what I darn well please to do,” but it’s not good for him. His affections are all out of whack. All it is, is evil lust.

One who is not submitted to Christ will not submit to anyone, *not anyone*. His children are just tokens for his own glory, that’s all—he doesn’t love them, he doesn’t care a thing in the world about them. His wife is just a doormat to gratify his own filthy flesh. He shows no honor to his own parents who raised him and nurtured him. He finds fault with everyone in the church he attends, but himself. He won’t submit to an employer; he rebels against authority of every kind—police, political leaders, pastors—anyone and everyone but himself.

An unregenerate stiff-necked sinner believes all men ought to bow to *him*, because in rebellion against the King, in rebellion against the *King*, in rebellion against THE King, he has exalted *himself* as a king. He may say he doesn’t love himself and put on some show of piety and humility, but even that’s just love for himself. He’s putting on a good show.

The sinner whom God has made to behold Christ the King, who loved us, and gave himself for us, that sinner is truly brought to bow and submit and to subject himself to the Lord Jesus Christ. And that sinner doesn’t see himself as anything—he’s nothing apart from the One whom he loves. And therefore, you won’t find him defending himself; you won’t find him rebelling against you or rousing up in objection to you, unless it is against the One he loves. And even then, even then, if he speaks an unkind word it will weigh on his heart until he can come back to you and tell you he’s sorry for saying it. Because he’s been brought to see what submission is, and submission is bowing to Christ and trusting him alone.

Have you ever wondered why the institution of marriage exists? Ephesians 5:31, “For this cause”—everything I’ve been telling you right here—“For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother and shall be joined unto his wife and they two shall be one flesh.” Because Christ joined himself to his bride and they’re one flesh. For this same reason, a man is going to leave his father and his mother, and he’s going to be joined to his wife as one flesh. Because God ordained the institution to glorify his Son. To glorify him, our Husband. And it’s like all other positions of authority—it glorifies God.

Look at Ephesians 6:1—“Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right.” Why? Because it glorifies the Son of God who honored his Father and obeyed his Father in all regards. Ephesians 6:4 says, “Fathers, provoke not your children to wrath.” Why? Because it glorifies God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, whose tender love toward his Son nourished him and cherished him, and his love toward his elect children. That’s why. Ephesians 6:5—“Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh with fear and trembling and singleness of your heart.” Why? Because it glorifies Christ, the Servant of God whose heart was set on one single purpose of glorifying him. “Masters, do the same to your servants.” Why? “Knowing that your Master also is in heaven; neither is there respect of persons with him.” As believers concerning our pastors, the Hebrew writer says, “Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves, for they watch over your souls as they that must give account.” Account to whom? Account to the King who rules over them, that’s who. And so it is with a husband and a wife. Ephesians 5:33 says, “Nevertheless let every one of you in particular so love his wife even as himself.” Even though we’ve been talking about the church, Christ, and the church is Christ’s bride, “nevertheless, let every one of you in particular”—each of you; let’s bring this thing down, now, to where we are—“every one of us in particular so love his wife even as himself, and the wife see that she reverence her husband.”

What does Eph. 5:21 say? “Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God.” Do you see what the word says there? Submitting *yourselves*. Each one in particular. If I go to this scripture and I listen to this message this morning, and I use it to examine my wife, how she ought to be treating me, I haven’t submitted to Christ. And if my wife goes to this scripture and hears this message this morning, and she uses it to examine how I ought to be treating her, she hasn’t bowed to Christ; she hasn’t submitted to Christ. But how I treat her, how *I* treat *her*—not how *she* treats *me*, but how *I* treat *her*—speaks volumes as to how I reverence my God. It speaks volumes as to what I really think of God. My Lord sanctified me, set me apart, made me holy by sanctifying himself on my behalf.

Have you cut yourself apart from this world, and from anger, from obstinacy, and from rebellion, for the good of your spouse, and your brethren, and your children, and your employer, and those who work for you, and your civil leaders and rulers that the Lord has set over you? That’s submission to Christ. That’s submission to our God. Do we fear God? Do we truly reverence God? If we have not submitted to him in faith, we will not submit to anyone but our own sinful lusts.

Well, what if I believe, but my husband doesn’t? What if I believe, but my wife doesn’t? What if I believe, but my children don’t? As Paul wrote to the Corinthians, are you showing them by your actions, by your words, your commitment and submission to Christ? Are you showing them that you are in submission to him? It just may be that the Lord may use you to save them. That’s what scripture says.

A sheep is an animal that needs to be led, and taken care of, and provided for. It can’t be beat into submission; it can’t be prodded into submission, it can’t be goaded into submission. It has to be led with a loving hand, not with a rebellious, stiff-necked demand for respect. I hear all the time, different things said about a spouse, a child, whatever, and I think it might be just as simple as, have you bought them any flowers lately? Have we made them dinner lately? Have we set

them down, and told them plainly how much we love them? Or do we just think, “Well, they ought to know it.” Love has to be *shown* in some capacity, doesn’t it?

When I was leaving Fairmont, the last time I was there, I spoke with brother Henry. He knows this northeast region pretty well; he’s had a lot of dealings up here, and he knows a lot of folks here. His last words to me were, “Clay, they’ve been whipped enough. Love them to Christ.”

In any relationship we’re in, we have to remember *who* it is we’re in subjection to, *who* it is that’s in authority, and *who* is ruling and reigning. And I guarantee you that if we keep that thought ever present in our hearts and in our minds, it will help us to submit, even when we’re not submitted to. Because everything our Lord has ever done—can you say this?—*everything he’s ever done has turned out for our good.*

So then, if your pastor takes off into some foolish error, you can be sure that the Lord who turns the king’s heart whithersoever he will, if I am his, he’s going to turn my heart. And I can do the same for you, and for my bride, and she can for me, and for my children, and all the while we do it loving one another, carefully, tenderly, kindly, helping one another and teaching one another, but all the while, submitting to one another. That’s how the Lord’s church operates. That’s how the Lord’s people operate—because that’s how our Lord operates towards us.