

01.07.07 Coromandel Baptist 10:00 a.m.
The Authority and Submission of Love
Bible Readings = Eph. 5:22-32 and Col. 3:12-25

Introduction:

- (1) Last week we were considering the fact that it is impossible to know the love of God apart from knowing how God has loved us in Christ, who gave himself up for us.
 - a. The past tense verbs of Eph. 5:25 do not exhaust the love of Christ (he goes on loving us forever, giving himself for us, interceding for us, etc.) but (as in 1John 4:10) it is in this action of self-giving love that we know the love of God for us.
 - b. We saw that this was not dependent on the merits of the Bride!
- (2) We also saw that this passage (and those like unto it!) have received no little critical comment for two reasons. They reflect a society (it is said) which was patriarchal (and therefore by nature, oppressive); and it implies an order of authority described as hierarchical (which, by its nature is the manifestation of an unjust power relationship). However, the matter of submission does not relate simply to wives and husbands, but to all aspects of life. Therefore the principle of submission in love to one authority can be transferred to all.
 - a. The matter of authority and submission is always problematic for us, because of the nature of the Flesh and the consequence of our sin. ‘We did not honour and give thanks’ means that we have refused to come under the authority of God.
 - i. Comment re post-modern literary theory and philosophy re the death of the Author and the power of the reader.
 - ii. By contrast, both in Ephesians and in the parallel passage in Colossians thankfulness is the mark of a life submitted to God.
- (3) The fact that any fallen human being should or could submit to any other person (or God himself!) is a miracle of grace. However, draw attention to the ‘filling’ of Eph. 5:18 and the dependent participles...including submitting.
 - a. Compare with the parallel passage of Col. 3:12ff., where having the word of Christ richly dwelling within (Col. 3:16) is parallel to the filling of the Spirit and its effects (cf. Eph. 5:18-19).
- (4) The other matter that deserves mention at the outset (and in view of the sensitivity we have to the matters of authority, submission, inferiority, superiority etc.) is that we cannot allow ourselves to be derailed from considering the topic by the common method of argumentation that takes things at the extreme and makes them general principles (e.g. from the abortion debate).
 - a. The Bible does talk about the extreme, and there are ways in which we can respond which are both obedient to God and honouring of human beings, but in many instances our first question when confronted with the matter of obedience and submission in Love is “What are the limits?” Where may I draw the line? In what circumstances may I be excused from submitting?
 - b. Rather, we want to come to hear positively what the Father has for us.

This week we give our attention to the authority and submission of love and aim to see how the love of God is manifest in the submission of a humble spirit. Far from being bondage, this is true freedom.

1. The Patterns of Authority

(1) Every one of us lives our life in the context of authority structures and relationships. Indeed, the whole universe is ordered with certain authorities in place. Authority and submission did not come about as a result of the sinfulness of humanity, but these things belong to the very nature of the created order.

- The order of relationships within the Trinity (as reflected in such passages as Phil. 2:1-11; 1 Cor. 15:24ff.) - though not implying any essential difference in the substance, dignity, eternal existence of the Persons of the Godhead - does imply that within the divine relationships there is a voluntary submission of love for the plan and purpose of the Father to be accomplished.
 - This should remove from our thinking any idea of submission and obedience being linked to our ideas of superiority or inferiority. So many of our difficulties come from our sense of inferiority (when looking comparatively) and also by way of the self justification that takes place when we either seek to exercise power for our own sake, or live under the authority of others.
- 'Creator creates creation' (Brueggemann) is a one way sentence, which implies and necessitates God's ongoing authority over the creation. He never has, and never will, relinquish that authority, as seen, for example in the Noachic covenant and in the establishment of a cleansed heaven and earth.
 - Every biblical category of thought and action has authority structures within it: covenant, Law, worship, wisdom, grace, mercy, love, obedience, etc.
- The creation of human beings in his image means that we are made to exercise authority in and over the creation, as in Gen. 1:26ff.
- In every relationship we exist in the context of authorities that are appointed by God (e.g. Rom.13:1ff.; 1 Pet. 2:13ff. cf. John 19:11).

2. But...The Patterns of Authority Now Exist in the Context of Human Sin and Cosmic Evil

(1) For human beings in our guilt and sin, we see authority as the opposite of love and freedom. In actuality, to be under authority is to be free. Because all authority derives from God, who is love, the existence of authority and our submission to it is one with our living in the reality of love.

- To love is to obey (1 John 5:3; 2 John 1:6 cf. Jn. 14:15, 21; 15:10, 14; etc.)
- To obey is to be free, and thus to fill out our human destiny (cf. John 5:19, 30).
- But we do not recognise this in our own sinful flesh, as in this state we are trying to be 'as god' ...in the way we imagine him to be!

(2) We are created to exercise authority by being under authority as is made clear in the example of Jesus and the centurion in Matt. 8:5-13.

- Living under authority does not diminish personhood, but magnifies it.

(3) What we must come to see is that we are always under the hand of the Father.

- We receive things from him, rather than from any human being. If we receive them from a human being, we then become focussed on them and us!
- (4) The supreme example of this is the Lord himself, supremely in the event of the Cross, but throughout his life.
- See 1 Peter 2:21-25
 - We receive the fruit of that submission, as his Bride!