

Ephesians 5:22-33

Being Subject to One Another In Christ

We recently looked at Paul's instruction on being filled with the Holy Spirit of God. As you walk by faith in union with Christ you are walking by the power of the Holy Spirit. As you fix your eyes upon Christ, who is your life and who sits at the right hand of the Father in heaven, the Spirit of God is working through the means of grace to transform you into the glorious image of Christ, filling you full of the knowledge of the Son of God until you grow up into the full measure of the stature of the mature man which belongs to the fullness of Christ (**cf. 4:13**). As the Spirit of God is working to transform you into the image of Christ there are noticeable characteristics that are being produced in and through your life. We noted a few of them in the opening verses of chap. 4 (**see vv. 1-3**) and even more of them throughout chaps. 4 & 5 until we came to the climax in **vv. 19-21** where we were taught that the Spirit of God will produce a life of singing joyfully in your hearts to one another and to the Lord, living a life of always giving thanks in everything to God, and being subject to one another in the fear of Christ.

We noted that the last statement served as a "hinge" verse that completes the list of results of being filled by the Spirit with Christ but also begins the next section (almost serving as a title) on how being filled with the Spirit works out practically and specifically in our day to day lives. Therefore, we are still talking about the Christian believer being filled up with Christ by the Spirit of God and specifically how that works its way out in our daily relationships with one another. Paul first speaks of the closest relationship that many of us have in our relationship with our spouses.

Remember what we have said from the beginning that everything Paul says in chaps. 4-6 is grounded in the glorious indicatives of the gospel in chaps. 1-3. In other words, none of this is applicable to those who have not been regenerated by God's Spirit and united through faith to the Son of God. Equally, Paul can now speak to those who have been gloriously delivered from the kingdom of darkness and safely brought into the kingdom of God's marvelous light and by God's amazing power and love, have been lavished with the glorious riches of God's mercy, being reconciled to God and are now being fitted together by God's Spirit to grow into the holy temple in the Lord.

Because you have been united to Christ and his Spirit is now working in you, your relationships to one another in the body of Christ will begin to be transformed so that those unique characteristics of Christ's life will begin to be imitated in your life. As we begin to look more closely at your individual relationships, remember that Paul is addressing the church. Though each of these relationships properly function in their own distinct spheres outside of the immediate sphere of the church, Paul teaches us that there is some degree of overlap so that the Spirit of God working among the life of the body of Christ is truly affecting your daily relationships outside the immediate bounds of the gathered church.

Also, note that though Paul speaks of wives, husbands, children, etc. it is absolutely clear that what is unique about these instructions is Paul's grounded each of them in the life of Christ; in the gospel. These are gospel-imperatives in which you have received the promises of God's power ahead of the command so that by faith and by God's grace these characteristics can and will be produced in your daily relationships.

Also, each of these commands are a joy and the bread of life to us because in each of them we have the glorious privilege of modeling the life of our Lord and Savior in so many ways in our every day lives.

Finally, before we look at our passage today, there are some here this morning who may think that because they are not married that this passage has nothing to say to them. However, Paul is not limiting the working out of our union with Christ to only these three relationships mentioned in **5:22-6:9**. These characteristics of our union with Christ may be found in every relationship we have. Paul is merely giving some very specific, practical examples of how our lives are being transformed by God's Spirit so that we may see concretely what being filled by the Spirit will look like in our day-to-day relationships with one another. But we should not limit what Paul is saying to only these three relationships. Try and look at the bigger picture here. Paul is speaking about our lives which by God's Spirit are taking on the characteristics of Christ (**cf. 4:1-3**). Though he is presently giving us some specific pictures on how that will look, the characteristics themselves ought to be present in all our relationships to one another.

Now, we want to turn to the first relationship that Paul mentions: wives and husbands. In **vv. 22-24**, Paul specifically addresses the wife first. **Vv. 22** and **24** gives us the command while **v. 23** gives us the basis of the command. In light of **v. 21**, Paul first applies this command to the wife: wives are to be subject to their own husbands as to the Lord. In **v. 24**, Paul adds: "in everything." Ultimately Paul roots this command in the higher relationship of the church to Christ, her head.

Let's look at a few things about Paul's statement:

I have heard many men, even Christian men, who have taken Paul's words here and used them as a club to crush the spirits of their wives in such a way that they end up diminishing the glorious, unique qualities that God has given to women. I believe this is a serious problem in the church when men will take these words and use them as support to mistreat and even abuse their wives. As we read Paul's command here we should remember that there is nothing uniquely Christian about Paul's instruction on the wife being subject to her own husband, because he is the head of his wife. Many teachers have placed the emphasis here and have used these verses to, so-called, "put women in their places." But I would argue that we would all be hard-pressed to find any man in the world who would not believe this statement without ever reading Paul. Just watch the daily reports on the Islamic culture around the world and you can see how another religion promotes the same idea but often to extreme. But there is nothing unique to Christianity so far. What is unique to a Christian's wife to her husband is that she is to be subject to her own husband "as to the Lord."

Christian wives have the glorious privilege of modeling or being a picture of the church's relationship to her Savior both to the body of Christ and the rest of the world. There is something gloriously unique about the marriage between a Christian husband and wife that is a picture to the world of Christ's relationship to his church. The church is the bride of Christ. She loves her husband and expresses this love by willingly, lovingly deferring her will (in everything) to her true love. As the Christian wife thinks about her relationship to her husband she must realize that by the Spirit of God uniting her to Christ and thereby filling her full of Christ that everything in her life now takes place in the fullness of the realm of Christ's life. Remember what Paul reminds us all in **Galatians 2:20**:

"I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the *life* which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and delivered Himself up for me."

As wives, you are teaching and preaching the gospel to the whole body of Christ and to the world. You are displaying the loving relationship of a church which has been bought with the high price of Christ's blood, which has been shown truly amazing love and grace, and how that church thankfully responds to her true love in light of the gospel.

This characteristic of "being subject to one another" belongs to the whole body of Christ. Each one of us as Christians who are being filled by the Spirit of God will express our union with Christ by being subject to one another. But where are we going to turn to see practically what that looks like? Paul teaches us that one place that we can turn is to look at the Christian wife who wonderfully models the life of Christ who submits his will to the Father to serve the church even to the point of death and now the church who now gratefully submits her will to Christ to serve him even to the point of death if he so chooses. As Christian wives you have the glorious privilege and responsibility of teaching all of us how we are to be subject to one another in the fear of Christ.

Now to the Christian husband (**see vv. 25-33**). Christian husbands also have the glorious privilege and responsibility of using their God-given "headship" or leadership to teach and proclaim the gospel of Christ to the church and to the rest of the world. Just as Christ used his leadership to humbly serve the body of Christ (**cf. Phil. 2**) so the husband uses his leadership in the relationship to humbly serve his wife. Notice how the roles are reversed: as the wife models the church's submission to her Savior, Christ, so the husband models Christ's loving service to his bride, the church. Paul specifically notes this parallel in **v. 32**.

It never ceases to amaze me that so many so easily get this all confused. The reason for such confusion is that when we come to these verses many will suddenly revert back to the world's way of thinking about authority and submission when they come to these verses. Remember the conversation that the disciples had before Jesus (**Matt. 20:25-28**; **Mk. 10:42-45**; **Luke 22:24-30**). Jesus beautifully illustrated this in **John 13:3-17**. We must remember that we are all called to submit ourselves one to another. Such

submission of one's will does not exclusively belong to the wife, but also the husband. He too must learn that God has given him leadership and authority which is completely opposite of the world's understanding of authority. Rather, God has given him authority to wrap the towel of his own will around his waste and humble himself and serve his wife in love. The apostle Peter finally learned this and wonderfully explains the nature of Christian leadership in his epistle (see **1 Peter 5:1-5**). But where Peter and all of us learn how we are to humbly submit our wills in service to one another is in and through the life of Jesus Christ (cf. **Phil. 2:3-8**).

Jesus Christ loves you the church to the extent that He willingly submitted His will and gave Himself up to death for you. Do you feel the impact of those words? Have these words become to common-place? Jesus loves you so much that He gave you something! He could have given you anything. He created the whole world. He sustains the whole creation. He could have picked anything out of it to give to you. But He chose to give you Himself even to the point that He would loose His own life so that your life might be saved.

It is by the glorious work of the gospel that Jesus willingly obeyed the whole law for you and willingly gave up His own life as a sacrifice for your sin that by faith you might become His eternal Bride. And it is through the word of this gospel that he is using to sanctify you that He might present you on the day of judgment as His holy and blameless Bride, having no spot or wrinkle. Notice the immensity of the love of Christ for you. He crossed the eternal chasm of heaven and earth and became your slave by taking on your own fallen nature and perfecting it through his life and death, even the death of a criminal. In doing so you have been joined to Christ and have become his own body (**vv. 29-30**) and what God has joined together, no man shall separate.

Now Paul turns to the husbands, with this glorious example of eternal love and mercy and says to you, "so husbands ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies" (**v. 28**). What a glorious privilege you have! You are to exemplify and imitate for the whole body of Christ and the watching world what Christ's amazing love for his own Bride looks like. Remember that Paul prayed in **3:17-19** that an instrumental aspect to our sanctification is that we would comprehend the four-fold fullness of Christ's glorious love for you. Where do we turn to see an example of Christ's love for us: we look to our Christian husbands and watch how they love their wives as Christ loves the church.

In **v. 33**, Paul sums up his instructions to the Christian husbands and wives, as well as to the whole body of Christ. It is our rich privilege as individual members of the body of Christ, as wives, husbands, and even our single members, that in every relationship we have among the body of Christ to be subject to one another in the fear of Christ. It is only as we are constantly filled with Christ by the Holy Spirit that the characteristics of his life will find their expression through earthen vessels of clay so that the glory of the gospel of Christ might be on display for the whole body of Christ and the watching world who needs Christ as their Savior.

Amen! - SDG -

Insert to Sermon on Ephesians 5:21-33

Paul's commands to the wife and husband are very clear, succinct, and straightforward: **WIVES - 5:22-24** - Paul addresses the wives among the Christian community explaining how their being filled with the Spirit (5:18) will be manifested in their relationship with their husbands (as a specific example of our union with Christ).

He states the exhortation in **5:22** and repeats it in **5:24** and in **5:33**.

HUSBANDS - 5:25-32 - Paul addresses husbands among the Christian community explaining how their being filled with the Spirit (**5:18**) will be manifested in their relationship with their wives (as a specific example of our union with Christ).

He states their exhortation in **5:25** and repeats it in **5:28** and in **5:33**.

It is even more succinct in Col. 3:18-19 where Paul says simply:

Colossians 3:18-19 Wives, be subject to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord.
¹⁹ Husbands, love your wives and do not be embittered against them.

But then Paul adds a little phrase to **Eph. 5:28** that excites him (even as an unmarried man; 1 Cor. 7:8) "as their own bodies."

Paul can't help driving everything he sees to the gospel. Here he notices an analogy in the world for what is always consuming his soul - **Jesus' intimate union with His church body**. He notices that in something he sees in the marriage union beautifully parallels what he sees in our union with Jesus Christ and he pursues that thought for the next few verses.

Paul's thinking about this analogy works both ways: first, he wants us to think more deeply of the marriage union of "one flesh" (**5:31**) by looking at our union with Christ, but he also wants us to think more deeply of our union with Christ by looking at our marriage union.

What Paul wants us to focus our attention upon here is **just how intimate** is the union between the husband and wife so that when the husband loves his wife the husband loves himself. The union between the husband and wife is so beautifully and fully bonded together, that Paul says in loving your wife, you truly love yourself. What does he mean by this?

To gain insight into this union, Paul suddenly switches to the union between the church and Christ as he did in **5:25**. Here what Paul is saying to you this morning (**5:29**): Jesus does not hate you; he is not ashamed of you; he does not despise you. He loves you as He does Himself; as His own flesh. He loves you so that He nourishes you and cherishes you. Why? Now here is one of the greatest thoughts that can ever penetrate your mind and heart: **You are His own body!** He nourishes you and cherishes you because **you** are his body. He cares for you as if you are His own flesh; because you are. He doesn't hate his body, because no man hates his own body. He takes care of you the same way He takes care of His own body because that is what you are to Him.

The next time you are experiencing the deep, dark moments of your life, know that He loves you, He will nourish you, He cherishes you and He will be faithful to you even as a man is to his own body. You must think of how far a man will go towards self-preservation of his own body; how he cares for every cell of his flesh – to feed it, protect it, care for it, etc. This is how Jesus cares about you!

Now, when you begin to grasp the significance of that, Paul says, “Turn to your wife and love her that way”.

Paul quotes **Genesis 2:24** here to emphasize the "one flesh" that has now become what you now are in union with your wife AND in union with Jesus Christ.

BTW, Jesus also quotes this same passage of **Gen. 2:24** in **Matt. 19:4** when the Pharisees were looking for a loophole in the law which would permit them to divorce their wives. Jesus argues for the **insolubility of marriage**, except in those rare cases where adultery has broken the covenant bond. In marriage, our Master Jesus teaches, the two are no longer two, but **one flesh** and what God has joined together as one, no man must put asunder.

You can now see why we in the church must take **our** marriage unions so seriously because God has made Christian marriages an analogy of the insoluble union between Christ and His bride, the church, and divorce is an ugly lie to the watching world about what is permanently true of our God blessed union with Jesus Christ.

Further, Paul said in Eph. 5:8 that we are to walk as light in this dark world and expose the “unfruitful works of darkness” which we can best do by how we love one another. One of the best ways we in the church can demonstrate the beauty of the gospel is how we first love our families. There is no excuse for our being faithful in loving those outside our families without loving those God has put closest to us in our family.

Wives Be Subject to Your Husbands

5:22

αἱ γυναῖκες τοῖς ἰδίοις ἀνδράσιν

| EXHORTATION

b

ὡς τῷ κυρίῳ,

| Comparison of 5:22a

5:23

ὅτι ἀνὴρ ἐστὶν κεφαλὴ τῆς γυναικὸς

| Ground of 5:22a

b

ὡς καὶ ὁ Χριστὸς κεφαλὴ τῆς ἐκκλησίας,

| Comparison of 5:23a

c

αὐτὸς σωτὴρ τοῦ σώματος•

| Description of 5:23b "Christ"

5:24

ἀλλ' ὡς ἡ ἐκκλησία ὑποτάσσεται τῷ Χριστῷ,

| Comparison of 5:24b

b

οὕτως καὶ αἱ γυναῖκες τοῖς ἀνδράσιν

| EXHORTATION

c

ἐν παντί.

| Sphere of 5:24b

Husbands Love Your Wives

5:25

Οἱ ἄνδρες, ἀγαπᾶτε τὰς γυναῖκας,

| EXHORTATION

b

καθὼς καὶ ὁ Χριστὸς ἠγάπησεν τὴν ἐκκλησίαν

| Comparison of 5:25a

c

καὶ ἑαυτὸν παρέδωκεν ὑπὲρ αὐτῆς,

5:26

ἵνα αὐτὴν ἀγιάσῃ

| Purpose of 5:25c

b

καθαρίσας

| Result of 5:26a

c

τῷ λουτρῷ τοῦ ὕδατος

| Means of 5:26b

d

ἐν ῥήματι,

5:27

ἵνα παραστήσῃ αὐτὸς ἑαυτῷ ἔνδοξον τὴν ἐκκλησίαν,

| Purpose of 5:26a

b

μὴ ἔχουσιν σπίλον ἢ
ρυτίδα ἢ τι τῶν τοιούτων,

| Negative of 5:27c

c

ἀλλ' ἵνα ᾗ ἁγία καὶ ἄμωμος.

| Goal of 5:27a

5:28

οὕτως ὀφείλουσιν [καί] οἱ ἄνδρες ἀγαπᾶν τὰς ἑαυτῶν γυναῖκας
 ὡς τὰ ἑαυτῶν σώματα.

| EXHORTATION

| Comparison of 5:28a

b

c

ὁ ἀγαπῶν τὴν ἑαυτοῦ γυναῖκα ἑαυτόν ἀγαπᾷ.

| ASSERTION

5:29

Οὐδεὶς γὰρ ποτε τὴν ἑαυτοῦ σάρκα ἐμίσησεν
 ἀλλ' ἐκτρέφει καὶ θάλπει αὐτήν,

| Negative of 5:29b

| Ground of 5:28c

b

c

καθὼς καὶ ὁ Χριστὸς τὴν ἐκκλησίαν,

| Comparison of 5:29b

5:30

ὅτι μέλη ἐσμὲν τοῦ σώματος αὐτοῦ.

| Ground of 5:29c

5:31

Gen. 2:24

ἀντὶ τούτου καταλείψει ἄνθρωπος [τὸν] πατέρα καὶ [τὴν] μητέρα
 καὶ προσκολληθήσεται πρὸς τὴν γυναῖκα αὐτοῦ,
 καὶ ἕσονται οἱ δύο εἰς σάρκα μίαν.

| Verification of 5:28c

5:32

τὸ μυστήριον τοῦτο μέγα ἐστίν•

| ASSERTION

ἐγὼ δὲ λέγω εἰς Χριστὸν καὶ εἰς τὴν ἐκκλησίαν.

| Explanation of 5:32a

b

Summary

5:33

πλὴν καὶ ὑμεῖς οἱ καθ' ἓνα, ἕκαστος τὴν ἑαυτοῦ γυναῖκα οὕτως ἀγαπάτω

| EXHORTATION

| Comparison of 5:33a

b

c

ὡς ἑαυτόν,

ἢ δὲ γυνὴ ἵνα φοβῆται τὸν ἄνδρα.

| EXHORTATION

Wives Be Subject to Your Husbands

5:22 Wives, be subject to your own husbands,

| EXHORTATION

b as to the Lord.

| Comparison of 5:22a

5:23 For the husband is the head of the wife,

| Ground of 5:22a

b as Christ also is the head of the church,

| Comparison of 5:23a

c He Himself being the Savior of the body.

| Description of 5:23b "Christ"

5:24 But as the church is subject to Christ,

| Comparison of 5:24b

b so also the wives ought to be to their husbands

| EXHORTATION

c in everything.

| Sphere of 5:24b

Husbands Love Your Wives

5:25 Husbands, love your wives,

| EXHORTATION

b just as Christ also loved the church

| Comparison of 5:25a

c and gave Himself up for her,

5:26 so that He might sanctify her,

| Purpose of 5:25c

b having cleansed her

| Result of 5:26a

c by the washing of water

| Means of 5:26b

d with the word,

5:27 that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory,

| Purpose of 5:26a

b having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing;

| Negative of 5:27c

c but that she would be holy and blameless.

| Goal of 5:27a

5:28 So husbands ought also to love their own wives

| EXHORTATION

b
c
5:29
b
c
5:30
5:31
b
c
5:32
b
5:33
b
c

Gen. 2:24

as their own bodies.

| Comparison of 5:28a

He who loves his own wife loves himself;

| ASSERTION

for no one ever hated his own flesh,
but nourishes and cherishes it,

| Negative of 5:29b

just as Christ also does the church,

| Ground of 5:28c

because we are members of His body.

| Comparison of 5:29b

| Ground of 5:29c

For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother
and shall be joined to his wife,
and the two shall become one flesh.

| Verification of 5:28c

This mystery is great;

| ASSERTION

but I am speaking with reference to Christ and the church.

| Explanation of 5:32a

Summary

Nevertheless, each individual among you also is to love his own wife

| EXHORTATION

even as himself,

| Comparison of 5:33a

and the wife must see to it that she respects her husband.

| EXHORTATION