

Spirit-Filled Submission Ephesians 5:21-24

Introduction

NJFK—Tray; towel—breakfast in bed when you are sick; who serves whom? The parent serves the child. Who has the higher authority? But who is serving?

²¹ Submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ. ²² Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. 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. ²⁴ Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands.

What word keeps showing up in this passage?
Submission, submits, submit

1. Christ-Honoring Submission to One Another (21)
2. Christ-Honoring Submission of Wives to Their Own Husbands (22, 24b)
3. Submission of the Church to Christ the Savior (23-24a)

David Bell talked last week about the chiasmic structure—ABBA—the Greek letter chi. The focus is on where they cross. Here it is again in 22-24. Submission of wives to their own husbands at the beginning and the end.

22 Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. 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. ²⁴ Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands.

The theological pattern for a wife's submission to her own husband is the church's submission to Christ.

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1. Christ-Honoring Submission to One Another (21)

Submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.

To submit means to arrange (line up) under
As in the military

It has to do not with our intrinsic worth, but with our functional response to the created order.

We live this way out of reverence for Christ (fear). He's the anointed King, and we bow the knee to Him.

Verse 21 links what comes before it and what comes after. It's not even a complete sentence, but the last in a series of participles describing the effect of being filled with the Spirit (addressing, singing and making melody, giving thanks always, submitting). The effects of being drunk are destructive toward ourselves and those around us. The effects of being filled with the Spirit are beneficial to those around us and do them good. Paul will get into what that looks like in specific relationships in the home and in the workplace (5:22-6:9).

But verse 21 describes the foundational mutual (one another) submission of brothers and sisters in Christ. It was countercultural in its day. And it still is. It goes cross-grain against the self-centered spirit of the age, the spirit of disobedience energized by Satan himself (Ephesians 2:2).

Jesus Himself sets the pattern.

Matthew 20:25-28

²⁵ But Jesus called them to him and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. ²⁶ It shall not be so

among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, ²⁷ and whoever would be first among you must be your slave, ²⁸ even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

John 13:3-5, 13-15

³ Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going back to God, ⁴ rose from supper. He laid aside his outer garments, and taking a towel, tied it around his waist. ⁵ Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was wrapped around him.

¹³ You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am. ¹⁴ If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. ¹⁵ For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you.

To be under the Spirit's control leads to living as Jesus' lived. Reverencing Christ. The Spirit empowers our self-sacrificing love and humility toward one another. His doing so make it our joy to consider one another more significant than ourselves and to give up ourselves for the sake of the needs of others.

This happens throughout the body of Christ. Our greatest opportunities to live this way happen where our relationships are closest—in the home.

2. Christ-Honoring Submission of Wives to Their Own Husbands (22, 24b)

²² Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. 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. ²⁴ Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands.

Literally, “wives, to their own husbands” and “so also wives, to their husbands in everything”

In both cases what the wives are to do is rooted in the activity of verse 21—submitting to one another—and the activity of verse 24—as the church submits to Christ.

She places herself under her husband as Christians do for one another out of reverence for Christ. She places herself under her husband as to the Lord, for she is a member of the body of Christ and submits to Christ, the Head and Savior of the body.

Christian “submission is the humble recognition of the divine ordering of society” (John Stott, 218).

Those in authority at any level are not absolute in their authority. Theirs is a derived authority. They themselves answer to God. And if they require what God forbids or forbid what God requires, we are obligated not to submit to them.

God’s ordering of society called for reciprocal duties of wives and of husbands, of children and of parents, and even of slaves and of masters.

3. Submission of the Church to Christ the Savior (23-24a)

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

The Head—sometimes the word head refers to source—the source of a river can be called its head. But to force that meaning into this text is to violate the context. Clearly in this verse authority is in view. Authority that is beneficial. Christ’s being Head of the church means He is in charge of it, just as the head of a body coordinates the activity of the body, causing it to function in unity.

In the human body, if the head (the brain) sends out messages to the body parts that cause the body harm, there's something wrong with the head or its communication to the parts of the body. The head of the body functions for the good of the body.

And when the head is functioning properly, the body parts are well served to follow the direction they receive from the head. If the parts do not yield to the brain's direction, the parts don't function well and harm follows.

Christ's action on behalf of His body brought about its salvation. He is the Savior of His people. It is to our good to submit to Him. Resisting His authority does us harm.

This concept of headship will provide the light we need to understand the husband's function toward his wife. Never for her harm. Always for her care, her good. Not abusive, but cherishing.

Conclusion

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