

## Submit to One Another Ephesians 5:21-31

<sup>21</sup> And by submitting to one another in reverence for Christ. <sup>22</sup> Wives, submit to your own husbands as to the Lord. <sup>23</sup> For the husband is the head of the wife, just as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he himself is the Savior. <sup>24</sup> Moreover, as the church submits to Christ, so also wives are to submit to their husbands in everything. <sup>25</sup> Husbands, love your wives, in the same way as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her <sup>26</sup> to make her holy, by cleansing her with the washing of water in connection with the Word. <sup>27</sup> He did this so that he could present her to himself as a glorious church, having no stain or wrinkle or any such thing, but so that she would be holy and blameless. <sup>28</sup> In the same way, husbands have an obligation to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. <sup>29</sup> To be sure, no one has ever hated his own body, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, <sup>30</sup> because we are members of his body, of his flesh and of his bones. <sup>31</sup> "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two will be one flesh."

The opening verse of our text concludes the prescription for Spirit-filled worship. We looked at that last week. It describes and calls for a mutual willingness to subordinate one's own role in public worship to that of others, to submit to the interests of others in worship, and do that out of reverence for Christ. From his appeal concerning worship, Paul moves to the Table of Duties with instruction concerning the relationships of wives and husbands, children and parents, slaves and masters. Today we consider the verses dealing with wives and husbands. People who are filled with the Holy Spirit can understand spiritual truths like the one before us. This divine truth is not acceptable to most and laughed at by many. The God-given truth is that a husband is the head of his wife and a wife submits to her husband's leadership. We need the Holy Spirit to guide us through this today. Contained in each of us is an ally of Satan that rebels against everything God commands. We know it better as our Old Adam or sinful flesh. When men hear that we are the head of our wife then flesh starts thinking we can boss her around or be lazy in our leadership. When women hear that you are to submit to your husband in everything, sinful flesh starts you thinking that God is some divine chauvinist who wants to tie you down and keep you from reaching your full potential. But do not let sinful flesh take you there. Instead let God fill you with his Spirit so we can follow the direction God has given us in marriage.

In his infinite wisdom, God has decided that the best way for a marriage to work in any society is to have the husband be the loving head and have his wife be his loving helper. To show how a man can best carry out his leadership responsibilities and how a woman can best accomplish her submissive responsibilities, God had the Apostle Paul write the Scripture before us. For a proper understanding of how God wants husband and wives to carry out their responsibilities, Paul begins this Scripture: *by submitting to one another in reverence for Christ.*

God had Paul give us the right motivation for submitting to one another. We do this out of reverence for Christ. We submit to one another out of respect for all that Christ has done for us. The Bible often uses the picture of a marriage to describe God's relationship to his people. When we take a close look at our text, we are reminded that we were not prized candidates to be his bride. By nature we were dirty, stained with the ugliness of sin. By nature we have a face that even a mother would find hard to love. As far as our devotion to Christ, we have adulterated our relationship with him. In the Old Testament, God used the prophet Hosea to show his people how unfaithful they had been to him. God told Hosea to marry a prostitute named Gomer. Hosea's marriage to Gomer was one that no parent would give their blessing. As a prostitute, Gomer bore children with other men. God put his prophet through this to show Israel how

unfaithful they were to him. When you compare what type of bride you are to your Lord, we aren't much better than Hosea's bride. How many of us stood before the altar on our confirmation day and made a solemn vow to be faithful until death. But then we walked away, not so much to a life of devotion. One can better describe it as defiance, broken promises, and adulterous living. Could you blame our Lord if he threw us out of his life forever?

But look at what Christ has done for us. Paul writes, "*Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, by cleansing her with the washing of water in connection with the Word. He did this so that he could present her to himself as a glorious church, having no stain or wrinkle or any such thing, but so that she would be holy and blameless.*" Through the waters of holy Baptism, Christ cleaned us up, giving us the ultimate makeover. With his own precious blood he removed every stain, wrinkle and blemish that sin has left in us. Now before God we appear holy and blameless and radiant—the most glorious bride the world has ever seen!

When a married couple reaches 50 years together, they celebrate. It's a golden event. But it pales in comparison to the celebration our Bridegroom has waiting for his bride in heaven. We are his eternal soulmates. And we eagerly await the day he will return to take us home to the heavenly banquet feast where we are the guests of honor. It can only thrill us to think of that heavenly celebration. The hymn writer Paul Gerhard captured it well in a hymn that we'll be singing in the End Times portion of our church year:

*Lord, when your glory I shall see and taste your kingdom's pleasure,  
Your blood my royal robe shall be, my joy beyond all measure!  
When I appear before your throne, your righteousness shall be my crown;  
With these I need not hide me. And there, in garments richly wrought,  
As your own bride I shall be brought to stand in joy beside you. (CW 219)*

That day is coming. Each day it draws nearer and nearer when our Bridegroom will come to take us home. Can there be any limit to what we do for him while we wait for his return? God had his apostle Paul show us what to do: Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.

It is important for the bride of Christ living in a world that hasn't a clue about marital duties or devotion that we understand what it means to submit. When God tells you to submit, it doesn't mean that you are of lesser value or importance than the person to whom you are submitting to. An illustration from baseball might show how submitting to another is a blessing. Two very important positions on the baseball field are the pitcher and the catcher. Both players are on the same team and have the same objective—to get the batters out and win the game. The catcher is usually the person who decides which pitch to throw, be it a fastball, a curve, a change-up, or what have you. The pitcher submits to the catcher's decision. That doesn't mean that the pitcher can never shake off a pitch or that there might be an occasional conference at the mound. It doesn't mean that the catcher is better than the pitcher for calling the pitches. It doesn't mean that the pitcher is inferior because he submits to the catcher's decisions. It's simply the best way to play the game. That is true in baseball. It is true in life. It is true in marriage.

God show spouses how to submit to one another out of reverence for Christ in their specific roles in a marriage. That's why God had Paul write, "*Wives, submit to your own husbands as to the Lord.*" Nowhere in all of Scripture are you going to find God telling husbands to make sure their wives submit to them. A wife's submission to her husband is her responsibility. Husbands have plenty of responsibility to their wives when we get to those verses in just a bit. Wives,

submit to your husbands. That doesn't mean you are less important to God. You are both equal in value. Submit to your husband means that you put his needs ahead of your own.

And God tells you why you should do this. *For the husband is the head of the wife, just as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he himself is the Savior.* It makes sense to submit to Christ. After all he is God. He's our Savior. He left his glorious throne to enter life for you. He won you God's forgiveness and an eternal home in heaven. We have no problem submitting to Christ. But now you're supposed to submit to a man whose bad habits you've come to know and have had to live with for some time. And you're told to put his needs ahead of your own? Absolutely. God says, *"Moreover, as the church submits to Christ, so also wives are to submit to their husbands in everything.* Submit to him in everything. Do this out of reverence Christ. Put his need before your own.

Now God shows us men how he wants us to be leaders in our marriage. *Husbands, love your wives, in the same way as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.* God tells men to love their wives. I think we already knew we were supposed to do that. But do you understand what kind of love God expects you to show your better half? The Greek word for love in our text is not the friendship type of love that enjoys being with our loved one. It's not even the type of love that shows itself in intimate relations. They type of love that God commands is the highest kind of love. It is completely unselfish, a love that attaches no strings, a love that benefits the other. It's a love that is best shown us by Christ. He loved us not because we asked to be loved. It's not because we deserved his love. He loved us when we were completely unlovable creatures. He loved us enough to give up his life for us. That is how we men are to love our wives. We could never save them by dying for them. Only Jesus can do that. We devote our time to fulfilling their needs first. There can be no limit to the good things we do for our wives.

God gives us another reason to love our wife this way. Paul writes, *"In the same way, husbands have an obligation to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. To be sure, no one has ever hated his own body, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body, of his flesh and of his bones.* God tells us to treat our wife the way we treat our own body. We feed and care for it. Do the same for your wife. God reminds us to do this because she is your body. To prove that Paul quotes the marriage passage found in Genesis 2: *"For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two will be one flesh."* Love your wife because she and you are one in marriage.

Have you figured out God's key to a good and happy marriage? It sure isn't selfishness. When husbands and wives submit to one another out of reverence for Christ, with wives submitting to their husbands in everything and the husbands loving his wife the way Christ loved him, you have a happy and blessed marriage. When the wife puts her husband's needs first and her husband stays busy putting his wife's needs first, you have a God-pleasing marriage. Maybe the world can't understand how God's design for marriage is a blessing. But we don't need their approval. We have God's promise. He's the God who loved us and gave us his Son to save us. He's the God who put on human flesh and endured sin's punishment for us. He's the God who fills our hearts with faith so we believe all he says in his word is true. He's the God who took us dirty, stained, wrinkled, and blemish creatures and made us radiant, glorious, holy, and blameless. Out of reverence for Christ, we gladly submit to one another, knowing our Bridegroom is coming soon to take us home the heaven.