

EPHESIANS

GRACE & GLORY

Commentary and Questions | Ephesians 5:21-33

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Commentary:

Verse 21 is absolutely foundational for the passage ahead. The general principle of mutual submission out of reverence for Christ is not only a product of being filled with the Spirit (as the former passage suggests) but is also the foundation for the principles of authority of submission that Paul will begin to explain. In other words, self-centered tendencies will cause relationships to crumble! Paul says to the Philippians, "Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves" (emphasis mine). The key that unlocks good, Gospel-centered relationships is a heart disposition that counts others as more significant than oneself.

In a world full of tragedies, the slow demise of the family is undoubtedly one of the most devastating. Marital infidelity, the exaltation of sexual sin, abortion, feminism, homosexuality, divorce and an overall passivity towards these problems have all contributed to the slow decay of the traditional family. However, we have a God who deeply cares and speaks into these issues. We have a Bible that sets up Gospel parameters for believers to live in. And we have the Gospel that empowers believers to live in stark contrast to the rest of the world.

After Paul lays the foundation of mutual submission out of reverence for Christ, he begins applying Christ and the Gospel to three different sets of relationships: wives and husbands, children and parents, and slaves and masters. The latter two are not what concerns us now but the first set, wives and husbands, does concern us. The passage on wives and husbands can be divided into three different sections.

First, wives are called to submit to their husbands as to the Lord. Every time the Bible discusses the husband-wife relationship, the role of the wife is always discussed before the role of the husband. This is simply because no husband can lead a wife that is unwilling to follow from the beginning. Further, the idea of submission is one of willing and voluntary submission. If the wife submits with a begrudging disposition, the marriage relationship will still suffer. This idea is expressed in verse 24 when Paul relates a wife's submission to her husband's authority to the church's submission to Christ's authority. Christians are not called to begrudgingly submit to Christ but to willingly and voluntarily submit!

Second, the passage deals with the way in which husbands are to lead. The church can submit to Jesus voluntarily and willfully because of how Jesus leads! This is so crucial for husbands to grasp. The general principle is that husbands are to love their wives and lead their wives as Christ loves and leads the church. More specifically, husbands are called to lead by encouraging and supporting the wife in her own personal sanctification. Also, the husband's leadership should involve providing for and protecting the wife. For the husband to succeed at any of these, he must first take his eyes, attention, affection and love off of himself and place them on his wife. This is such a difficult obstacle to overcome! Nonetheless, a husband is called to consider the interests and needs of his wife before he looks to his own interests and needs.

Third, this passage is primarily about the Gospel of Jesus Christ and about God. It would be easy for someone to read Ephesians 5:21-33 and conclude that the main issue here is the marriage relationship. However, the relationship between a husband and a wife is merely a shadow of the Gospel. If a husband is struggling to selflessly love his wife, his first step is to consider how Jesus selflessly loves him. If a wife is struggling with the idea of submission, she as well should consider how Jesus selflessly loves and leads her. This is how the Gospel empowers believers to have a God-glorifying marriage! Thus, marriage is not so much about emotional or physical love between two people as it is about the great Lover.

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It is not so much about physically providing and protecting, as it is about the great Provider and Protector. It is not so much about a wife submitting, as it is the church willfully submitting to Christ. The hope then is that Christ would be exalted in marriage.

Questions for Interpretation:

1. Write down any ideas, insights or questions that you have from either the sermon or the passage.
2. Read verse 21 in chapter 5. Describe the foundation for Christian relationships in your own words.
3. How does the Gospel of Jesus Christ create a heart disposition of mutual submission? In other words, what is it about Jesus and the cross that should empower and motivate us to serve one another?
4. Read verses 22-24. In your own words, describe what Biblical submission is for the wife.
5. Read verse 25-33. In your own words, describe what Biblical leadership is for the husband.
6. In what ways do you see the Gospel in this passage? How does it exemplify, empower and motivate Biblical submission and Biblical leadership?

Questions for Application:

1. Describe the current condition of marriage and the family. Is it good/bad? Explain.
2. What are some obstacles that husbands have to overcome to be good leaders in the home?
3. What are some obstacles that wives have to overcome to display Biblical submission well?
4. As a husband, how would you describe your leadership in your marriage? In what areas do you need to improve? As a wife, explain how the idea of submission plays out in your marriage. Do you find this easy or difficult? Explain.
5. As a husband, what are some ways you can show Biblical love to your wife?