

Submit to One Another

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[0 : 00] Let's read together from Ephesians 5, verses 18-33. We're working our way through Ephesians. Ephesians 5, verses 18-33.

! And then we'll sing a hymn together just after that. And God's Word says this, And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery.

But be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.

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

Husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the Word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.

[1 : 27] In the same way, husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself, for no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it just as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body.

Therefore, a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband. This is God's Word for us today. We are walking through the back half of Ephesians, and the question that we're asking every week is, what does the church do?

How do Christians live a redeemed life all the way? And from this week, the next several weeks, Paul turns to say that the gospel reorders and changes the way you do personal relationships. So marriage, obviously dating and marriage this week, and then if you look down in the, if you have a Bible, you can see that then he goes on to talk about children and parents, and then employers and employees.

[2 : 42] So he's talking about how the gospel can change the way you live in personal relationships, in every arena of life. So today, marriage, we've got to do a flyover again like last week, because when you work through a passage like this, you see that every single clause, every single word could have its own reflection, and there could be a long series just on marriage, of course, right?

We could have weeks and weeks just thinking about the Bible's understanding of marriage, the mystery of marriage. Paul calls it the mystery of marriage, right? And so some of you, if you're married in the room, maybe you look at your spouse sometimes and say, you are a mystery to me. Marriage is a mystery, right? And you say, I already know what Paul means. Marriage is a mystery. Now, there's a lot to that word, mystery. Marriage is a mystery, but what does he mean? Let's just think about the big idea, the flyover, one kind of pass through on what that means. And I want to focus on the headline, which is actually the language submit, submit to one another. Now, if you come today, we all come today to the Bible's teaching here about marriage, this very famous passage, Ephesians 5, and we come from different backgrounds, different relationships to the concept of marriage.

[4 : 05] Some of us may come divorced. We may come having had a bad marriage, a hard marriage, a difficult marriage at the present maybe. And so you might come and read Paul's model

for marriage and be skeptical as to whether it's possible.

And some of us come single today, and we're single maybe in content. And so there may be a bit of an indifference to what Paul says here about it. This is just not where I am and not where I really want to be.

Some of us come single and discontent, frustrated, upset as to our relationship status right now and wanting something different. And so we could come to this jaded and cynical about marriage and the model of marriage that we read about here.

Some of us come living a pretty good marriage right now in our lives. We have a good marriage. And we know, however, if you come in a good marriage, that marriage is very up and down at times.

And I know that I can look at this today and say that I am teaching today not as the husband that I want to be. Sorry, I said that completely wrong.

[5 : 10] Not as the husband I want to be. Boy, that's bad. Not from a perspective of the husband I am, reading my own life into this passage, but what I want to be, right? The women in the room that are married, you can say this is what I want to be.

Husbands, this is what I want to be, not what I am. So that's the perspective I'm coming from today as a teacher here. But I sure know this, that all of us come as contemporary Western people in the year of our Lord, 2025, in a city like Edinburgh.

And that means when we read the word submit, we get a little squirmy in our seats and it's challenging and we don't like it at first. And that's because I think if you'll open up to this, what Paul says here, what God says here, what God says here about marriage, open up to it.

I think we get squirmy about this concept because we have a problem with our view of marriage.

First, that's the first point today. And then that means when we see that, we can then turn to see the goal of marriage, the real goal, secondly.

And then finally, only if we see those two things can we then see the power that Paul talks about for better marriages. So those three things, the problem we have, the goal of marriage as it actually is, according to God, and then the power that's here for better marriages.

[6 : 27] So let's think about that. First, we have a problem with marriage. Every person does. All of us human beings do have a problem with relationships. And the problem is this. We approach marriage and dating from the perspective of self-interest and personal self-fulfillment.

We approach marriage and dating from the perspective of self-fulfillment and a personal interest in meeting our own needs. So we ask when we come to relationships, instinctively, even if you don't say it out loud, from the bottom of your consciousness, how is this relationship going to better me and meet my personal needs?

The pleasure I'm looking for, the satisfaction in life, the money goals that I might have, we all do that. And so that, because of our selfishness, it's really hard to come and read this passage when it says submit.

Now, press pause on that. We read not from verse 22 to 33, which is the classic text on marriage in Ephesians 5. We read from 18 to 33. And there's a reason for that.

Usually 22 to 33 is treated as an island all by itself. And it begins with, wives, submit to your husbands. Right? So if you back up to verse 18, Paul says, don't get drunk, be filled with the Spirit.

[7 : 48] So it's almost like when you section it off like that, it's like Paul is saying, bullet point one, stop drinking too much. Bullet point two, let me change subjects and say, now wives, submit to your husbands.

Right? And that's not the right way to read it. This passage is not on an island. It's, you can't, let me say that you cannot understand what Paul's saying without 18 to 21. That's the, it's fundamental to understanding what's going on here.

And in 18 to 21, we have one long sentence in Greek. So if you're reading from an NIV today, it's broken it up into a couple sentences, but in Greek, it's one long sentence. And let me just read it to you one more time.

Don't get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery. Be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, singing, making melody of the Lord with your heart, giving thanks always and for everything to God, the Father, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.

So that last clause, submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ, he's talking to everybody when he says that. And so this, you could think of that last line, submit to one another out of reverence, the word that in Greek is fear of Christ, as the headline into which all the rest of Ephesians 5 and 6 comes underneath.

[9 : 08] And so what is he saying? Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. Husbands, submit out of reverence for Christ. Wives, submit out of reverence for Christ.

Children, submit out of reverence for Christ. Parents, there's even a parental submission to children out of reverence for Christ. Employers, masters and slaves in the early first century, employers and employees submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.

mutual submission is the headline article at the top of the paper. If Paul's writing a manual for personal relationships, the title of the manual is mutual submission.

Back and forth. It goes both directions throughout every single one of these relationships. If you have a Bible, you can look over at Ephesians 6 verse 9 just to prove this. In Ephesians 6 verse 9, he turns to the masters in a master-slave relationship in the first century and says, masters, do the same as your servants are doing for you.

Submitting, serving. That's what he says. So we see that this is a mutual submission situation.

What is submission? What does it mean to submit? This word here has a synonym throughout the rest of Ephesians and the synonym is service or helpfulness.

[10 : 23] So submission just means serve, helpful, be helpful. And Paul gives a really clear definition of it in the next book of the Bible, Philippians, a whole chapter in fact on it, Philippians 2, where he says, this is submission, this is service.

Do nothing from selfish ambition or self-centeredness. Instead, all things in humility like Jesus by counting others more significant than yourself.

So what does it mean to submit, according to Paul? It means to count the other person more significant than yourself and to give yourself away for them. Service and helpfulness is what the concept means.

So let me say like this, submission is laying down your rights in order to serve somebody else with humility like Jesus served you. Laying down your rights to serve somebody else to seek their ultimate good.

Serving them unto their ultimate good, never using them. So that's the difference in the modern conception. We approach relationships, self-fulfillment. And so we use people to meet our needs.

[11 : 30] And the Bible's model is mutual submission where I lay down my rights to serve the good of my spouse, the ultimate good of my spouse to meet their needs, to make their ultimate good happen.

Okay, so let me prove this to you once more and move on. In verse 22, when it says, wives submit to your husbands, to your own husband, as to the Lord, the word submit is not there in the Greek text.

So it doesn't say wives, in the Greek text it does not say wives submit to your own husbands as to the Lord. It says, wives to your own husbands as to the Lord. You see, what's it doing?

It's pulling the word submit from the previous verse and assuming it, meaning you cannot read 22 if you have not read 21 and gotten that as the headline. Right?

There's not even a verb there. So mutual submission is the headline and now he turns and says, now wives, there's a way to do that and husbands, there's a way to do that. So he repeats, he assumes the word for a wife to a husband and then husbands, he assumes and gives you a word called love.

[12 : 42] Mutual submission is the model that he gives us. Now let me sum it all up. Sum it all up here. This is saying that the Holy Spirit, when you believe the gospel and the Holy Spirit comes into your life, the Holy Spirit reorders relationships to be what they were meant to be from the time of creation.

Marriage given from the beginning of world history, 18 to 21, how does it start? Be filled with the Spirit and submit to one another. Meaning that he's talking to Christians and he's saying to Christians and Christian marriage, the gospel and the presence of the Holy Spirit in your life has to change the way you approach marriage.

It's a choice to submit to one another, to display what marriage was meant to be from Genesis 1 and 2 and you've got to get the Holy Spirit into your life in order to live this out.

It's a gospel transformed mutual submission perspective. It's a model that only the gospel can bring into your life and what that means for us is that when we look at the problem, self-interest, self-fulfillment, meeting my needs all the time.

Paul's telling us you need the Holy Spirit in your life to change you from the inside out and marriage is here to serve that. Let me give you three quick applications of this in your life. Number one, more conceptually driven.

[13:57] Number one, if you look at verse 22 where it says, wives submit to your husbands and that you get frustrated by that language, squirmy by that language, just remember that what Paul's doing here is he's saying the model is mutual submission and there's a type of submission appropriate for men and women in both directions in certain roles here.

And it is Holy Spirit empowered laying down of personal rights to seek the good of the other in different ways. Now, the context he says that line into, Aristotle was the dominant philosopher of the first century.

He had lived several centuries prior. Aristotle says, quote, it is natural that men rule over women just like some men rule over other men.

So, Aristotle believed that there were slave races, that some races were meant to be slaves and he also believed that women were meant to be hierarchically subordinate as slaves, as servants to men.

So, this is Aristotle. This is the dominant view in the Roman Empire. And so, men in the Roman Empire would often marry and they would marry for status. And then, of course, they would live any life they wanted to on the side, right?

[15:17] They were never committed. The commitment was for their station in life, but they were never really committed in love and cherishing. And you've got to see that when Paul, boy, verse 28 and 29, verse 33, when Paul turns in the Greco-Roman culture and says, husbands, love and cherish your wife as if she were your body.

because nobody hates their own body. He is talking into a culture that's dominated by Aristotle where men really do believe that women are a slave gender and it's revolutionary.

It changed the world. And he's saying that no, not at all. Men and women equal before the Lord and called to mutually submit to one another in the beautiful model that God has given us in marriage. Secondly, non-Christians can have healthy marriages and that's a different talk for a different day. I can't treat that right now, but I want to say this. In the light of verses 18 to 21, you can't come and expect a culture, the culture at large to approach marriage the way that we're reading about right here.

Why? Because verse 18 to 21 says you need the Holy Spirit. You need the gospel. You need the Spirit. And so when we look and say, boy, our culture doesn't understand marriage, verse 18 to 21 makes sense of that.

[16:33] It says that the Holy Spirit has got to get into your life to see the model of marriage that God created from the beginning. And so we can't expect a culture without the Holy Spirit to think about marriage like the Holy Spirit drives us to think about marriage like.

And then thirdly and finally, if you're married today or if you are dating or if you hope to be dating soon, if you have plans, what does this mean? This means you've got to get verses 18 to 21 in your life first.

You've got to get the Holy Spirit in your life first. You've got to look for somebody that sees 18 to 21 mutual submission laying down their rights to serve one another as the model for the relationship you're stepping into.

Look for that person. Secondly, I've got to be quick, the goal. All right, the goal here of marriage, that's the problem we have. The Holy Spirit reorders our relationships.

And then secondly, the goal for marriage. Now, Paul says here that marriage is meant to be a one flesh union with one another in verse 31. What does he mean by flesh?

[17:34] Is it physical? And of course, we know that that is a reality in marriage. But flesh also means person as well. So he's saying that there's a dynamic here where you become one person.

And so when he says, you know, you move together as one person in one direction. Not the band, but just a good relationship. That's how it moves. All right? And then he says, okay, here's what mutual submission looks like.

Wives, submitting to your husbands, giving yourself away in service and love and helpfulness to husbands. And so he says here, yes, the husband leads, but how?

So the word submission here is a word for both parties and it's a word that has a military connotation to it. It's a soldiering word and it's got the connotation of a captain leading a group of soldiers.

That's the background of this word. And you can imagine, this is what he says. He says, mutual submission, husbands leading, yes, but how? How do they submit? Well, the captain, imagine trench warfare and in trench warfare the captain gets the troops all together and he says, we're about to go over the edge and we're going to run right into the firing squad.

[18:48] And who is the first person? The captain gathers the troops, the captain says, this is where we're going together. And it is the captain who takes the first step and takes the first bullet, right? And so Paul turns and says, this is your role, husband, mutual submission.

Your role is to lead by giving your life away, if that's what it takes, to take this relationship to the point of spiritual maturity, of real growth. There's an activity of giving your life away for the sake of your bride, your spouse.

And then he turns to a wife and says, well, let me picture it. It's easier to image than describe.

Imagine a beautiful dance, a waltz, a great waltz, right?

Imagine you're watching Strictly Come Dancing, right? I've never seen that show, but I understand it's like Dancing with the Stars, I think, from America. I have seen that. And, you know, you get these great, these dancers, and they're going to waltz.

And if both people try to step forward in the waltz at the beginning of the dance, what happens? They kick each other in the shin, right? So, one person has to take a step forward and the other takes a step back, right?

[19:57] And you get this beautiful harmony, this giving and receiving that takes place, and it becomes this one flesh movement, to put it in the metaphorical sense, this beautiful dance. And that's what Paul's talking about here, this harmony of movement, of giving and receiving, of leading, yet submitting, at the same time, all together.

It's a harmony. And he's saying, this is the model, and the motivation is the big goal. And here's the big goal. Point to the big goal. Verse 32, he says, the mega mystery in Greek is that this marriage, this harmony, this dance, is to be a living reenactment of Christ, the true groom's love for His bride. That this harmony should reflect the love that Jesus Christ has for His ultimate bride, the church. And so here's the big idea. Only a Christian marriage can see the big vision of this, that marriage exists to be a living illustration and signpost of the love of the gospel itself.

The love of Jesus Christ, the groom, for His beautiful bride, the church, in the gospel itself. Marriage is to be so harmonious and love and cherishing that it looks like that. That's the goal. That's what we're striving towards in marriage.

Now, let me mention a couple quick practicals here and move to the final point. Number one, notice that there is not a word in this passage telling you what leading and being led looks like in any particular way.

[21:20] There's not a word. There's nothing here that says one of you should cut the grass, one of you should take out the trash most often, one of you should work, one of you shouldn't.

Not a word. You don't have details here. And that's because it's not always the same. Right? So this can be worked out in many, many ways. Secondly, is it saying, wives, do what you're told by your husband because he's the leader?

No. Not at all. Why? Lots of reasons, but let me just give you one. What is submission?

Submission, we said, mutual submission is laying down your rights to seek the ultimate good of your spouse, the other.

And wives in the room surely know that sometimes your husband makes decisions that are not seeking anybody's ultimate good. Right? And it is not seeking his ultimate good to not confront, to not have conflict, to not say sometimes that was the wrong decision.

Right? Of course. See, conflict in marriage is necessary if you're actually seeking the other person's ultimate good because there's times where you've got to come and say that was the wrong choice. You said the wrong thing.

[22:37] That was mean. Right? And that means if you're truly seeking somebody's ultimate good, there's always a back and forth between activity and passivity, a mutual giving and receiving in both directions, always.

You have to be. You see, let me give you this. The goal underneath the goal. What's the goal underneath the goal? If you look at verse 26 and 27, what was Jesus' goal in coming for His great bride?

It says, He came to cleanse her and make her wrinkle-free, cleansed from all unrighteousness. Right? What is the goal of marriage? The goal underneath the goal to signpost the gospel and the goal underneath that is to pursue your spouse's holiness, to seek their holiness, that you say, I want them to be a diamond.

And what have we been talking about in the back half of Ephesians? It's all about imitation of Christ, of becoming who God has made you in Christ, of becoming the emerald, the diamond that God has pronounced you to be through the gospel.

Marriage, the goal of marriage, is to seek the well-being of your spouse so much so that he or she becomes the diamond that God has pronounced them to be. It's to pursue their holiness ultimately. [23 : 49] And that means finally, and I'll move to the last thing, that two qualities, I read through this passage and I just note some of the particular words. It says, Husbands, love her, cherish her.

It says to both parties, verse 31, hold fast to one another. Love and respect, mutual submission, all these words. You take all these words, I think you whittle them down and you have two qualities to a healthy marriage.

And the two qualities are passionate love commingled with unyielding commitment. Think about the world Paul's speaking into.

The first century, dominated by Aristotle. That old world was commitment without passion.

Commitment without cherishing.

So I will marry you, said the first century husband. I will marry you, but I will have lots of relationships on the side. And I need you to provide status for me.

[24 : 51] Right? That's commitment, but there's no love. There's no cherishing. There's no looking at your bride as your own body. And you look at the new world and what is it?

We have all love, all feelings, but no commitment. Right? We have feelings without foundation. We have feelings of love without holding fast.

And Paul says the model here is passionate love where you are seeking to actively cherish your spouse and at the same time unyielding commitment, holding fast.

And those two things are coming together and that's a beautiful relationship according to this model. Now if you are married, again, if you are dating, if you hope to be dating, look for somebody, become somebody, talk to your spouse and say, is the goal of our relationship one another's holiness?

That's the question. Have you talked about it? Have you sat down and said, is it really the case that our goal for one another is pursuing each other's holiness? That's what Paul's calling us to here.

[25 : 54] Lastly, I have to finish. Where are we going to get the power for this? That's the question often at the end of these sermons. Where are we going to get the power for this? If you just look from verses 18 to 33, notice how many times in this sequence Paul brings us back to Jesus.

So from 18, I'll just list a few of you, a few of them. Verse 18, be filled with the Spirit. Verse 19, make melody to the Lord. That's Jesus. Verse 20, give thanks in the name of the Lord, Jesus Christ.

Verse 21, submit to one another why out of reverence for Christ. Submit to the Lord, the next verse, as Christ is the head of the church, its Savior.

The church submits to Christ. Love as Christ loved. Love as Christ gave himself up. Every single clause, Paul says something to us, and then he turns and says something about Jesus.

Every single clause in a back and forth. And notice the one probably most important one, the headline, submit to one another out of reverence for one another.

[27 : 01] No. It's not submit to one another out of respect and reverence for each other. It's submit to one another out of fear of Jesus, fear of Christ. Fear there means all.

Love, honor. In other words, what is it saying? It's saying the way to sustain a beautiful marriage, like we're reading about here and to grow into it, is not because you look and say, I deserve to be loved like this, and she or he deserves to be loved like this.

Right? You know that that cannot sustain it. If you look and say, I love you because of all your qualities and that's it, you know that over time you will both struggle if that is the only reason.

What does he say? He says, submit to one another in deep love and affection, cherishing, holding fast out of fear of Jesus, out of reverence for Christ. He says, keep coming back to Christ and look at him if you want to be able to look at one another and serve one another to the point of seeking their holiness.

He says, you've got to constantly come back to the Christ who died, the great groom who died for you, the great bride. That's the one you have to look at if you want to be sustained in this possibility, a relationship like this.

[28 : 12] And this is the last word here. He says at the end, verse 32, marriage is a mega mystery. What is he talking about there? He's bringing us in that word mystery all the way back to the beginning of history.

Genesis 1 and Genesis 2. And you can remember there that there was a marriage. Adam and Eve were married. And Eve stood in the Garden of Eden next to the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

and she reached out her hand and she took from it. And in verse 7 of Genesis 3, it says, Adam was with her. And Adam had been given a calling, protect the garden.

Protect your bride. Love her and cherish her forever. And seek her ultimate good. What is marriage? It's there to seek the ultimate good of the other. And Adam had been given that charge, seek her ultimate good.

And you know what he did? He stood next to her as she reached out and she ate and she broke the world. She was deceived. He was not. He knew what was happening.

[29 : 16] And he let it happen the whole way. And then when God came into the garden, God said, what is going on? Where are you? What have you done? And what did he do? The first word he speaks is he blames her for it.

So that is the opposite of Ephesians 5. That's the opposite of healthy marriage. Okay? And if you were to read Ephesians 5 backward into Genesis 2 and 3, what could we ask?

What would a beautiful, wonderful husband, what should Adam have done in the moment that Eve reached out her hand and took and ate? When God came down, boy, that cost the world.

It's exile. It's the loss of God's presence. It's bruised and broken by the fall. What should he have done? What does Paul say here in Ephesians 5? The role of a husband is to love her to the point of laying down his life for her sake.

What should he have done? He should have said, Lord, don't send her into exile. Don't let her go into judgment. Take me.

[30 : 17] It's my fault. I will lay down my life for her. I will die so that she might live. That's what he should have said. Thanks be to God that there is a better Adam than the first one.

A second Adam. A true Adam. An Adam that came all the way into the middle of history and said, I will lay my life down for my bride. A great groom. If you're married, if you're dating, if you're looking for marriage, do you see that because Jesus Christ came to be your great groom, the more and more you run into his arms, the more your relationship has the potential for greatness.

Let us pray. Father, we ask that you would give us conviction about the way we are pursuing our relationships.

We ask, Lord, that we would be convicted of our selfishness and turned today by the power of the Spirit to pursue the ultimate good of our beloved ones.

and we know that the only way to do that right now is to turn our eyes upon Jesus to say, I am not my own. My goal is not me. So, Lord, as we sing now, we just ask for help.

[31 : 37] We ask that you would turn us away from ourselves and give us a reimagined vision for beautiful marriage. We need it. We need it. We struggle so much, Lord, so I know I do, so Lord, help us.

We pray in Christ's name. Amen.