

Husbands And Wives Under Submission

Ephesians 5:21-24

I am especially excited about these next steps of our study of this Book of Ephesians, because it is in these words that we encounter some of my most favorite words of truth in all the bible, foundational truths given to us to govern the most precious relationship outside of our relationship with Christ, that of the relationship between a husband and wife.

Why would I be so bold as to say that these words have that level of importance? It is because God seems to say much the same right within these very words. Here, the Spirit of the Lord tells us that the relationship between a husband and wife has so very much likeness to our relationship with Christ that we can use one as a pattern for the other.

And I praise the Lord for the detailed explanation and instruction and exhortation that He gives to help us to not miss out on the great blessings that will be ours if we will humble ourselves and join with Christ in this so very intimate and loving relationship of husband and wife. With that being said, may we begin by reading these words, beginning with verse 21!

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. 25 Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, 26 that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, 27 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. 28 In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. 29 For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, 30 because we are members of his body. 31 "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." 32 This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. 33 However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband. (Ephesians 5:21-33 (ESV))

These words folks hold a special key that not only guarantee us the most delightful relationship we could ever hope to enjoy with Christ, they also hold the key to and will absolutely guarantee the most delightful and dedicated love relationship that a husband and wife could ever hope to enjoy.

And this “revealed truth” begins with one of the most important concepts contained in the whole of scripture, that of “submission”. A simple word that would seem so easy to do, but has proven to be one of the most, if not the very most difficult task that all of mankind has ever encountered. “Submission”! Listen again to these few words of verse 21,

21 . . . submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ. (Ephesians 5:21)

Now the next verse begins with an instruction to the wife regarding this word “submission”, but we must not move there too quickly, else we will miss out on the intent of this verse 21,

21 . . . submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ. (Ephesians 5:21)

Here, “submission” is not a command that is being limited only to the wife, but rather is being given to everyone. Note those words,

21 . . . submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ. (Ephesians 5:21)

And listen to these words given in Philippians 2!

3 Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. 4 Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. (Philippians 2:3-4 (ESV))

Here, the instruction to be “humble” is given to all of us, both men and women, whether inside the family or outside, to husbands, to wives, to children, and also to our neighbors, to our co-workers and to others.

And I am so glad that God does things this way, because by saying it this way . . .

21 . . . submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ. (Ephesians 5:21)

And

3 . . . in humility count others more significant than yourselves. 4 Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. (Philippians 2:3-4 (ESV))

“Submission” takes on a far broader meaning than just the instruction in the next verses regarding the wives. But why would that be so important right from the beginning of our

study. It is because “foolish” men, “foolish husbands” often want to use these next words as an excuse to “Lord over” others, especially their wife or girlfriend and even all women.

May I say these words again, because this is such an important instruction to us men!
21 . . . submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ. (Ephesians 5:21)

And

3 . . . in humility count others more significant than yourselves. 4 Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.
(Philippians 2:3-4 (ESV))

Each of us, and may I speak especially to us men, must humbly count others more significant, more important than ourselves.

Why do men so often have a problem with these words? It is because of that “other” “word”, the one that is exactly opposite of the word “humility”, and that is “pride”. It is clear throughout these scriptures that God declares “pride” to be the most consuming and most depraved condition that the human soul will ever encounter and will ever have to deal with. Pride is an all-consuming, all-demanding, all-enslaving condition of the soul; and it forms the basis for most all of the many other sins we will ever get caught up in.

And what is at the heart of the depraved condition of “pride”? Oswald Chambers narrows it down to just a few words, “my claim to my right to myself”. I have shared those words with you on other occasions, but may we examine them again; because do they not fit perfectly with the meaning of this word “pride”?

Think about it, an arrogant father Lords over His children as he demands their submission in exercising “his claim to his right to his self”.

Or in the workplace an arrogant boss tries to control everyone who works for him through intimidation and threats. He rules with an iron fist as he exercises “his claim to his right to his self”.

And as we are about to study in these next words of Ephesians 5, an implicit warning is being given to husbands to take extreme care lest they be in danger of being led astray by “pride” as he demands to have “his claim to his right to his self”, lording over his wife and making demands that will often ultimately drive his wife away from him.

And may I say that I feel so very sorry for men who give in to that temptation and make demands that their wife “knuckle-under” to their demanding ways. Their condition of mind and soul and their understanding of these scriptures is so very foolish as they stand there angrily before their wife making demands that are simply not in accordance with these words of God.

For men to take words, such as these in the following verses that instruct wives to submit to their husbands, and then use them as a weapon to try to coerce their wives into obedience are in seriously dangerous territory with the Lord.

While disagreements and frustrations can precipitate all sorts of arguments, we men dare not twist God’s word and try to use it as a weapon against our wives. God will surely hold us accountable for such misuse of His word; and the accountability will often begin immediately right within the family as the wife eventually will pack up and leave. And then also, that accountability will follow on into eternity when Christ brings judgment upon men’s souls for such foolish behavior.

I realize that my words might sound strong and demanding and perhaps even harsh. But we men must recognize that those attitudes and behaviors that we might think are private, hidden “behind the closed doors” of our homes where we feel more free to “lord over” the “weaker” family members, are not hidden from God.

13 . . . there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do. (Hebrews 4:13 (NASB))

Folks, God is all-knowing. And He is not just “up there” watching us, as the words of the song tell us, “from a distance”. Not at all! For those of us who have Christ as our Savior, He is very “up close”. He Spirit is right within us having to endure our foolish rants and our misuses of His words. So then, as the words of these verses command,

21 . . . submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ. (Ephesians 5:21)

And

3 . . . in humility count others more significant than yourselves. 4 Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.
(Philippians 2:3-4 (ESV))

Each of us is to humbly submit to one another out of reverence for Christ, counting all others more important than ourselves.

A question . . . how far should a man go with his humility and “submission”? Must a man go so far as to allow his wife, his children, his friends, his neighbors, his coworkers

to run “roughshod” over him? Is a man to be “passive”? Folks, simply put, that is not at all the meaning of “humility” and “submission”. Humility is a “strength”, not a weakness.

May I say that again! Humility is a “strength”, not a weakness. Humility is when a “strong man” controls his “weakness of pride” and brings his behaviors under the control of His strength.

That is the example given in these words that tell us that Jesus humbled Himself and gave Himself, even to death on the cross, so that others might gain. He humbly gave everything He had, His very life. And that took strength and courage and commitment.

And no, Jesus did not give up His responsibilities as a man, and as our Savior and our Lord. And neither must we men give up our responsibilities as a man and as a leader in our family, our community and in our workplace. We can actually do it all, without any part of our responsibilities being compromised or forfeited.

Jesus was the strongest man that ever walked the face of the earth. And He was the greatest leader that the world has ever known, with untold billions faithfully following after Him, eager to do His will. But yet, He walked through each day as a loving and gentle servant, meeting the needs of others.

And that is the legacy that Jesus has left to you and me, and especially to us men. So before we proceed into these next verses that instruct the wives regarding humility and submission, may we men first clearly understand and embrace the humility and submission that is required of us. Again, those blessed words . . .

21 . . . submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ. (Ephesians 5:21)

And

3 . . . in humility count others more significant than yourselves. 4 Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.
(Philippians 2:3-4 (ESV))

So then, how do we accomplish this so very important exhortation from the Lord? The answer is given right within these words. The essential key to humility and submission is found in the words “out of reverence for Christ”.

A favorite verse of mine as I consider my relationship with Christ, and as I also consider my relationship with my wife is one found in Ecclesiastes 4, verse 12.

12 A cord of three strands is not (easily or) quickly broken. (Ecclesiastes 4:12)

As we consider the often tentative nature that binds us together in relationship with one another, sometimes even the smallest of disagreements or misunderstandings can separate loved one, especially a husband and wife. And it is in the mystery of this verse, that I find strength.

12 A cord of three strands is not (easily or) quickly broken. (Ecclesiastes 4:12)

The third strand that can be, and must be, added to the “cord of marriage” is the person of Jesus Christ. When He is added into the equation, His “third strand” will bring an increased strength to the relationship that is exponential. As we receive His presence and as we surrender ourselves into His hands, His Spirit will bring about this “reverential fear” spoken about here in these words.

21 . . . submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ. (Ephesians 5:21)

Folks, listen! All of this is very, very real. The Spirit of Christ really is living and abiding within each of us who have Him as our Savior and Lord. And thanks be to God, He really will do exactly as He promises. In those awful moments of frustration and arguments when the only answer seems to be that we “demand” obedience and submission from our wives, God’s Spirit will be faithful to convict us of the wrongfulness of that sinful temptation.

Those familiar words again in 1 Corinthians 10,

13 No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.

(1 Corinthians 10:13 (ESV))

And that “way of escape” can be far more simple than our minds can imagine. Our escape can come through a simple show of humble love. Instead of demands and threats, we can actually “love” our wives into the submission that is required of her . . . a hug rather than a harsh word.

And as we husbands step on further into that loving relationship with our wives, simple “consideration” and “respect” will literally produce miracles within the relationship.

Listen . . . those words from 1 Peter 3 . . .

7 Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers. (1 Peter 3:7)

Men, if we do this, then those arguments and frustrations will all go away.

May I conclude our time today with the simple instruction to each of us that “love” is such a much better way! And it will provide benefits and happiness beyond anything we could ever hope for. These words again . . .

7Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers. (1 Peter 3:7)

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