Ephesians 5:21-24

Spirit Filled Submission

Sermon final

We are currently in our series, "The Spirit Filled Household". Last week we considered the foundation of marriage. That marriage is about oneness and that oneness in marriage is meant to be an illustration of the oneness of Christ and the church. This morning we are going to consider a very controversial statement in Ephesians **– v.21 -** "***submitting to one another in the fear of Christ***" – it's five words in the Greek, its directly addressed to the wives, and these five words have caused much controversy and differing of opinions.

I'll never forget one Monday morning walking into work at the Chiropractors office. My boss asked me, as he often did, "What was the sermon about on Sunday?" I told him rather reluctantly, "it was on the wife's role in marriage to submit to her husband." To which he began to criticize and laugh at the audacity of Christians that husbands would expect such a thing. I understand the concern!

Husbands, how would you feel if someone told you that you needed to submit to someone like you? Put yourself in your wife's shoes for a moment! This topic has kept me up at night…because I know how difficult of a person I can be!

He looked down the hall and yelled to our receptionist, "Marianne, come down here for a minute!" I thought, "Oh boy…here we go." "Brian here thinks that a wife should live in submission to her husband…what if I told you that the man you eventually marry was to be your leader and you needed to submit to him?" "I'd be like…WHY!" And she went on and on with my boss chuckling in the background. But then the Holy Spirit, as He often does, gave me exactly what to say. "Ok, let me have a shot at this now. What if I told you that God's desire was to bring to you a man who was going to love you, and sacrifice himself for you, that his leadership decisions he makes for you and for your family would always have your best interests in mind…and when he strays, God would redirect him and get him back on track. Your husbands command from God would be to love you as Jesus loved His church. Jesus gave Himself as a sacrifice for the church and God would hold your husband accountable to love you that much…and He was asking for you to willingly submit to such a man." She was quiet for a moment…as was my boss…and then she said, "that changes it a bit."

Paul calls the wives in this household code to do something Christ-like…Jesus was a man of submission and humility. Paul calls the wives to be willing to so trust God, that she would put her life and her family under the care of a very flawed individual. But don't forget the following verses as we consider this calling to submission. Husbands are to lay down their lives for their wives in loving sacrificial leadership. Jesus laid His own body over His own bride and took the

blows for her…that's the kind of love He calls us to men…and women are called to submit to such a man – not a tyrant, but a servant, sacrificial, leader. God help us all! Marriage is a beautiful picture…but it takes a MIRACLE…why would it take anything less?! God is in the miracle making business and He loves to accomplish miracles so that He would get all the glory for it!

With all of the challenges and abuses in marriage, it's important that we affirm God's divine order. Three things I want to consider this morning…

1. God created mankind as male and female in His own image. Gender is at the heart of what it means to be mankind created in the image of God. 2. God has distinct roles within Himself. Submission is something that is seen within the Trinity – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit "submit to one another". 3. Submission in marriage is a result of the Spirit and a picture of the church. Hence the title of my sermon, "Spirit Filled Submission".

1. God created mankind as male and female in His own image

Gender is at the heart of what it means to be created in God's image, that's why the devil loves to attack it because if he can distort the image he can distort the display of God's glory. On the sixth day of creation, God created humanity, we call it "mankind" because the woman was taken from the side of the man and a single person became two persons. She was brought to the man as His helper to assist Adam in tending the garden, and to fulfill God's command to "**be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth" (Gen. 1:28**). The one man became two people, and when God joined them together, the two people became one flesh. One mankind, two distinct persons….two distinct persons coming together to become one flesh. ***This oneness and this distinction is what Paul has in mind as he writes about wives and husbands – their oneness, and their distinct roles. Both are to play their part as a parable of Christ and the church.***

Men and women are created in the image of God. An image is a copy of an original. In what way are we copies of the original? Look at **Genesis 1:27**:

> **So God created man** [mankind – the word is Adam. It isn't "womankind", that's important] **in his own image**, **in the image of God he created him** [him is singular, him/mankind]**; male and female he created them** [that's a plurality – male and female, them]**. (Genesis 1:27)**

One of the ways that we are copies of the original is that mankind is both a singular as well as a plural – one mankind, two genders – male and female. The wording is very specific and extremely important. Moses does not say, "God created male and female in His own image, in the image of God He created them." That would simply say that God created two persons in His image. Nor does Moses say, "God created man in His own image, in the image of God He

created him." That would simply say that God created 1 person, a man named Adam. Moses specifically words it: "***God created man*** (that's a singular) ***in His own image, in the image of God He created him*** (that's a singular); ***male and female He created them*** (that's a plural)." One mankind, two persons…and in this way we are created as copies of the original. How is this a copy of the original – one God, three persons – a singularity and a plurality – Father, Son, Holy Spirit. In fact, the word for "God" that Moses chooses here (there are many other words for God he could have used) implies both a singularity and a plurality (Elohim). Conclusion: gender and gender distinctions are at the very heart of what it means for us to be created in the image of God!

God means something when He created you a male or a female. You are a beautiful picture of the image of God and we should celebrate gender as God created it! Today people are trying to get rid of the image by redefining gender. Males are trying to be females, and females are trying to be males and what it means to be a man or woman has been so confused that you can't even get a straight definition anymore! When we attack gender, we strike right at the heart of what God means by mankind created in His own image. Men and women are not the same, but in marriage they are brought together like the keys of a piano: not white keys only or black keys only, but a glorious harmony of both playing together their part in the song.

Within God there is a distinction of persons (Father, Son, Holy Spirit)…and also within God there is a distinction of roles…

2. God has distinct roles within Himself

Father, Son, and Spirit are equally divine and there is ONE GOD. They are also three separate persons, and there is a hierarchy and subordination within the Trinity. In 1 Corinthians 11 Paul is writing about the cultural expression in his day of "head coverings" which were meant to be a distinguishing mark of marriage. Some women were forsaking the cultural expression and were refusing to have their heads covered which was meant to show their submission to their husbands in marriage. Similarly, men were not to have long hair or have their heads covered because it would be considered effeminate in that culture. Paul isn't so much concerned about the cultural expression – today you wouldn't expect a man to wear makeup and dresses – but he is very concerned about the order within marriage that the cultural expression portrayed to others. So he argues for women to have their heads covered, for men to not have long hair or have their heads covered while praying – these were distinguishing marks in that culture – and he takes the Corinthians to the distinctions in marriage and the order…in doing so, he shows that even within God Himself there are distinctions and there is a hierarchy and subordination:

> **But I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ, the head of a wife is her husband, and *the head of Christ is God*. (1 Cor. 11:3)**

So you have a clear distinction of persons and their roles here. The husband is the head of the wife, Jesus is the head of the husband, ***and God the Father is the head of Jesus***. The Son of God is in full submission under His head, the Father. This submission of Jesus is best displayed when in the garden of Gethsemane, just before He was to face His own crucifixion, He prayed, "Father, not my will but your will be done." ***Submission ceases to be a dirty word when you see the Son of God submitting to the will of the Father.*** No where in Scripture do you see the Father in subjection to the Son. Everywhere in Scripture you see the Son in subjection to the Father. This submission of Jesus to the Father in NO WAY makes Him less equal in divinity. Submission in marriage in no way makes the wife inferior or less valued than her husband. They are both equal in the eyes of God, and they both equally have the right to become children of God through faith in Jesus. Paul wrote to the Galatians that Christ died equally for all people groups and that all can equally become one with God in Christ: "**there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, *there is no male and female*, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." (Gal. 3:28)**. We are all equal before God, but the distinctions of roles within marriage mimics the distinction of roles within the Trinity. God is a God of order, and harmony within the home can only happen as each person plays their part within the household. It is the Holy Spirit that pours into the home and fills it with order and harmony and love – a wife that affirms her husbands leadership and respects him, and follows him where she must, a husband who makes his every decision tempered with a motive of sacrificial love for his wife and his family. This makes for a glorious picture of who God is and the oneness that is seen in Christ and the church. Our final point we'll get from our text in Ephesians…

3. Submission in marriage is a result of the Spirit and a picture of the church

Lets look together at **Ephesians 5:21-24**…

> **submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ. 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. (5:21-24)**

3 things to notice in this passage…

First, submission in marriage is the result of the Spirit's filling. The words "submitting to one another" is the result of the filling of the Spirit in **5:18 – "be filled with the Spirit…submitting to one another…"**. However, the verbal idea of submission then carries down into the household code in **vv.22-24**. Look carefully at **v.22** – the word **"submit" in v.22** is not there in Greek. It simply reads, "**wives…to your own husbands**". So it could literally be read, "**submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ. Wives…to your husbands.**" Submission is the result of the Spirit's filling and is then further directed to the role of wives.

Second, submission is for the wives to their husbands, but not for the husbands to their wives. Here is where the argument lies (thinking caps on)…**5:21** is huge in the debate about wives and husbands and their roles in marriage. Paul says, **"submitting to one another".** That sounds as though each person equally submits to the other! The word "one another" makes submission reciprocal. Why then does Paul say, "wives…to your husbands" and not also "husbands to your wives"?

Some say that by writing "submitting to one another" Paul cancels out the role distinctions because husbands and wives are to equally and in the same way submit to each other. If I were to say, "throw the baseball to one another", both are equally throwing the ball to one another. This reading would make wives submitting to their husbands, and husbands to their wives equally. But that makes the passage totally nonsensical and it removes the idea of "submission" because the action of submission implies one person submitting and one person leading!

How then do we understand "submitting to ONE ANOTHER"? The word for "**one another**" has to be understood in its context and with the verbal idea that it's attached to: for example, Jesus commands us, "**love one another**" (**John 15:12 s**ame word for one another). This is clearly an equal and unqualified reciprocal idea – we are to equally and with the same intensity love one another, and Jesus says**, "as I have loved you**". Paul also says, "**serve one another**" (**Gal. 5:13** – same word for "**one another**"). We are to equally and with the same intensity serve one another – there is no differentiation as to how that plays out. What about "one another" with other actions? In **Rev. 6:4** the antichrist is "**permitted to take peace from the earth, so that people should slay one another**". This can't mean that each person equally and with the same intensity "slays one another". One person slays another so that there is a *victor* and a *victim* – they are distinct. A military unit has an order of submission, and everyone within that military "**submits to one another**" – but not equally or in the same way. Corporals submit to their sergeants, sergeants to their captains, captains to their colonels…and so forth. So "**one another**" is only understood by the action that it is attached to. Slaying one another cannot happen without the distinction of victor and victim. What about the verb "submit"? Submission implies a *leader* and a *subordinate.* No where in all the Greek language is the word "**submit" (υποτασσω**) used where two parties equally and with the same intensity submit to one another. There is always a leader who leads and a subordinate who submits…otherwise the verb itself becomes nonsensical…it is no longer "submission" but something else. Again, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit "submit to one another" but not in the same exact way…there is an order of submission.

Now, certainly there is submission on the part of the husband…he submits to the household code itself, and certainly he submits to God and to his role of "loving" his wife and

"giving himself" for his wife, and "nourishing and cherishing" his wife. This all takes submission, humility, and sacrifice. Often times, the husband leads in a way where he surrenders his opinion to the wisdom of his wife (happens all the time in my marriage!)…Husbands, you would be wise to listen to your wives when making decisions – she is your greatest counselor and helper. But when a husband is swayed by the wisdom of his wife, he isn't ceasing to lead in that moment, he is leading through the wise counsel of his wife. So there is a "sense" in which the husband submits practically…but it's better to call His part sacrifice or service or leadership and the wife's part submission, or else the distinction of roles can become very murky.

Third, the wife submits to the husband as her head even as the church submits to Christ as its head. I won't belabor the point that her role is played as a parable of Christ and the church, that was last week's message, but I do want to draw your attention to the idea of **headship**. The word "head" also has suffered many abuses by those who want to say "headship" does not imply authority. How does Paul use "head"? Look back at **Ephesians 1:22-23:**

> **And he** [the Father] **put all things under** [same word in Greek as "submit" in our text – υποτασσω] **his feet** [that's Jesus] **and gave him as head** [the word is κεφαλη – it is used to speak of Christ as authority] **over all things to the church (Eph. 1:22)**

Now in v.24 – "as the church submits [υποτασσω**] to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands."** So Paul's way of using "head" in Ephesians can have the idea of source and provision, but it also clearly carries with it the idea of "authority" as Christ is the head of the church. This is its normal use outside of Ephesians as well. So the husband is to be the head, the authority of the household and of the wife – this headship implies provision, protection, initiation, and sacrificial leadership - and the wife's part is to be in submission to her head. God help us to live out this harmonious balance with wisdom and humility and as a glorious display of the oneness between Christ and the church!

Now a word of caution for both wives and husbands and a closing illustration:

Caution for the wives. I know there are abuses of this command to women. You do not have to submit to your husband if he is asking you to do ANYTHING that goes against God's will…but it ought to be clear that it goes against God's will. Christ is your ultimate authority. Notice Paul says, "***submitting to one another…OUT OF REVERENCE FOR CHRIST***". You are to do this in obedience to Jesus…not primarily for your husband, and Jesus is your ultimate authority. I know there are many unique challenges that face women in marriage and submission and headship in marriage need to be carried out with great care, wisdom, humility, and prayer. I know that husbands fall short of the standard here – but the same gospel that saves us from the penalty of our falling short is the same gospel that teaches us to forgive one another, extend grace, and yield to God's truth even when it's difficult. There are many husbands who really do

long to lead their wives but the culture around them and their constant mistakes make it hard for men to be the leaders that God calls them to be. ***I've found that when a woman begins to show respect and honor towards her husband (because that's what God calls her to do!) he begins to play the part of sacrificial leader.***

Caution for husbands: It isn't easy for men to fulfill such a high calling of loving our wives as Christ loved the church. This also takes great wisdom, prayer, and reflection – and I know there are many abuses of passive aggression or an unwillingness to show men respect. But even if your wife isn't being submissive or lacks the respect that God wants her to extend – nevertheless you are to do 100% of your part. Leadership within a marriage where submission isn't established will take great thought, counsel, and wisdom. Your motive to love her as Christ loved the church has to be primary***. I've noticed that when a man loves His wife sacrificially (that is what God commands of you husbands!), she is more willing to submit and show him respect.***

Now to close with a story: There was once a King who ruled over a kingdom and it was discovered that his own wife, the queen, led a revolt against him in secret. Two thirds of his kingdom followed the queen in this revolt. The plot was discovered and brought out into the light and the royal court issued the sentence that the queen was to be put to death through flogging. The King loved his wife, but he was facing a massive dilemma. If the King were to overturn the ruling, which was his right as the Head of his kingdom, he would be abdicating his responsibility to rule his kingdom with justice. It would be said that he loved his queen, but was not a fit leader to rule. If the King were to carry out the sentence, he would have to kill his own wife, whom he loved dearly. The King made his decision - the punishment upon the queen had to be carried out. On the day of the execution, his wife, the queen, was strapped to a table and the kings chief executioner ripped open the back of the queen's shirt, and just before he began to flog the queen to death, the King stepped up, "Wait!". The King then tore off his shirt, laid his body over his wife's body and ordered the executioner – "NOW carry out the sentence!" The executioner was stunned…he did not want to submit to such an order from the King who did not deserve to be treated this way. Nevertheless, because the King ordered it, he carried out the death sentence upon the King.

This is the gospel – Christ took our penalty for the treason we've committed against God…and it is also a picture for us of what true, sacrificial leadership looks like. "Husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the church and gave Himself for her".

We're going to now celebrate communion together. When we celebrate communion, we remember that our King laid his body over His bride the church…over each one of us that has confessed Jesus is Lord and are a part of His body. The bread is a picture of His body that was given for us. The cup is a picture of His blood that was poured out as a payment for the

sentence we all deserved for our high treason against God. This picture is for believers only…if you are a believer in Jesus we invite you to come with us to the table to celebrate. If you have not yet chosen to follow Jesus…consider with us what Jesus has done to pay for those He loves. God loves you and God doesn't want you to pay your penalty…He has provided for you through His Son, the King. Finally, husbands and wives…as we are faced with our marital challenges…each of us is to sacrifice in marriage, we constantly have to DIE TO SELF…and we sacrifice willingly because Jesus gave Himself willingly for each one of us.

Directions

Prayer

partake