

Ephesians: The Crown Jewel
Part 8 – Submission & Sacrifice
Ephesians 5:21-6:9

Intro

Ephesus was a vibrant port city with commerce, trade, and activity. Her outdoor amphitheater sat in a picturesque vantage point overlooking the port. Within its walls, the area's residents would gather for festivals and sporting events. North of the city sat the temple of Artemis, one of the 7 Wonders of the Ancient World.

To give some perspective on the sheer scope of the Temple of Artemis, she stood [in size] 4 times larger than the Parthenon in Athens. The temple served as a bank, a sanctuary, and a *refuge* for the those fearing retribution.

The city was filled with promise and possibility. As a result of her affluence, Ephesus naturally became a breeding ground for idolatry. The most prevalent, idolatry of self.

It is within this backdrop that Paul wrote this letter to the church.

Ephesians 5:21

submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.

Paul ended the last section encouraging us to learn to walk [live] in love with one another.

Look carefully then how you walk (vs 15).

His concern is that our lives and growth in Christ would lead to a maturing faith. And one of the greatest ways for us to grow is in relationship with other people. And to be in true relationship with other people, this fellowship must be born out of submission to one another.

Unfortunately, the S word [submission] isn't something that we like to talk about.

Submission sounds like – *people always telling me what to do. Then I have to serve them, do whatever they say, and have the feeling that I never get to make any decision on my own ever again. No one should be able to tell me how to live.*

Submission is NOT about control. Submission is about concern. Yes, submission carries the connotation of yielding to someone who has authority in your life. However, submission is ultimately about TRUST. Trusting that the other person desires for your good, and not your harm.

Two-Fold Problem

1) we aren't always good at trusting other people.

2) we have a difficult time seeing our own inadequacies.

We need other people [trusted people] in our lives more than we are willing to admit, but we have a hard time trusting they will treat us fairly.

But here's what we have to understand: not everyone should have the authority to speak into your life, but somebody should. If we don't allow anyone close enough to see through our facade, if we are never fully open and vulnerable with someone, then we will never experience true growth in our lives. We will only carry with us a weak simulation of maturity.

Factors for Growth

- 1) *we cannot grow to full maturity without being in relationship with others.*
- 2) *we need to allow someone to speak into & have influence over us.*
- 3) *submission is the posture that best allows for this maturing.*

Relationship Settings

It's now with that understanding that Paul addresses 3 of our main relationship settings where submission and trust should be evident.

1) Marriage Relationship

This section of Scripture brings up a whole host of emotions.

5:22-24

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.

Marriage is regarded as the perfect union of body, mind and spirit between a man and a woman. However, at the time of Christ's coming [& Paul's writing], the marriage bond was in danger even among the Jewish people, so much so that the very institution of marriage was threatened completely.

The situation was worse in the **Greek** world. Prostitution was an essential part of Greek life. They stated, ***We have courtesans for the sake of pleasure; concubines for the sake of daily cohabitation; and wives for the purpose of having children legitimately and of having a faithful guardian for all our household affairs.***

The **Greek** expected his wife to run his home, to care for his legitimate children, but he found his pleasure and his companionship elsewhere. Home and family-life were near to being extinct and fidelity was completely non-existent.

In **Rome** the matter was still worse. One writer stated, ***women were married to be divorced and divorced to be married.*** The whole atmosphere was adulterous. The marriage bond was on the way to complete breakdown.

It is against this background that Paul writes. When he wrote this passage, he was not stating the view that every man held. He was calling men and women to a new purity and a new fellowship in the marriage relationship. And not one that further degraded women and their role, but one that actually called for greater love and concern for them from their husbands. It is impossible to exaggerate the effect Christianity had on marriage life in the ancient [& current] world.

Instead of telling wives to *obey*, as was typical in Roman households, Paul appeals to them to ***submit***, based on his conviction that men have a God-given leadership role in the family. The term suggests an ordering of society in which wives should align themselves with respect to the leadership of their husbands, ***as is fitting in the Lord.***

The understanding is that you are first submitting your life to God. That you are opening your life [hopes, dreams, family, career, relationships, and significance] to Him in a way that allows Him to speak into and over how you live and think about life in general.

The currency of submission is trust.

Because the economy of God is not one-sided, it is not skewed to benefit the male. Whereas Roman and Greek culture tipped the balance of relationship in favor of the husband, Christian culture is designed for the good of both male and female.

The result of this trust is growth and maturity in ways and areas we could not achieve on our own. ***Husbands the goal of your wife's submission is not for your pleasure or advancement, but for the growth and good of your wife.*** And you are directly tasked with being a large part of nurturing her soul, to help that growth occur!

Look at the rest of the passage.

5:25-31

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. 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."

Notice that husbands are not commanded to submit to their wives, which at first glance seems to raise an eyebrow of suspicion toward the legitimacy of the new Christian ethic as it pertains to the view of women. But, instead, husbands are called to a role much more difficult, that of a servant – to ***give himself up for her.***

His role is to sacrifice himself, his own needs/desires/wants, so that he might help his wife experience joy and fulfillment within their marriage. This is a clear improvement over the view and practice of marriage within the Roman and Greek cultures. Again, submission does not encourage or allow oppression or male tyranny. Instead, husbands have the responsibility to sacrificially serve their wives as Christ served the Church, which is what Paul addresses in the next verses.

5:32-33

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.

Marriage from the beginning of creation was created by God to be a reflection of and patterned after Christ's relation to the Church. Thus, Paul's commands regarding the roles of husbands and wives do not merely reflect the culture of his day, but present God's ideal for all marriage at all times, as exemplified by the relationship between the bride of Christ (the Church) and Jesus Himself, the Son of God.

That relationship was often one-sided. Jesus came to love and serve mankind, but oftentimes we discounted and rejected that love. Yet, He continued to love His bride despite her lack of love in return. He kept loving us faithfully despite our indifference and rejection – even to the point of laying His life down so that we could experience peace and freedom.

The gospel is that Jesus trusted God enough to sacrificially love us and serve the Father in spite of our consistent lack of love in return. And that's one of the hardest things you will ever do – live out the gospel in that way in your marriage relationship.

But the marriage relationship is the greatest picture of Jesus' continual [covenant] love for us, even when we don't love Him in return.

Next, Paul address another family relationship.

2) Parental Relationship

6:1-4

Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. “Honor your father and mother” (this is the first commandment with a promise), that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land.” Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

Again, Paul uses the idea of submission and trust to bring about change and growth in our lives. Obviously, as children we don't want to submit to anyone. Everyone is in our way in the pursuit of fun and independence. But we all would also agree that allowing a young child to do whatever they desire will lead to disaster, and frankly a spoiled brat who was never told *no*.

So we would all agree, especially in this relationship, that submission is actually a beneficial and necessary part of the growth and maturity of the child. No one, in their right mind, would assume that children should be able to do whatever they like without ever having to submit to and trust their parents' guidance and direction.

Notice, however, yet again that Paul does not leave this ledger tilting toward one side. Part of the responsibility, probably the first and most important part of the relationship, is that Fathers are not to provoke their children, but that they are to lead and teach them with love and care – which builds trust, which is the currency that ultimately allows for submission.

It is easier to submit to someone's authority or influence in our lives when we trust their agenda and goal is for our ultimate good.

And finally, Paul ends this section around a relationship that all of us have encountered and sometimes struggle to manage well.

3) Workplace Relationship

6:5-9

Bondservants, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, with a sincere heart, as you would Christ, not by the way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, rendering service with a good will as to the Lord and not to man, knowing that whatever good anyone does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether he is a bondservant or is free. Masters, do the same to them, and stop your threatening, knowing that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and that there is no partiality with him.

The employer/employee dynamic has always been a tenuous and volatile relationship over the years. However, the Christian ethic calls it into a newly defined status. In Christ, they are one. There is not partiality, no favoritism between those of different cultural or social statuses. Whether we are an employee [servant] or a boss [master], we are called to work and serve one another as though we were serving God Himself.

How You Walk

In all of these relationships, the calling in our lives [as Christians] is to submit to and serve one another – in a way that sacrificially loves the other person, in order to help them in their walk and growth with God. Paul calls believers to a new standard, a new way of viewing relationships and life. Instead of struggling with the idolatry of self, we are to sacrifice and give ourselves up for each other – as Christ has lovingly and selflessly done for us.

Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise.
Ephesians 5:15