

We had this passage at our wedding, which I now think was a mistake. Yes, of course it's about marriage and therefore a wedding sounds like a good place to have this read. But, when some of our friends heard verse 22 they stopped listening to the rest of the sermon. They were so offended by the seemingly outrageous suggestion that wives should submit to their husbands that they closed their ears to what else was said.

Now, I'm hoping none of us do that. Even if you're shocked by what the Bible says here please don't close your ears. Please look at what it says and see if what God is saying might be a good thing.

However, before we get into the detail let's just spend a moment thinking about the word 'submit'. First, to submit to someone in the Biblical sense is about a role not a value. Someone who submits is not less valuable or important than the other. Let me illustrate what I mean. God the Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, is fully God. God the Father is also fully God. You cannot get more valuable than that. Totally equal in value and status, but, with different roles. God the Son submits to God the Father. It is a beautiful, mutually exalting, relationship between them. Totally of the same value and delighting in their different roles. The Bible uses the word 'submit' to define a role not a value.

Of course, men and women are different, we have different roles. One is not more important than the other. I'm a husband and a father. Nicki is a wife and a mother. Different roles of equal value. The modern equality worldview seems to me to want to squash any perceived difference between the sexes. Yes, of course, men and women should have the same opportunities, the same value, but to say we're exactly the same is to unhelpfully squash our wonderful differences. Perhaps a silly example to illustrate this. There is a reason for two 100 metre finals at the Olympics. One for men and one for women. Elaine Thompson got a gold medal that was identical to Usain Bolt's. Same medal; not the same race.

Submission in the Bible is about someone's role, not their value. With all that in mind let's look a bit more closely at Ephesians. In chapters 1-3 we heard what God has done for us. We've been given every spiritual blessing and are adopted into God's family. God has done all of that, we do nothing to deserve it or earn it. And then, from chapter 4 we're told what it looks like to reflect our true identity as part of God's family. Chapter 4:1 "Live a life worthy of the calling you have received." Chapter 5:1 "Follow God's example."

We've had lots of instruction about our character; what we should do, what we shouldn't do. And now, at the end of this section, we're going to look at our domestic and our work life.

Verse 21 gives us the banner headline for this section. "Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ." The NIV has it under a new heading. But, in the original, verse 21 is part of one sentence starting back in verse 18. See the middle of verse 18. "Instead, be filled with the Spirit." Then we get a description of what a Spirit filled life looks like. God the Holy Spirit lives in everyone who is part of God's family. And that life looks like verse 19-21. A Spirit filled person speaks to one another in church, to encourage, to build up to

support. A Spirit filled Christian “Sings and makes music from your heart to the Lord”. Their life is marked by thanksgiving for everything. And, verse 21, they “submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.”

To be a Spirit filled Christian is to be submissive. All of us submit to someone. There is order in relationships. Paul takes this banner headline and focusses in on 3 areas of life. Marriage, family and work. And the motive to live this way is out of reverence for Christ. It's to honour Christ, to respect him, to live for him. He is our Lord and our Saviour; our Master and our King. We all submit to his authority and rule. To be a Spirit filled Christian is to live a life worthy of your calling:

1. In your marriage (5:22-33)

Now I realise that not all of us here are married. Why should you listen to these very specific instructions? Well, firstly, you might be married one day. So, you need to know what kind of godly characteristics you're looking for in a spouse. And, secondly, you need to help those who are married here to reflect their true identity as part of God's family. Marriage is great, but it's hard work. We need to help each other to be the husbands and wives God wants us to be. So, that is a responsibility for all of us here.

a. Wives submit to your husbands (22-24)

See verse 22. “Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord.” Wives please note this is a call for you to voluntarily submit. Husbands please note, nowhere in the Bible is it permissible for you to force your wife, to be a tyrant, to be domineering, to treat her as your subject, your possession. But, wives please hear this. This is a call for you to be a spirit filled Christian.

And you're not left guessing what this looks like. You're given a model to copy. You already submit to the Lord. So, in the same way, submit to your husband. Verse 23 describes the intimacy of the relationship between Christ and the Church. The church is God's family and we are his body, he is our head. This is intensely intimate language. My body and my head are part of the same whole unit of me. So, Christ with the church. Connected, united, part of one entity. Then, in verse 24, we get the mirror of verse 22. “As the church submits to Christ, so the wife should submit to the husband in everything.”

So, what does this look like in practice? Should a good Christian wife just sit meekly in the corner smiling sweetly as the husband makes all the decisions? Not at all!

You are bright, capable women. You have wisdom and insight, in many cases more so than your husbands. In your marriage, your husband would be a fool not to listen to you.

But, when you've had the discussion, and all things have been considered, and he makes a decision you don't agree with, you need to allow him to lead. Help him to delight in fulfilling his duty to love you sacrificially by voluntarily submitting to him.

What about those who are married to a non-Christian? Well this instruction still stands. Voluntarily submit to your husband as you do to the Lord. There is one very important caveat though. Your submission to Jesus is more important than your submission to your husband. So, if he says you must stop doing something that the Bible tells you to do, then what God says is more important. A lady at our old church was in this situation and her husband didn't want her to go to church, but they came to an agreement that she would go on Sundays but would do nothing mid-week in the evening. It is hard to be married to an unbeliever, so look for support and encouragement from your church family.

Also, what about if a husband is a bullying tyrant; if he is violent and abusive? Well, the church family needs to care for those in danger and suffering. It is right to leave that husband and not submit to his authority. People have used passages like this to justify abuse. Let me be very clear, that is totally and always wrong. It is a horrific corruption of what the Bible says. Those being abused need our love, support, care and protection.

But, what about a husband who just is a bit slack? Not a tyrant, but doesn't fulfil his God given role as described from verse 25; should a wife still submit to them? Yes. There is no call here for the wife to only submit if the husband matches up perfectly. A godly, Spirit filled wife is called to submit herself to her husband in everything. Likewise, a husband doesn't only sacrificially love his wife if she submits to him. He needs to fulfil his duties and responsibilities. So, let's have a close look at those now.

b. Husbands love your wives (25-33)

Verse 25, "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her." Us husbands are simply told to love our wives. There we go, not controversial, simple instruction for us. Right, let's move onto children!

But, wait, it's not that simple. This is a huge call. Like the wives called to submit, we're given a model to show us how to love. "Just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her." It's the same model, Christ and the church. But, this time from the other perspective. Husbands need to be willing to die for their wives. To sacrifice themselves for her.

For the sake of the church, God's family, Jesus allowed himself to be beaten, condemned to death and brutally executed on the cross. Why? Look from verse 26. "to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word,²⁷ and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless." Blokes I know this will be hard to imagine, but try and think of the preparation a bride goes through on her wedding day to make herself look spectacular. Well that's the language here. Jesus died on the cross to do everything to make his bride, the church, look radiant, spotless, clean, free from any blemish, to be holy and blameless.

Do you see what Jesus did and why? Now, husbands, look at verse 28. “In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself.” In the same way. Our job as a husband is to put the needs of our wife so far ahead of ours that we’re willing to sacrifice what we want for her sake. I’m guessing most of us wouldn’t think twice about jumping in front of an actual physical bullet to save our wives. But, I think it is so much harder to be willing to give up our dreams, our desires, for the glory of our wife.

Now, this doesn’t mean we say yes to everything our wife asks or wants. We need to think in Christ like terms here. Ask yourself, what should we do as a couple, to ensure that my wife develops and matures as a Christian? Ask this practical question; what can I do to ensure she has time to read the Bible and pray? My motive, my driving force in this marriage is for the sake of my wife. I need to love her as I love my own body. Should I do this even if my wife wont submit to me? Yes, of course.

At the heart of this passage is verse 32. Look at that now. That verse tells us our marriages are illustrations. They are illustrations of the gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ. We are models of the perfect marriage in heaven. The marriage between Christ and his bride; the church. The Church submits to Jesus, and Jesus, sacrificially laid down his life for the sake of his bride.

For those who are single here, the fact marriage is an illustration of something far better, hopefully is an encouragement to you. You will experience all the blessings of marriage one day, with none of the challenges. In eternity, we will be married to Christ.

And for those in tough marriages, or those who are divorced, my prayer is that this is an encouragement to you too. Whatever has gone wrong, or is going wrong, in your earthly marriage you have a perfect, unblemished, eternal one to look forward to.

And for those of us who are married, do you realise your marriage is an illustration. The question is it a good illustration of the gospel or a poor one?

So, we’ve thought about marriage and how that reflects our life as a Spirit filled Christian. We’re going to very briefly look at our family and our work. So, to live a life worthy of your calling:

2. In your family (6:1-4)

a. Children obey your parents (1-3)

Look down at chapter 6:1. This is a much stronger word than the call for wives to submit. This is a command to obey. Again, the motive and the model is how you relate to the Lord. As you obey Christ, so obey your parents for this is right.

Now, the younger children aren't here, but for the parents of babies, pre-school and primary aged children, it's vital that we teach our children that they live in a world where authority is real. And we teach them to respect it. Teach them what the Bible says about obedience. Help them grown and mature into godly young men and women. I read a brilliant article this week by John Piper titled "Parents require obedience of your children." Please do read it. I can give you the web address after.

For the teenagers and young people. You're no longer infants, you are growing in knowledge and wisdom. I hope your parents are discussing things with you, understanding your thoughts and ideas. But, whilst you still live at home, this instruction stands. Children, obey your parents in the Lord.

But, for the rest of us who have left home, for some quite a few decades ago, what about us? Well we're not called to obey our parents. But, the instruction to honour our father and mother continues throughout our life. We mustn't neglect them, belittle them, ignore them. We must care for them, listen to their wisdom, respect them. And I think that carries on after they die. We're to respect and honour their memory.

Now, for those who had terrible parents this will be difficult. If you've suffered because of your parents, I am so sorry. That is awful. But, please take comfort from the fact you are part of God's family. And he is the perfect parent. He loves you unconditionally and will be with you for eternity.

b. Fathers do not exasperate your children (4)

"Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord." I think Fathers are highlighted because we're more tempted to absolve ourselves of responsibility and think bringing up the children is the mothers' job. Particularly if they're a full time, stay at home, mum.

So, fathers should expect obedience from their children, but we mustn't exasperate them. That's to bully them, be a tyrant. To be an abusive father is awful, shocking and evil. But, I suspect for most of us its subtler. We might exasperate our children because we don't spend quality time with them; we're dismissive. Ask yourself; am I saying 'no' to them because it's good for their godliness as they learn obedience, or am I saying 'no' because I can't be bothered?

It is our responsibility to bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord. How are you getting on with that?

If you're a single parent, or your spouse isn't a Christian, this is particularly hard for you. But, you are part of a church family. There are godly men and women here who would love to help you. You're not alone.

For all of us, think about what it looks like for you to be a Spirit filled Christian in your family.

Finally, and very, very briefly. To be a Spirit filled Christian is to live a life worthy of your calling:

3. **In your work (6:5-9)**

a. **Slaves obey your masters (5-8)**

Paul is not approving of slavery. He is commenting on what it looks like to be a Christian for someone who is a slave. He isn't making a moral judgement. Elsewhere he condemns slave trading. Also, our image of slavery is from the Wilberforce era, much slavery in the ancient world was quite different. Some wasn't, but here Paul is talking about domestic household slaves. Often, they were valued members of a family, they could become quite wealthy.

Regardless of this discussion about slavery, none of us are slaves, so what does this have to do with us? Well the principle of working for your boss, as if you were working for Christ applies to us. See verse 7. "Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord." Think about your attitude to work and to your employers. Does it match the character described here? If not, what do you need to change to more closely reflect a Spirit filled member of God's family in your workplace?

b. **Masters respect your slaves (9)**

And those of you who are employers treat your staff in the same way. That is to respect them, care for them, provide for them, don't be penny pinching, pay them appropriately and on time. Don't be a bully or a tyrant. Yes, you should expect hard and efficient work, yes you can discipline those who fall short.

But, what do you need to do to ensure your employees delight to work for you? Because remember, as Paul says in verse 9. God is both their master and yours. And there is no favouritism with him.

We started discussing equality. With God we are all equal, there is no difference in how he treats us; slave or free, Jew or gentile, man or woman. Total equality, but glorious diversity. Don't squash our differences celebrate them. And help each of us to live a life worthy of the calling we have received. Encourage each of us to be Spirit filled Christians.