

This morning we are continuing our study in Ephesians by considering Ephesians 5:18 and 21. These verses deal with submitting to one another in reverence to Christ.

Submission is not a popular word in our day and age. It carries with it all sorts of negative connotations.

When anyone uses the word submission, the thoughts that come to mind are:
servitude,
being lesser,
and losing personal freedom.

When we submit ourselves, we station ourselves under another. And then their needs become more important than our own.

And so by nature, we shun submission to one another because it interferes with our own self-determination.

Yet Christ was not afraid of submission.

In fact, he embraced it.

And he did so because the salvation of his people and the glory of his Father depended upon it. Christ's submission is how he saved us.

So, let's read God's word beginning in Ephesians 5:18.

Now for context, I am going to read all the way to verse 25 so that you can see where Paul is headed with all of this.

So, beginning in verse 18:

Ephesians 5:18 And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, **19** addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, **20** giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, **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...

This is God's word.

The grass withers and the flower fades but the word of our God stands forever.

Pray.

In your worship orders, you have a sermon outline that will help you follow along. It should be of particular help this morning because this study is a bit more involved.

And the first point in your outline is...

I. Grammar Issues

Right at the start of these verses, we need to recognize that there is something rather complex going on here grammatically.

In verse 18, Paul tells us not to "get drunk on wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit".

Filled with the spirit is the controlling verb of this whole passage.

And with the idea in mind of "being filled with the Spirit", Paul goes on to give 4 applications of what being filled with the Spirit should look like.

The first is in verse 19:

19 addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs

The second is related to the first:

singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart

The third application is in verse 20:

20 giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ

And finally comes the fourth application:

21 submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.

Now of course, this idea of submission is carried forward into Paul's teaching on marriage which begins in verses 22.

Yet it is important for us to note, that before Paul ever addresses the idea of submission and sacrificial love in the marriage, he has already applied the idea of submission to every believer in the church.

We are all called to submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.

So, let me ask you: do you like to submit to people in your family or in the church?
Do you like to submit to those who have authority over you?
Do you like submitting to speed limits and parking laws?
Children, do you like submitting to your parents?

All of us by nature are submission averse.

Just think of Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden.

Their sin was one of **insubordination**.

They listened to the serpent instead of to God who created them.

And they followed their own desires instead of God's will.

A lack of submission was what humankind's very first sin was all about.

God gave his law very clearly and Adam and Eve just didn't submit.

And now, as we scan human history from the Garden of Eden to the present day, we see a history of people forcing others into submission and others rebelling against the authorities.

Indeed, we all have a very complicated relationship with the idea of submission.

Yet we all know that submission is necessary for any kind of social order.

If everyone just did as they pleased, it would be chaos- in the home, in school, in the church, at work and in public.

Submission is vital to social order but it's not something we love doing.

Yet wouldn't it be great if we could embrace submission the way Jesus did?

Consider how much Jesus loved submitting himself to his heavenly Father.

In John 4:31, as Jesus was finishing his discussion with the Samaritan woman at the well, his disciples rolled up and offered him something to eat.

Now Jesus evidently hadn't eaten in quite a while.

So they said:

John 4:31 "Rabbi, eat." **32** But he said to them, "**I have food to eat that you do not know about.**" **33** So the disciples said to one another, "Has anyone brought him something to eat?" **34** Jesus said to them, "**My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work.**"

Do you see the other-worldliness of what he is saying?

He is telling us that his ministering tirelessly, his early morning prayers, his late night teaching, his hot days of healings, his constant interactions with the needy- all of these are God's will and **they are like food to him**.

He feeds on God's will.

Jesus thrives on submission.

And so should we as we follow Him.

Submission to God and submission to others ought to delight us.

So, how are we to ever get to the place where we embrace submission and actually come to love it?

Well, that brings us to our next point which is...

II. The Source: Be filled with the Spirit (18)

Grammatically, we have to remember that the command to submit to one another isn't just an isolated command.

Verse 21 depends upon verse 18.

Being filled with the Spirit of God is the source of power whereby we can delight in submitting to one another.

Without the Spirit working in our minds and hearts, submitting to one another is a chore.

But when he is at work in us, our duty to submit becomes a delight.

So, what does it mean to be filled with the Spirit?

Well, the answer is in John 16 and in I Corinthians 2.

In John 16, Jesus was preparing his disciples for his departure.

And he told them that it is good that he is going away because only then will God send them His Holy Spirit.

In John 16:13-14, Jesus tells us what the Spirit will do in them. He says:

13 When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. **14** He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you.

And this means that one of the principal works of the Spirit is to give us an understanding of Jesus and his work.

The Spirit enables us not just to understand the Gospel.

He gives us the ability to believe it, to cherish it and to live in accordance with it.

The Spirit takes that what is of Christ and declares it to us.

Paul speaks a similar truth in 1 Corinthians 2:12 when he says:

12 Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God.

The Spirit makes God's promises real to us. He makes the Gospel real to us.

And this is why being filled with the Spirit is necessary for us to delight in submitting to one another.

Because it's only as we internalize the unique message of the gospel that we will embrace submission.

So, Is the gospel beautiful to you? And do you want to give your life to Christ as a response?

Jesus lived a life of submission and he calls us to do the same.

And this leads us to our next point:

III. The Command: Submitting to One Another (21a)

In verse 21, Paul tells us to submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.

To submit means to station yourself under another in terms of authority or importance.

And like I said earlier, this runs dramatically counter to our nature.

By nature, we want to be at the top of the heap in importance.

We want to call the shots- if not for all the world, then at least in our own lives.

There is something in most of us that dreams of being unaccountable.

To be able to just do as we please whenever we feel like it.

To wake up when we want.

To pass our days as we want.

A deep part of us wishes that we had no one else to answer to.

This is why many in our culture dream of being retired or independently wealthy.

Just having the ability to do what we want for as long as we live.

And this dream of retirement or of being independently wealthy is really a dream of no longer having to submit to anyone.

It's the desire to be king of our own domain.

Certainly this is not Christ like.

It's only self-serving.

Yet this is our nature.

But the nature of Christ is different.

Christ, when he came to earth was Lord of all, yet his life was filled with submission.

First, he submitted to the Father by becoming a human being in the first place.

And then, instead of arriving on the scene as a fully mature man, he came into the world as a baby.

He grew up in his parents home, submitting himself to his father and mother.

He attended his local synagogue and submitted to his local Jewish leaders.

He submitted to his Father's trade and became a carpenter.

He worked long hours with his hands in order to provide for himself and his family.

As he entered into the ministry, he submitted himself to be baptized.

This seemed utterly inappropriate to John the Baptist and so John protested.

"Why should the messiah submit to be baptized? Certainly he doesn't need to repent or be washed."

Yet Jesus submitted himself and identified with people who sin and need to repent.

And then in his ministry, Jesus submitted his every hour and breath to the work of serving others.
He preached, healed, listened and traveled constantly.
He lived with 12 other men for 3 years.
12 men who weren't all that well adjusted and faithful.
Certainly living alone would have been easier.
Yet he submitted himself and lived among his disciples.

His whole life belonged to God and because of this, he submitted himself to the needs of the people around him.

On more than one occasion, his disciples were confused by his submission.
In Mark 10:42 Jesus said:

Mark 10:42 "You know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. **43** But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, **44** and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. **45** For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

Think of how other-worldly those words are: **the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."**

Jesus exemplified this service in John 13 when he washed his disciples feet.
Now, in their minds, Jesus washing their feet was just about as inappropriate as it gets.

It was too subordinate!
But Jesus insisted.
And so one by one, Jesus dramatically and humbly washed his disciples feet.
Peter, always being the one who wanted to stand out, protested.
But still Jesus insisted.
He came to serve.
He came to subordinate himself to the needs of his people.

And he washed their feet to show them that they must do likewise.

John 13:12 ... "Do you understand what I have done to you? **13** You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am. **14** If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. **15** For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you. **16** Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. **17** If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them.

That was the penultimate way that Jesus submitted himself.
The ultimate way of course was the cross.

In the hours leading up to Jesus' crucifixion, Jesus submitted himself to unrelenting injustice.
He was betrayed by Judas and humiliatingly arrested in front of his disciples.
He knew what was coming and he didn't have to submit to that.
But He did.

And then submitted himself to insults.
He was called a blasphemer and a rebel.
Which is ironic because he is the only person in all of history that didn't rebel against God.
Yet he was called all those names for us.
And then he submitted to a sham trial.

Then he was beaten, mocked, spit upon, his beard was pulled out.
He was brutally scourged by the Romans who knew how to wield a whip.
Those scars would have lasted a lifetime on any one of us.
And yet he took them for us- so great was his humiliation, so great was his submission.
Finally, he was crucified. And on the cross, he faced the wrath of God.
He had merited the Father's love, but because he stationed himself under us, he received our judgment so that we could receive his benefits.

Jesus submitted himself to the uttermost.
He had the highest station yet he willingly took the lowest.
It would have been impossible for Jesus to subordinate himself more than he did.
And this he did so that we could be rescued.

Jesus did nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility he counted others as more significant than himself. He looked not to his own interests, but to the interests of others.
This is the extent of the submission of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And now he calls you to follow him.
Are you ready? Are you willing to submit?

The submission we are to aim at is beautifully summarized in Philippians 2:3:

3 Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.

The implications of this verse are enormous: “count others as more significant than yourselves.”
If we really took this to heart, we would be better listeners and less opinionated.
Our motivation at work would be one of providing service rather than just making money for ourselves.
And in the home, we would cease being so insistent and assertive.
Or intractable and stubborn.

If only we would count others as more significant than ourselves.

You see, when we understand the submission of Jesus, we recognize that there really is no end to level of submission that he calls us to with one another.

And as we look ahead to the implications of submission in marriage, we need to see that it applies quite genuinely to both the man and the woman.
When a husband loves his wife like Christ loved the church, there is no end to his service toward her.

He willingly subordinates himself to her needs.
And the wife’s submission to the husband is offered willingly because of Christ’s work for her.

Jesus is inspiration for both the husband and the wife.

And so there ought to be this game in marriage where each tries to outdo the other in showing honor.

This is how it is supposed to be in marriage and also in the church.
Paul says in Romans 12:10:

10 Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor.

Such submission is not inspired by how the person treats us but rather how Christ has treated us.
He had the highest station and yet he became the servant to all his people.

So let me ask you: what is your inspiration in showing honor to others?
Is it because of their greatness over you or because you find them inherently honorable?
Do you show honor because of what you will gain?

Or do you show honor because Christ has honored you and given his life for you?

This leads us to our final point.

IV. The Motivation: Reverence for Christ (21b)

Paul says in verse 21 that we are to submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.
And the word here for reverence is literally translated as fear.
Phobos. From this word we get our word phobia.

To have fear of Christ is to not have an apprehension of his condemnation.
It’s not the fear of damnation.
Rather it pertains to awe, amazement, or as the ESV puts it, reverence.

And this means that the only way we are ever going to be able to rightly submit to one another is by having a firm understanding of the majesty and grace of Christ.
He is not only majestic in his power.
He is also majestic in his grace and love.

So has his love caused you to marvel?
Does his love define who you are at the core of your being?

And does it cause you to willingly surrender all?
Will you surrender all of your control over your life to him?
Even your pride and reputation?
Even the way you spend your time and your money?

When we revere Christ, submission to others just flows.
Because Christ shows us who we really are.
We are just sinners...who have been ravishingly loved by Christ our bridegroom.
We were once enemies but he has called us friends.

This is all because of his great grace.
And the Lord's supper is a picture of that.

Jesus provided everything for the meal.
He provided the bread that is his body and the wine that is his blood.
Their expense is incalculable.
And we are more than just his honored guests.
We are more than just his friends around his table.
We are more than just his brothers and sisters.
We are his bride who sits at his side.

And so we are more than welcome at his table.
This table is for us.
He delights in to provide us this meal!

Christ's submission made it possible and so we are to submit to one another out of reverence for him.

AMEN.