



A Post Tenebras Lux Study on Ephesians...

In Subjection to One Another...

Ephesians 5:22-6:9

^{NIV} **Ephesians 5:22**...Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. ²³ For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. ²⁴ Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything. ²⁵ Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her 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. ²⁸ In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. ²⁹ After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church--
³⁰ for we are members of his body. ³¹ **"For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh."** ³² This is a profound mystery-- but I am talking about Christ and the church. ³³ However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband. ^{NIV} **Ephesians 6:1**...Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. ² **"Honor your father and mother"**-- which is the first commandment with a promise-- ³ **"that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth."** ⁴ Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord. ⁵ Slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ. ⁶ Obey them not only to win their favor when their eye is on you, but like slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from your heart. ⁷ Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not men, ⁸ because you know that the Lord will reward everyone for whatever good he does, whether he is slave or free. ⁹ And masters, treat your slaves in the same way. Do not threaten them, since you know that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no favoritism with him.

The passage we are looking at this morning has precipitated about as much controversy as any passage in the Bible. Now, there are a number of reasons why that is so. First, the modern mind is an autonomous mind. It does not want to be told what it may do or not do; it wants to exercise the freedom of self-rule and it is willing to assert its independence even if it has to do so in a world of ashes. As a result, there has been a loss of a sense of community. The societal norms that have been established over the past five thousand years of recorded history are unraveling and there is a tendency within our culture to resist at almost every level either the restrictions or the responsibilities of belonging to a group. There is a headlong pursuit of the fulfillment of the individual at the expense of the community.

We can see that, I think, in the apparent readiness of men to abandon their families. We see it in women forsaking their husbands, parents neglecting their children, children rebelling against their parents and companies abusing their employees. You can see in the church, as well, when men and women refuse to accept or adhere to its doctrine and practice, choosing to pack up and leave rather than come under its authority. But the role of the autonomous self is not the only reason why such communal responsibilities have been abandoned. There has certainly been a fair share of abuses along the way. Some men have made a practice of dominating their wives and demanding subservience in a loveless way. Some parents have made a practice of either beating their children into submission or neglecting them altogether. Some employers have drained the life out of their employees without either kind words or financial reward. Some churches have demanded their sheep be herded, shorn and discarded without feeding or nurture.

It is no wonder there is a sense of obstinacy in our culture.

There is a sense in which we do not want to be instructed, guided, rebuked or even encouraged. That is why I love the following story.

The captain of the ship looked into the dark night and saw faint lights in the distance. Immediately he told his signalman to send a message. "**Alter your course 10 degrees south.**" Promptly a return message was received: "**Alter your course 10 degrees north.**"

The captain was infuriated; his command had been ignored. So he sent a second more aggressive message: "**Alter your course 10 degrees south--I am the captain!**" Soon another message was received: "**Alter your course 10 degrees north--I am seaman third class Jones.**" Immediately the apoplectic captain sent a third message, knowing the fear it would evoke: "**Alter your course 10 degrees south—I am a battleship.**" Then the reply came "**Alter your course 10 degrees north--I am a lighthouse.**" (Paul Aiello, Jr.)

There is sense in which I think we ought to try to keep this illustration in mind as we look at Paul's instruction in Ephesians 5. So much of what is included there is so thoroughly rejected by our culture at large that it is easy to forget that these commands are not suggestions. They are words of life. They are the commands of God given to the people of God and as such are not to be rejected as the musings of some patriarchal misfit. Because the words given here are the words of the Holy Spirit breathed through the pen of the Apostle Paul they transcend cultural bias and even cultural evolution.

When we find ourselves sitting in judgment on Paul's words. You may hear things like, **"But he was a man, and his opinions are the opinions of a typical man in an ancient male dominated culture"**. When we say things like that we are actually not sitting in judgment on Paul, we are actually sitting in judgment on the Bible and the Holy Spirit as its superintending author. When we say things like that we are the battleship, rather we are the row boat telling the lighthouse to move ten degrees to the south.

With all that in mind, I want us to take a few minutes to examine what Paul is doing in Ephesians 5. First, it has to be said that the whole argument of Ephesians 5 occurs in the context of Christian unity. Now, remember what Paul has been arguing. He has been arguing that the Gentiles have been included in God's glorious new society, the church. The wall of division that separated the Jews from the Gentiles has been done away. Gentiles now have a share in the benefits and blessings of being a part of the people of God. There is a sense in which he is saying there is no longer any distinction. In that regard Paul is mirroring what he says elsewhere.

^{NIV} **Galatians 3:26**...You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, ²⁷ for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. ²⁸ There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. ²⁹ If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

Still even the repetition does not always make things clear. Listen to S. Lewis Johnson.

There is a sense in which all distinctions are done away. Within the body of Christ there is no longer any superiority. Jews are not better than Gentiles, men are not better than women, adults are not better than children. But that does not mean that there is no

longer any structure, or any hierarchy. What Paul wants to accomplish here is to explain how that structure is supposed to work in an environment guided by unity.

Both sides of the debate have admitted that Galatians 3:28 has not always been handled well. Klyne R. Snodgrass, in his significant article, has said this text, like some others, has become a hermeneutical skeleton key by which we may go through any door we choose. More often than not, Galatians 3:28 has become a piece of plastic that people have molded to their preconceived ideas. James B. Hurley, holding a different view of the text, agrees, contending that much of the debate has arisen over an abuse of Galatians 3:28. (S. Lewis Johnson http://www.cbmw.org/html/chapter_7.html)

The same may be said of Ephesians 5. It is a text that has often been manipulated by overbearing pastors or husbands. Rather than trying to mold it to fit our own behavior, I thought it might be worthwhile to try to examine the big idea of the passage.

First, there are really four different commands. They are:

- (1) Everyone should be in subjection to each other (*vs. 21*)
- (2) Women should be in subjection to their husbands (*vs. 22-33*)
- (3) Children should be in subjection to their parents (*vs. 6:1-4*)
- (4) Slaves should be in subjection to their masters (*vs. 6:5-9*)

Let's take them individually.

^{NIV} **Ephesians 5:21**...Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.

For Paul this is an overarching principle. Christians are to be in subjection to one another. That means that we are not assert ourselves over each other. But that we are to view each other as the purchased objects of Christ and genuinely look towards each other's benefit. We are to recognize that God has gifted others in ways that He may not have gifted us and we are to defer to gifted people. We are

not to covet someone's gift or speak harshly of them because they are gifted in a way that we are not. Rather, we are to submit to them in the fear of the Lord knowing that whatever they possess they possess at the will of Christ.

And we are to do so in the fear of Christ. Paul uses that phrase as Christianization of the Old Testament phrase *the fear of the Lord*. There is a sense in which we are refusing the authority of Christ when we refuse to submit to others. Of course, there can never be exercise of pride or lording it over others because we have some gift that they do not. The fear of Christ should apply to all parties.

In the next section Paul focuses on the issue of subjection in marriage.

^{NIV} **Ephesians 5:22**...Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. ²³ For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. ²⁴ Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything. ²⁵ Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her 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. ²⁸ In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. ²⁹ After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church--
³⁰ for we are members of his body. ³¹ **"For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh."** ³² This is a profound mystery-- but I am talking about Christ and the church. ³³ However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.

Now, it seems to me that there is a restlessness in the culture for women. I do not mean that in any kind of patronizing way either. But it seems like there is a real struggle for women in finding their identity. They are torn between pursuing a

career of excellence or raising a family and the pressures on women are real. I like the little poem Horton includes in his book *Putting Amazing Back into Grace*.

*I have taken the pill,
I have hoisted my skirts to my thighs,
Dropped them to my ankles,
Rebelled at the University,
Skied at Aspen,
Lived with two men,
married one.
Earned my keep,
Kept my identity,
And frankly...
I'm lost.*

But Paul is not addressing the struggle women face in general. Rather, he is specifically addressing the way married women are supposed to live in order to preserve unity in the body of Christ.

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Now there are three distinct points to be noted here.

- (1) Wives are to be subject to their husbands as they are to the Lord.
- (2) Men fill the place in the structure of a home that Christ fills in the church.
- (3) Wives are to be subject in every area.

Now, our tendency is to try to see the ways in which such commands are unfair. We generally look for areas in which such subjection sucks out our life and

vitality but Paul does not view this idea of subjection as a grievous thing. Nevertheless, I want to press on to the area in which Paul seems to have even more concern.

^{NIV} **Ephesians 5:25**...Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her 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. ²⁸ In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. ²⁹ After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church-- ³⁰ for we are members of his body. ³¹ "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh." ³² This is a profound mystery-- but I am talking about Christ and the church. ³³ However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.

I see four major ideas in this passage.

- (1) Husbands are to love their wives in a sacrificial way, like Christ loved the church.
- (2) Husbands are to love their wives in a way that produces righteousness, and holiness in their wives
- (3) Husbands are to love their wives as much as they love themselves
- (4) Husbands are to live lives separated unto their wives

I grew up in a theological tradition that spent a lot of time talking about the submission of women and spent very little time talking about the responsibility of men to love their wives. Men are called to love their wives as Christ loved the church. Of course, it's an impossible standard nevertheless it is what we are called to. That means that we are to live our lives in a sacrificial way. We are to relegate our own desires and ambitions to secondary importance. We are to give

up our very lives that our wives might be provided for; we are to give up our lives for the redemption of our wives.

All of which leads me to the second point. We are to live our lives in a way that produces righteousness and holiness in the lives of our wives. In the same manner that Christ's active obedience to the law of God produced righteousness in the church, our lives and behavior are to produce righteousness in the church. We are to help present our wives before the Lord as blameless, without spot or wrinkle.

Men, I think that means a couple of things. We ought to be praying for our wives. We ought to be guiding our wives in the things they read and the things they experience. We ought to try to protect them from things that will diminish their personal holiness. You know it is an easy thing to evaluate how our wives talk and what their attitudes toward certain things are. It is much harder to evaluate how our actions and words have influenced them, but that is the standard. If we ask ourselves about our own behavior, we will know what to do.

Will reading this produce holiness and purity in the life of my wife?

Will watching this produce holiness and purity in the life of my wife?

Will having this kind of relationship produce holiness and purity in the life of my wife?

Will talking this way or talking about his person or this thing produce holiness and purity in the life of my wife?

Thirdly, we ought to love our wives as much as we love ourselves. The text is so obvious here that I don't really need to say a lot about it, except that when we

chose to get to get married we took an oath to do this very thing. We are no longer to think in terms of our own personal desires. We are to think in terms of how things will affect our wives. If we don't want to dishonor ourselves, we shouldn't want to dishonor our wives. I think if anything has been made apparent the last few days, it is that every action and every behavior has consequences. How differently we would live if we loved our wives as much as we love ourselves. We wouldn't be thinking so often in terms of our own personal fulfillment and gratification. We would be thinking in terms of our mutual fulfillment and gratification.

And this point is tied to my last point. We ought to be separated unto our wives. That means that we ought to love our wives with the same kind of singular dedication and allegiance that we give to God. We should stay focused on our wives and them alone. When we ponder forbidden desires we are essentially pondering relational idolatry. In marriage, we are to worship at the same altar, we are to stay as dedicated to our wives relationally as we are to God spiritually. We diminish ourselves when we diminish our wives.

Of course, when husbands and wives contemplate these kinds of issues, they cannot help but be overwhelmed by the seriousness of their own failures. That's why I want to read you an email I received from Larry back in July.

St. Tomas

I heard something interesting the other day that I thought was a perfect example of how the Law and Gospel should permeate every area of the Christian life. This past weekend there was a wedding and during the ceremony the minister had the bride and groom repeat some very strong vows and asked them if they intended to keep them to which of course they said yes. His response was to say that they would, in fact, not keep them. That indeed they could not keep those

vows regardless of their sincere intent and best effort. That is why they needed Christ whose perfect obedience to the Law and whose sacrificial death did for them what they could not do for themselves as individuals and would not be able to do in their marriage.

When I heard that, I thought what a profound way to begin a Christian home--Law and Gospel from the outset--where the wedding vows themselves are seen as a genuine extension of God's law in terms of reflecting biblical standards of conduct and behavior. And instead of stressing our efforts to be the proper husband or wife, dependence on Christ and his work for us is emphasized as the hub of the marriage. We respond as the grateful recipients of grace from Him and we therefore relate to one another in grace rather than in expectation.

It reminded me of what I have heard you say repeatedly at APC about the Ephesian passage regarding husbands loving their wives and wives submitting to their husbands. How the truth of that passage works out in life if understood in terms of law and gospel. Instead of husbands expecting submission and wives expecting love and both being disappointed, what would happen if both expected failure in themselves and in the other and extended grace to their spouse for their failure and accepted grace from Christ for their own?

Peace,
St. Lwayn

But let's turn from husbands and wives to the other issues addressed here. Look at Ephesians 6:1.

^{NIV} **Ephesians 6:1**...Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. ² "Honor your father and mother"-- which is the first commandment with a promise-- ³ **"that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth."** ⁴ Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.

The command is simple enough so I just want to make a couple of points. It is important that children are obedient. A rebellious child is a child headed toward destruction. Kids have the responsibility to obey their parents. That is how they

submit to them. And there are two additional ideas that are set forth here. They are to obey their parents in the Lord. That means that are not to obey their parents in unrighteousness. There can be no excuse here for sin. If it comes to a choice between obeying parents or obeying God children should not be confused about which takes priority. I have to say here that I think that Bill Gothard has this exactly wrong.

Secondly, a life that is patterned in obedience has long-term benefits. Proverbially speaking, obedient children will reap the benefits of the obedience they have learned throughout their lives. I think that is fairly obvious to all of us. If a child is reared without discipline they will have difficulty with obedience in general. Children must learn that justice exists in the world. They must learn that actions have consequences because that is the way life is. A child that is permitted to develop a rebellious spirit will have trouble in relationships and trouble with society and even worse they will produce children that have the same kinds of problems.

As parents we ought to be committed to the loving, consistent discipline of our children. And that is tied I think to Paul's second point. We should not exasperate our kids by implementing inconsistent discipline.

I am thinking of my nephew, Ricky. He was a rambunctious little boy. He was filled with energy and curiosity. But his parents exercised absolutely no consistency in his discipline. He would be allowed to act out without even so much as a reproach on some occasions. At other times, he would be beaten down mercilessly for some minor infraction. What it produced in him was an inability to understand the difference between seriously bad behavior and normal

childhood folly. When spilling the milk and lying are treated with the same kind of discipline or lack of discipline, it is hard for a child to develop a biblical view of right and wrong.

He is twenty-nine years old now and he has spent the last eleven years in and out of prison. He has never committed any violent crime but he just cannot stay out of trouble. Part of his problem is that he was never disciplined consistently and part of his problem was that he was never instructed in the Lord.

Finally, Paul discusses one last relationship.

^{NIV} **Ephesians 6:5**...Slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ. ⁶ Obey them not only to win their favor when their eye is on you, but like slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from your heart. ⁷ Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not men, ⁸ because you know that the Lord will reward everyone for whatever good he does, whether he is slave or free. ⁹ And masters, treat your slaves in the same way. Do not threaten them, since you know that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no favoritism with him.

In this section Paul gives a command to slaves. There were a great many slaves in the New Testament church. Some scholars have estimated that upwards of eight percent of the world was in slavery. I'm not sure that is accurate but we know that there were a great many slaves in the church. The Epistle to Philemon is about one such slave. Notice what Paul's command is. Not slaves rebel against your masters but rather slaves obey your masters. Naturally, many students of the Bible accuse Paul here for not advocating the end of slavery. But it's an unfair accusation. Paul was not addressing Christian behavior in the world as it should be but rather in the world as it was.

His command is that slaves should serve their masters as they would the Lord. They were not just to serve them superficially either. They were to serve them with genuine hearts, not just when in view of their masters but all the time.

There is, I think, a genuine application here for our relationship with our employers. We are to work for them with singularity of mind and genuine loyalty because they have been placed in our lives at the sovereign command of our Lord. Disobedience or disloyalty to them is a rejection of God's providential hand.

In the same way, if we are employers we ought to take seriously the welfare of those over whom we have charge. We should not be vindictive or threatening. We should be understanding and kind because God holds us accountable for them.

I am reminded of a story about George McClellan and Abraham Lincoln.

McClellan was the commanding officer of the entire Union army. But he stayed in trouble with Lincoln because he would not attack the Confederate army. Lincoln was constantly trying to prod him into action. Once McClellan was in Washington and Lincoln dropped by with his Secretary of War to see him at his home. McClellan's butler informed Lincoln that he was not at home and asked Lincoln if he wanted to wait for him to arrive. Lincoln and Stanton were shown the parlor.

Eventually, McClellan came home and he saw the two men sitting in his parlor. He walked right past them without a word and went upstairs. Lincoln thought he was going to change his clothes because he had been out in the field all day.

After an hour or so, Lincoln asked the butler to ask McClellan if he could have a word with him. The butler went upstairs and finally returned grim-faced to tell the President of the United States that General McClellan was, in fact, in bed and could not be disturbed.

Scranton wanted to go upstairs and pull the young upstart out of bed and beat him, but Lincoln simply picked up his hat and left.

Scranton wanted to know why Lincoln would tolerate such behavior. Lincoln simply told Scranton that he knew McClellan's potential and that the slight was of no significance. He then told Scranton that he would hold the reigns of McClellan's horse, if he thought he could get him to fight.

I love that because it demonstrates both sides of what Paul is saying here. Though under the command of employers should be obedient and respectful and loyal which McClellan was not. And employers should deal with their employees in a gentle, non-threatening way which Lincoln did.

Now in closing I want to remind you of something I said at the beginning. Paul is not just discussing these relationships to be discussing them. He is discussing them because they are vital to the maintenance of peace and unity in the church. Every relationship we're involved in, whether it is our marriage, or our children, or even our jobs impacts the life of the church. We do not live these things out in

isolation from the church. Committing ourselves to do what is right in these areas has not just temporal value but actual long term eternal significance.

Let's pray.