

Ephesians 5b Call to Submission

5/8/00 8:10 AM

Overview

5:21 commanded the believers to “submit yourselves one to another in the fear of Christ.” His example of washing feet and his command to love as he loved us, show that our relationships with one another are not one-sided, but have reciprocal responsibilities. Paul follows with three specific instances of this submission:

- Husbands and wives
- Parents and children
- Masters and servants

The expression “submit yourselves one to another” is, strictly speaking, an oxymoron. “Submission” implies a directionality, while “one to another” implies reciprocity. The same expression, with the same ambiguity, returns in 1 Pet 5:5, dealing with church offices. As we read more carefully, we realize that there is a clear headship responsibility in each case; but there is also a reciprocal sense of responsibility. Both sides are responsible for making the relationship work. Calvin: “God has bound us so strongly to each other, that no man ought to endeavor to avoid subjection; and where love reigns, mutual services will be rendered.”

5:22-33, Husbands and Wives

The section treats first of the responsibilities of the wife, then of the husband, with a chiastic summary in v.33. Note the amount of space dedicated to each:

- Wives: 3.5vv
- Husbands: 8.5vv

Clearly, the emphasis is not on the duty of the wife, but on that of the husband.

22-24, 33b, “*Let the wife see that she fear her husband.*”

These verses form a chiasm, with 33b closing off.

| | |
|----------------------------------|---|
| Command to wives re. husbands | 22 Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. |
| Comparison of H/W and C/C | 23 For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: |
| Description of Christ and Church | and he is the saviour of the body. |
| Comparison of H/W and C/C | 24 Therefore [Gk “But”] as the church is subject unto Christ, so <i>let</i> the wives <i>be</i> to their own husbands in every thing. |
| Command to wives re. husbands | 33b Let the wife see that she reverence [Gk “fear”] <i>her</i> husband. |

22,33b, Wife honors husband as she does the Lord.—The wife, as a believer, is subject to the Lord, and fears him (recall discussion of v. 21). She should show the same fear and subjection toward her husband.

23a,24, Husband/Wife like Christ/Church.—The point here is subtly different, focusing on the organic relationship that leads to the individual responsibilities emphasized in 22,33b. Christ stands in an organic relationship to the church as head to body. This organic relationship implies that the individual believer should be subject to him. Similarly, the husband has an organic responsibility as the wife’s head, which has consequences for the conduct between them.

The point of this argument is to understand the reason for biblical submission. Worldly relations of dominance and submission are founded on differences in strength or skill. “Let the best man win.” Such considerations do not govern relations among believers. Rather, our relations are based on the organic relationships into which God has placed us. We are individually subject to Christ, not because he is stronger than we are (although he is), but because we are members of the church that is his body. The wife is subject to the husband, not because he is wiser or stronger (he may or may not be), but because of the organic relationship in which they stand.

23b, The Reciprocal Truth.—While the church is subject to Christ, it should never forget how Christ has subjected himself to her in becoming her savior. This pinnacle of the instruction to the wife will shortly become the foundation of the instruction to the husband. (On the adversative at the start of v.24, see Robinson and BAG meaning 6.)

25-33a, “Husbands, Love your Wives”

Two laws of love:

- Lev 19:18, cited in Matt 22:39, “love thy neighbor as thyself”
- John 13:34; 15:12, “love one another as I have loved you”

Two differences:

- the one loved (anybody who needs our care, in Lev; a brother in the Lord, in John)
- the standard of love (our love for ourselves in Lev; Christ’s love for us in John)

Paul brings both of these laws to bear in motivating the husband’s love for the wife, and associates each with an ordinance of the church.

25-27, Love your (believing) wife as Christ loved the church (Baptism)

25, What Christ did

He loved the church and gave himself for it.

For the general principle, see

- Isa 43:4, “I have *loved* thee, therefore will I *give* men for thee, and people for thy life.”
- John 3:35, “The Father *loveth* the Son, and hath *given* all things into his hand.”
- 2 Thes 2:16, God “hath *loved* us, and hath *given* us everlasting consolation and good hope through grace”

This pairing is common in Paul:

- 5:2, “Christ also hath *loved* us, and hath *given* himself for us”

- Gal 2:20, “who *loved* me, and *gave* himself for me.”

The word “give” παραδίδωμι has the sense of surrendering, of delivering into the control of someone else. It is the word used for betraying someone. Christ surrendered his autonomy for us. He gave himself into the control of sinful men, so that through their actions he might redeem us.

It is worth emphasizing that he gave himself *for* us, not *to* us.

- Love that gives *to* someone may help them or spoil them, depending on their needs and the nature of the gift. When a child whines, “If you loved me, you would give me XYZ,” the most loving thing to do is not to yield to this manipulation.
- Love that gives *for* someone has given careful thought to their needs, and provided a gift that will be suited to those needs.

The details of the “for” are spelled out in the following verses.

26-27, Why he did it

Two purpose clauses tell us the objective that motivated our Lord’s gift, one characterizing the beginning of our Christian life, the other its end. These may be derived from Ezek 16.

Sanctify and cleanse.—cf. the Lord’s treatment of the waif in Ezek 16:8 (sanctify) and 9 (cleanse). It has been suggested that the washing is a bath that the bride takes before the wedding is consummated. The grammar makes the sequence clear.

1. Our Lord gave himself for the church that he might sanctify it, set it apart.
2. He sets it apart by cleansing it. This cleansing has two mechanisms:
 - a. “The washing of water” most reasonably describes baptism. If he had not given himself for us, we could not be identified with him in baptism. This ceremony has strong symbolism of cleansing; cf. Acts 22:16; 1 Pet 3:21. Yet this latter passage reminds us that the act itself has no effect, thus to the figure, Paul adds the reality:
 - b. “By the word” modifies “cleanse,” not “washing of water.” It is by the work of the Scriptures that we are truly cleansed.

Present.—Ezekiel goes on to say how after the Lord took Israel into covenant with himself, she rebelled against him. Yet at the end, he restores her to himself, 16:60-63. Our Christian lives are similarly marked by failure, sin, rebellion. It ought not so to be, but which of us will claim to be immune to such struggles? In the light of this, What God begins, he finishes. Our Lord’s gift of himself is the foundation not only of our profession of faith in baptism, but also of his continuing intercession for us in heaven, on the basis of which we are accepted in him. When he returns to take us to himself, “we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.”

Coaches know that if athletes prepare for their contests by visualizing a perfect performance, they will be more likely to perform that way. Paul wants us to see ourselves as we shall be at the end of the battle. Three terms of description:

- Glorious, as God himself is glorious. We read three times in ch. 1 that we are to be to the praise of God’s glory (1:6, 12, 14).
- Without spot or wrinkle—no trace of any “unseemly thing” (Deut 24:1) that might make the bride displeasing to her husband.

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- Holy and without blame: cf. 1:4, the purpose for which God has chosen us.

The first and third of these take us back to Eph 1. Our Lord's purpose in giving himself for us is to complete the eternal plan of redemption that the Father set forth.

How different this is from earthly marriage, often entered into more with a view to immediate gratification than ultimate purpose. The husband is not to enter marriage out of carnal lust (1 Thes 4:5), but with a view to giving himself for his bride so that she might be perfected. He is to love her as Christ loved the church.

28-33a, Love your wife (even unbelieving) as you love yourself (Lord's Supper)

28a, men ought to love their wives as they love themselves. Bald statement of their responsibility. This is the statement to be proven, and he will return to it in 33a as a summary of this section.

The foundation for this statement is twofold:

- Internal consistency: if you love yourself, it is in your own interests to love your wife.
- External example: the example set by the Lord Jesus.

28b-29a, Internal Consistency

The argument here is a syllogism: A & B → C.

A: By loving his wife, a man loves himself (28b).

B: Men naturally love themselves (29a).

C: Therefore men should naturally love their wives (28a, 33a)

A.—28b differs in two ways from 28a.

- It inverts the order: he who loves his wife, loves himself. Not “love your wife because you love yourself,” but “loving your wife is a way to love yourself.”
- It moves from imperative to indicative. This is no longer a command, but a statement of fact.

Assertion **A** rests on the assumption that the wife is part of the man. This assumption is founded in Gen 2:21-24. The marriage relation turns two people into one, in a union that cannot be dissolved. So it is in a man's self-interest to care for his wife.

B.—29a describes how a man naturally treats his own flesh:

- “nourishes,” what Joseph does for the people during the famine in Egypt, Gen 47:17. More generally, “cause to grow,” cf. 6:4. He eats, exercises, nurtures it.
- “cherishes,” lit. “keep warm,” coddle, make comfortable, protect from outside harm.

Paul reminds his male readers that they naturally take good care of themselves, both providing good things and protecting from harm. Once they accept that their wives are part of themselves, it is only logical that they will want to protect and provide for them.

NB: Male nature being what it is, it is often easier to nourish another than to cherish. But a moment's thought will show that we do indeed both nourish and cherish ourselves, and thus we should be careful to cherish as well as nourish our wives.

29b-32, The Example of Christ

In further support of his exhortation that men ought to love their wives as they love themselves, he recalls that Christ nourishes and cherishes the church. The “nourishment” metaphor calls to mind

- the “bread of life” discourse in John 6:26-58,
- symbolized in the Lord's Supper, where we recall that we have partaken of the Lord's flesh and blood by faith.

How does he “cherish” us? By his continual work of intercession for us at the right hand of the Father, defending us from the accusations of Satan, and by the continuing presence of his Spirit to comfort and encourage us.

v.30 explains that in nourishing and cherishing us, the Lord is doing nothing less than caring for his own body. Again, Paul is drawing on the metaphor that dominates this epistle, of the church as the body of Christ. We are filling him (1:23), carrying out his work, and his tender care for us advances his own sovereign purposes.

In 1 Cor 12, this metaphor led him to think of feet, hands, ears, eyes. Here, he thinks of the commonality of flesh and bone among the members of the body, and recalls an OT verse: “bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh” (Gen 2:23). But in its original context, this verse describes Eve's relation to Adam. Paul goes on to quote 2:24.

He evidently had this verse in mind in 28-29 in insisting that a husband who cares for his wife cares for himself, and at first we are tempted to think that he has drifted back from Christ and his body to the husband and his wife. But 32 shows us that he is not drifting. The meaning of Gen 2:21-24 extends beyond human marriage to the relation between Christ and the church. Christ is the second Adam and we are his bride, partakers of his flesh and blood. This is the foundational marriage relationship. All our physical pairings are manifestations of it.

v.33 closes off the section by reminding us of its two main threads:

- submission of the wife to the husband;
- tender love and care of the husband for the wife.

6:1-4, Parents and Children

Again, a hierarchical relation is modulated by the command to “submit yourselves one to another in the fear of God.” Again, the traditionally lower role comes first.

There is an important contrast between the husband/wife case, on the one hand, and the next two, on the other. These give more attention to the responsibility of the lower member, while the husband/wife case emphasizes more the responsibility of the upper member.

1-3, Children

The Command.—“Obey your parents.” Do as they say.

“In the Lord”:

- Not a qualification of the commands, as though those not “in the Lord” may be disregarded; cf. Col. 3:20, “Children, obey your parents in all things.”
- Nor a qualification of the parents, which would be contrary to the whole tenor of this section.
- Rather, cf. 1 Peter 2:13, “Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord’s sake,” also the end of Col. 3:20, “for this is well pleasing unto the Lord.” Paul is addressing those who are “in the Lord,” urging them to “walk as children of light,” in a way consistent with their position. In particular, the obedience of believing children to their parents is to be rendered from this perspective: not grudgingly, not with a lick and a promise, but wholeheartedly.

First Reason: “It is right.”—Probably a reference to social approbation. Hillary Rodham’s notion that children can lawfully resist their parents’ authority is a novelty. The authority of parents over children has been widely held in many different cultures and ages.

Second Reason: The Fifth Command.—Not only is it pleasing to society, but also to God, as evidenced by its place in the decalog.

The promise given under the Old Covenant is here renewed under the New. Note that he replaces the OT’s “in the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee” with “upon the earth,” moving the commandment from a restricted application to Israel, to a more general one.

4, Parents

He focuses on the fathers; the mothers, as subject to them, will naturally follow their lead.

“Provoke not”.—Sometimes a parent’s actions have the unavoidable effect of making the child unhappy, as when the rod is necessary. Such are not forbidden. But in the world, those who are more powerful often tease those under them, just because they can, and such conduct is inappropriate for a believer.

“Bring them up”.—Same word as “nourish” in 5:29. Two main elements to their diet:

- Nurture παιδεία: More accurately, “discipline,” which never “seemeth to be joyous, but grievous,” Heb. 12:11. In the NT, this word family regularly conveys the overtone of punishment. Paul would acknowledge the OT emphasis on the appropriate use of the rod in raising a child.
- Admonition νουθεσία: Jay Adams’ survey of this word family in the NT shows that it has three elements:
 1. to confront an obstacle or shortcoming
 2. by verbal means
 3. for their benefit.

The conduct is exemplified by Nathan’s confrontation of David after his sin with Bathsheba, or our Lord’s confrontation of Peter after the denial.

Both of these are to be “of the Lord.” Just as universities were once held to function *in loco parentis*, “in the place of parents,” so parents function *in loco domini*, “in the Lord’s place.”

So on both sides, the relation between parent and child is defined “in the Lord.” Robertson: “There is a ‘discipline of the Lord’ which is the responsibility of the parent, just as obedience ‘in the Lord’ is the duty of the child.”

6:5-9, Masters and Slaves

One expects that in the intimacy of the marriage relation, husband and wife might “submit themselves one to the other.” Though the parent-child relation is more hierarchical, even there a parent’s natural love for the child would lead to a certain reciprocity. The final example is the one where reciprocity is least natural and most needed. We are dealing here, not with employees or servants indentured for a period, but with bondslaves, owned by their masters.

5-8, Slaves

Under the New Covenant, where “there is neither bond or free” (Gal 3:28), slaves might be tempted to rebel. This Paul rejects. Their owners are still their “lords according to the flesh,” described with the same term used for the divine Lord.

How can such service be consistent with their freedom in Christ? The answer is found in a contrast that pervades this paragraph, between the “lords according to the flesh” (v.5) and “the Lord” (v.8):

| Human Lords | The Divine Lord |
|--|---|
| 5 Servants, be obedient to them that are <i>your</i> masters according to the flesh, | with fear and trembling, in singleness of your heart, as unto Christ; |
| 6 Not with eyeservice, as menpleasers; | but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart; |
| | 7 With good will doing service, as to the Lord, |
| and not to men: | 8 Knowing that whatsoever good thing any man doeth, the same shall he receive of the Lord, whether <i>he be</i> bond or free. |

It is Christ the sovereign Lord who has placed them under their human lords, and they serve him by serving them. (Note thus the vacuity of speaking of being “in the Lord’s service.” Every career is “in the Lord’s service,” if it be executed as enjoined in this section.) Paul outlines several characteristics of this service:

With fear and trembling.—Addressed to Christ (cf. 5:21 and the parallel in Col 3:22), not the master. It is the Lord who has placed us in our positions of servitude, so we are really serving him.

In singleness of heart.—The opposite of “craftiness” (Job 5:13, LXX); godly simplicity. Some employees are always plotting and trying to “game” the system. Our objective should be that of

our employer, wholeheartedly supporting the organization's mission. If we can't do this, we should seek other employment. Cf. the parable of the talents; the one who hid the talent in a napkin was not single-heartedly pursuing the Lord's objectives.

Not with eyeservice, but ... from the heart.—Amplifies “singleness of heart.” The criterion for our service is not whether it looks good, but whether it reflects the true loyalty and devotion of our heart.

With good will.—Not grudgingly, but willingly.

Knowing (v.8).—Even if our human masters don't appreciate what we do, the Lord does, and it is to him that we look for our reward.

9, Masters

“Do the same things,” that is, behave openly and fairly. Cf. parallel in Col 4:1, “that which is just and equal.” He is enjoining the golden rule on masters. For a detailed exposition of the duty of masters toward their servants, see Philemon. Two modifiers:

Forbearing threatening.—*How* they are to “do the same things.” Calvin explains the behavior here enjoined as “disdainful and barbarous treatment.” Just as servants are to strive to support the master's objectives whole-heartedly, so the masters are to deal with servants with respect, not browbeating them.

Knowing.—Masters are not absolute. The notion that service is to a higher Lord makes servants better servants, but it also limits the authority of masters. They, like their servants, must answer to a heavenly Lord, who is not impressed by social status. Cf. the injunction to elders in the church in 1 Pet 5:3,4 to be examples rather than lords over the flock, when they keep in mind the Chief Shepherd.

Summary of Submission

On one hand, the world treasures hierarchical power relations and seeks to climb the ladder. On the other, anarchists seek to do away with such relations, sometimes citing our equality in Christ (Gal 3:28). Paul respects the relations, but recognizes that they are colored by our relation with Christ. Two overarching principles:

1. These relations are bilateral. They impose duties on the superior as well as on the inferior.
2. They are governed by “the fear of Christ,” 5:21. Both parties are ultimately subject to the Lord. Wives submit to husbands “as to the Lord”; children obey parents “in the Lord”; slaves serve “as unto Christ.” Similarly, the husbands, parents, and masters are enjoined to recognize that they are *in loco domini*, and answerable to him.

It is important to note the parallel in 1 Pet 2:18; 3:1, which makes clear that the obligations of one side are not removed if the other side fails. Both sets of obligations are imposed absolutely, not contingently on the obedience of the other side. This emerges naturally from the second summary principle. However the other party behaves, we serve the Lord, and our duty to him is unchanging.

Analysis

5:22-33, Husbands and Wives

22-24, Wives

22 Ai(gunai^kes toi^s i)di/ois a)ndra/sin u(potassesqe w(s tw^| kuri/w|,

23 o(/ti a)nh/r e)stin kefalh\ th^s gunaiko\s

w(s kai\ o(Xristo\s kefalh\ th^s e)kklhsi/as,

au)to\s swth\r tou^ sw/matos. *The following adversative is clearer if we take this as an*

interjection by the wife. “But He, Christ, is far more than my husband; he is the Savior!”

Nevertheless, the comparison still stands. It is true, as the sequel shows, that the husband

is to emulate the care of Christ for the church. If Paul had in fact written “therefore,” one

“savior.” But this is not the cause of the wife’s submission, nor is she justified in

withdrawing it if the husband does not behave in this way. ...But see Robinson’s

alternative analysis, also BAG meaning 6 for alla.

24 a)lla\ w(s h(e)kklhsi/a u(pota/ssetai tw^| Xristw^|,

ou(/tws kai\ ai(gunai^kes toi^s a)ndra/sin e)n panti/.

25-33, Husbands

25-27, *Motive one: love as Christ loved us; illustrated in baptism*

25 Oi(a)ndres, a)gapa^te ta\s gunai^kas,

kaqw\s kai\ o(Xristo\s h)ga/phsen th\n e)kklhsi/an

kai\ e(auto\n pare/dwken u(pe\r au)th^s,

26 i(/na au)th\n a(gia/sh|

kaqari/sas tw^| loutrw^| tou^ u(/datos e)n r(h/mati,

27 i(/na parasth/sh| au)to\s e(autw^| e)/ndocon th\n e)kklhsi/an,

mh\ e)/xousan spi/lon h)\ r(uti/da h)/ ti tw^n toiou/twn,

a)ll' i(/na h)^| a(gi/a kai\ a)/mwmos.

28-33, *Motive two: love as you love yourself; illustrated in the Supper*

28 ou(/tws o)fei/lousin oi(a)ndres a)gapa^n ta\s e(autw^n gunai^kas w(s ta\ e(autw^n sw/mata.

o(a)gapw^n th\n e(autou^ gunai^ka e(auto\n a)gapa^|,

29 ou)dei\s ga/r pote th\n e(autou^ sa/rka e)mi/shsen,

a)lla\ e)ktre/fei kai\ qa/lpei au)th/n,

kaqw\s kai\ o(Xristo\s th\n e)kklhsi/an,

30 o(/ti me/lh e)sme\n tou^ sw/matos au)tou^, Cf. 4:25

“ek ths sarkos autou kai ek tw^n ostewn autou.

31 a)nti\ tou/tou

katalei/yei a)/nqrwpos [to\n] pate/ra kai\ [th\n] mh/te/ra

kai\ proskollhqh/setai pro\s th\n gunai^ka au)tou^,

kai\ e)/sontai oi(du/o ei)s sa/rka mi/an.”

32 to\ musth/rion tou^to me/ga e)sti/n,

e)gw\ de\ le/gw ei)s Xristo\n kai\ ei)s th\n e)kklhsi/an.

33 plh\ n kai\ u(meis oi(kaq' e(/na e(/kastos th\ n e(autou^ gunai^ka ou(/tw s a)gapa/tw w(s e(auto/n,

h(de\ gunh\ i(/na fobh^tai to\ n a)/ndra.

6:1-4, Parents and Children

6:1 Ta\ te/kna, u(pakou/ete toi^s goneu^sin u(mw^ n [e)n kuri/w|],
tou^to ga/r e)stin di/kaion.

2 ti/ma to\ n pate/ra sou kai\ th\ n mh te/ra,
h(/tis e)sti\ n e)ntolh\ prw/th e)n e)paggeli/a|,

3 i(/na
eu)^ soi ge/nhtai

kai\ e)/sh| makroxro/nios e)pi\ th^s gh^s.

4 Kai\ oi(pate/res, mh\ parorgi/zete ta\ te/kna u(mw^ n,
a)lla\ e)ktre/fete au)ta\ e)n paidei/a| kai\ nouqesi/a| kuri/ou.

6:5-9, Masters and Slaves

5 Oi(dou^loi, u(pakou/ete toi^s kata\ sa/rka kuri/ois
meta\ fo/bou kai\ tro/mou

e)n a(plo/thti th^s kardi/as u(mw^ n
w(s tw^ | Xristw^ |,

6 mh\ kat' o)fqalmodouli/an

w(s a)nqrwpa/reskoi

a)ll' w(s dou^loi Xristou^

poiou^ntes to\ qe/lhma tou^ qeou^ e)k yuxh^s,

7 met' eu)noi/as douleu/ontes,

w(s tw^ | kuri/w| kai\ ou)k a)nqrw/pois,

8 ei)do/tes o(/ti e(/kastos, e)a/n ti poih/sh| a)gaqo/n, tou^to komi/setai para\ kuri/ou, ei)/te dou^los ei)/te e)leu/qeros.

9 Kai\ oi(ku/rioi, ta\ au)ta\ poiei^te pro\s au)to u/s,

a)nie/ntes th\ n a)peilh/n,

ei)do/tes o(/ti

kai\ au)tw^ n kai\ u(mw^ n o(ku/rio/s e)stin e)n ou)ranoi^s,

kai\ proswpolhmyi/a ou)k e)/stin par' au)tw^ |.