

What Kind of Church? – Part 5 – Ephesians 5

Somebody tell me what your first vehicle was and what year you graduated high school. Okay, now, imagine with me that it's Friday night and the football game starts in a few minutes. You're heading over to pick up your buddy and go to the game. You grab your keys to that vehicle and tell your mom you're leaving. What are the words that probably come out of her mouth? *"Be careful"*, right? Be careful. So, because she says those two words, does anything in your world change? Does that mean the least little thing to you? At sixteen years old, probably not. Because Mom said to be careful, are you going to be careful? It's comforting to hear and you are reminded that she loves you but it's not going to make you drive any slower or make any better judgments. She might as well have said, *"Okay honey, see how fast you can get there! Act like an idiot!"*

Well, hopefully – hopefully – we have all changed and matured quite a bit since then. Maybe not all of us but most of us have probably even heard ourselves say the same thing to our loved ones as they left us. We want people to be careful because we love them and don't want anything bad to happen to them that might happen if they were not careful. It's a dangerous world out there and bad things happen even when you are careful so let's at least try to minimize the dangers, right?

That's exactly what the Apostle Paul is telling us in this passage in **Ephesians 5** this morning. Paul loves the people at the church in Ephesus and wants them to be the church God wants them to be. But he knows that for a church to be the church God wants, the people of the church have to be the individuals that God wants them to be.

The problem is that Satan hates us and is doing everything he can to keep us from being the church God wants us to be. Not only that, there are so many distractions all around us that keep us from doing what is wise. Plus the world itself doesn't like it when we are holy and unified as a church and so there is pressure from everywhere to be more like the world. And the world is full of fools that look like they are having fun. They look carefree. Lots of them are wealthy. They have no thoughts for tomorrow, much less eternity. So, why not be more worldly? Why not party and live it up, act like you want and live for today? And the world especially wants us to live for ourselves. Follow your heart. Grab the gusto. You only live once.

But that is not how Paul is commanding us to live if we are Christians and to live that way is foolishness. But we have to be careful because it's easy to let the world influence the church when the church should be influencing the world. All of this is found in Ephesians and today we will look at **Ephesians 5, verse 15-**

21. *Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, ¹⁶making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. ¹⁷Therefore do not be foolish but understand what the Lord's will is. ¹⁸Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit, ¹⁹speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit. Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord, ²⁰always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

²¹Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.

When Paul wrote Ephesians, he did not have all the punctuation we have nor did he put in paragraphs and certainly not the paragraph headings that most of us have in our Bibles and most of the time they are very helpful. But in my Bible, **verse 21** is separated from the rest of this and I don't think it should be.

In fact, **verse 21** sums up all of the rest of the passage we are going to look at. Read **verse 21**. *“²¹ Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.”* Now, good luck finding that in any of those self-help books that litter every bookstore and library. And honestly, I want to stop right there and camp out on that verse because if we can get that right then it will manifest itself in all of our relationships.

If we submit to one another out of reverence for Christ then our relationship with our spouse will honor the Lord. If we can submit to each other out of reverence for Christ then our relationships at home will honor Christ and also for our relationships at work. If we submit to one another out of reverence for Christ then our whole lives will honor Christ.

There is, of course, one small problem. When I say the word “submit” what is your natural reaction? I can almost guarantee you that your first natural reaction was not. *“Oh, ok. No problem. That’s easy.”* Right? It’s the same problem we had over in **chapter 4, verse 2** where it says to be completely humble and gentle, with patience and love. Oh, sure. Want me to give a million dollars away too?

There are at least 3 questions that come up when one considers the prospect of submitting to another person. They are good and natural questions and need to be answered.

- 1) If I submit to my husband, parents or boss, does that mean that I am inferior to them?
- 2) If I don't look out for myself, then who will?
- 3) What if the person to whom I submit abuses their role?

To answer all 3 of those questions it is helpful to know exactly what that word “submit” actually means. It was originally a Greek military term meaning to arrange in military fashion under the control of a leader. It shows order and purpose. In non-military use it was a voluntary attitude of giving in, cooperating, assuming responsibility and carrying a burden. It quite literally means “to put under”. (Strong's Concordance)

Now, does putting yourself under someone else mean that you are inferior to that person as in question 1? Martin Luther wrote that *“we are to sharply distinguish between these two, the office and the person.”* As a person, we are all created equally. Since this is a military term, let's think about how the military operates. Everyone in the military has a rank. Without it, there would be chaos. Nothing would get done.

My Uncle Bill is quite a character and evidently always has been. When he joined the army they, of course, sent him to boot camp. He said he was there for only a couple of weeks and they sent another group of young men to the camp to start their basic training. Uncle Bill thought it would be funny to wake the brand new recruits up in the middle of the night and claim he was a sergeant. He made them get dressed and do pushups and even got them out in the yard to do some marching. He screamed at them and told them they were worthless and all the stuff the real sergeant had been screaming at him.

He thought that was real funny until the next morning when they figured out what happened and made him stand in front of everybody in camp and salute himself in front of a mirror and order himself to do pushups. True story.

See, without order, the military would collapse and so would the church and so would our lives and our relationships. But at the same time, if the lowliest private is trapped behind enemy lines, the military will still do everything possible to get him back because they recognize the value of the man as a person.

John 3:16 says that “*God so loved **the world**...*” He died for everybody, not just the famous people or the rich or the ones who make laws. What you have to realize is that part of the definition that says to submit is a voluntary act of putting yourself under another. And what happens when you put yourself under someone? You lift them up. It’s not about being inferior. It is about voluntarily lifting others up out of reverence for Christ.

The second question that might be asked is, “*If I don’t look out for myself, then who will?*” And it is a shame that this question has to be asked but it’s a natural. If I lift other people up; if I submit myself to others out of reverence for Jesus, then who is going to lift me up and meet my needs? My first response to that question (and I have several) is that we are not guaranteed to have anybody in our life to meet our needs as we see them. I’m sorry to be blunt but it is just a fact. Ask Paul who is writing this. He spent his whole life lifting others up and lifting Jesus up and there were times in his life when I think we can all agree that his needs as we would define them were not met. You know the passage in **II Corinthians 11** where Paul describes his hardships; beaten, shipwrecked, stoned, hungry, thirsty, etc. So, there’s no guarantee that anybody is going to lift you up and meet your needs. I’m sorry. But the command is still there to do it.

And that is something else I want us to see about this verse and that is that it is a command. Paul is not asking. He is not saying, “*Hey, it would be nice if you could...*” “*You know, when your needs are met then work on others.*” No. This is a command to submit to each other no matter what. And what happens when we are obedient to a command? BOOCOD? There are blessings of obedience and consequences of disobedience.

What happened when Abraham was obedient and left his comfortable home? Blessings. What happened when David was obedient and killed Goliath? Blessings. What happened when Peter was obedient and got out of the boat? Blessings. What happened when our church was obedient when we didn’t know how to pay our electric bill back in Runaway Bay? BLESSINGS! When we are obedient to what God tells us to do, God takes care of His children. It may not be how we think it should be done. But He always takes care of us.

Lastly, when you are submissive to others in a church, do you know what happens? What have I said about our attitudes? They are contagious. If you walk into a church where everybody has to have their way, how are you going to act? But when we as a church submit ourselves to each other in reverence for Christ, it starts to catch on. It is not the default attitude for people and so sometimes it may take a while but God sees it and blesses it and pretty soon we are known as a church that doesn’t have stress or

division or members talking behind each other's backs. We are known as a church that has a passion for people and a passion for Jesus which is just how we want to be known.

The last question I want to address today is if I submit to someone, what if they abuse that submission? What if they take advantage of me? This could happen in any one of these roles; as a wife to a husband, a child to a parent or a slave to a master or even right here in the church. To answer that, we must first see where this authority comes from. It comes from God. God is a God of order and has established certain authority or leadership roles. He tells wives, children and workers to be submissive but the husband, parents and bosses must understand that the Lord Himself has given them that authority and it is not to be abused. It is the same with all Christians. We must submit out of reverence for Christ who not only wields the authority but also humbled himself as a servant.

So that submission that we are commanded to give is not unconditional. That authority is not unlimited. The submission required is to God's authority delegated to human beings. If, therefore, they misuse their God-given authority by commanding what God forbids or forbidding what God commands then our duty to submit no longer holds and to do so would disobey and dishonor God.

So, we see that submission does not make you inferior to the other person. We will be taken care of by God and be blessed when we submit to others and we see that authority is not unconditional. So it should be real easy now that we understand, right? No problem?

I hear you. I do. *"Todd, I just can't do it. I know I should but I just can't. I've been burned before and I just can't do it."* As I have told you several times as we have gone through this series...you are exactly right. You can't do it. No matter how hard you try you will not be able to submit, at least not for long. But when you come to that realization, you are right where you are supposed to be.

You see, the answer is back in **verse 18**. Let's go back and read that. Not the part about not getting drunk although those are wise words but the latter part. *"Be filled with the Spirit."* Everything past **verse 18** supposes that you are filled with the Spirit. You can't speak to one another with spiritual songs unless you are filled with the Spirit. You can't submit to your husband for any length of time without being filled with the Spirit and so on for children, workers and members of this church.

Every one of these sermons on Ephesians has hinged on being in Christ; you do it through Christ; you do it out of reverence for Christ. You remember what Paul said earlier about Christ being the cornerstone of the church? You can't do any of this without Christ being foremost, filling and working through you. It's not about you. Because when you make it about you there will be stress in your home. There will be stress in your job. There will be stress, disunity and division in this church. But with Christ and through Christ we can have new relationships with each other and we as a church can have a new relationship with the city of Chico, Wise County and the rest of the world.

Music Do you have Christ living in you? If not, you can. And all you have to do is believe. Quit trying to do it yourself and let God do it for you. Surrender yourself to Him first and then let Him give you peace and joy in this life. Then you can submit to others in the church and watch that peace and joy multiply like only God can do. Do it right now as the music plays.