

Family Ties
[Who Am I... In Christ – Part 4]

November 2, 2008

Ypsilanti Free Methodist Church

After services last week, someone came to me and shared something that both caught me off guard and also made me laugh. They said that when I began the sermon with so much talk about change that they thought I was going to give a political message! Believe me, that was the furthest thing from my mind and I am certain it is not what Paul is talking about in the fourth and fifth chapters of Ephesians! No, the change we looked at in Paul's letters has to do with personal changes that God will empower us to do inside our hearts and minds.

Hopefully this week you've given some thought to what changes God wants to make in you. I know I have. There is one note in particular that Paul makes –one we only briefly touched on last time – that has been on my mind and actually serves as a pivot point into the passage of scripture we are going to look at this week. It is that statement that jumps out and appears at first glance to be a stand-alone statement. While it can stand alone in its strength and meaning, it actually serves as the premise and basis for what Paul wrote next. It is the twenty-first verse of Ephesians chapter 5: *Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.* So, before we move on to look at the following verses, lets pause here a moment and consider this one.

We noted last week that submission does not come naturally for most people. So, to declare that we, as members of the Body of Christ, are to submit to one another, there needs to be a clear understanding of why we need to submit and what it means to submit. Paul's reason for submitting is encapsulated in the clause "out of reverence for Christ." We choose to submit to one another because Christ set the example and submitted Himself for the good of others. He first submitted by coming to earth, submitting Himself to a young woman named Mary, His mother here on earth. He submitted to authorities who arrested Him, tried Him, and even put Him to death. Above all else, He submitted to His Heavenly Father, even when it was not the easiest thing to do. The night before His crucifixion, Jesus prayed to His Father and said, "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will" (Matthew 26:39 ~ NIV). So, out of reverence to our Lord who set the example, we are told to submit to one another.

What does that mean, though? Literally, the term translated "submit" means just that. It means to give up one's own rights or to submit one's own will to another's. It was often used in

military terms to describe soldiers submitting to superior officers or other authorities. In a moral sense, it was used to connote putting others and their welfare ahead of your own. That is exactly what Jesus did.

I mentioned earlier that this verse seems to be a pivotal verse in Paul's message. It seems to connect both the overall message that precedes it with the practical examples that follow. The message Paul has been sharing up to this point in the passage is his urging for us to "live a life worthy of the calling you have received" (Eph. 4:1). He reiterated this message in Ephesians 5:1-2, where he wrote, "Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children, and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God." Staying on course, Paul wrote in Ephesians 5:15, "Be very careful, then how you live – not as unwise but as wise," going on to encourage his readers to be filled with the Spirit. So, if we are to *live like Jesus* then we must also *submit* like Jesus – that is, putting others and their welfare ahead of our own.

Again, this is a counter-cultural thought today. The first question on the lips of most Americans is usually "What about me?" The second question is often "What if *I* know better than they do?" So, the idea of submitting to authority of any kind has fallen out of favor in society. Unfortunately, this is one societal belief that has found its way into the Church. So, while Scripture tells us to "submit to one another out of reverence for Christ," *and* to the leaders over us (Hebrews 13:17), the response by many Christians is "only if it's done *my way!*"

According to Scripture – to put it bluntly – that's not going to cut it! Stuart Briscoe, a fine biblical scholar and pastor, has made this observation about Ephesians 5:21 –

The force of this phrase is that the motivation to live a submissive life in the fellowship of believers is not necessarily to be found in the super quality of the fellowship, the infallibility of its leadership and the unbelievable sanctification of its membership, but in obedience to the Lord Jesus.

Point well taken. We are not perfect and mistakes will be made from time to time, but for order to occur within the Church we need to heed Paul's words and "submit to one another out of reverence for Christ." Then, we will be "living a life worthy of the calling you have received" (Eph. 4:1).

Submission is one of many aspects of our living for Christ. It works in concert with many other aspects of Christian living. With its purpose being to put the welfare of others as

well as the welfare of the entire church before our own desires or well-being, submission also stands out as a characteristic action of stewardship.

Christian stewardship is about making choices, as individuals and in community, about how we will invest and manage the resources God has given us. Needless to say, God wants us to consider the needs of others as we use the resources he's provided. But, the first place that God wants us to practice biblical stewardship is not in the church – it is in our homes, and that is where Paul turns his attention in Ephesians 5:22ff. Let's look together at Ephesians 5:22-6:4.

²²Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. ²³For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. ²⁴Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.

²⁵Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her ²⁶to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, ²⁷and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. ²⁸In the same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. ²⁹After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church – ³⁰for we are members of his body. ³¹For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.” ³²This is a profound mystery – but I am talking about Christ and the church. ³³However, each one of you, also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.

^{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.”

⁴Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.

What, again, was the underlying motivation of submission? (I'm not speaking of the action of submitting to the authority of those in position over us, but to the heart motivation for our actions.) Wasn't it to put others and their welfare ahead of our own? Can you see the spirit of that in this entire passage we just read?

When Paul tells wives to “submit to your husband as to the Lord” and qualifies it by saying “as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands,” he is fleshing out the idea of submission. Wives are to put the welfare of their husbands – and, their family - ahead of their own. These acts of selflessness reflect back to the call to “be imitators of God” (Eph. 5:1), as that is how God has treated us. It is the guiding principal in life stewardship.

But, lest we take it out of context and label Paul a chauvinist who is trying to put women in a lesser position, we need to consider his instructions to husbands. Husbands are to respond to their wives the way Christ responded to His church. How was that? He gave his very life for Her! He continues to provide the Church all that she needs to be holy, blameless, and fulfilled. In other words, He submitted to Her by putting Her welfare first.

Likewise, a husband is to live in submission by putting the needs of his wife ahead of his own. When you read of the way Christ loves and cares for the Church and then consider that husbands are to love and care for their wives with the same attitude, it is a true picture of submission. So, as both the husband and wife do as Paul instructs here, they will be submitting to one another, and that will be examples of spiritual and relational stewardship.

But, this dynamic doesn't stop with the husband and wife. It is to be lived out throughout the entire family. So, Paul touches on it with children – “obey your parents in the Lord... Honor your father and mother...that it may go well with you and you may enjoy long life on the earth” (Eph. 6:1-3). In other words, kids, submit to your parents “out of reverence for Christ.” This doesn't mean that you just “obey” and “honor” them. It means that you actually consider their needs ahead of your own. “But isn't that *their* job – to put the needs of their kids first?” Yes, but as Christ-followers, we *all* are to consider the needs of each other first.

Imagine how this would transform the atmosphere of the home if everyone considered others first. Would there be tantrums – by either kids *or* parents – when someone didn't get their way? Would there be yelling matches with each individual trying to get their point of view heard above the other? Would anyone use the “silent treatment” to try and punish others when their feelings got hurt – because living like Christ doesn't prevent us from getting our hearts stepped on from time to time? If your family practiced “submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ” and lived the way Paul describes in Ephesians 5 and 6, your home would be a much safer, more peaceful, loving place to be.

At the center of this happening is the last family member Paul addresses in this passage. Look at Ephesians 6:4 – *Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.* Dads, as the God-ordained head of the household, you – above everyone else in the home – set the tone. How you treat mom, as we've already considered, will either be a testimony to the kids that *this* is truly a Christian home or that this is not always a safe place to be. How you treat your children should also demonstrate that you

have determined to live according to the word of God. And, Paul's words in verse four provide two key ways to show that you are putting your children's needs above your own. Treat them with respect and consistency that reflects the Lord living inside of you, and, raise them in a way that points them to Jesus every day.

How fathers raise their children has a huge impact not only on how children grow to see themselves, but also how they grow to see God. Whether we do it consciously or unconsciously, we all tend to compare God as our Heavenly Father with our fathers here on earth. So, the better we do as fathers to live out the Christian life before our children, the better chance that they will develop a healthy image of their Heavenly Father.

A life of submission – being a steward who considers the needs of others above our own – needs to be developed as we daily seek to work with God to change our way of living. Old habits are hard to break, but they can be broken. New habits can be developed as we determine in our hearts to change and submit to God's Holy Spirit. He will empower us to live more and more like Christ. But, before any change can happen, we need to develop our trust in God, the One who is calling for us to submit and change.

We have briefly discussed how fathers can help their children learn to trust God by modeling a godly life. However, some of you did not have a godly example in your father. In fact, if God is anything like your father, you probably don't want anything to do with him! But, to you I would say that you need a new vision of your Heavenly Father – a truer vision of Who God is. To do that, begin by asking Him to reveal Himself to you. He wants to do that anyway, and He will know the best way to do that – through His Word, through other people, through study and teaching. But, the starting point is in asking Him and that can be done in prayer.

In a moment, I will lead you in a prayer to ask God to help you get a better idea of who He is, but first, David King is going to come and share a song that describes one man's journey in getting a clearer picture of God. Let's listen and then we'll close in prayer.