

Introduction:

- A. Illus.: Years ago I was reading one of those “Best & Worst” lists that came out at the end of the year. One of them was, “Worst Alibi,” and it said, “*George Shamblin insisted to police that he was trying to save his wife from drowning when he threw rocks at her as she struggled in the Kanawha River. ‘I was trying to drive her back to shore,’ he said.*” [#1113] Does your marriage ever look like that? Your parenting? How about your relationships at work? Any chance you’re doing more harm than good?
- B. Illus.: This morning when I was getting my coffee at Einsteins, one of the guys started telling me about his former marriage and his current relationship. I said that was an interesting coincidence because I was going to be preaching about marriage. He said, “*So I suppose you’re going to talk about communication?*”
- You see, that’s the thing—that’s what people usually think is the secret to a good marriage. In fact, there are two strange things about what the Bible says on marriage: (1) it doesn’t say much, and (2) when it speaks, it focuses on one thing, and it *isn’t* communication. It is the same thing for parenting or even work relationships. “*Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.*” That is the expectation that is the cornerstone of marriage relationships, of parent-child relationships, and of employee-boss relationships. Depending on the particular role you have, the submission expected of you is nuanced by words like love, respect, obey and honor. But essentially, whether your role is the One Up or the One Down, whether you are the leader or the follower, this is the key expectation the Bible has of you. “*Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.*” Turn to **Eph. 5:21-6:9**. Today, we’re going to do an overview sermon of this whole section. Then over the next few weeks, we’ll look at each section more closely.
- C. Submission has gotten a bad name. It comes into our heads dragging doormats and sledgehammers; it has a loud voice and a deaf ear. It has a reputation for vandalizing gentle hearts and running roughshod over relationships. But Jesus Christ baptized this word in a basin of water and it is born again. Submission, coming from Christ, is a word that says, “*I once was lost, but now I’m found; was blind, but now I see!*” **I want to show you from this text what makes Christian submission so unique, powerful and good.**

Look at **Eph. 5:21**. It looks like a new paragraph, but actually we’re in the middle of a sentence that gets its start back up in **v.18**, where it says, “*Instead, be filled with the Spirit.*” That is followed by five *-ing* words: “*speaking to one another..., singing and making music in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God...* [and] *submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.*” Isn’t that interesting? So...

I. CHRISTIAN SUBMISSION HAPPENS NATURALLY WHEN WE ARE FULL OF GOD’S SPIRIT (5:18,21)

- A. Being full of God’s Spirit is the normal state of the Christian just as having your lungs full of air is the normal condition for your body. So long as there is nothing in the way, the Holy Spirit fills us. We can breathe deeply of the Holy Spirit when we do not harbor sin in our hearts, when we walk by faith, when we love Jesus.
- B. Did you notice the surprising company submission was keeping in this passage? When we’re filled with God’s Spirit, we exhale songs and thanksgiving *and submission*. Our spiritual lungs are tubercular, asthmatic, clogged and scarred with selfishness and fear and power struggles. But when we breathe in God’s Spirit he begins to heal all that and we start to exhale a glad submissiveness.
- C. Outside of our faith, submission is often the picked-on little brother in the power family, it is loser in life’s competition. Submission, in many families and work places, is the price of coming in second. But here is a submission, breathing deep of the Spirit of Almighty God, that actually elevates a person, ennobles a heart, and strengthens character and personality. Spirit-filled submission is a breath of fresh air.

In all these verses about submission there is a common theme. V.21, “submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.” V.22, “Wives, submit to your husbands **as to the Lord.**” V.25, “Husbands, love your wives **just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.**” 6:1, “Children, obey your parents **in the Lord.**” V. 4, “Fathers... bring [up your children] in the training and instruction **of the Lord.**” V.5, “Slaves, obey your earthly masters... **just as you would obey Christ.**” V.7, “Serve wholeheartedly, **as if you were serving the Lord.**” And v.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 second key to Christian submission:

II. CHRISTIAN SUBMISSION IS FOCUSED ON CHRIST

Illus.: Yesterday at Einsteins one of the ladies who works there came out from behind the counter, looked at me and said, “Good morning.” I was surprised, because she is very quiet, and I wasn’t even looking at her, but I said “Good morning,” back... Just as the person coming through the door said it. Turns out, she wasn’t talking to me. I’m sure she didn’t mind getting a two-fer out of one greeting but she was really talking to the person behind me.

Here’s a Christian wife trying to be submissive to her husband. She’s looking at him, but behind him and above him, she is really looking at Jesus. Here’s a Christian husband, trying to love his wife, but he’s really looking behind and above her to see Jesus. Same with a parents and children, workers and employers. I don’t mean to suggest that we don’t actually relate to the other person, but that we do so *as we would to Christ*. It’s a two-fer. Think what that does:

- A. Seeing Christ behind the other person elevates them. If we are doing this for Christ, *they* will get our purest submission, our best love, our most heart-felt obedience. They receive what we would give to Christ. That will honor and ennoble them. That makes our submission a gift of grace in disguise, something they don’t deserve and could never earn.
- B. Submitting for Christ’s sake shifts the burden of responsibility. The problem with submission, say, of a wife to a husband, is that the husband is *not* Jesus. He’s not as good or wise or selfless. That is what makes submission confusing. No one has much trouble submitting to someone who’s doing what we know is smart and good. But what if the person we’re submitting to is doing something foolish? Should we *enable* that kind of behavior?

Submission doesn’t mean we eliminate give-and-take from relationships; it doesn’t mean we enable destructive behavior, and it certainly doesn’t require us to do what is sinful. Actually, Christian submission brings a kind of peace, wisdom, and prayerful spirit to the way we interact with those over us. Christian submission takes the competition out, the power struggle, the fear, the one-upmanship, and tends to make relationships more open and productive. But even if your submission means doing something that makes no sense to you, it shifts the responsibility from your mate, or parent or boss, over to Jesus. “*Lord, I will follow his/her lead because I trust you to work through this. I’m doing this for you, so you be in charge of the outcome.*”

The point of submission is not that the person over us knows best. God knows that isn’t true, as surely as you do. But apparently, God values the benefits of submission over the benefits of always doing the most sensible thing. Submission, for Christ’s sake, produces qualities of trust, humility and love that are more valuable than anything we’d get from fighting back, from having our way—even if our way is right. Ultimately, God takes responsibility to work all things—even things that make no sense to us—together for good because we trust and love him.

- C. There’s one other thing: When our submission is focused on Christ we become like Christ. Through our service, our obedience, our humility he sculpts our hearts, chisels off the rough edges of pride, presses trust into our habits, and skills us in a high and holy love, till we begin to resemble him. **These are the hard places where Christians mature.**

So the unique things about Christian submission are (1) that it comes naturally from being filled with the Spirit, and (2) it is not focused on the person we submit to, but on Christ. One more key. In 5:1 Paul wrote, “*Be imitators of God... and live a life of love.*” When we go home or to work, **submission is what “a life of love” looks like.**

III. CHRISTIAN SUBMISSION SPRINGS FROM CHRISTLIKE LOVE

- A. Paul tells husbands to love their wives “*just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.*” That is submissive, self-sacrificing love. And since we are all to “*live a life of love*” the submission in all these relationships is to be infused with that same self-sacrificing love.
- B. There is a hidden potency in all this. Love wrapped in clean submission always changes relationships. It is catalytic. Take any relationship, no matter how tough or antagonistic, and bring to it humble, loving submission—a Christlike willingness to be hurt, to be taken advantage of—and I absolutely guarantee that the relationship will start to change. Peter told wives of unsaved and hardened husbands that they could win them over *without talk* just by displaying the purity and reverence of their lives. **Flannery O’Conner** has a character in one of her stories who says of Jesus, “*He thrown everything off balance.*” And Jesus did it by his grace-filled suffering submission.

So, are we good to go?! Everyone feeling sweetly and eagerly submissive? Wives? Husbands? Kids? Parents? Employees? Bosses? Everybody got your basin and towel? Listen...

IV. EVEN WITH ALL THESE HELPS, CHRISTIAN SUBMISSION IS HARD

The real challenge of Christian submission isn’t with the demands of the others in your family or workplace. **The real challenge is the stubborn resistance of our own hearts.** So remember what we’ve learned:

- A. When submission is hard, take a deep breath... of the Spirit of God. We clear our spiritual lungs by repenting of our pride and selfishness, by confessing how scarred and competitive and power-hungry we really are. And when we cough up all that yutz the Spirit of God’s Great Servant, Jesus, will fill our lungs and we will breath out submission as surely as we will our songs.
- B. See Jesus over the shoulder of the person you must submit to. Do this “*out of reverence for Christ,*” do this “*as to the Lord,*” do this “*in the Lord.*” If submissions means doing something that makes no sense to you, and you cannot lovingly work it out with the other person, then give Jesus responsibility for the whole business and submit, trusting it all to him.
- C. Ask Christ for the heart to love your spouse, your child or parent, your boss or employees as he does, because he always loves with the heart of a servant. Jesus’ love always serves willingly and humbly. Christian submission is unique, baptized and born again. It comes from a born again heart, and it has power coursing through it, when we “*Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.*”