



PERHAPS TWENTY-FIVE YEARS AGO, during a private, one-on-one Bible study, a friend and I were plowing through the epistle to the Ephesians. Though even then a believer for decades, having walked the aisle of the Baptist Temple at the tender age of seven, I was at the moment in the role of the one being discipled by a mentor. The church and I had been estranged for years, and during that period there had been instilled in me a fair amount of world-thought. Scripture was not a stranger, but it was an old friend with whom I had not corresponded for some time.

During my time away I had picked up and adopted as my own much of the world's philosophies. In the typical skew of the worldling, I would now interpret Scripture in the light of my temporal knowledge; I would compare the counsel of God to my inbred common sense, rather than compare my earthly wisdom to God's eternal. Within this myopic stricture, when conflict between the two arose, invariably the worldview won out. It was practical. It was sensible. It was right.

So, in our study of Ephesians, as we approached the twenty-second verse of chapter five, I felt my back tightening. There was clearly something wrong here. Surely the apostle Paul could not mean *this*:

Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. 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. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.

*Ephesians 5:22-24 NIV*

*Submit? Submission?* What about equal rights? What about *women's* rights? Who was *I* to assume a role of such dominance? My wife and I had a fifty-fifty relationship; she was bright, intelligent, strong, independent—and I liked that. I had no right to expect her to submit to me.

My concept of the word “submit” came straight from the clay. The image that sprang to mind upon reading the word was of a jack-booted thug pressing down on the neck of a cringing slave. “*You vil obey, or else!*” It was of a whimpering *haus frau*, barefoot and pregnant, performing all the menial tasks of the home for the steely eyed lord and master.

This, of course, is not at all what the passage means, for the subject of submission begins not with verse twenty-two, but with verse twenty-one.

Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.

*Ephesians 5:21 NIV*

## Complemented by Love

For the believer, true biblical submission to one another—wife to husband, child to parent, church to Christ—is a beautiful, even poetic concept because it is always complemented by love and committed devotion. If the child is to obey his parent, the parent is not to provoke the child, but to love him. If the wife is to be subject to the husband, the husband is to love the wife with a selfless, sacrificial love. If the church is to submit to Christ as her head, it is because He has already sacrificed Himself for her.

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her.

*Ephesians 5:25*

Our heart can grow cold to God when we forget the exquisite order He has established for life in His family. We first came to Him in an act of submission: we acknowledged our own spiritual bankruptcy and bowed before Him. We acknowledged that we were incapable of saving ourselves, that our salvation would come only through His superior plan: the atoning sacrifice of His Son, Jesus Christ.

But submission, like sanctification, is an ongoing process. We cannot file it away in a drawer after using it the once, and expect our communion with the Savior to remain in place. The believer's submission to Christ—like that within the human family—is a daily, practiced, eventually habitual attitude that results in a full flowering of the ideal man-to-God, God-to-man relationship.

## Consider Him

As with everything pertaining to our relationship with Jesus, our submission to Him begins at the cross.

Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

*Hebrews 12:2-3 NIV*

A believer cannot consider—honestly, earnestly—Jesus' very real and bloody sacrifice and not bow in reverent submission before Him. At the cross we are reminded of who He is, what He did for us, and what our position and attitude to Him should be as a result. In one sense, of course, at the cross we too were exalted. At the cross we were declared kin, co-heirs, ultimately co-rulers with Christ. The Christian is not a worm. He is not a pitiable slave cowering beneath the jack-booted oppression of a stern and merciless master, but a brother, a sister to the very Lord of creation.

Our submission to Christ is not at the end of a whip, but within the loving embrace of His arms.

*Sweet the moments, rich in blessing,  
Which before the Cross I spend;  
Life and health and peace possessing  
From the sinner's dying Friend.*

*Truly blessed is this station,  
Low before His Cross to lie;  
While I see divine compassion  
Beaming in His languid eye.*

*Love and grief my heart dividing,  
With my tears His feet I'll bathe;  
Constant still in faith abiding,  
Life deriving from His death.*

*For Thy sorrows we adore Thee—  
For the griefs that wrought our peace—  
Gracious Saviour! we implore Thee,  
In our hearts Thy love increase.*

*Walter Shirley, et al*

NEXT WEEK: *Confession*