

EPHESIANS WEEK #11 - SJGC
“Spirit-Filled Relationships”
 EPHESIANS 5:18-33

PATTI

Welcome to one of the most hotly debated passages in the New Testament.

AS WE HAVE NOTED in preceding studies, the Letter to the Ephesians takes a dramatic turn at chapter 4. Chapters 1–3 address Christian *doctrine*, whereas Chapters 4–6 are devoted to *Christian living* - how we practice our faith and live out our beliefs in community.

With regard to the latter, we heard the command last week in 5:18, **“Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit...”**

This phrase introduces a new section of the letter that pertains to **Spirit-filled Relationships**.

This is important, because, as sinful human beings it is simply not in our nature to be consistently loving,
 kind,
 gentle,
 patient,
 joyful,
 peaceful,
 good,
 faithful, and
 self-controlled.

These characteristics are called, in Galatians 5, the FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT, and they are clearly NOT our default mode as sinful human beings. Instead, we tend to display their opposites – things like...
 selfishness,
 pushiness,
 impatience,
 despair,

anxiety,
wickedness,
infidelity, and
indulgence.

Of course, these are some of the very things that cause trouble in relationships or end them altogether.

Do you see, then, why being filled with the Holy Spirit is so important?

JEFF

But how does this in-filling of the Spirit happen?
And how should we understand it?

If you've been baptized into Christ,
have been sealed with God's Holy Spirit;
You have God's Spirit living in you.
The real question is, "Are you being
controlled by the Spirit's power?"

I'm not talking about some strange, fanatical experience.
In the same breath that Paul commands us to be filled
with the Spirit, he says, "Don't become drunk with wine."

To be filled with wine is to be under the influence of alcohol.
But to be filled with the Spirit of God is to be
under the influence of God... that's all. So are you?
I suspect if we were honest, we would answer,
"Sometimes, yes – and sometimes, no".

As a believer, you have all of the Holy Spirit
that you're ever going to have.
The question is, "**Does the Holy Spirit have all of you?"**
We are filled with the Spirit when we
yield to God's desires, revealed to us in Scripture.

This filling of the Spirit has implications for how we...

1) speak to one another – v. 19 (in psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit...)

The implication is that we should be thankful not grumpy or complaining.
And the filling of the spirit causes us also to

2) submit to one another - v. 21.

Notice that this submission is MUTUAL.

Why? Because the whole of the Christian life is about submission. It's about submitting to Jesus and His will and His way.

500 years ago, Martin Luther gave this chapter the title "Haustafel" or "**House Table**" because it lists the responsibilities that Christians have to one another in three different types of household relationships:

1. wives and husbands (5:22-33),
2. children and parents (6:1-4),
3. slaves and masters (6:5-9)

That last one is archaic and blessedly not so relevant to us today, unless we apply it to relationships between employees and employers. We'll get into that next week, along with child/parent dynamics. But for today, let's take a closer look at submission in marriage.

PATTI

First, we should note that Paul assumes, as does the book of Genesis, that marriage is between a man and a woman, which is radical enough in a time when our children are being taught that they can choose their own gender, which is fluid and not fixed or God-given. But that's another topic for another day.

Secondly, as NALC Lutherans, we believe that Scripture holds an **egalitarian** rather than a **complementarian** view of gender. That basically means that men and women are EQUAL in terms of AUTHORITY and RESPONSIBILITY, and that therefore women may serve as pastors (thankfully and obviously).

But we still have to deal with the text. And even the idea of submission is explosive in today's western culture.

This is the age of liberation, after all.
 And to many modern ears, the word submission sounds like **oppression, subjugation, or dominance**.

So maybe in order to understand what submission IS, we need to first understand what it IS NOT.
 A wife's submission to her husband "**in everything**" can't *mean slavish obedience* or silence.
 It means everything consistent with Christ and his character.

Sadly, submission has become a suspect word in our day, partly because the truths of this text have been perverted and abused by sinful men. God's holy Word in the hands of a religious fool can do immense harm.

We've witnessed this in **insecure men**, whose wives don't dare go to the grocery store without permission, and in men who even tell their wives what to think and how to dress

JEFF

But the fact that evil men have perverted God's Word is no reason to throw it out.

So let's put these verses in context:
 Christianity cut against the grain of first-century Greco-Roman culture, a culture obsessed with **power, status, and privilege**, a culture organized along **relentlessly hierarchical principles** (as if that ancient world is so different from ours).

In Paul's day, people didn't know that equality was something they should be in favor of, or strive for, and they also didn't believe that arrogance was a bad thing. They did, in fact, believe that some people were better than others.

And Paul is saying, "No, that's not how it is among us.

The ground is level at the foot of the cross.”
 Given that power-hungry nature of his culture,
 it may be that Paul felt the need to clarify
 that wives should submit to
 THEIR OWN individual husbands...
 rather than, perhaps, submitting
 to other people’s husbands -

Although, by the time the husbands have gotten done
 loving the wives as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her,
submission might look like the easier job description.

In all of this, it seems to us, there is a mutuality.
 Yes, the husband is the head of the household
 just as Christ is the head of the church.

But look at the verbs in v. 25-27, which husbands are to emulate.
 Christ **loved**, and literally **handed himself over** for the church;
 the goal was to **make the church holy**.

With regard to that last one, which I would call **“sanctifying love”**
 let’s not misunderstand Paul’s intention or a husbands’ limitations.
 Jesus alone has the power to make a person holy.
 And he enacts this cleansing in us by WATER and the WORD.
 By baptism and the gospel.

So what application does this have for husbands?
 While a husband can never atone for his wife’s sins,
 he can absolutely love her in a way that helps her
 grow as a disciple of Jesus!

PATTI

Right. In fact, the question Paul may be prompting husbands to ask here is...
**“Is my wife more like Christ BECAUSE she’s married to me?
 Or is my wife like Christ IN SPITE of me?”**
 How am I doing at building her up in the faith?

V. 28 says that husbands **“ought to”** love their wives.
 The Greek here indicates that husbands literally **owe it to their wives** -

to love them “**as their own bodies**”.

The way Christ loves the church as his own body.

Greek mythology tells of a beautiful youth who loved no one until one day he saw his own reflection in the water and fell in love with that reflection. He was so lovesick that he finally wasted away and died and was turned into the flower that bears his name—*Narcissus*.

We are repulsed by narcissism and carefully seek to avoid it.

But here the Scriptures actually call us to **self-love**:

This valid self-love also demands communication.

I communicate with myself all the time.

I even talk to myself when I’m preaching!

And if husbands love their wives as themselves,
they will work at communication.

We will be “speaking the truth in love,”
as we saw a few weeks ago.

Proverbs 24:26 says, “Whoever gives an honest answer kisses the lips.”
An honest answer is an act of love.

When you lovingly communicate in truth,
you join an elite group of people in the western world,
because only a small percentage of the population ever experience this—
and its purifying effect on their souls.

And then there’s this:

What if the image of the husband being the head of the wife
or the man being the head of the woman is there
to remind us that a head separated from a body
is dead and lifeless?

They need to be connected and working together
in order to grow and be vital. And now we’re back
to Chapter 4, where Paul talks about **maintaining the
unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, and
growing up in every way into Christ, who is our head, and
being a body that builds itself up in love.**

JEFF

Surely when Paul says, wives submit to your husbands, he does NOT mean that a married woman must continue to treat her abusive husband as her personal lord, so that if he tells her to go stand outside in the snow barefoot until he gives her permission to come in, she has to do that, because the Bible, which is to say, God, says so.

It would be nice to imagine that no allegedly Christian HUSBAND would ever do anything like that in real life.

It would also be nice to imagine that no allegedly Christian PASTOR would ever tell a married woman in that situation that she will have to do whatever her husband says, and endure the ensuing humiliation and danger because of what the Bible says, and because that's what she has to do to please God and be saved and go to heaven when she dies... Which might happen sooner rather than later if that's the kind of husband she has.

The sad truth is that both of us have counseled women whose pastors, acting as misguided shepherds, told them exactly that.

But what about other, possibly more typical, situations in which "submission" might practically and legitimately come into play?

Is it "submission," for instance, when after 30 or so years of married life, you have learned not to try to tell the driver of the family car which route to take, even though you yourself hate taking the one the driver always takes and would never do it if you were driving the car yourself?

But you just go with it, without making a comment and without saying "I told you so" when that annoying thing happens the way it always happens on this route?

Or is that just, you know ... **keeping the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace?**

PATTI

There is nothing degrading or dehumanizing about the *ordered equality* ¹of these domestic instructions. Rather, they're the key to marital elevation and upbuilding.

Finally, v. 33 says, **"However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband."**

Ironically, in survey after survey, this desire is reflected in survey after survey in 2020 America. Women want to be loved, and men want to be respected.

Finally, a true story to illustrate how this works practically in the real world...

Dr. Wayne Grudem, a world renown bible scholar, served on the staff of Trinity University in Chicago for 20 years with colleagues like D.A. Carson and Douglas Moo. They were the "Seal Team Six" of Christian Theology Professors.

Grudem's wife suffered from fibromyalgia, a disease that causes pain to multiple muscle groups, and for which there is no known cure. Increasingly, she had a difficult time walking upstairs and doing household work.

They had prayed and tried everything, but there was no relief. Her pain was aggravated by cold weather and humidity, so Chicago was not the ideal place for them to live.

Some friends invited the Grudems to Mesa, Arizona for vacation, and they learned that the warm, dry climate was helping her. They even took some day trips and rode bikes together for the first time in 12 years.

Dr. Grudem told Margaret, "I want to move us here to Arizona, but there are no seminaries here." A few days later they were flipping through the Yellow Pages and found Phoenix Seminary. Dr. Grudem reached out to see if there were any open positions

and within a few weeks they offered him a position.

After much prayer, he began pondering this very chapter of Ephesians, particularly the part about loving his wife as he would his own body. He thought, "If I were suffering like Margaret, wouldn't I want to move for the sake of my health? The obvious answer was "yes."

But Margaret DIDN'T want to move because she knew her husband had an influential role at a large, internationally respected institution. So there they were. He wanted to leave for her sake; she wanted to stay for his sake.

Finally, Phoenix told him they would give him a reduced teaching load, with more time to write. Margaret thought this was a great incentive, so she said, "Wayne, I'm going to trust you to make this decision." In the end she followed the loving leadership of her husband, who made a great sacrifice in order to care for his beloved (Grudem, "Upon Leaving").

What a witness! What a testimony!

God ordained marriage.

Christ Jesus set the pattern for marriage.

The Holy Spirit empowers marriage.

JEFF

The good news of the gospel is that Jesus died for those who could not keep God's commands perfectly.

But the Spirit daily renews and empowers us as we look to Christ for grace and mercy.

This passage should cause us always to rejoice that Christ is our heavenly Groom and we, His Bride.

PRAYER:

Come, Holy Spirit and fill the hearts of your faithful people. In these challenging times when so many are working from home, home schooling, and caring for aging parents; in these challenging times when some of us are never apart from the people we love most, we yield to You. Would you be the master of our emotions and our thoughts, so that we can more accurately reflect Christ and walk in a manner that is worthy of Him. In Jesus' name we pray... AMEN.