

MUTUAL SUBMISSION

Ephesians 5.21: In order to adorn the Gospel, we need to submit one to another

Theme: Esteem others better than yourself

- In spite of your natural (carnal) inclination to do the opposite, strive to esteem others better than yourself.
- Know this: If you are a born-again Christian, the Spirit will drill you over and over and over again until you learn this principle.
 - ✓ And He will use your personal relationships with others to do that.

Ephesians 5.21: This verse serves as a bridge from the *filling* (v18) we saw before and the instructions about key *relationships* that follow (Eph 5.22-6.9).

- The filling (control) of the Spirit (v18) will lead to "speaking" (v19), "giving thanks" (v20), and "submitting" (v21ff).
- The filling of the Spirit will result in *mutual submission* among the brethren (and the submission of Christian to others in key relationships): "...submitting yourselves *one to another*..."

As we work through next several passages, remember this: Submission goes far beyond obedience.

1. *Obedience* deals with our actions: Doing what we are told.
2. *Submission* deals with our attitude: Desiring to do what is expected.

I. (v21a cf v18) The Fruit of the Filling: Mutual Submission

A. The Principle of Mutual Submission

1. God desires for us, in our relationships with one another, to submit ourselves to everyone else.
 - a) This refers to a relationship of love and respect, seeking the biblical well-being of others over our personal well-being (over our personal comfort).
 - b) We've seen this concept before in Ephesians 4.1-2: For the sake of the Mission (our new vocation/work Christ), we need to forebear one another in love.
 - c) (Php 2.19-22) That means we are to set aside our own desires in order to serve others (to meet their needs) in the Gospel.
2. (Php 2.1-4) God's Expectation: God expects that each and every one of us esteem others better than ourselves so that we "look on" the things of others—we pay attention to their needs and serve them for their well-being in Christ.

B. The Problem: Mutual Submission is Not Natural

1. (Php 2.1-4) Paul's exhortation to mutual submission was to address a problem that existed in the church (and that exists in our church, and in every church).
 - a) (Php 2.3a) People were bickering (strife) with one another and not getting the job done.
 - b) (Php 2.3b) People were thinking only of themselves (vainglory), rather than of others.
2. (Php 4.1-3) The saints, who should have been laboring together, were not of the same mind:
 - a) The saints could not get along enough to labor together in the Mission God gave them!
 - b) Observe: Both Euodias and Syntyche had labored before with Paul in the Gospel. They were devout and dedicated Christians that worked alongside Paul in evangelism and edification.

- c) Problem:
- (1) Their problem (the problem between these two good, Christian ladies) was *not* doctrinal, *nor* was the problem ministerial (with what to do in the ministry: they both labored in the Gospel).
 - Paul does not point out any doctrinal or ministerial problem with these two.
 - (2) Paul rather points to their "mind": Be of the same mind (he says to these two women)!
 - (a) (Php 2.2-4) They were *not* "likeminded"—they could not get along with one another because of *personality conflicts*. Each did not esteem the other better than herself.
 - (b) Rather, each esteemed herself (her opinion, her perspective) better than the other.
3. There is strife and vainglory in our church, also.
- a) The majority of the problems that have come up between us ("us" means husbands/wives, parents/children, pastor/congregants, or just the brethren) have *not* been about *doctrine* or the work of the *ministry* to accomplish the Mission.
 - b) Most of the problems we have had address (that have hindered the work) have been about:
 - (1) *Personal opinions* (one person doesn't agree with the choices another makes in areas of liberty, etc.),
 - (2) *Perspectives* (how one person thinks the ministry should look when the Bible gives freedom to develop as the church sees fit), or
 - (3) *Personalities* (one person just doesn't like how the other person *is*).
 - c) And so, this brings us to an important clarification about mutual submission...
4. Mutual submission goes against our *nature* and against the *spirit of our age*.
- a) By nature (in our old man, our flesh) we are independent, rebellious, self-centered, selfish, proud, and defiant.
 - (1) We don't want to obey... we don't want to submit...
 - (2) And, we think our way is the right way and every other way is not (pride).
 - b) Also: (Rev 3.14) The spirit of our age is the spirit/attitude of Laodicea... My way!
 - (1) *Laodicea* is a compound word that means *rights* (*dicea*) of the *people* (*laos*).
 - (2) The Laodicean (the spirit of our age) says: Church should suit *me*. You have offended *me* (*my* rights). You should be like *I* want you to be and you should treat me how *I* think *I* should be treated. The ministries of the church should look how *I* want them to look. And... if things don't go *my* way, then I'm going to leave to find a "better" church.
 - (3) We need to understand that there are two types of Laodiceans:
 - (a) There are the typical Laodiceans who are apathetic and indifferent to God and His work, ministry, and mission (they are the "lukewarm," neither hot nor cold).
 - (b) But there are also the self-centered nit-pickers and gnat strainers that *have* to have *everything* *their* way... ("rights of the people").
 - i) These are those who refuse to submit one to another, for the sake of the Gospel.
 - ii) These are those who esteem themselves (their opinions, standards, perspectives) better than others—they seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ's.
 - (c) We need to be mindful of *both* because *both* make up the "spirit of our age" (the general attitude in Christendom that influences us constantly).

- c) Therefore, be aware of the opposite of mutual submission (because seeing the contrast usually helps to understand the concept).
 - (1) Mutual submission: (Php 2.4; 19-22) Esteeming others better than yourself and seeking to serve them for their well-being in the Gospel of Jesus Christ.
 - (2) The opposite of mutual submission: (Php 3.3; 4.2-3) Bickering, murmuring, nit-picking, and gnat-straining because things don't go your way or because others aren't the way you think they should be.
 - (a) The opposite is the Laodicean "me-first, me-church" attitude.
 - (b) Instead of you in submission to others for their well-being...
 - (c) You want them to change so they don't irritate you—so that they submit to what you want them to be like.
5. (Rom 12.10) God's Expectation: God has called all of us to mutual submission—to prefer others before ourselves for their well-being in the Gospel.
- a) So, as we work through the next section of Ephesians (on our personal relationships, especially marriage, parenting, and the workplace), be ready for an emotional reaction.
 - b) We do not naturally submit one to another, and the spirit of our age is just the opposite!

C. The Practice: Mutual submission is serving others for their well-being in the Gospel.

1. The concept of mutual submission does not mean that the leader in a relationship (or the more mature) ceases to be leader.
 - a) Mutual submission requires that we re-think the role of a leader, and how we help others who are under us (or others who need to follow us as more mature believers in Christ), to grow.
 - b) Example: (5.22 or 6.1) Mutual submission between husband and wife does not mean the husband ceases to be the head of the family or that the parents do everything the child wants.
2. Our mutual submission (Php 2.1-4) should Christ-like (Php 2.5-8): **Luke 22.24-27**.
 - a) (v24) This is how we are by nature: We want to be "greatest" (I'm in charge here!).
 - b) (v25) But God's "leadership model" is not like that of natural men! We do not lord over others.
 - c) (v26) God's leadership model is one of mutual submission—esteeming others better than yourself in order to serve them (meet their needs; give them what they need) in order that they might fulfill God's plan and purpose.
 - d) (v27) That's what Jesus did! He humbled Himself to serve us (He esteemed us and our need greater than His glory and His rights) in order to meet our greatest need: salvation.
3. Each of us needs to choose to...
 - a) Make ourselves of no reputation... take upon ourselves the form of a servant...
 - b) Humble ourselves before God... submit (attitude!) and obey Him...
 - c) Seek the the good and the well-being of others or our opinions, perspectives and personalities...
 - d) Esteem others better than ourselves...
 - e) (Php 2.5) Let this mind (the mind of Christ!) be in you! Not the mind of the old man.
4. How do we develop such a mind? How do we learn to live in such stark opposition to our old nature and the spirit of this age?
 - a) (Eph 5.18) First: Remember that mutual submission is a fruit of the filling of the Spirit.
 - When He controls our lives (attitudes, actions, decisions), through our submission to the Scripture, then we will find ourselves more interested in others than in ourselves.
 - b) (Eph 5.21b) Second: Fear of God will motivate us, if we choose to allow it to do so.

II. (v21b) The Fear and the Filling: Motivation for Submission

A. Fear is healthy, and fear of God is the healthiest fear there is.

1. Fear will warn you of dangers. Fear will keep you out of harms way. Fear is a good deterrent to bad behavior, and a good motivator to good behavior.
 - a) We fear walking alone at night in the "bad parts of town" and that keeps us from harms way.
 - b) Children fear the pain of the "rod of correction" when the rebel against their parents, and that deters bad behavior and motivates good behavior.
2. (Heb 12.5-11) Fear of God will motivate us to right behavior: Mutual submission in the Mission.
 - a) Every child of God will receive God's discipline in order to help him grow (we don't have to fear the damnation of hell, but it is right and good and sane to fear God's correction: it hurts!).
 - b) With regard to mutual submission (esteem others better than ourselves in order to serve them in the Gospel—lead them to salvation, help them to grow in sanctification), God will teach us!
 - c) Remember God's plan, purpose, and predestination in us:
 - (1) (Rom 8.29) God has predestinated all those in Christ to be conformed to His image.
 - (a) (Php 2.7-8) Jesus Christ because servant to all, willingly obedient even unto the death of the cross, so that we might be saved and sanctified.
 - (b) (2Cor 8.9) Christ made Himself poor (low) so that we might be made rich in Him (not money and things, but rather salvation and an inheritance with Him in eternity).
 - (c) (Mark 10.45) Jesus Christ came to serve—He came to minister to others for their salvation and sanctification. He did not come to be served.
 - (2) Firstly: When we are filled with the Spirit, we will live according to God's plan, we will manifest Christ-likness... and that include mutual submission (one to another, Mission).
 - (3) Secondly: When we refuse to do this... we are in rebellion and God will chastise us.
 - d) And because submission (for the well-being—salvation and sanctification—of others) is such a major part of God's work in us (because it is such a part of Jesus Christ), the Holy Spirit will drill us constantly and continually until we learn it and live it out in our daily lives.
3. Understand this (and allow it to cultivate a healthy fear of God and His "rod of correction"): The Holy Spirit will drill us in mutual submission until it becomes a part of us (habit, characteristic).
 - a) **Drill:** [def] Strict, methodical, repetitive training designed to build new habits into our natural reactions.
 - (1) Example: Military. They drill you in weapons handling and hand-to-hand so that when a fire fight erupts you react immediately how you have been trained to react.
 - (2) Example: Music. They drill you in rudiments, scales, chords, finger placement... so that when you move on to more complicated combinations, the basics are "natural" to you.
 - b) The Spirit of God will relentlessly drill us until we learn this principal: Mutual Submission.
 - (1) And He will use our personal relationships to do that...
 - (a) (Eph 5.22-23) The best training ground for mutual submission drills is marriage.
 - (b) (Eph 6.1-4) But another very good training ground is family (parents and children).
 - (c) (Eph 6.5-9) And a third "practice area" the Spirit will use to mold us is the workplace.
 - (d) One thing you can be assured of: God will use our personal relationship one with another to drill us in mutual submission because this is the mind of Christ.
 - (2) And when we refuse to respond to God's "training" in this area, we can expect His discipline. And that should cause us to fear... and therefore submit and learn!

B. Fear of God is a choice: You will choose to learn to fear God (or not), and you will choose to allow that fear to motivate you to right attitudes and actions (or you will not).

1. (Prov 1.29) You choose to fear God or not.
2. (Prov 2.1-5) You choose to fear God when you choose learn, understand, and apply His Word.
3. (Deut 17.18-19) You choose to fear God—you learn to fear God—by drawing close to God in a relationship of submission and obedience based on knowledge and application of His Word.

Conclusion:

Ephesians 5.22ff: In our next message, Lord willing, we are going to focus on the first key relationship God uses to drill us in mutual submission: Marriage.

Ephesians 5.21: However, we would miss the overall context of Paul's instruction if we overlook the principle of *mutual submission* in the first verse.

- If we hope to survive as a church... If we hope to serve God together... If we hope to fulfill the Mission...
- We need the mind of Christ—to esteem others better than ourselves and serve them in the Gospel!
 - ✓ In spite of our natural (carnal) inclination to do the opposite...
 - ✓ In spite of the spirit of the age that constantly influences us to think about "my rights"...
 - ✓ We need to strive to esteem others better than ourselves for God's glory and the good of others.
- The Spirit will drill us over and over and over again until we learn this principle.
 - ✓ And He will use (principally) our personal relationships with others to do that.
 - ✓ To respond well to that training, we need to cultivate a healthy fear of God through learning, understanding, and intentional application of Scripture (knowing He'll chastise us if we don't).