

THE RELATIONSHIP OF EPHESIANS 5:21 TO EPHESIANS 5:22-6:9
Iowa District East Fall Pastors' Conference
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Ephesians 5:21

“Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.” (NIV)

“and be subject to one another in the fear of Christ.” (NASB)

Ephesians 4

- walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. (4:1-3) NASB)
- So this I say, and affirm together with the Lord, that you walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walk, in the futility of their mind, being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart; and they, having become callous, have given themselves over to sensuality for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness. (4:17-19) NASB
- Therefore, laying aside falsehood, speak truth each one of you with his neighbor, for we are members of one another. (4:25) NASB
- Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you. (4:32) NASB

Ephesians 5

- Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise, (v. 15) NASB
- So then do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit, (vv. 17-18) NASB
- speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord; (V. 19) NASB

Specific relationships that are mentioned in Ephesians 5:22 - 6:9.

Those relationships are:

1. Wives to Husbands / Husbands to Wives
2. Children to Parents
3. Fathers to Children
4. Slaves to Masters
5. Masters to Slaves

The word "dominion" is used in this study to mean "rule or power to rule," without any negative connotations. It is only because of the corruption of sin that dominion is commonly abused and is often linked with oppression. Because of this linkage in common usage, a good argument can be made to avoid using the word altogether lest it cause offense. For those who wish to speak as Scripture speaks, however, an alternative solution is preferable. Since Scripture uses the word "dominion" without negative connotations in this passage and elsewhere, the church has an obligation to teach such a sense to its members, and to reclaim its Scriptural usage. It is shameful for the church to avoid teaching the correct understanding of Scriptural words for fear of causing offense. A greater offense is to be negligent in teaching what Scripture says, which could lead uninstructed Christians to become offended by the words of Scripture itself when they finally read it for themselves.

Man as Male and Female: Created in the Image of God
Nathan Jastram CTQ Volume 68:1 January 2004
(p. 24)

The Greek text of Ephesians 5:21 is this:

ὑποτασσόμενοι ἀλλήλοις ἐν φόβῳ Χριστοῦ.

It is translated in the following ways by the most common translations.

- NIV Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.
- ESV submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.
- NASB and be subject to one another in the fear of Christ.
- NKJV submitting to one another in the fear of God.
- NRSV Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ.

The New Testament describes the early Church as a communal society, which repudiated some common social distinctions in an attempt to promote unity. Therefore it is not surprising that the exhortation "Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ" (Eph. 5:21), is often misunderstood as a call to a peculiar virtue of "mutual subjection" or "mutual submission." It is not clear how such a virtue would operate in society; solutions that reinterpret "be subject" as if it meant "love," "serve," or "honor" have, in effect, rewritten the passage to eliminate the difficulty, and those that suggest that the mutuality of subjection comes from taking turns obeying each other have difficulty with the examples of subjection or obedience that follow this verse (wives to husbands, children to parents, and slaves to masters).

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In a book review for the periodical Logia of a book entitled, *As Christ Submits to the Church: a Biblical Understanding of Leadership and Mutual Submission*. By Alan G. Padgett, Dr. John Nordling provides an insight into how one can understand Paul's phrase ὑποτασσόμενοι ἀλλήλοις. Nordling points out "in the NT ὑποτάσσω ("to submit") regularly describes the submission of someone in an ordered arrangement to another who is above the first—that is, in authority over that person." . . . Therefore, ὑποτάσσω does not describe "symmetrical" relationships at all, but rather ordered relationships wherein some persons are "over" and others "under."

Blogia – The Blog of Logia
A Journal of Lutheran Theology
Book Review - January 5, 2012

Nordling's examples:

Luke 2:51 – Jesus being submissive to Mary and Joseph.

⁵¹ καὶ κατέβη μετ' αὐτῶν καὶ ἦλθεν εἰς Ναζαρέθ, καὶ ἦν ὑποτασσόμενος αὐτοῖς. καὶ ἡ μήτηρ αὐτοῦ διετήρει πάντα τὰ ῥήματα ταῦτα ἐν τῇ καρδίᾳ αὐτῆς.

⁵¹ And he went down with them and came to Nazareth and was submissive to them. And his mother treasured up all these things in her heart. (ESV)

Luke 10:17 – demons submit to the 72 Disciples

¹⁷ Ὑπέστρεψαν δὲ οἱ ἑβδομήκοντα δύο μετὰ χαρᾶς λέγοντες· Κύριε, καὶ τὰ δαιμόνια ὑποτάσσεται ἡμῖν ἐν τῷ ὀνόματί σου.

¹⁷ **The seventy-two returned with joy and said, “Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name.” (NIV)**

Romans 13:1 – Being subject to governing authorities

Πᾶσα ψυχὴ ἐξουσίαις ὑπερεχούσαις ὑποτασσέσθω, οὐ γὰρ ἔστιν ἐξουσία εἰ μὴ ὑπὸ θεοῦ, αἱ δὲ οὗσαι ὑπὸ θεοῦ τεταγμέναι εἰσὶν.

Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. (NIV)

I Corinthians 15:27 – Everything has been made subject to Christ

²⁷ πάντα γὰρ ὑπέταξεν ὑπὸ τοὺς πόδας αὐτοῦ. ὅταν δὲ εἴπῃ ὅτι πάντα ὑποτέτακται, δῆλον ὅτι ἐκτὸς τοῦ ὑποτάξαντος αὐτῷ τὰ πάντα.

For “God has put all things in subjection under his feet.” But when it says, “all things are put in subjection,” it is plain that he is excepted who put all things in subjection under him. (ESV)

1 Peter 3:22 – Angels, authorities, and powers in submission to Christ

²² ὃς ἔστιν ἐν δεξιᾷ θεοῦ πορευθεὶς εἰς οὐρανὸν ὑποταγέντων αὐτῷ ἀγγέλων καὶ ἐξουσιῶν καὶ δυνάμεων.

who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to him. (NIV)

2 Examples of how the pronoun ἀλλήλοις is used differently in the New Testament.

Galatians 6:2

ἀλλήλων τὰ βάρη βαστάζετε, καὶ οὕτως ἀναπληρώσετε τὸν νόμον τοῦ Χριστοῦ.

“Bear one another’s burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ.” (NASB)

Romans 12:5

οὕτως οἱ πολλοὶ ἐν σώμα ἕσμεν ἐν Χριστῷ, τὸ δὲ καθ' εἷς ἀλλήλων μέλη.
“so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.”
(NASB)

Ephesians 5:22

Αἱ γυναῖκες τοῖς ἰδίοις ἀνδράσιν ὡς τῷ κυρίῳ,

Ephesians 5:24

ἀλλὰ ὡς ἡ ἐκκλησία ὑποτάσσεται τῷ Χριστῷ, οὕτως καὶ αἱ γυναῖκες τοῖς ἀνδράσιν ἐν παντί.

- **But as the church is subject to Christ, so also the wives ought to be to their husbands in everything. (NASB)**
- **Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything. (NIV)**
- **Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands. (ESV)**

Lenski comments, “The verb is the middle voice: the church subjects herself voluntarily, joyfully. This is her normal and natural relation to Christ, which could not be otherwise. Just so is the relation of the wives to their husbands.”

Lenski further adds that the verb to be supplied is either an indicative (*subject themselves*) or an imperative (*let them subject themselves*) but that the passive (*is subjected*) is out of place. This would make the subjection of a wife to her husband a case of compulsion.

R.C.H. Lenski
Commentary on Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians
p. 627, 628

Discussion Questions:

1. Marriage is a picture of Christ and the Church. Why will there be no marriage in the new creation?
2. How can you minister to both men and women with Paul’s picture of the Gospel in marriage (and other human relationships where God establishes order) when divorce, abuse, and homosexuality rob this gift of its glory?