

This is a Great Mystery

A Study of Ephesians

Week 24 – Ephesians 5:21 - 5:27

Prayer – Lord Jesus, as we get into a section of Scripture that has caused some confusion and hurt, we ask you to shine your light in our hearts today so that we would see you in these verses. Bless husbands and wives, whether young or old, here or abroad, so that they would glorify you in their love for each other. In your holy name we pray. Amen.

Introduction – Before we launch into this next exciting section of God’s Word, what lingering questions do you have from verses 14-20?

While Pastor Plagenz preached on this section for worship two weeks ago, there’s no way a 15 to 20-minute sermon can give a full treatment of the doctrine of the roles of men and women, especially as it pertains to marriage. Neither am I going to claim that an hour (or two or three) of discussion today and over the next few weeks will automatically and fully answer your questions about this doctrine that is difficult to apply from generation to generation. But, I still want you to ask any questions you have so that, God willing, we might learn from them and grow in our faith and understanding together. With that, are you ready to dig in?

Verse 21 – ὑποτασσόμενοι ἀλλήλοις ἐν φόβῳ Χριστοῦ,

[Submit] to one another in fear of Christ;

1. This is more of a linguistic thing than a doctrinal thing to start; but the first word is not really an imperative, as we often see it in translation. Instead, it’s a participle which, in Greek, builds off of a main verb. So, what’s the main verb? It’s all the way back in verse 18—“be filled with the Holy Spirit.” In the EHV, you get a nice way to see how each of the following verbs build off of that as verses 19, 20, and 21 start with “by.” You want to be filled with the Spirit? Here are some ways to do that.
 - a. At the same time, it is not wrong to translate this word as an imperative. For one, participles are insanely flexible. They can kind of become whatever fits the context (within reason, of course). Another reason that might be done is that it breaks up the otherwise long sentence from 18 to 20. However, remember that the punctuation is not inspired. So, even though there is a period at the end of verse 20, many translations have taken that period to be misplaced, adding verse 21 as a continuation of verse 20.
 - b. That’s a tough thing to explain so I apologize if that is unclear.
 - c. We will hold off on the meaning of the word “submit” until the next verse.
2. ἐν φόβῳ Χριστοῦ (in fear of Christ) – If I were in Greek 101, this is how I would translate this phrase, as odd as it sounds. What would be the wrong way(s) to interpret this phrase?
 - a. What is the correct way to interpret it? *Hint: many translations help out with this, as do other parts of the Bible that talk about “fearing God.”*

Verses 22-24 – Αἱ γυναῖκες τοῖς ἰδίοις ἀνδράσιν ὡς τῷ κυρίῳ, ²³ ὅτι ἀνὴρ ἔστιν κεφαλὴ τῆς γυναικὸς ὡς καὶ ὁ Χριστὸς κεφαλὴ τῆς ἐκκλησίας, αὐτὸς σωτὴρ τοῦ σώματος · ²⁴ ἀλλὰ ὡς ἡ ἐκκλησία ὑποτάσσεται τῷ Χριστῷ, οὕτως καὶ αἱ γυναῖκες τοῖς ἀνδράσιν ἐν παντί.

Full disclosure: I translated these verses literally. That's why there are some places where it will sound like English is my second language. The Lord had a reason for leaving some articles out and including others; and the Ephesians would've had no problem understanding Paul's message, at least from a linguistic point of view.

The wives [are to submit] to their own husbands, as to the Lord ²³ for husband is head of the wife as also Christ is head of Church. He is Savior of the body. ²⁴ But as the Church submits to Christ, thus also the wives [are to submit] to their husbands in everything.

3. This is only speaking about husbands and wives; if you want to talk about the overarching doctrine of the roles of men and women, that will have to be for another class. If you want to look at it more in-depth, these sections would be helpful: 1 Corinthians 11:3-12 and 1 Timothy 2:8-15.
4. Submit – The word itself can be broken down to “sub-” and “-mission,” which helps us better define it.
 - a. “Sub-” means what, typically?
 - b. “-mission” implies what?
 - c. What mission did God have, under which Jesus put himself? Read **1 Timothy 2:3-4**.
 - d. What mission does Jesus have, under which the Church puts herself? Read **Matthew 28:19-20**.
 - e. What mission does a husband have, under which the wife puts herself? Read **Ephesians 5:25**.
 - i. In what way does that help a wife carry out the overarching principle of Ephesians 5 – “Imitate God”?
 - ii. What is the driving force behind this submission? Read **Ephesians 5:21**.
5. What's different between earthly husbands and Christ, which makes submission more difficult?
6. “In everything” – In what ways could (sadly, do) husbands abuse these words?
 - a. This phrase doesn't imply blind “obedience.” Still, what godly reminder does it give women?

What comments and questions do you have?

Verses 25-27 – Οἱ ἄνδρες, ἀγαπάτε τὰς γυναῖκας, καθὼς καὶ ὁ Χριστὸς ἠγάπησεν τὴν ἐκκλησίαν καὶ ἑαυτὸν παρέδωκεν ὑπὲρ αὐτῆς, ²⁶ ἵνα αὐτὴν ἀγιάσῃ καθαρίσας τῷ λουτρῷ τοῦ ὕδατος ἐν ῥήματι, ²⁷ ἵνα παραστήσῃ αὐτὸς ἑαυτῷ ἔνδοξον τὴν ἐκκλησίαν, μὴ ἔχουσαν σπίλον ἢ ῥυτίδα ἢ τι τῶν τοιούτων, ἀλλ’ ἵνα ᾖ ἁγία καὶ ἄμωμος.

The husbands, love the wives, just as also Christ loved the Church and handed himself over for her ²⁶ so that he would make her holy by cleansing her with the washing of the water in the Word, ²⁷ so that he would present her to himself as a glorious Church, not having a stain or wrinkle or any such thing, but so that she would be holy and blameless.

7. We looked at “submit;” let’s look at “love.” What words do we use to describe love, especially *agape* love?
 - a. Obviously, the prime example of this love is Christ. He “handed himself over” to die for his bride. While a husband would say he would die for his wife, what is a more practical, everyday approach to loving his wife as Christ loves his Church?
 - b. What excuses that might be given by both husband and wife as they look at this command?
8. After verse 25, the spotlight is solely on Christ and what he has done and continues to do for his Bride. I think we’re all aware that husbands have no part in making their wives holy, etc.
 - a. “Cleansing her with the washing of the water in the Word” – This refers to what?
 - i. In what ways is baptism like a wedding day?
 - b. Look at all the positive and divinely given attributes that Christ gives to us, his Church—holy; glorious; without stain or wrinkle or any such thing; holy (again); blameless. Which one of these adjectives hits home the most for you as you consider your relationship with Christ as part of his Bride, the Church?
 - c. With such a perfect description, the reality is that Christ’s Church, filled with sinners though it is, is a perfect Bride. The relationship is untainted. How can that be?
9. In verse 27, Jesus is both the receiver of his Bride and the one giving her away. He gets to present his Bride to himself. He’s the only one who can rightly do so, since he has created his Bride and he has committed himself to love her endlessly and without condition.

What questions and comments do you have?

Next time, we will more about what it means to be a “head” and what it means to be a “body” as that comes up more in verses 28-30. God-willing, that will give us more time for questions of application in the marriage relationship.

Also remember next week, November 7, we will be in the sanctuary to accommodate the Craft and Bake Sale.

Closing Prayer – Christian Worship '21 #764 Gracious Savior, Grant Your Blessing v. 1 and 4
This is a new hymn in the wedding section of the new hymnal. It has a beautiful text and a beautiful melody.

**Gracious Savior, grant your blessing to all husbands and all wives,
That in peace they live together in your love throughout their lives.
Christ, defend them from the tempter and from all that would destroy
Love's foundation you've established, and its pathways paved with joy.**

**Let our love in marriage picture how you dearly loved your bride:
When you gave yourself to cleanse her, when for her you bled and died.
Jesus, you have made her holy, pure and fair her radiant train;
To yourself, your Church presenting without wrinkle, spot, or stain. Amen.**