

The Christlike attitude of submission Eph. 5:21

Intro. Spring is the season when grass greens / birds nest / daffodils make their appearance / and umpires holler, "*Play Ball!*" Baseball is truly "the great American pastime." Yesterday was the Home Plate Event at Comerica Park. "*Did the Tiger's win or lose? / What was the score? / Who did they play?*" (As you can tell, I'm really into baseball.)

But some of you know a great deal about the game. You know team rosters and records. Mike Kennedy, Larry Harris and the Aspins are like walking baseball encyclopedias. I think Brenda Pope knows a bunch more than I do. Since not all of us know the finer rules and technicalities of the game, I'm going to refer to a rule I think most of us understand. Now don't laugh. Here it is...a player is not allowed to advance to second base until he touches first base. If he misses first base, he can be tagged out even though he's standing on second. The same is true for third. A player may not advance to third base unless he touches second. Am I right? Is that basic enough?

My father and Peggy's father shared a common interest. Peg's dad played baseball for Wheaton College and my dad played "triple A" ball in the Yankee farm system. Both men had a reputation for stealing bases. When my dad brought his thievery to church softball, the saintly women of our Baptist Philathea class wondered how Mel Stewart could possibly be a Christian.

But back to basics...you can't advance to second until you touch first. I think this simple rule is a helpful analogy for the logic in **Eph. 5**. As we said in previous studies, the key to living a life worthy of our calling as Christians (**4:1ff**) is contained in the command to **be filled with the Spirit. (5:18)** The Spirit's filling is God's provision for Christlike life and service. Apart from God's wisdom and energy at work in us, we are hopelessly inadequate and incapable. So the Spirit's filling is first base. And the Lord's desire to fill us with Himself is intensely personal. As we said last time, the Spirit doesn't fill churches. He fills individual believers in churches! So we're not prepared to advance to **v.19-21**, where Paul describes the qualities of a Spirit-filled church, until we who make up the church are Spirit-filled. Let me read those verses again starting at **v.18. Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit. Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.** So let me ask...Are you filled with God's Spirit this AM? Is your heart overflowing with praise and thankfulness? Do you exhibit a willingness to submit to others in the family of God? These are the hallmarks of a Spirit filled life and church.

So in the logic of this chapter, we might think of **v.18** as first base and **v.19-21** as second base. Second base is conversation and songs of praise that emanate from the heart / thankfulness for everything / and mutual submission. The idea is this...we can't

advance to these Christlike attitudes and behaviors until we've stood on first base and experienced the Spirit's filling. In other words, if we don't make it to first, we won't advance any farther!

But Paul doesn't leave us at second base. Like a base runner, his eyes are looking down the base path to third. Notice how the general command of **v.21** relates to the specific command of **v.22**. **v.21 - Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. / v.22 - Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord.** The general command that applies to every believer urges an attitude of submission... **submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.** The specific command that applies to believing wives is **submit to your husbands as to the Lord.** From relational qualities that honor Christ in the church, Paul proceeds to relational qualities that honor Christ in the home. As we'll see in coming weeks, **5:22-33** contain instructions for husbands and wives. Dare I preach **v.22-24** on Mother's Day? Wait and see! But **6:1-4** then contain instructions for children and parents / and **6:5-9** contain instructions for workplace relations.

But here's what we need to understand...and this is so important. If first base is a Spirit-filled life...second base includes, a Christlike attitude of submission that **submits to one another out of reverence for Christ.** Until we practice a spirit of submission among fellow believers in the body of Christ, we aren't prepared for third base and the challenge of practicing love and respect in our marriages / with our children / or in our workplace. Just as the Spirit's filling precedes and is necessary to life in the church, a submissive spirit among fellow believers precedes and is necessary to life in the home. We can't advance to third without touching first and second!

If I've confused you at all, just remember this...*"Who's on first, What's on second, and I don't know is on third."*

But in all seriousness...scholars trained in the original languages and hermeneutics recognize a clear flow of truth in the closing chapters of Paul's letter. Just so you know I'm not making this up, here's a quote from The Greek New Testament of the United Bible Societies concerning the textual apparatus used here. *"v. 21 provides a transition from the verses that precede to those that follow. Even though the verb **submit to** is appropriately rendered as an imperative, as are others that precede it (**speak, v.19, sing and make music, v.19**, it (like them) is a participle that concludes the string of exhortations begun by Paul in **v.18** with the true imperative **be filled with the Spirit. Submit to one another** thus concludes the list of things that should characterize Spirit-filled living by the redeemed. Further-more, in a couple of manuscripts, no verb appears in **v.22**, so that **submit to** from **v.21** has to be understood as functioning in **v.22** as well. Both readings tie the two verses together, since the same verb is either understood or repeated. Hence, **v.21** needs to be considered in its transitional role."*

Let me explain those last two sentences. In some reliable manuscripts, the verb translated **submit** in **v.21** is implied but not found in **v.22**. In those manuscripts, **v.21, 22** reads like this...**Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ and wives to**

your husbands as to the Lord. Once again, the submission commanded of a wife is her specific duty and the specific duty of a husband is to love his wife. But both of these specific responsibilities are based on and qualified by the command which urges believers to **submit to one another.**

Let me keep this in baseball terms we can all understand. **v.18** is first base / **v. 21** is second base / and **v.22ff** is third base! The specific command for a husband to love his wife and a wife to submit to her husband is controlled by the general command to **submit to one another.** Until we understand and possess the attitude that submits to God and to others, we are unprepared for the more specific commands of marriage. And then remember, both the specific command of **v.22** and the general command of **v.21** are based on the foundational command of **v.18 - be filled with the Spirit.**

But why this long explanation? Because...some tend to separate the submission urged of wives in **v.22** from its immediate context and from other related teachings in the NT. Racing past 2nd base and the command to **submit to one another**, they try to advance to 3rd. They insist the wife's responsibility **to submit** to her husband means something beyond and separate from the meaning of the very same word in **v.21.** A misunderstanding of these verses in their context has contributed to extreme views of male headship and extreme views concerning female subordination. These misunderstandings have also led some men to think their wife is not included in the **one another** of

v.21 and is therefore excluded from those he is obligated to submit to. In other words, she must submit to him, but he doesn't have to submit to anybody, especially her. So to get these essential instructions right, we need to interpret **vs.22-33** in their context. In the application of God's truth to our marriages we need to be diligent to advance one base at a time. Whether we're male, female, husband or wife, our greatest concern should be to live a Spirit filled life. Amen? Then as God's Spirit fills us, we should make it our ambition to **submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.** Only when we humbly relate to others are we prepared to succeed in the marital responsibilities of love and respect. The attitude that submits to others is the foundation and the basis for a wife's submission and a husband's love. This is why it's so important for us to train our children...not to be demanding big-shots...but to be humble servants...not to be young men and women who think they're superior to everyone around them, but in humility, to consider others better than themselves. **(Phil. 2:3)** Our children need to learn this from the example they see in us. They will do what they see us do more readily than what they hear us say. So we must be careful to model the humility and meekness of Jesus.

Every conflict we see in the world is like a tug of war...where those at both ends are in a struggle for dominance and supremacy. I'm sure you agree that no relationship is more vital to the health of churches and communities than marriage. Healthy marriages are necessary to healthy homes and healthy homes are the building blocks of society. But here's what we need to understand...while marriage is vital to the health of society, no relationship is under greater attack or affected more by this tug of war struggle than marriage.

In our times, the Scriptural commands for husbands and wives have been thrown aside as archaic and demeaning. Women often enter marriage with no intention of submitting to a husband. Yet at the same time the typical man has no idea how much it will cost him and what's involved in the love God expects him to show his wife. He wants a wife who submits to his leadership while living a selfish life that is not submitted to the control of God's Spirit. He demands respect without exhibiting the fruit of the Spirit which is love. That's claiming third base without touching first. Others want a wife who submits to them when in fact, they submit to nobody, especially her. That's jumping to third without touching first or second. Do you get the point? In the context and according to Paul's reasoning, these commands are sequential. Each command qualifies and builds on the one before it. If we fail to acquire first base and second base, we will surely be disqualified at third. This logical sequence is so important I'm willing to run the risk of insulting your intelligence and appearing foolish!

Three ideas are inherent in the teaching of **v.21**. Each idea must be considered in the order it appears to properly grasp the verse's meaning and relevance. I've expressed these ideas as three questions:

1. What is meant by the command to submit to one another? The Greek verb **hupotasso** has the basic meaning *to subject or subordinate*. The use of the middle voice focuses on what one does to oneself. We **submit** ourselves to others. To **submit** is to assume a lower place. The submitting spoken of here is the act of voluntarily yielding ourselves to others in love.

I had to smile at what I found when I googled images of submission. Do you know what showed up on the screen? The predominant entrees are guys clamped in headlocks and tattooed cage fighters pummeling their opponents into bloody submission. Time out! That's not what the word means in the Bible! That's may be the world's idea of submission, but it's not God's idea! Through-out the Bible, submission or subjection is what we do of our own volition in relation to someone else... submission isn't something forced on us. Submission isn't relenting or surrendering so we finally and reluctantly say, "uncle." And listen...the Bible never authorizes "husbands to subject their wives to their headship" and it never instructs masters to beat their slaves into submission! Submission is the personal responsibility of every believer. It's a command we must take personally. It's something we must learn to do. First, we must submit to God. Then in obedience to His Word and His Lordship over us, we must learn to submit to others. And this voluntary yielding of ourselves isn't something extreme based on an obscure verse. The call to a submissive lifestyle is all through the Bible. Here's an OT verse that is certain to be used next Sunday in the Sermon on the Mount event. **Psa. 32:9 - Do not be like the horse or the mule, which have no understanding but must be controlled by bit and bridle or they will not come to you.** In other words, don't be so rebellious that God has to break you before you come to Him. From the example and teachings of Jesus, submission to God and to others is a hallmark virtue of the Christian community. Let's compare some verses in the NT where believers are urged to have a submissive attitude:

- **Phil. 2:3 - Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves.** To consider others better than ourselves is to place ourselves beneath them rather than over them. This exhortation is based on the example of Jesus who instructed His followers to take the lower place as servants instead of pushing themselves up like lords and masters. **Lk. 22:25-27 - Jesus said to them, "The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who exercise authority over them call themselves Benefactors. But you are not to be like that. Instead, the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves. For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who is at the table? But I am among you as one who serves.** Submission is the most basic and essential attitude of a servant and Christ is our supreme example. Christians talk a great deal about being a servant and servant-style leadership, but the command to **submit to one another** receives much less emphasis. Submit to others? Are you kidding me? This is the 21st century! We're taught to assert ourselves and win by intimidation! Life is all about competition and the quest to be #1.
- Like Paul did when writing to Timothy and Titus, Peter urges younger men to submit to elders and each believer to submit to the others. **1 Pet. 5:4, 5 - And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away. Young men, in the same way be submissive to those who are older. All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."** Once again to quote more of Martin Luther's comment on **v.21**, *"There must be a willingness in the Christian fellowship to serve any, to learn from any, to be corrected by any regardless of age, sex class or any other division."* Notice **all of you clothe yourselves with humility toward one another.**
- In fact, in **Eph. 6:9**, Paul urges masters with these words...**treat your slaves in the same way.** The phrase, **In the same way** goes back to **v.5** which says, **Slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ.** It means that masters must treat their slaves with the same **respect, fear, and sincerity of heart** the Lord expects slaves to show their masters. This mutual submission between masters and slaves is the outworking of Christ at work in both classes of men. This same sense of mutual submission is what emerges from the connection of **Eph. 5:21** and **22.**

So the exhortation in **Eph. 5:21** is in complete harmony with many other NT passages. It's a general exhortation to mutual submission...submission to God first, but then the submission of equals in God's sight...the submission of one believer to **another**. Harold Hoener of Dallas Theological Seminary writes, *"Spirit controlled believers willingly serve others and place themselves under them rather than dominating them and exalting themselves over them."*

2. What is meant by *submit to one another out of reverence for Christ*?

Notice the believer's motivation for submitting to one another is clearly stated in **vs. 21 - Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ**. I think the KJV translates the Greek word, *phobos* as **fear of the Lord**. If you aren't saved and made right with God, fear is the better translation. Jesus is coming and the next time you see Him He will appear as a righteous judge. But since God's word is for God's people, **reverence** is the preferred translation. This *phobos* isn't a trembling, fearfulness or dread. It isn't the feeling we might have if called to face an IRS audit or hearing the phone ring at 3 AM. It isn't an emotional motivation that reasons, "*I'd better do this or else!*" Fear-based living and serving misses the point of God's love and the wonder of His grace and mercy. **I Jn. 4:18** explains how God's love corrects our tendency to fear God in a trembling way. **There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love.** Our love and reverence for Christ is to be the reason we submit to one another with love and respect.

So *phobos* refers to a respectful reverence for Christ. It's doing what we should because of who Jesus is and because He is worthy of nothing less. Yet **reverence for Christ** contains a subtle reminder. It reminds us we wouldn't submit to anybody if Christ hadn't won our hearts and brought our lives under His authority and control. The original sin was rebellion and self-will. The bad news is this...we're all infected by it. Just consider the many conflicts and power struggles in the world. But now, because Christ is our Lord and because He has commanded us to do so, we submit to others out of respect for who He is...He is our Savior and Lord. Paul makes this same point in other passages. For example, when writing to the Corinthians he wrote this...**If anybody thinks he is a prophet or spiritually gifted, let him acknowledge that what I am writing to you is the Lord's command. - I Cor. 14:37** In other words, this word I'm giving you comes from the top. Respect it. Obey it. It's not optional. It's not a suggestion or a man-made idea...this instruction is from the Lord to you! And so is this one...**Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.**

So the matter of submitting to one another is motivated by reverence. It's an act of obedience to the Lord we love. The same is true in **v.22** where wives are instructed to **submit to their husbands**. A wife is to submit to her husband, not because he's a godly man and an awesome leader who deserves her respect. She isn't to submit to him only when he loves her unselfishly the way Jesus loves the church. The Christian wife is to submit to her husband because of Jesus. As **v.22** says, she must submit to him **as to the Lord**. If she isn't submitted to the Lord, it stands to reason she probably won't submit to her husband. In both **v.21** and **22**, the Lord is the reason we submit to each other. And yet as we've been saying, **v.21** sets the tone for the relational instructions that come after it.

3. How does this call for mutual submission relate to the specific instructions for husbands and wives?

Jack Hayford once told a story about a married couple who attended a seminar taught by one of those male demagogues determined to prove that Scripture teaches that man is IN CHARGE at home. It was the terrible kind of teaching on submission that turns women into doormats. Well, the husband loved it. He never heard anything like this in his life, and he drank it all in. His wife, however, sat there fuming as she listened to hour after hour of this stuff.

When they left the meeting that night, the husband felt drunk with power as he climbed into their car. While driving home, he said rather pompously, "Well, what did you think about that?" His wife didn't utter a word, so he continued, "I thought it was great!"

When they arrived home, she got out and followed him silently into the house. Once inside, he slammed the door and said, "Wait there--just stand right there." She stood, tight-lipped, and stared at him.

"I've been thinking about what the preacher said tonight, and I want you to know that from now on that's the way it's gonna be around here. You got it? That's the way things are gonna run in this house!"

Having laid down his mandate he didn't see her for the next two weeks. But after about two weeks, he could start to see her...just a little bit out of one eye!

Question: According to the analogy I've used this AM, what does first base represent? **v.18 - Be filled with the Spirit.** And what does the Spirit produce when He controls our lives? **Gal. 5:22, 23 - ...the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.** Now ladies, with no reference to what your guy is or isn't, *how many of you would like to have a husband who consistently exhibits these Christlike qualities?* In fairness to the men, *how many men would like to have a wife who consistently exhibits these qualities?* Let me ask both men and women..."*How many wish their spouse was more like Jesus?*"

In the context of relationships, what did second base represent? **v.21 - Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.** Now let me ask you another question. Ladies, raise your hand if you'd find it easy to submit to a husband who is like Jesus because he considers you better than himself? Men, raise your hand if you'd find it natural to love a woman who is like Jesus because she makes your needs more important than her own? I hope I haven't started any wars by asking you to do this? But truthfully, I hope God's word has sparked something in you this AM.

Where does a Christlike attitude of submission come from? It comes from contact...from time spent with Jesus. It comes as we admit our need and open our lives to the control of His Spirit. **II Cor. 3:18 - And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.** The Holy Spirit affects change in us. He reproduces the likeness of Jesus. He develops the same attitude of submission seen in Jesus, in us. He does this as we submit and learn to be like Christ through the media of His Word.

Now I mentioned that Peggy's dad and my dad were speedsters who were notorious for stolen bases.

Here's what we need to understand. There's no stealing in the Christian life. None of us are qualified to take third until we've touched first and second. The base paths are well marked and we are obligated to stay within them.

This AM we've been talking about getting to second and third base. But there's a consideration we haven't even mentioned. Nobody can advance to first base if they strike out at the plate! None of us have any chance of being filled with the Spirit until the Spirit of God enters and takes up residence in our lives. **Rom. 8:9** says, **You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ.** Notice the how the conjunction **if** appears twice in this verse. **Don't be like the horse or the mule, which have no understanding but must be controlled by bit and bridle or they will not come to you.** The most basic need we all have is to humble ourselves and submit to God's way of salvation by putting our faith in Jesus Christ. Have you come to Him in faith?

Jesus humbled Himself and submitted to Calvary's cross. He submitted to God's plan. He voluntarily bore our sin and shame. He suffered and died between two criminals. He took the penalty we deserved. He asks us to believe Him and trust Him to save us. If you make that decision to trust Him, His Spirit will enter your life and begin to change you from the inside out. But until you trust Him, you've struck out and spiritual progress isn't possible.