

Creekside Community Church
"Identity Theft" Paul's Letter to the Ephesians
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John Bruce - pastor

The Wise Wife
Ephesians 5:18-23

Last week we began to look at Eph. 5:22-33, the longest passage on marriage in the New Testament. We looked at what God's instructions to husbands - or more accurately, God's instruction to husbands. Because Paul only tells husbands to do one thing: love your wife like Christ loves us. And if you weren't here, I encourage you to listen on line or to our podcast or to pick up a cd, because God's instructions to wives won't make sense, if we don't begin with His instructions to their husbands. This week we'll look at what Paul says to wives. And if you haven't read this passage before, let me warn you. It is out of step with much of what women are being told by our culture. Plus these verses have been misinterpreted, and misapplied for centuries to perpetuate a patriarchal culture in the church, where women are treated as morally and spiritually inferior to men. That's why for many of you, when you read this passage, alarms go off, warning lights begin to flash and you feel this knot of dread in your gut. I thought Christ came to set us free, but this looks like a return to the dark ages. Paul has joined the Taliban. What has this got to do with the gospel? And it's all because of one little word. "Wives, **BE SUBMISSIVE** to your own husbands." And that's about as far as some of you are able to read, before you're ready to explode. Submit? To him? Why? I'm more fit to lead than he is. If I submit to him, we'll be broke before the year is out, and all he'll do about it is to change the channel. I mean, this is the 21st century. Women have had the vote for quite a while now. Women are no longer dependent on men and we're not about to turn back the clock. Submit to your husband? I thought the Bible was relevant today but this looks like it was lifted out of sharia law. Did Jesus know that Paul was writing this stuff? The truth is, a lot of sincere Christian women want to ignore this passage. And if that's where you're at this morning, I'm asking you to try to lay aside for a few minutes the baggage of centuries of bad behavior by men, and try to see what this passage is actually says.

To really understand Eph 5, we first need to strip away some of our preconceptions. So let's look first at what submission is not. Submission is not gender specific and has nothing to do with inherent worth or dignity. When I worked at Cal with Campus Crusade, there were Christian guys who thought they should be in charge just because they were guys and that every Christian women needed to submit to their leadership because they were women. These guys didn't date much. But that's the way some people view submission; it's all about gender and so women see the command to submit as an attack upon their gender and the inherent dignity, abilities and the worth of women; that somehow women are weaker or more emotional or have less leadership ability than men. And in a society where today more women graduate from college than men, with higher grade point averages, more extracurricular activities including study abroad, and according to professors, more confidence, drive and concrete plans for the future, and are more likely now than men to go to grad school, advance in the workplace, buy a home, and increasingly are out earning men; that view sounds like

something out of the Middle Ages. But that's not what the Bible teaches. In vs. 22, the words, "be subject" aren't even in the original. They're implied from the preceding verses. This section on family life is not a new section. It is linked with the verses right before. *"And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord; always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father; and be subject to one another in the fear of Christ. Wives, to your husbands as to the Lord."* (18-22) Remember, Paul is talking about living under the influence of God's Spirit and he compares it to living under the influence of wine. In both cases, you give up control and in both cases, there are things you have to do to put yourself under the influence. There was no hard liquor in the first century and so to get drunk you had to keep on drinking wine. In the same way, to be filled with the Spirit, there were things you have to do to put yourself under the Spirit's influence; by *speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord*; (we put ourselves under the influence of the Spirit by attending and participating in the public worship of God) by *always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father* (we put ourselves under the influence of the Spirit by thanking God always for everything that happens, trusting that He loves us, that He is in control and that He is working all things for our benefit); *and by being subject to one another in the fear of Christ*. Being filled with the Spirit is the opposite of being filled with self. All Christians - male and female, young and old - are called to submit ourselves to each other, putting others first, being concerned for the interests of others, letting other people have their way rather than pushing our own. And it is in the context of this command to all Christians to submit to one another that Paul commands wives to submit to their husbands. So submission is not gender specific, or something only women are supposed to do. A submissive spirit is a Christ-like spirit and is required of every Christian - not just the women. The fact that submitting ourselves to one another in the fear of Christ means that submission has nothing to do with worth or dignity, since we're all to do it. The fact that God tells me to submit to someone doesn't mean that I am less important or competent than they are, or that God trusts them to make better decisions than He trusts me to make, or that I am in some way inferior to them. Submission is not gender specific and has nothing to do with inherent worth and dignity.

Submission is not an abdication of personal responsibility, moral or otherwise. God is the only Supreme Authority, and there is a legitimate time to refuse to submit to people in order to obey Him. That's what the apostles did when the government told them to stop preaching the gospel. The Bible commands us to submit ourselves to the government - except when the government commands us to disobey God. That's when - like the apostles - we say, "We must obey God and not men." And there are times when a wife must choose between submitting to her husband and obeying God. When there's physical abuse or when laws are being broken or when children are endangered, wives have to do what's right and refuse to submit to their husbands. In the fifth chapter of Acts, a couple named Annaias and Sapphira sell some land and give part of the proceeds to the apostles, which was fine. The money belonged to them and they could give as much or as little of it as they chose. The problem was, Ananias and Sapphira said they gave everything to the church. They lied. And when Ananias brought the

money to Peter, Peter said to Ananias, "You're not lying to men but to God." and Ananias fell over dead. Three hours later, Sapphira shows up, unaware of what's happened. Peter asks her how much they sold the property for and she also lies and falls over dead as well. The church learned an important lesson that day. Give a little or give a lot, but don't fake it. Because hypocrisy will kill the church. Here's my point. If submission meant following your husband no matter what, then Sapphira couldn't be held responsible for her actions. Yet she suffers the same fate as Annaias because she is just as responsible for what she does before God as he is. Submission doesn't mean abdicating your moral responsibilities. "He told me to do it and I submitted like God told me to."

Third, submission isn't a personality type. Some women are soft spoken and some women are loud. Some women are out-going, take charge, make things happen personalities and some are more shy and retiring. Some women are in your face and with some, you never know what they're thinking. And those are just the personalities God gave them. However, some people interpret submission as a personality trait. That the truly submissive woman is soft spoken, shy, retiring, and non-assertive. However - as we'll see in a minute - when the apostle Peter chose an example of a truly submissive wife, he chose Abraham's wife, Sarah. Yet when we read about Sarah in the OT, and we discover a no-nonsense woman who wasn't shy at all about telling her husband what she thought. Notice that Paul says that we are to subject ourselves to one another in the fear of Christ, and that wives are to be subject to their husbands as to the Lord. We submit to people because we have submitted to Christ. Submission refers to our relationship with God, not to our personality. Jesus was assertive, confident, a real leader...and yet He is the example of submission. Some of the most submissive women I know have aggressive, no-nonsense, let's-get-it-done personalities. And some of the least submissive women I know are quiet and non-assertive - until you ask them to do something. Submission is not a personality type

Well, if that is what submission is not, what is it? First of all, submission is voluntary. The word Paul uses here always means to subject your self to someone in authority. The Bible uses the same word when it says that Jesus as a 12 year old was submissive to His parents; that citizens are to subject themselves to the government, that Christ is subjected to God the Father, that church members are to be subject to the elders of the church, that servants are to be submissive to their masters and that Christians are to be subject to God. However, husbands are never commanded to subject their wives, to make their wives submit. Rather, wives voluntarily submit themselves to their husband - not because he's wise and unselfish and a wonderful leader, but because Christ commands it - just like He commands husbands to love their wives as Christ loves the church; not because their wife is attractive or loving or easy to live with, but because Christ commands it. Submission is simply recognizing God-ordained authority and voluntarily submitting ourselves to that authority.

Which brings us to a second observation about what submission is; submission is a voluntary response of faith in Christ. Notice in vs. 21 that all Christians are to submit themselves to one another in the fear of Christ. We don't submit ourselves to each other because you're right and I'm wrong or because you're wise and I'm stupid. We submit ourselves to one another out of

fear or respect for Jesus. Submission to people says a lot more about our relationship with Christ than it does about our relationship with people. That's why Paul continues, "*Wives, be subject to your own husbands as to the Lord.*" As a wife submits herself to her husband, she is submitting herself to Christ; which means that the kind of submission Paul is talking about is born out of faith in God, not out of fear of men. This really comes out in Peter's instructions to women in 1 Peter 3:1-6. *In the same way, you wives, be submissive to your own husbands so that even if any of them are disobedient to the word, they may be won without a word by the behavior of their wives, as they observe your chaste and respectful behavior. Your adornment must not be merely external--braiding the hair, and wearing gold jewelry, or putting on dresses; but let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the imperishable quality of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is precious in the sight of God. For in this way in former times the holy women also, who hoped in God, used to adorn themselves, being submissive to their own husbands. Thus Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord, and you have become her children if you do what is right without being frightened by any fear.*" Now there's a ton of information in these verses about the power God has given wives in influencing their husband, but what I want you to see right now is that Christian wives don't submit themselves to their husbands because they're afraid of their husbands. They submit themselves because of their faith in God. Their hope isn't in their husband. Their hope is in God. As one woman said, "Submission is just ducking so God can hit my husband." A Christian doesn't submit because she's afraid of what her husband might do if she doesn't. She submits because God tells her to submit, and she trusts God that if she does, He'll take care of her, regardless of what her husband does, which is exactly what happens in the story of Abraham and Sarah. God leads Abraham and Sarah to the Promised Land but when they arrive, there's a famine. And instead of staying where God led them and trusting Him to provide, Abraham takes Sarah south to Egypt where he tells her to pretend that she's his sister in case the Egyptians might be tempted to kill him and take her because Sarah's such a beauty. By the way, Sarah was 65 at this point which means that either she was extraordinarily well-preserved - all that exercise and natural food - or that Abraham didn't see very well. Now remember, this is Abraham, the friend of God, the beginning of the nation of Israel, telling his wife to take off her wedding ring and pretend to be single so that nothing will happen to him - telling Sarah in effect, "It doesn't matter what happens to you as long as nothing happens to me." And what's even more surprising is that Sarah goes along with it, not because she trusts Abraham but because - according to Peter - she trusts God. They arrive in Egypt and when the Pharaoh sees Sarah and finds out she's Abe's sister, he immediately has her brought into his harem and gives Abe gold and flocks and property. But before he can sleep with her, the Lord casts a plague on Pharaoh's entire family because of Sarah. Pharaoh learns the truth and kicks Abe and Sarah out of Egypt. Her husband didn't protect her but God did because Sarah put her hope in Him and was unafraid. Submission is not a result of a wife's faith in her husband or a result of a wife's fear of her husband. It is a result of her faith in God. That's what Peter means when he writes, *For in this way in former times the holy women also, who hoped in God, used to adorn themselves, being submissive to their own husbands.* They were submissive to their husbands because they hoped in God. My husband may be wrong - in fact, in this case my husband is wrong. But God will take care of me. *Thus Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord, and you have become her children if you do what is right without being frightened by any fear.* So submission is a voluntary response of faith in Christ. That's

why Peter says a gentle and quiet spirit is precious in God's sight. Because it's born of faith in Him. It's not so much that you're gentle and quiet toward your husband, it's that you're gentle and quiet toward God. You trust Him and refuse to fight with him, refuse to give into your fears and believe that God has promised to take care of you. One of the most common problems I see in Christian marriages today is misplaced faith. Husbands and wives are putting their hope in each other rather than in God. As a result, they're trying to control their mate and make them do what they want them to do because they think that if he doesn't do what I need him to do, I'll be miserable. It's his job to make me happy. It's his job to meet my needs. It's his job to protect me and care for me and make me feel important. If you believe that, when your mate fails - and he will - you will be devastated, your hopes crushed, your dreams lost. You'll feel disillusioned, disappointed and deceived. All because you expected your mate to do for you what only Christ can do. We make an idol out of our mate, trusting them to do for us what only God is capable of doing.

So submission is voluntary - we choose to subject ourselves; it is a voluntary response of faith in Christ - we're responding to Him, not to people - the people may or may not deserve to be followed, but Jesus says to follow them - and finally a wife's submission is a voluntary response of faith in Christ and in God's design for marriage. Why are wives to submit to their husbands? *"For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself being the Savior of the body.* Just as Paul tells husbands to love their wives as Christ loves the church, he tells wives to submit to their husbands as the church submits to Christ. God's design for marriage is modeled on the relationship between Jesus and His bride, the church. Which means the reason that Paul tells wives to submit is not based upon the culture of that day nor on the curse that resulted from the fall when God told Eve that one of the consequences of eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil was that her husband would rule over her, nor on the old covenant which has been abolished in Christ. God's design for Christian marriage is based on the new covenant - on Christ's relationship to us - and therefore cannot be argued away as simply Paul's accommodation to first century patriarchal culture. Wives are to submit to their husbands because the husband is the head of the wife just as Christ also is the head of the church. The meaning of the word, "head" has been debated by scholars since the 1970s. Prior to that, every interpreter of the Bible understood head to carry some sense of leadership and authority. However in the 70s, some interpreters began arguing that the word didn't mean authority but instead source. As a spring is the source of a stream, so the husband is the source of his wife, since historically God created Eve from the side of Adam and thus, Adam is the source of Eve, just as Christ is the source of the church. In other words, Eph. 5:23 doesn't mean that God has ordained the husband to lead his wife. There are a ton of problems with this view. First, the Greek word for head is never used to mean source anywhere in the Bible or anywhere else in Greek literature. It is always applied to people in authority. That's why every dictionary of ancient Greek today defines head as "person in authority over" and none as "source." Second, I am not the source of my wife; interpreting head that way makes no sense. Third, the wife is called to be subject to the husband because he is head - which makes no sense if by head, Paul means source. Finally, no interpreter who claims that head means source would say that Christ has no authority over His church. Yet because in Paul's example, the husband is to the wife as Christ is to the church, you would be forced to come to that

conclusion. Paul's point is that Christ is the head of the church which is His body; that just as our head directs our body, so Christ directs the church - which is consistent with the way head and body were used in the ancient world by medical writers and philosophers. In the same way, the husband is the head of his wife.

Which is why Paul continues, *But as the church is subject to Christ, so also the wives ought to be to their husbands in everything.* Why does Paul tell wives to submit themselves to their husbands? Because the relationship between husband and wife is modeled after the relationship between Christ and the church and submission is a voluntary response of faith in Christ and in God's design for marriage. The husband is not the head because he wants to lead. He's the head because God made him the head. The wife is the body because God made her the body. And that changes everything. Husbands are to love their wife, not because their wife loves them, or because she is easy to live with, or is attractive but because Christ loves the church and husbands are to love their wives because Jesus loves them. Wives are to submit themselves to their husband - not because their husbands always make great decisions or are exemplary leaders, but because Jesus is our leader and He calls wives to follow their husbands. That's why the success of a marriage depends far more on our relationship with Jesus than it does on our relationship with each other. He supplies the strength and desire to love and to submit, to put one another before ourselves. He supplies the example, the motivation, and the hope for the marriage. That's why submission is a voluntary response of faith in Christ and in God's design for marriage. I can never love my wife the way God calls me to love my wife unless I trust Jesus. My wife cannot submit to me unless she trusts Jesus.

How does this work out practically? I'll speak directly to the wives and then to the husbands. I believe that submission means always treating your husband with respect. In the last verse of this section, Paul writes *"Nevertheless, each individual among you also is to love his own wife even as himself, and the wife must see to it that she respects her husband."* Wives love their husbands by respecting their husbands. Most men fear failure more than anything else and when their wife condemns them, berates them, minimizes them, or tries to control them, it affects them far more deeply than most wives realize. Most men are insecure anyway and when the person we love most thinks we're a failure, it is devastating. Wives, if you think about what makes your husband most angry, you'll probably think of something you do or somebody else does to disrespect him. And because so many wives don't respect their husbands, their children don't respect him either which is why so many men are AWOL from their families. "Why hang out with a group of people who treat me like I'm a doofus?" Now I know what some of you are thinking. "But my husband isn't respectable. He needs to earn my respect." No, he doesn't, anymore than you need to earn his love. Jesus commands him to love you and commands you to respect him. If you want to be blessed by Jesus and for your family to be blessed by Jesus, treat your husband with respect - not because he's earned it but because of the position God has put him in. God will deal with him if you will trust and obey. Now does treating your husband with respect mean you always have to let him have his own way? A healthy marriage is two who have become one. You're a team and a team makes decisions together. You make financial decisions together, parenting decisions together, career decisions together. My wife is the smartest woman I know. I would be a fool not to listen to her. Most

decisions we make we agree upon and so technically, there's no submission involved; we both agree on the way we're to go. The only time we submit to anybody is when what they want is different than what you want. And in a Christian marriage, the only time a wife submits is when after a lot of discussion, the two of you are unable to agree on a decision, and yet a decision has to be made. It's at that point that the Bible says a wife needs to follow her husband's lead because God has given him the responsibility of leading.

Now guys, God's command to your wife to submit is not your license to do whatever you want. We learned last week from Jesus' example that loving your wife like Jesus loves us means cherishing your wife - treating her like you treat your own body, because she's part of you and you're part of her. Her happiness is your happiness, her pain is your pain. So think about the way we treat our body. We give it whatever it wants. If you're hungry, you eat. If you're thirsty, you drink. If you're tired, you rest. And so loving my wife means giving her whatever she wants, letting her have her way, putting her happiness before my own, because her happiness is my happiness. The only time we don't give our body what it wants is when good and evil are involved. Sometimes we have to say no to our body for the sake of our body or in obedience to God. And sometimes we have to lead our wives in a different direction than they would choose to go, for their own good. Jenny had colic when she was a baby and routinely screamed from 5 - 11 every evening with Laurie or I holding her until she finally went to sleep. Then we'd creep into bed ourselves but within minutes, she would be awake and screaming again and one of us would sit with her in the rocking chair until she finally fell asleep. Jenny had us well trained. I remember thinking, "We're not going to make it unless we get some sleep!" Well, one night Jenny began her regular screaming and Laurie got out of bed to get her. But I said, "We need to let her scream." Laurie said, "I can't do that." And I realized that because of my wife's strong maternal instincts, I was going to have to make this call. So I said, "Honey, you've got to let her cry herself to sleep because this isn't working." Did I know what I was doing?" Of course not. I'd only been a dad for a couple of months. But Laurie submitted although I know it was agony for her, torn between her concern for her daughter and her conscience towards God. And I'm praying I've made the right decision. Jenny screamed for 30 minutes that night and then went to sleep. The next night she screamed for 20 minutes and then dropped off. The next it was 15 minutes, then 10, then 5. But we were liberated. In 33 years of marriage, that's about the only time I remember Laurie ever having to submit to me. Not because she's so independent. But because we usually work through an issue until we agree. My point is that God has given husbands authority in the home for their wife's good, not for their own self indulgence.

I think that marriage is one of God's primary tools in making us like Jesus because it forces us to face our greatest weaknesses and faults. Men are not by nature, lovers; we're independent, selfish and passive. The only way we can love our wives as Christ loves the church is by depending on Jesus. Women are not naturally submissive. Most women want to be in control, to make sure things happen the way they're supposed to happen. The only way they can submit to their husbands is by trusting Jesus. And because our marriage will be blessed if we obey and miserable if we don't, marriage becomes God's tool in teaching us to trust Him. Married or single, everything that God allows into our lives is designed to teach us one lesson.

Trust Jesus instead of yourself. Because faith is at the heart of Christianity. The righteous shall live by faith. Without faith it is impossible to please God. Jesus does for us what we cannot do for ourselves when we trust Him. And if you've never begun the life of faith, you can do that this morning.

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