

Going Deeper with the Sermon

Kevin Ephesians 5:21-33 part 1

“submit to one another out of reverence to Christ”

The NT describes our present existence as followers of Jesus in all sorts of ways. For example:

- Jesus ... “you are in the world but not of it”
- Peter ... “strangers in the world ... who live as foreigners ... refugees”

As those who belong to Jesus we have been called to live not under the influence of the prevailing cultures in which we live but as those who are under the influence of the Sovereign God Himself. We walk to the beat of a different drum.

Eph 5:8-20 emphasizes how we have been called to live a life worthy of the calling we have received in Christ, to live as children of light and to live not as unwise but as wise. Paul continues this theme and calls us to submission as one practical outworking of living in this way ... **21**

In simple terms the concept of submission is not dissimilar to the concept behind our give way sign. Give way to one another. This is something all of us are to give each other. It is a call to be other centric. To not be consumed by my rights but to focus on how to serve others. We do it not because of who the other person is but out of reverence for Christ. Notice how Paul expresses the same idea in **Phil 2:3-11**

Having established the principle Paul now seeks to go into the world of the Ephesian believers and get them to think about what this looks like for them. And in particular in their primary relationships. In their relationships as husbands and wives, as parents and children, and masters and slaves. You and I need to do exactly the same thing. We need to take this call to mutual submission into our primary relationships. The challenge of course is that the world Paul lived in was so unbelievably removed from the world you and I live in.

Then and Now

This was acutely true when it came to husbands and wives. Ephesus was a city held together by social distinctions. In the Greco-Roman world men were the masters of the household. It was a totalitarian patriarchy. Women were not equals but an inferior sub-class. They were property and had no existence apart from men. A woman’s safety, sustenance and future were dependant on a man.

We see something of this in the way Demosthenes a first century author wrote, “Mistresses we keep for the sake of pleasure, concubines for the daily care of the body, but wives to bear us legitimate children”. And, preferably these of course were male. Let’s not forget that this was a culture that engaged in the wholesale abandonment of girl babies.

Households were not the nuclei family of today but a place where husbands, wives, concubines, slaves and employees lived and transacted business. Women didn’t eat with the men.

Women didn’t pass the middle door into the public space of the house. This was the domain of men. Women stayed in the back. The idea that men and women might be equal partners in marriage didn’t exist.

We need to also appreciate that Paul is not seeking to eliminate these existing structures and replace them with something different. In Ephesians he is neither legitimizing nor critiquing the cultural structures but calling followers of Jesus within those structures to live worthily, to live as children of light and to live as wise ones.

This is most evident when we think of how the NT handles slavery. We will look at this in more detail in a few weeks but what is interesting for us to consider now is that Ephesians doesn’t challenge the system of slavery, it simply speaks into the lives of believers who are slaves or masters and encourages them how to be followers of Jesus in the midst of their circumstances.

Paul is not on a campaign to overthrow slavery. Yes it is wrong and needs to be stamped out but that is not what this portion of Scripture is about. Yes the Bible calls us to pursue justice but that is not what this portion of Scripture is about. This portion of Scripture is calling us to live in submission to one another in every aspect of life.

So what does this look like in our relationships as husbands and wives? What can we pick up from how Paul applies the principle of mutual submission to these Ephesian believers?

The part 2 study will inspect more closely what this looks like in marriage but the primary principle is this: “In your marriage submit to one another out of reverence for Christ”. I don’t know if you realize but what we are being challenged with here is an outworking of what Jesus said ... **Luke 9:23-25**

As I reflect on my role as a husband to my shame I can see the instances when selfish ambition, vain conceit and my own interests dominated my behaviour.

What about you? What do you see in your relationships?

As followers of Jesus we have been called to something different ... 1 Cor 13:4-7

Questions for reflection

1. Kevin explains that there were cultural attitudes at work against marriages/relationships in Ephesus—what are the cultural attitudes that potentially sabotage marriages/relationships today?
2. What do you think it practically means to “give way” to one another?
3. Why do you think we find it hard to “give way” to one another?
4. As you reflected upon the Sermon was there any thought that challenged you? Or anything that prompted a further question for you?
5. Reflecting upon Luke 9:23-25, (as an individual or group) take some time to read over this portion 3 or 4 times. As you prayerfully read it is there something that God is asking you to do in response?