A Covenant of Mutual Love
Eph 5:21-33
SS Lesson for 08/25/2019

Devotional Scripture: Col 3:17-25

OUTLINE

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Background from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

Year after year, star-studded romantic comedies are released by Hollywood for public consumption. People meet, at first hate each other, then share experiences, grow as human beings, and fall blissfully in love. Usually, though not as often as one was the case, the couple’s adventure ends in their marriage. This, the entertainment industry tells us, is what marriage is. Two people are “meant for each other” in their mutual fulfillment. Their romance makes everything right. Their marriage serves as nothing except the exclamation point on their romantic experience of self-fulfillment. Of course, most married people, and probably most unmarried people, will say that this view of marriage is nonsense. Yet the focus on romantic self-fulfillment still powerfully shapes people’s understanding of marriage. In New Testament times, marriage was as much misunderstood as it is today, though the misunderstanding then was not like ours now. Today’s text has much corrective for both.

Our text comes from Paul’s letter to the Ephesians. This is known as one of Paul’s four Prison Epistles, written while he was in the custody of the Roman military. (The other three epistles designated as such are Philippian, Colossian, and Philemon.) Ephesians was written to Christians in the city of Ephesus, a large, grand city on the west coast of Asia Minor. Paul chose Ephesus as a base for evangelistic efforts in that area. He spent nearly three years in the city (Acts 20:17–21, 31). The letter itself falls into two parts: a discussion of the nature of the gospel (chapters 1–3) and a discussion of how to live in light of the gospel (chapters 4–6). The second section makes clear that the Christian life is an outgrowth of the Christian faith. It begins with an exhortation to “live a life worthy of the calling you have received” (Ephesians 4:1). That is, the recipients were to live according to the gospel message by which God made them members of his people. The story of Jesus—the one who gave his life for the sake of those alienated from him, the one who now reigns in the heavenly places—determines the life of the Christian. To walk in a manner worthy of the Christian calling is to live as did Jesus, imitating him by living to bless others, not oneself (5:1, 2). Our text falls in the middle of this practical discussion, as Paul sets forth what many refer to as a “household code.” He discusses each of the common roles in a household—the family and any servants who worked in it—of his time. Throughout the discussion, Paul speaks within the relationships that people commonly knew in that period. But he does something far different from merely affirming the common social order: he infuses every household role with the story of Jesus.

Key Verse: Eph 5:21

Submitting one another in the fear of God.

Commentary from the Bible Knowledge Commentary

5:17. Rather than being foolish (aphrones, “senseless”) or “unwise” (asphoi, v. 15), Christians are to understand (syniete, “comprehend intellectually”) what the Lord’s will is. Only after one understands what pleases God (v. 1) can he carry it out in his life.

5:18. Going from the general to the specific, Paul explained how wisdom, as an intellectual and spiritual capacity, works out in one’s conduct. Verse 18 includes a negative command and a positive one. The negative is to abstain from getting drunk on wine with which there is incorrigibility. The word asōtia is translated debauchery (NIV, RSV), “excess” (KJV), “riot” (ASV), and “dissipation” (NASB). All these give the idea of prodigal or licentious living that is wasteful. In this verse the literal sense of incorrigibility seems best, for a drunken man acts abnormally. Rather than controlling himself, the wine controls him. Conversely, the positive command is, Be filled with the Spirit. Thus a believer, rather than controlling himself, is controlled by the Holy Spirit. It may be more accurate to say that the Holy Spirit is the “Agent” of the filling (cf. Gal. 5:16) and Christ is the Content of the filling (Col. 3:15). Thus in this relationship, as a believer is yielded to the Lord and controlled by Him, he increasingly manifests the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23). The Spirit’s indwelling (John 7:37-39; 14:17; Rom. 5:5; 8:9; 1 Cor. 2:12; 6:19-20; 1 John 3:24; 4:13), sealing (2 Cor. 1:22; Eph. 1:13; 4:30), and baptism (1 Cor. 12:13; Gal. 3:27) occur at the time of regeneration and thus are not commanded. However, believers are commanded to be filled constantly with the Holy Spirit. Each Christian has all the Spirit, but the command here is that the Spirit have all of him. The wise walk, then, is one that is characterized by the Holy Spirit’s control.

5:19-21. Paul then gave four results of being filled with the Spirit. First is communication with one another with psalms (psalmois, OT psalms sung with stringed instruments such as harps), hymns (hymnois, praises composed by Christians), and spiritual songs (a general term). Second is communication
with the Lord by singing and making melody (psallontes, singing with a stringed instrument) in the heart. Church music, then, should be a means of believers’ ministering to each other, and singing should be a means of worshiping the Lord. Third is thanking God the Father (cf. 1:2-3, 17; 3:14) continually for all things (cf. Col. 3:17; 1 Thes. 5:18). Fourth, Spirit-controlled believers are to submit to one another, willingly serving others and being under them rather than dominating them and exalting themselves. But basic to Christians’ attitudes toward others is their reverence for Christ. Paul next elaborated on this subject of submission (Eph. 5:22-6:9).

Having admonished believers to be wise by being controlled by the Holy Spirit, Paul now applied this to specific life-relationships. It is relatively easy to exhibit a Spirit-filled life for one or two hours a week in church but it takes the work of the Holy Spirit to exhibit godliness not only on Sundays but also in everyday relationships between wives and husbands, children and parents, and slaves and masters. In each of these three relationships the first partner is commanded to be submissive or obedient (5:22; 6:1, 5). But the second partner is also to show submissiveness by his care and concern for the first partner. Both partners are to act toward one another as a service rendered to the Lord.

5:22-24. Wives are to submit to their husbands. (The verb “submit,” absent in Gr. in v. 22, is borrowed from v. 21). As to the Lord does not mean that a wife is to submit to her husband in the same way she submits to the Lord, but rather that her submission to her husband is her service rendered “to the Lord” (cf. Col. 3:18). The reason for this submission is that the husband is the head of the wife (cf. 1 Cor. 11:3), and this is compared to Christ’s headship over the church (Eph. 5:23; cf. 4:15; Col. 1:18). As Christ is the Savior of the church, His body, so a husband should be the protector of his wife, who is “one flesh” with him (Gen. 2:24). As the church is in submission to Christ, so also a wife should be to her husband. It would be foolish to think of the church being head over Christ. But submission does not mean inferiority. It means that she recognizes that her husband is the head of the home and responds to him accordingly without usurping his authority to herself.

5:25. After speaking of a wife’s submission to her husband (vv. 22-24), Paul then stated the measure of the husband’s love for his wife (vv. 25-32). Husbands are commanded, Love your wives (cf. v. 33) just as Christ loved the church. The word “love” (agapao) means seeking the highest good for another person (cf. 2:4). This is an unselfish love as seen in Christ’s sacrificial death in which He gave Himself up for the church (cf. 5:2; John 10:11, 15, 17-18; Gal. 1:4; Eph. 5:25; Heb. 9:14). A wife’s submission in no way hints that a husband may lord it over his spouse, as a despot commanding a slave. The “submit-love” relationship is a beautiful mixture of harmonious partnership in marriage.

5:26-27. The purpose of Christ’s death was to make the church holy (hagiasē, “to set apart” for Himself as His own forever; cf. Heb. 2:11; 10:10, 14; 13:12) which He did by cleansing her by the washing with water through the Word. This is not baptismal regeneration for that would be contrary to Paul’s teaching in this book as well as all his other writings and the entire New Testament. Metaphorically, being regenerated is pictured as being cleansed by water (cf. “the washing of rebirth” in Titus 3:5). The “Word” (rhēmati) refers to the “preached Word” that unbelievers hear (cf. rhēma in Eph. 6:17; Rom. 10:8, 17; 1 Peter 1:25). The ultimate purpose of Christ’s death is to present... to Himself the church as radiant or “in splendor” (RSV). This adjective, “glorious,” in NEB, is not attributive (as in NIV’s “a radiant church”). It is in the predicate position because there is an article before church (to “present the church... glorious,” NEB). This purpose is then described negatively (without stain or wrinkle—no taint of sin or spiritual decay—or any other blemish) and positively (holy and blameless). These last two adjectives (hagia, “set apart,” and amômos, “without blemish,” like a spotless lamb) are stated in Ephesians 1:4 as the purpose of God’s election: that Christ may present His church to Himself in all its perfection (cf. “make holy” in 5:26; also cf. hagious and amômos in Col. 1:22). Whereas human brides prepare themselves for their husbands, Christ prepares His own bride for Himself.

5:28-30. In verses 28-32 Paul applied the truths given in verses 25-27. As the church is the extension of Christ, so is the wife an “extension” of her husband. No one hates his own body but takes care of it. Feeds (ektrephei; cf. “bring them up” in 6:4) and cares for (thalpei; cf. 1 Thes. 2:7) is literally, “nourishes and cherishes.” Thus as Christ loves the church, His body (of which all believers are members; cf. Eph. 4:25), so should husbands... love their wives as their own bodies (5:28; cf. v. 33). Men care for their bodies even though they are imperfect and so they should care for their wives though they are imperfect.

5:31-32. Verse 31 is a free rendering of Genesis 2:24, indicating that the bond between husband and wife is greater than that between parent and child. The greatness of the mystery refers to the two becoming one
B ut then Paul returned to mention the wonderful bond between Christ and the church, which illustrates the love of a husband for his wife. 

5:33. This is a restatement of the responsibilities of the husband and wife toward each other: love by the husband (cf. v. 25) and respect by the wife.

**Major Theme Analysis**

*(Scriptural Text from the New King James Version; cross-references from the NIV)*

**Love Relationship of the Wife (Eph 5:21-24)**

21 submitting to one another in the fear of God.
22 Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord.
23 For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body.
24 Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything.

**Submit because it is fitting in the Lord (Col 3:18)**

18 Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord.

**Submit so that others may be won over to God (1 Peter 3:1)**

3 Wives, in the same way be submissive to your husbands so that, if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without words by the behavior of their wives,

**Submit so that no one will malign the Word of God (Titus 2:5)**

5 to be self-controlled and pure, to be busy at home, to be kind, and to be subject to their husbands, so that no one will malign the word of God.

**Submit in harmony (1 Peter 3:8)**

8 Finally, all of you, live in harmony with one another; be sympathetic, love as brothers, be compassionate and humble.

**Submit to be used by God (2 Tim 2:20-21)**

20 In a large house there are articles not only of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay; some are for noble purposes and some for ignoble. 21 If a man cleanses himself from the latter, he will be an instrument for noble purposes, made holy, useful to the Master and prepared to do any good work.

**Submit to God's will (James 4:13-15)**

13 Now listen, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money." 14 Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. 15 Instead, you ought to say, "If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that."

**Hierarchy of relationship (23-24)**

**Hierarchy of headship (1 Cor 11:3)**

3 Now I want you to realize that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God.

**Hierarchy of rule (Gen 3:16)**

16 To the woman he said, "I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing; with pain you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you."
Hierarchy of origination (1 Cor 11:8)
8 For man did not come from woman, but woman from man;

Hierarchy of authority (Rom 13:1)
13 Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God.

Love Relationship of the Husband (Eph 5:25-31)
25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her,
26 that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word,
27 that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish.
28 So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself.
29 For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church.
30 For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones.
31 "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh."

Love relationship (25-28)

Love that does not allow harshness (Col 3:19)
19 Husbands, love your wives and do not be harsh with them.

Love that comes through understanding (1 Peter 3:7)
7 Husbands, likewise, dwell with them with understanding, giving honor to the wife, as to the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life, that your prayers may not be hindered.

Love of whole family (Titus 2:4)
4 Then they can train the younger women to love their husbands and children,

Love that God allows one to leave parents (Gen 2:24)
24 For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.

Love that is captivating (Prov 5:18-19)
18 May your fountain be blessed, and may you rejoice in the wife of your youth. 19 A loving doe, a graceful deer — may her breasts satisfy you always, may you ever be captivated by her love.

Unifying relationship (29-31)

Unifying because God puts them together (Matt 19:6)
6 So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate."

Unifying to combat sin (1 Cor 7:2)
2 But since there is so much immorality, each man should have his own wife, and each woman her own husband.

Unifying because of being considered one flesh (Gen 2:24)
24 For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.

Unifying because we all belong to one another in Christ (Rom 12:5)
5 so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.
Unifying because we are unified with Jesus in spirit (1 Cor 6:17)
17 But he who unites himself with the Lord is one with him in spirit.

Comparative Relationship of Marriage and the Church (Eph 5:32-33)

32 This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church.
33 Nevertheless let each one of you in particular so love his own wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.

Christian relationship (32)

Christian relationship through faith (Gal 3:26-28)

26 You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, 27 for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. 28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

Christian relationship through sanctification (1 Cor 7:14)

14 For the unbelieving husband has been sanctified through his wife, and the unbelieving wife has been sanctified through her believing husband. Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy.

Christian relationship because of being one of God's chosen (Col 3:12-14)

12 Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. 13 Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. 14 And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

Christian relationship that is based on not being independent (1 Cor 11:11)

11 In the Lord, however, woman is not independent of man, nor is man independent of woman.

Respect relationships (33)

Respect to those it is due (Rom 13:7)

7 Give everyone what you owe him: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor.

Respect out of brotherly love (1 Peter 2:17)

17 Show proper respect to everyone: Love the brotherhood of believers, fear God, honor the king.

Respect those who are weaker (1 Peter 3:7)

7 Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers.

Respect as part of trying to please others (1 Cor 7:33-34)

33 But a married man is concerned about the affairs of this world — how he can please his wife — 34 and his interests are divided. An unmarried woman or virgin is concerned about the Lord's affairs: Her aim is to be devoted to the Lord in both body and spirit. But a married woman is concerned about the affairs of this world — how she can please her husband.

Respect because a prudent wife is from God (Prov 19:14)

14 Houses and wealth are inherited from parents, but a prudent wife is from the Lord.
Conclusion and Other Thoughts

Commentary Thoughts from Bob Deffinbaugh

Conclusion

Our text is based upon a principle, which is vitally important and yet little understood in our times: God has established certain institutions in this world which are earthly symbols of heavenly realities. The nature of the heavenly reality determines the nature of the symbol. Stated briefly the substance dictates the symbol. This inter-relationship between substance and symbol is referred to by the writer to the Hebrews:

1 Now the main point in what has been said is this: we have such a high priest, who has taken His seat at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, 2 a minister in the sanctuary, and in the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, not man. 3 For every high priest is appointed to offer both gifts and sacrifices; hence it is necessary that this high priest also have something to offer. 4 Now if He were on earth, He would not be a priest at all, since there are those who offer the gifts according to the Law; 5 who serve a copy and shadow of the heavenly things, just as Moses was warned by God when he was about to erect the tabernacle; for, “See,” He says, “that you make all things according to the pattern which was shown you on the mountain” (Hebrews 8:1-5).

To pervert or the symbol is to distort the picture of the heavenly reality, which it represents. And for this reason, conduct which may not seem to be an abomination by society is regarded by God as that which requires the most severe discipline. This is evident in Paul’s teaching concerning the conduct of the Corinthians at the Lord’s Table. Evils they did not take seriously were dealt with most severely:

17 But in giving this instruction, I do not praise you, because you come together not for the better but for the worse. 18 For, in the first place, when you come together as a church, I hear that divisions exist among you; and in part, I believe it. 19 For there must also be factions among you, in order that those who are approved may have become evident among you. 20 Therefore when you meet together, it is not to eat the Lord’s Supper, 21 for in your eating each one takes his own supper first; and one is hungry and another is drunk. 22 What? Do you not have houses in which to eat and drink? Or do you despise the church of God, and shame those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you? In this I will not praise you. 23 For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus in the night in which He was betrayed took bread; 24 and when He had given thanks, He broke it, and said, “This is My body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of Me.” 25 In the same way He took the cup also, after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in My blood; do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.” 26 For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until He comes. 27 Therefore whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner, shall be guilty of the body and the blood of the Lord. 28 But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. 29 For he who eats and drinks, eats and drinks judgment to himself, if he does not judge the body rightly. 30 For this reason many among you are weak and sick, and a number sleep (1 Corinthians 11:17-30).

When the Corinthians behaved as they did at the Lord’s Table, they not only violated divine instructions concerning communion, they distorted the symbolic commemoration of our Lord Himself and of His atoning sacrifice for our sins. To disregard God’s instructions concerning symbolic institutions is a sin of the most serious order. What was true of communion is also true of Christian marriage, and of the conduct of the man and the woman as husband and wife. Each has a symbolic role to play, and to ignore, reject, or distort their symbolic duties is a serious matter.

When Paul lays down these instructions to husbands and wives in Ephesians chapter 5 he also informs us that these duties are symbolic in nature. Beyond this, he informs us just what it is that we are privileged to symbolize in our role as husband or as wife. The duties which Paul sets down are not a reflection of Paul’s narrowness and chauvinism, as some would say, but the teaching of our Lord Himself, pertaining to matters of great importance. We should expect that these teachings conflict with the values and attitudes of our society. The Christian’s conversion brings about a radical transformation of our thinking and behavior, and this will not be in harmony with a sinful, fallen world. Let us expect reaction to Paul’s teachings. But let us not adopt the thinking of the world in which we live toward these matters. Let us rather obey God’s commands and fulfill our duty to portray heavenly truths, not only to men, but to angels as well:

8 To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ, 9 and to bring to light what is the administration of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God, who created all things; 10 in order that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places. 11 This was in accordance with the eternal
Christians have become far too casual about the commands of our Lord pertaining to symbolic actions. If such actions do not set well with our desires (the flesh), and are in conflict with the values of our culture (the world), then we pronounce them to be the idiosyncrasies of Paul, or actions related only to that culture and time, or just plain foolishness. In the light of our text, we dare not think this way any longer. There may be a few areas of our Christian life where we have a measure of freedom to change a symbol, so as to make it more pointed to our culture, but we have no right at all to disobey, change, or distort God’s symbolic commands when they distort the picture they are to portray concerning the substance.

For those who have chosen to set aside the teachings of Paul and Peter on the roles and responsibilities of husbands, and especially of wives, I have this question. If you have set aside certain biblical commands, duties, and actions, with what have you replaced them? What are you doing which boldly and dramatically reflects the headship of Christ over His church, and the submission of the church to Christ? What are you doing which contradicts the values and attitudes of the world in which we live, so that the dramatic contrast between Christianity and heathenism is underscored? What is it that you have replaced God’s symbols with, which brings about persecution for your identification with Christ and the proclamation of His glorious gospel? I am sad to say that those who have set aside divine duties have not replaced them with anything which challenges and contradicts the world, the flesh, or the devil.

Having spoken as directly and forcibly as I can concerning our duties and responsibilities to carry out our symbolic roles, let me also remind you that these roles are not a reflection on us as persons, but rather are a reflection of Christ and His church. In Christ, there are no distinctions; we are all equal in our standing before Christ:

26 For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. 27 For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. 28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus (Galatians 3:26-28).

Some attempt to use this text in Galatians to undermine the New Testament teaching on submission, particularly the submission of the wife to her husband. Those who seek to do so fail to get the point that while we are all equal in our standing before Christ, our roles differ when we are required to symbolize the submission of the church to Christ. The heavenly reality is one of headship and submission. Our earthly roles as husband and wife are to reflect this headship and submission. But our relationship to Christ is one of equality with every other believer, because we are all saved by His grace and stand justified in Him.

Let me attempt to illustrate what I mean in this way. Suppose that we are all actors in a play. In this play there are many characters, but among them there is a hero and a villain. The actor who is given the role of the villain is not any less a person in his standing because of his role than the one who plays the hero is a better person for doing so. We must distinguish between what we are as a person in Christ and what role we are to portray about Christ and His church. We are all given a role to play, but a subordinate role does not imply an inferior relationship to Christ.

If someone were to protest that the role they have been given to play is beneath them, I would first remind you that we are not worthy of any role. We were, as sinners, worthy only of Christ’s eternal wrath. Any role is a privilege. And, further, let me remind you that in order to achieve our salvation at Calvary, Jesus took on a role which was beneath Him. Finally, I would say to you that the values assigned to our roles by our culture are opposite to those assigned by God. Do you think it demeaning to hold a position of service? Our Lord has taught us that to be the greatest is to serve, and not to be served (Matthew 20:20-28). Why, then, should we agonize about any role which God has graciously given to us?

I must ask one final question of you, my friend. Have you received the salvation which this text calls on Christians to symbolize by their relationship as husbands and wives? Have you trusted in Jesus Christ as your Savior? As a man seeks out the woman whom he loves and woos her to himself, so Jesus Christ seeks those who will become a part of His bride, the church. He came to the earth, lived a sinless life, manifested God to a sinful world, and then died on the cross of Calvary, bearing the punishment which we deserve for our sins. By trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ and His sacrificial death, burial, and resurrection, we may become one with Christ, a part of His church. Just as a man proposes to the woman of his choice, so God has proposed to you through the gospel. As a woman must accept the proposal of her husband to be, so you must accept God’s offer of salvation in the person of Jesus Christ. There is no value in seeking to demonstrate the symbolism of the gospel until you have first received of its substance—Christ Himself. I urge you to trust in Him for your salvation.
Concluding Thoughts from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

This pattern set forth by Paul in today’s lesson challenged the ways people viewed marriage in his day. For people of pagan background, marriage placed the wife under the husband’s control for the benefit of the husband. The idea that marriage was for something other than the benefit of the husband was foreign. Yet to walk in a manner worthy of the good news of Jesus demanded that the pagan concept be replaced. Romance is terrific. The Bible celebrates it (see the Song of Songs). But romantic love is not the foundational stuff of a Christlike marriage. The Christian couple abandons cultural expectations of marriage and replaces them with Christ’s expectations. That will mean not the seeking of fulfillment of self but the losing of self to the Lord.

Concluding Thoughts from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator

The word “submit” means to subordinate yourself to the will and desires of another person. There are degrees of submission that we need to recognize. For example, wives are exhorted to submit to their husbands in all areas (Eph. 5:22). Believers are also taught to submit to rulers and the laws that they ordain (1 Pet. 2:13-14). These are examples of structures of authority. They are to be followed except where those in authority command things that go against God’s will. There seems to be a type of submission, however, that involves more of an attitude than a structure of authority. Our text is an example of this attitude. According to Ephesians 5:21, all believers are to submit to each other. When we apply this verse to husbands, it means that they in some sense must submit to their wives. This cannot mean that they must submit to their wives in the same way their wives are to submit to them. If that were the case, there would be no authority structure in the family. The exhortations to submit would cancel each other out. To avoid such absurdity, it is best to understand "submit to one another" as a general attitude that we should have toward other believers. There is a difference between yielding to the wishes of others as much as possible and operating within a system of structured authority. Believers yield to one another out of love and selflessness, not because of divinely ordained lines of authority, as a wife would submit to her husband (although both husband and wife should, of course, act this way). Often believers fail to have a submissive attitude because of pride and self-will. Since we all have a strong tendency to desire our own way, strong motivation is necessary to practice a submissive attitude toward others. In the last part of Ephesians 5:21, Paul revealed the motivation that is needed. He exhorted the Ephesians believers to submit to one another "in the fear of God." We could paraphrase it this way: "Out of deep respect for God, submit to each other." The ability to practice a submissive attitude is the fruit of a quality relationship with God. Jesus said, "If ye love me, keep my commandments" (John 14:15). It is amazing what we can do out of love for Christ. Stubborn, selfish people can learn to put the needs and desires of others above their own. When believers are dominated by a self-serving attitude, they are not doing things the Lord’s way. No wonder their love for the Lord is anemic. In Romans 12:10, Paul wrote, "In honour preferring one another." Mutual submission is a form of honoring others.

Concluding Thoughts from the Echoes Commentary

Marriage, Christ, and the Church - The Bible says marriage paints a picture of Christ's love and compassion for His Church. Submission is a part of that beautiful picture. Sadly, this word is often misunderstood and used inappropriately. The apostle Paul, in his letter to the Ephesians, outlined a Christian marriage with Christ as the center and the head. The Lord has the final word. Submission refers to both parties in the marriage subjecting to Him and to each other, as well as loving, honoring and learning from each other. Marriage is not a "What's in this for me?" relationship.

The Husband's Leadership - God is the authority over the man, who understands he has to answer to the heavenly Father for the way he treats God's daughter. Paul exhorted the husband to love his wife in the same way he loves and looks after his own self. He protects and nourishes his own body. So, he gives the same care to his wife.
The Wife's Submission - There are limits to what a wife must do because her husband tells her to. If her husband asks her to sin, or if he's abusive or controlling, God would not ask her to agree to what he says or to stay in a life-threatening situation. God would want her to make a better choice for the sake of the family. And if he commits adultery, the Scriptures give her permission to divorce. Agape is the word translated as "love" in these verses. The marriage should be characterized by genuine, unselfish, self-denying sacrifice, a continual giving from the heart. These attributes describe the kind of love Christ has for the Church. Christ continually serves His bride, the object of His love. Jesus ministered for the sake of God's children, not Himself. The relationship between Christ and His bride, the Church, is unique—an unexplainable bond. In a similar way, the relationship between husband and wife becoming one is mystical, the joining of two very different puzzle pieces. But with the help of the Holy Spirit, God fits them together and teaches them how to love one another.