

That's quite a text. It's long, yes, but that's not what I mean. I was referring to that one part that people often balk at. I'm referring to the part that, when I read it in wedding ceremonies, causes people to roll their eyes and even to snicker. I'm referring to the line, "*Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord.*"

This text is long for a reason. It's long because that one line is not its main feature, despite how much attention it gets. The original Greek presents this submission as a very natural, very flowing application of a broader encouragement, one that applies not only to wives, but to all Christians everywhere. What is that broader encouragement? "*Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.*" I repeat: That's for everyone, not just for wives. "*Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.*"

Submit. That's what the Spirit of God has to say to the children of God this morning. Submit. All of you. In your minds, arrange yourself *under others*, subservient to others. Submit.

That submission is an essential part of being a Christian. In fact, that submission is just the last part of a long list of things that Christians who are filled with the Spirit will want to do. Verse 18 says, "*Be filled with the Spirit.*" Then Paul lists activities that would be connected with being full of that Spirit: "*Speak[ing] to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual song,*" "*Sing[ing] and mak[ing] music in your heart to the Lord,*" and "*giving thanks to God the Father for everything.*" AND, of course, "*Submit[ting] to one another out of reverence for Christ.*"

Be filled with the Spirit, talking to one another in worship songs, singing and making music in your heart to God, giving thanks to God for everything *and* submitting to one another. We need to get used to tagging that on to the end of our list of things that Christians should typically be doing, just like the Spirit-inspired Paul to add it. No matter what others things we might say Christians should be doing, this should be part of the list.

So, do you think Christians should praise God more? Me, too! They should praise God **And Submit** to one another out of reverence for Christ. Are you concerned, perhaps, that Christians aren't serving the community enough? Fine. Me, too. I think they should

serve the community more *and* submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. Pray more? Yes. And submit. Praise, serve, pray and submit. I think you're getting the picture, right?

When you start thinking like that, thinking of submitting as being as much a part of the Christian's life as singing praises to God and giving thanks, then nothing in this section will sound odd to you. Then you will be thinking of submitting in exactly the same way that the Apostle Paul did when he added submitting as one of the things that Spirit-filled Christians will do. Then when you read, "*Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord,*" that won't sound any stranger than "*Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.*" And you won't be surprised to see submission to one another in "*However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.*" That is submission, too.

"Of course!" you will think. "Every Christian will submit to the needs of all others no matter what role they are in!" Therefore "*Children, obey your parents in the Lord,*" will make perfect sense when coupled with "*Fathers, do not exasperate you children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.*" "Of course!" you will think. "Once you understand that every Christian is called to do as Christ did, putting his own needs aside to serve others, submission easily becomes just as central as praise and worship, singing and giving thanks!"

And Christ himself is the key there, isn't he? That's especially true when you focus on what Paul said about the submission of the husband. The husband would rank number one in the family if we drew up ranks from these verses based on the pecking order of authority given to the individual roles, wouldn't he? Children aren't listed as having any authority but must obey their fathers and mothers. Wives, then, have authority over children, but not over their husbands, for it says, "*wives should submit to their husbands in everything.*"

But then look. In all those roles with all those levels of authority, which one of them is saddled with making the ultimate sacrifice? If you said the husband, you're close, but you're still not

quite getting this. It's a bit of a trick question.

Indeed the husband's role is compared most intimately to that of Christ. But "saddled with sacrifice" is hardly the way to describe Christ's mission. "*Christ loved the church,*" Ephesians says, and he "*gave himself up for her.*" "*Gave himself up*" is certainly an expression for *sacrifice*, but "saddled with it"? Christ *loved* the church! He would gladly and willingly give anything for her! It's in his heart, in his nature! Remember what it says in Hebrews about Christ's sacrifice? "*...who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame*" (Hebrews 12:2).

So how rightfully ashamed children should feel for being angry about "having" to obey their parents! God gave those parents and children know it. Feeling forced to obey them and ungrateful for all they provide is sitting in judgment on God!

How rightfully ashamed the wife should feel when she misconstrues the loving instruction of our Savior as some church law she has to obey or some arcane rule in need of overturning! Is Christ, who gave us these roles, dumb and arcane? Are you above Christ so that you can decide what principles of his are good for your life and happiness and which ones aren't?

And, oh, how shocking and sad it is when a father abuses his position of authority either by beating or insulting his children into submission or by looking down upon his precious wife as a servant put there to obey his whims! Such a man does not know his Father in heaven.

There is no reverence for Christ in any of these attitudes. There is only selfishness and lust for power—*selfishness* and *lust for power*. This is not the heart of Christ in action, Christ who married himself to us when we were nothing but evil and filthy in his perfectly holy eyes. Looking at this bride and the evil she had brought upon herself, Christ "*gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word... to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.*"

That is our Savior. That is the Christ. That is a God who has at his very heart the desire to serve his people even when they de-

serve his scorn. He *submitted himself* to the death we deserve. Though he never ceased to be God and always retained the power to end his mission and leave us to our own eternal disaster, he left his Father and married himself to our race. *That* is love. *That* is our *life*!

And though it seems simple enough for me to say this and it is nothing that hasn't been heard here before, please remember the price our loving Savior gladly and graciously paid so that I could say this to you, his bride: You are forgiven this day. Today you are cleansed and made new in Jesus' love and mercy. Hear it as though for the first time, bride of Christ! You are cleansed! You are holy! For the joy set before him, he has made you his own!

So rejoice! Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs! Sing and make music in your hearts to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ!

*And* submit. Joyfully submit to one another now out of reverence for Christ, our bridegroom. Remember the love that was happy to make you whole and new at the cost of his own blood. Remember it as you partake of the body given and the blood shed. Remember and be forever changed, so that a new heart that beats with the very love of Christ may rise and go home from this sanctuary. Let a new heart that trusts in God to bless as we give of our very selves go into the world through those double-doors today!

The world will say we're crazy. They may like to sing songs like we do, and they certainly wouldn't mind hearing that they are cleared of all charges in heaven so that they can go on living for themselves with impunity. Their natural religiosity may even lead them to sing certain songs of praise.

But on top of all those things, you would add something they never would: "And submit. Submit to one another as Christ has submitted himself in love to us." They will mock you, tell you that you need to grab all the power and pleasure for yourself that you can. But you have Christ. You have forgiveness. You have life. We will submit to one another gladly, for his sake, looking forward to the eternity of selfless, joyful love still ahead. Amen.