

## Ephesians Week 10

5:21-33

### Summary

#### **Summary of the Text**

Paul continues on his discussion of what it means to be imitators of God as displayed in Jesus. Now he turns to the household relationships of husband & wife, parents & children and masters & slaves. The key to this section is keeping in mind that this is not simply one off instruction. Rather this falls into the context of what it means in these relationships to give oneself up as a sacrifice to God. Which is why all this instruction comes under the main instruction of 'be filled with the Spirit' in 5:18. And, the direct context is verse 21 instructing the church to be subject to one another. In fact, the greek text places a comma after that instruction and then begins on the instruction to first wives and then husbands. In short, here is how wives will offer themselves as living sacrifices to God and here's how husbands will do so.

The instruction begins to wives, and it should be noted that much less is said to wives than husbands. It should also be noted that this instruction is directly to wives and not directed to husbands. Quite simply, wives are to submit to husbands because husbands are the head of the wife. That is all the rationale Paul has for the commandment. However, with his comparisons it should be noted that this is not a position of inferiority, simply order. Because, Christ is head of the cosmos (chapter 1) and head of the church (chapter 4).

The instruction to husbands is that they are to love their wives. Again, the comparison is what gives the instruction power. Just as Christ loves the church and gave himself up for her, demonstrates the way in which husbands are to love their wives and what the headship looks like. This comparison removes any sense of domination or tyranny. Rather, it is a responsibility to ensure that one's wife is presented pure and beautiful to God.

The comparison of husband & wife with Christ & church continue, because in reality the husband and wife become one flesh or body. So, to love one's wife is to love one's own self. Again, this unity of husband and wife is only a pointing to the real union of Christ and church - the mystery now revealed that the desire of God of being married to his bride.

#### **Application**

This passage has been used in history as a means of oppressing one gender into obedience and this is totally inappropriate. One thing to note is that these three units of relationships are not parallel, as in:

Husband = Parents = Masters

Wife = Children = Slaves

Wives are not children or slaves and husbands are not parents (of their wives) or masters (over their wives). Rather, there is an equality between men and women which God has established in Christ and which is not diminished by this order. And, there should be no fear of this being mistaken if it is kept in mind that these instructions are couched in the prior verses of being an offering like Christ, being filled with the Spirit and submitting to one another. With this for context there should be nothing but mutual love in respect in the fear of Christ.

#### **Discussion**

We talked about how these verses actually advanced dignity for women, children and slaves in Paul's time. Each of these categories were not considered people in the eyes of society and law. So, even having instruction to them and in consideration of them is quite leading edge. Really, Paul is trying to give his new communities, which have lost their identity from their ethnicity and cultural assumptions, instruction as to how the most basic societal grouping, the family, should behave.