

Submitting to Christ

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[0 : 00] I don't know what you immediately think of. We're going to look through these verses together. It'd be worth having your Bibles open in front of you. I don't know what you immediately thought of as Debbie read them.

I don't know what you immediately think of when you hear the word submit or submission as comes up in that passage. I think my mind probably goes firstly to kind of the world of wrestling or martial arts, which you'll be surprised to know I know almost nothing about.

But this kind of picture of kind of muscly guys in spandex trying to get people in a headlock or some sort of choke hold or arm lock until eventually the defeated fighter has to kind of tap out, has to give up, has to submit because they can't handle any more.

That idea to submit is to suffer, it is to lose, it is weakness. And I think that maybe that, perhaps without the wrestlers, but perhaps that is the kind of the common idea of submission that we have in our world today.

It's the idea of someone stronger, oppressing, taking advantage of someone or some group of people who are weaker. And with this weaker person, this weaker group, just kind of struggling along under the weight of this injustice, just accepting kind of the unfairness of the world.

[1 : 23] Well, my kind of task, I suppose, this morning as we look through this passage is to show that that is not what the Bible means. That is not what the Bible is talking about when it speaks of submission.

And that's not to say those things don't happen. Oppression, the strong taking advantage of the weak, the Bible has an awful lot to say condemning those things. But that is not what the Bible has in mind at all.

That could not be further away from what the Bible is meaning when it talks about this idea of submission as it does in these verses. And the goal is that if we get this right, that we won't just go away from here thinking, well, I suppose submitting is not quite as bad as I thought it was.

But rather actually thinking what a joy it is, what a blessing it is to be able to submit, what a privilege that is, that it's not weakness or suffering, but actually it's something that leads to flourishing and joy.

So that's the kind of direction, that's our goal for this morning. Let's get stuck into those verses that Debbie read. I asked Debbie to start at verse 21 there, which is where we finished last week.

[2 : 33] It's kind of in the middle of a sentence. But really it's a verse that introduces what the whole of this section, these verses that we're looking at, is about. Submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.

That's kind of the headline, as it were, for this section. And then you might notice if you look down at your Bibles, or as Debbie was reading it, that's then applied in three different and specific relationships.

The marriage relationship, husbands and wives. The parent and child relationship. And then the work relationship, employee and employer. So we're going to look at those three different relationships in turn.

Remember, we're in this section of Ephesians, having laid out the truths about the gospel. Paul now shows how this gospel changes everything in day-to-day life.

And here, how it transforms these relationships that we're going to look at. But first, just a couple of things from verse 21 that we began with, to help us get our bearings. Number one is to realize this before we begin, that submission is for all Christians.

[3 : 41] That all of us are to submit in one form or another. Submitting to one another, it says. So we can't look at these verses and say, well, that's not fair.

Why don't they have to submit? They do. We can't read these verses and say, oh, that's for other people. They should submit. No, it's for all of us. It's something that's, yeah, for all of us as we look through it.

And secondly, it is to see that this submission is ultimately for Christ and to Christ. Submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.

And so any authority that we're called to come under, to submit to, is only that authority that's given by Christ. It's only as it's modeled on Christ.

It's only as it's shaped by the gospel that we come under it. And that, we're going to see, I hope, makes all the difference in the world as we look through this passage together. Okay, so first up, Paul speaks about how this works itself out in the marriage relationship, wives and husbands.

[4 : 44] We're going to take a bit longer speaking about this one than the next two for a couple of reasons. Firstly, it's because Paul speaks about it in a bit more length. You'll see this section's a bit longer than the other two.

He kind of expands on things a bit more. But also, I think it's probably fair to say, this is probably the most controversial section, the most controversial thing that we're going to talk about this morning.

Now, this is probably one of the most countercultural, potentially offensive passages of the Bible that there are in 21st century Scotland. And it's really good that we face up to that, we understand that.

I was once at a wedding, and this was the passage read out, and two ladies in front of me stood up and left and didn't come back for the rest of the service. And so we can't get away from the fact that this is a passage that kind of cuts against the grain of our society.

And yet, hopefully, as we see, as we look at it, we're going to see that this is not something oppressive or backward or that needs to be left in the past. But actually, because it is based on the gospel, because it is shaped by the gospel, it's something that is really good news.

[5 : 54] And also, because really this passage is as much about the gospel as it is about marriage, how these two are inseparably linked, Paul moves from one to the other and back again, it means that this is a passage that's relevant for everyone.

One writer about this passage, he says that for all of us, whether single, married, divorced, widowed, or in any condition of marriage, this beautiful passage not only speaks of the things we can pray for those who are married, but celebrates the intimate spiritual union of all believers with Christ, to whom we will one day be united, the ultimate marriage made in heaven.

And so this is a description of the gospel. This is something for all of us as we look at this together. Okay, so what is it that Paul then says to wives and husbands?

And we want to keep these two really close together, otherwise it doesn't really make sense. Verse 22 and 23, wives, submit to your own husbands as to the Lord, for the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church.

And yet then Paul goes straight on to speak to husbands. Verse 25, husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.

[7 : 16] So who does Paul say a wife is to submit to? She's to submit to a husband, her husband, who loves her in the same way that Jesus loved the church.

And what does that love look like? What does Paul highlight about Jesus' love for the church? Well, that he gave himself for the church. This is a love that is completely self-sacrificial.

This is a love that is willing even to die for the sake of the other person. That is what Jesus did for the church. This is a love that will go to any length to achieve what is best for the other person.

And so we need to see straight away that the standard for both wives and husbands here is incredibly high. And the incredible thing then, these high standards, is that marriage, a marriage is to give a picture of the gospel.

And so marriage is not just a piece of paper, as we so often hear. Marriage isn't a man-made institution, but marriage is something established by God. We hear about the very first marriage right back in the opening chapters of the Bible with Adam and Eve.

[8 : 26] And it's there to give us a glimpse at the most incredible love relationship there is, that of God and his people. And so we can say this straight away.

Why is marriage so important? Why is it a big deal in the Bible? Why should we pray for people who are married? Well, it is not because marriage is kind of the be-all and end-all.

It is not because marriage is where we find true meaning. It is not because we can only be satisfied and loved if we're married. The Bible says that's rubbish.

The Bible says to speak like that is actually to make an idol of marriage. The Bible speaks really highly of singleness. Jesus was a single guy. He didn't live, you know, he lived a full life.

The Bible says the value of marriage is that it's given to us as a picture, as a pointer towards the true relationship where we do find meaning, where we do find satisfaction, where we do receive perfect love.

[9 : 28] And that is in being God's people, in being his church, in being the bride of Christ, as it's called elsewhere in the Bible. That's in being brought into this family through the gospel that Paul has been speaking about so far in Ephesians.

It's a pointer to that relationship which Jesus, who was God himself, gave his life for to make possible. And we need to have that kind of front and center before we go any further.

We need to see marriage. We need to see the idea of submission. We need to see the idea of headship or authority always in that light of the gospel and that good news of what Jesus has done for all of us to make us his people if we put our trust in him.

And it's as we do that, as we see marriage in that framework that I think we see, firstly, that what Paul is speaking about here is a kind of a timeless biblical principle. This isn't Paul just giving a cultural command that we can forget about because we've moved on now.

No, it's tied to that unchanging truth of the gospel. But it also shows us what that looks like. And again, I think it gives us a much more encouraging, positive picture than the first place our minds or our culture might go to when we hear about this.

[10 : 46] It's really understandable that people get worried about the idea of submission. It's understandable that when people read wives submit to your husbands or the husband is the head of the wife, it's understandable, perhaps you feel this yourself, it's understandable that people kind of bristle at that a little bit.

It doesn't sit nicely. Why is that understandable? I think at least one reason why that is understandable is because lots of guys have used their physical advantages, their strength of will, their perceived authority in ways that have been unhealthy and oppressive for women.

And the very worst thing about that is that some of those people have appealed to a Bible passage like this as a kind of justification of that when in fact they're completely out of line. But again, anything that we think of as kind of regressive about this is because we're failing to remember that the man's headship, his authority, is modeled on Jesus.

Jesus who died so that the church, verse 26, might be sanctified, cleansed, presented in splendor, holy, and without blemish. Christ's love for the church, you see, not in serving himself and making life easy for himself, but in humbling himself, in serving others, in enabling people to flourish and be who they were designed to be.

He does that, verse 29, by nourishing and cherishing his people. The big picture of the Bible is that it is a joy to submit to Christ.

[12 : 23] It is a joy to come under his care as he helps us move forward in our relationship with him and grow in our love for God. And that is what a man's responsibility to his wife is all about.

That is what being the head of a household looks like. It's not ensuring that a wife gets kind of the greatest holidays or the biggest houses. It's not saying that the man has to be the breadwinner and earn more money.

It's not saying there's different things that a woman can't do or should do. It's certainly not saying that, you know, that the man is kind of the boss around the house and the wife has to kind of scurry around and do what she's told.

No, it's that the husband is to lead his wife, to grow her in love for Jesus, to grow her in a relationship with God, to grow her in holiness, in her likeness to God.

And I can sort of, it's difficult to sort of say things up here because I speak as a husband who finds that incredibly difficult. You know, but in my average week, I find it hard enough sort of to keep my own life in order, you know, to make any progress in my own relationship with God, never mind thinking of someone else.

[13 : 35] And yet that's why the Bible compares it to that love of Jesus, that it's a sacrificial love, that it's actually putting someone else's needs and concerns first. And I think the incredible thing is that actually it's when we do that, it's as a husband puts his wife first, her spiritual growth first, that actually they find they're growing themselves, that they're carrying out that role that God gives us.

And that is what leading a family means. That's what it's all about. Submitting, well, serving, sacrificing in order that the other might grow in their love for Jesus, their likeness to God.

And so what does it mean then for a wife to submit? Well, really it's to accept that care that a husband offers. And again, that's not easy either. This is a challenging passage.

But the only way that we can do that is if we remember what the purpose is. There's a Christian writer called Amy Bird, and she puts it like this, that submission is not a heavy-handed dogma, but it is a struggle rooted in love and care for one another.

Another writer says this, it's not to be an unthinking obedience to a husband's rule, but rather a grateful acceptance of his care. This submission has nothing to do with weakness.

[14 : 55] This submission is not oppressive. But again, we only get this right if we think in light of how we, all of us, are to submit to Christ. Following him for us isn't to be a chore or a drudge or a misery, but it's to be a joy as he cares for us, as he leads us sacrificially.

And it's not that we're oppressed or kind of downtrodden or not able to be all that we could be because we follow Jesus. Instead, it's that in following him that we flourish, that we achieve all that he's laid out for us, that we are able to have that relationship with him that we're designed for.

And so as we finish this little section, I can't say exactly what this will look like in each different marriage with different people, with different gifts and different abilities and different situations that the Bible doesn't try and do that.

But it does tell us that that result of this relationship working in a gospel way as Christ and the church, the result being two people moving forward together joyfully in their relationship with one another and also in their relationship with God.

So there's that picture of submission in the marriage relationship. I know that's controversial. If anyone wants to kind of chat more about that, I'd be welcome to do it. But I do hope it gets across a kind of a positive picture, that it's a gospel submission, it's a gospel relationship.

[16 : 19] And it's as we understand what Christ has done for the church that we'll be able to walk forward in this and have it as a positive and an encouragement thing. Let's carry on and look at the next section.

We'll look more briefly at these. Firstly, children and parents, and again, we're going to see some repeated ideas in here, some repeated themes. What does Paul say? Well, firstly, that command that children are to obey their parents.

That's number five from the Ten Commandments. Note there, the word obey is different to the word submit. This is a different relationship, a different way of relating from a husband and wife, that children are given a command to live under the direct authority of their parents, that that is how life works best, that command that comes with a promise that you may have a long time in the land.

But again, the parent's authority has God's authority over that. Parents don't just tell their kids whatever they fancy. There is a responsibility on parents given immediately after.

Do not provoke your children to anger. The children don't obey just so that we can kind of annoy them and send them around on wild goose chases. Instead, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

[17 : 38] I've been learning recently that it's very easy to kind of wind the children up and to do the wrong thing and annoy them. It's very easy just to want children to kind of fit around what is convenient for you as a parent.

And yet, children seem to be born with this innate sense of justice and also with it incredibly long memories when it suits them. Our four-year-old will easily forget something you've asked her to do two minutes ago but will remember that promise that you made two months ago which you kind of half-heartedly thought she would forget and you wouldn't really have to do it but instead you find yourself we've got kind of a glass of water seeing what happens if you leave ten jelly babies in a glass for a long time and it turns out it goes moldy.

But that's the kind of thing I was hoping we wouldn't have to do that but it was remembered and they remember what you might forget and it's easy to frustrate kids to anger them by trying to kind of fob them off saying one thing and yet doing another by treating them as a kind of inconvenience.

The Bible says to parents not to provoke their children like that. But the incredible thing I think here that really kind of gets me the alternative that the Bible gives and this is where again it's different to our culture the alternative is not to just well in that case pander to the child's every desire and kind of spoil them as if the child is God or the child is an idol.

Instead the command the challenge to parents is to bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. Again the idea is that children are to be obedient to their parents because their parents are wanting what's best for them that they would come and know Jesus and that the parents aren't just wanting that but are actively encouraging them in that.

[19 : 23] We live in a world which is constantly trying to shape our children into a certain way of life a certain way of thinking and some of those things will be good things. If you go down the street to Knox Academy they've got new kind of values for them as a school ambition respect and community these are good things these are things we can get behind but actually the world around us is not going to be pointing our children to Jesus.

The world around us is not going to be telling each other that the community true community is based on the gospel like Ephesians says that respect comes because all people are made in the image of God and loved by them through Jesus.

Now that is a responsibility that parents have for their children a responsibility that we can't forget about a responsibility for the church to help out with that's why next door the children are learning from the Bible learning about Jesus.

But that can't be the only place that happens. Instead Paul calls on Christian parents to model Christian living to teach their children from the Bible to pray for them to make the gospel something which is part of their day-to-day lives which is seen and which is spoken about.

It says parents are doing that that then their children are to obey their parents in the Lord. It says parents do that that this obedience is not like a ball and chain that the children are desperately trying to get rid of but actually that they're able to recognize that even in times of discipline even in times when parents are having to be firm with their children even in times when children are not getting what they want that ultimately they'll know it was done for their good.

[21 : 08] You might not know that at the time they'll scream and shout and say it's unfair and all sorts of things but our prayer is that ultimately those children would come to know Jesus. They would come to know that what parents do for them is for their good that they would know the best thing possible that they're growing up in an uncertain world with complex relationships that they would have that perfect relationship with their heavenly father and that is the thing that we would want for our children more than anything else and so parents are given this responsibility as children are to obey that parents are to bring up their children to know God and then finally this last relationship that Paul deals with here is the work relationship really between employees and employers and again he speaks to both sides of that partnership it's worth saying quickly here a bond servant it says is not quite the same as what we might think of as a slave this is someone who is employed for a fixed period of time the Bible here is not talking about slavery condoning slavery or forced labor or even commenting on that instead Paul is speaking about how the gospel challenges and changes and transforms working relationships in whatever form they may come and again a similar pattern employees are to obey their masters as they would Christ verse 5 the point here is that whatever work we're involved in whoever our boss is if we have one ultimately we're working for God that our job whatever that is whether it's a minister or a teacher or a farmer or a parent or anything else our job is a way to serve God and so we do that to the best of our ability we do that as well as we can again we live in a world that says well take the most that you can for kind of the minimum effort and that can be a really tempting attitude to take into our work doing just enough to get by and making it seem like we're committed without ever really having to overdo it you know working hard if there's a potential raise or promotion at stake but slacking off if no one's watching that's that kind of eye service that Paul speaks against and he says how would our attitude towards our work be different if we realize that actually

Jesus is our boss how would that change the effort we put in how would that change how we behave even when no one is watching Paul's saying because actually that is the case God is our boss and so work as if working for him because that is the reality of the situation and again here the Bible gives this incredible approach to work which gives a balance that I don't think we can find anywhere else it says firstly that work is not the be all and end all work or our boss is not God it's so easy to make those things an idol where everything else family or health or time or church is sacrificed in the hope of the next promotion or performance review or paycheck thinking well that will satisfy us and the Bible kind of takes that idol of work down from its pedestal and puts Jesus there as the only one who can truly satisfy but it doesn't then say so just forget about work don't bother it's just a kind of hassle get through it doing the bare minimum and the Bible then says having put work in its proper place that we can work hard we can enjoy our work we can be diligent in our work we can find meaning in our work because work is part of God's good design for us that we work as if working for the Lord we work for God's glory and as employees are to work that way for their earthly bosses well those who are earthly bosses are then given this command about how they treat their employees not to threaten or take advantage of them but treat them well and again here's something that would have stuck out like a sore thumb in Ephesus in Roman culture your workers were basically your property you just do what you want with them so here Paul puts forward this radically different way for employers to treat their employees they're to be treated as equals and why is that well because again it's just the same ultimately God is in charge verse 9 knowing that he who is both their master and yours is in heaven and there is no partiality with him this business might run on a kind of a hierarchy structure that's totally fine but God does not run on that structure and that's a great place for us to finish as this passage comes to a close the gospel does not get rid of or kind of flatten out these relationships marriage parents and child work it says there are different roles there are distinct roles within these relationships there's submission there's headship there's obedience there's instruction but in all of these it is never that one person is above the other or better than the other or more valuable than the other the reason behind all of these things is that we are all

God's people and that he shows no partiality and that he loves us all male, female young, old employee, employer all people are made in his image all people have that offer of the gospel through Jesus who gave his life for the church Paul's point is that we're all loved by God through Jesus we're able to have this relationship with God and that's what these human relationships in all different areas of life are to be reflecting that great relationship and so we'd be encouraging one another in this truth pointing one another back to Jesus that we'd love others as he loved us sacrificially and that we would gladly submit to him gladly obey him as our master in order that we might know him more and live for him more and that he might be glorified and that we might be his people and that we would to be continued to manipulate the word of God and that he might live what he might want to be to distribute because it is maybe even for the same you can see by the way at least you can see the universe where he might magari