

“Two examples of mutual submission”: Ephesians 5:18, 21, 6:1-9

Tenth Sunday after Pentecost – August 8, 2021

Tom Mount – Holy Trinity Chico

Scripture reading – Eph 5:18, 21, 6:1-9

¹⁸ “Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit...²¹ Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ... Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. ² “Honor your father and mother”—which is the first commandment with a promise— ³ “so that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth.” ⁴ Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.

⁵ Slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ. ⁶ Obey them not only to win their favor when their eye is on you, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from your heart. ⁷ Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not people, ⁸ because you know that the Lord will reward each one for whatever good they do, whether they are slave or free. ⁹ And masters, treat your slaves in the same way. Do not threaten them, since you know that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no favoritism with him.”

Introduction and review

- The controlling thought of this text is 5:18: **“be filled with the Spirit.”** How is the Spirit-filled life demonstrated? Four examples: speaking, singing, giving thanks, submitting.
- The fourth example is 5:21: **“submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.”** Jesus exemplified this “submission principle” and told his followers to imitate him (Mk 10:42-45; John 13:12-16; cf. Phil 2:3). This is not a demand that we be doormats. It is an invitation to share the life of God by valuing each other in love.
- Paul illustrates this “submission principle” with three pairings of relationships in what follows (5:22-6:9), the *Haustefeln* or “Household Code.” In each relational pairing, Paul shifts the focus, as Jesus did, from “power leveraging” to “loving service”.
- The first pairing is the wife-husband relationship. Wives are to “submit to” and “respect” their husbands. Note what he doesn’t say: “obey.” Husbands are to “love,”

“cherish” and lay down their lives for their wives. In Greco-Roman household codes, husbands were told to make wives submit.

Two additional illustrations of the “submission principle”

1. Children and parents (vv. 1-4)

- Children: **“obey”** (*hupakouo*), “do what you are told.” In Jewish homes, honor was assumed. In Greek and Roman households, kids were expected to honor their parents as they would honor the gods. Two reasons: **“this is right”** and **“that it may go well for you.”**
- Fathers/parents: **“do not exasperate”** (*parorgizo*, “provoke to anger”): be gentle, fair and sensitive. **“Bring them up in the training (*paideia*) and instruction (*nouthesia*) of the Lord”**: lovingly develop, coach and educate them.

2. Slaves and masters (vv. 5-9)

- Slavery was common in the Greco-Roman world, with approximately one-third of the population making up the slave class.
- Paul is not condoning slavery. In fact, he subverts it in his letters. But here he prescribes behaviors that work within the received social conventions of the day.
- Slaves: **“obey.”** Several qualifications: **“with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ. ⁶ Obey them not only to win their favor when their eye is on you, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from your heart. ⁷ Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not people.”** They are to do their work with integrity, purity of heart and a desire to please Christ.
- Masters: **“treat your slaves in the same way. Do not threaten them, since you know that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no favoritism with him.”** They are to treat their slaves with respect, fairness, out of love for Christ.

Take away

- Ask the Lord to show you how the “submission principle” might be better lived out in your set of relationships at home and at work. What would it look like to reframe your relationships in terms of “loving service” rather than “power leveraging?”