

29. Learning to Submit to One Another

In our last topic, we saw that one of the ways that we show the love of Christ is by learning to stimulate one another to love and good works. We saw that we help our physical and spiritual children learn to stimulate others to love and good works by getting together with other Christians and encouraging one another. Today, we will see another way that we help one another to grow in our spiritual lives as we show our physical and spiritual children how to submit to one another. That will be the focus of our topic today.

In Ephesians 5:21, we read, “Submitting to one another in the fear of God.” Then, in 1 Peter 5:5, we read, “Likewise you younger people, submit yourselves to your elders. Yes, all of you be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility, for ‘God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.’” In these verses, we see that one of the things that the Lord gives us the strength to do as we yield to Him is to learn to submit to one another. Those who do not know Christ, and even many Christians, do not have a clear understanding of what it means to submit to one another. That is why it is important to see and understand what the Bible teaches because the natural response is to want to control others. However, the Lord will bring great joy to our lives as we learn how to put these verses into practice in our lives.

We need to understand the context of Ephesians 5 to understand the lessons that the Lord wants to teach us. Ephesians 5:18-21 says, “And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord, giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, submitting to one another in the fear of God.” A person that is drunk with wine is under the control of the alcohol in the wine. In contrast, as we show our children what happens when we yield our lives to the Holy Spirit, they see the joy that we experience in our lives as we yield to the Spirit. God gives us a very clear example of the difference between being controlled by the things of the world and being controlled by the Holy Spirit.

First, we see that when we yield to the Holy Spirit, it will affect the way that we speak. We see that we will be speaking the Word of God to one another. We will sing about the things that the Lord has done for us. We will be filled with joy so that we will have a song in our hearts. In contrast, most of the people who get drunk with wine or some other thing are using those things to forget. Through the years, I have talked to many alcoholics. One of the questions I usually ask an alcoholic is, “Do you drink because you like the taste of the alcohol or do you drink to forget?” Through the years, only one person has ever answered that she drank because she liked the taste of alcohol. All of the rest of the individuals have answered that they drink to forget. I will then say, “When you want to talk about the pain that you are trying to forget, I would love to listen and share with you how you can be set free from that pain.” That has opened the door to lead many to Christ.

Second, we see that when we yield to the Holy Spirit it will give us a thankful attitude. Without Christ, most people have a negative, critical and complaining attitude. Many Christians continue to have these attitudes. Some have these attitudes because they are not growing in their spiritual

lives. Others have these attitudes because they are not learning to yield their lives to the Holy Spirit. 1 Thessalonians 5:18 says, “In everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.” In this verse, we see that it is the will of God for us to give thanks in everything or in every situation. This means that we are actually out of the will of God when we are critical or complaining instead of giving thanks.

Third, we see that when we yield to the Holy Spirit we will submit to one another. Ephesians 5:21 says, “Submitting to one another in the fear of God.” The word translated “submit” means *to place yourself under another person*. Here, we see that as Christians that are yielding to the Holy Spirit that we will be choosing to place ourselves under one another. Instead of desiring to control others, we will want to place our full potential at the disposal of others as we serve them. No Christian is greater than any other Christian. We are “fellow laborers and partners in ministry” as we serve Christ. That means that it *should be our desire to serve other Christians and help them reach their full potential for Christ*. That is why we are to submit to one another in the fear of God. If we have true reverence for God, that reverence is what provides the basis for this submission.

That brings us to the question of how we submit to one another. That is explained in the verse that we quoted earlier from 1 Peter 5:5 where we read, “Likewise you younger people, submit yourselves to your elders. Yes, all of you be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility, for ‘God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble.’” In 1 Peter 5, Peter talks to the elders of the church about the way they exercise their leadership in the church and encourages others to submit to them.

In 1 Peter 5:2-4, Peter talks about the various ways that the elders of the church are to submit themselves to the people in the church. Those verses say, “Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock; and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away.” Here, we see that the very first way that the leaders of a church submit themselves to the congregation is by feeding or shepherding the flock of God. One of the great weaknesses in many churches today is the fact that the leaders are not submitting themselves to the flock and feeding the congregation by regularly explaining the Word of God to them. Many pastors and other spiritual leaders are using isolated verses to back up their own ideas instead of feeding the congregation by systematically explaining the Word of God chapter by chapter and verse by verse.

The second way that the elders submit themselves to the people of the church is by willingly taking the oversight of the church. Many pastors say that they do not have qualified leaders in their churches. In Titus 1:5, we read, “For this reason I left you in Crete, that you should set in order the things that are lacking, and appoint elders in every city as I commanded you.” Here, we see that the most important responsibility that Titus had was to qualify men to lead the churches in every city. His responsibility was to qualify men not disqualify men. If you are a spiritual leader in a church, your most important responsibility is to help additional people become qualified spiritual leaders.

The third way that the elders submit themselves to the people of the church is by not seeking dishonest gain but rather by serving the congregation with a willing and eager attitude. People learn from our example as they see our attitudes. That is why verse 3 says that elders serve the flock by being examples to the flock. One of the key things that we need to remember as leaders is that the people we lead will follow our example whether that example is that of a servant or that of a dictator. If we serve the people, the people will learn to serve others. If we try to control the people, the people will try to control others.

If spiritual leaders will submit to their physical and spiritual children by providing much spiritual food to help them grow, by helping others become qualified for spiritual leadership and by taking leadership with an attitude of willingness that provides a godly example to follow, those spiritual leaders will see many other Christians mature and become qualified spiritual leaders. In contrast, if spiritual leaders provide little spiritual food, fail to help people become qualified for spiritual leadership and fail to provide an example to follow, those spiritual leaders will develop weak and rebellious congregations and there will always be a shortage of godly spiritual leaders.

1 Peter 5:5 says, “Likewise you younger people, submit yourselves to your elders. Yes, all of you be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility, for ‘God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.’” Christians will choose to place themselves under the leadership of godly spiritual leaders that do the three things mentioned above. They will want to submit themselves to the elders of the church when the elders submit to the Lord and serve them by helping them develop their full potential for Christ.

In addition, we also see two key attitudes here that we want to develop in our physical and spiritual children. First, we want to show them how to become submissive to one another. Second, we are to show them an attitude of humility. The church is both a body and a family. As the body of Christ, each part of the body is dependent on other parts; we want to show each person how to be submissive to the other parts of the body.

As a family, we want to help every member of the family grow to spiritual maturity. Ephesians 4:14-16 says, “That we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ—from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.” Our goal as physical and spiritual parents is to help our physical and spiritual children grow to spiritual maturity where they become adult sons and daughters and full partners in ministry. This will be the result as we submit ourselves to help one another grow and mature in Christ. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your physical and spiritual children mature and become full partners in ministry for the Lord.