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Main Idea: For us to be successful in life, in our relationship to God and with our spouses, we must respond to Christ with love; then, we must be respectful and submit. The key to a successful and vibrant marriage is the wife and husband respecting and loving each other, because our relationship is bound to our Lord. We are not just the participants of the church, we model it to the world, and we must show that our Gospel and love is real and sincere. Love and respect are the two essential ways we can improve our relationship; this is the "secret" to a happy and content marriage. The husband cherishes his wife, regardless of his feelings, so she feels secure and valued, while the wife respects her husband, even when he does not deserve it. In this way, both have an authentic mutual affection and admiration for one another.

Contexts and Background:

This passage is sort of a "household code," directing how one should run the home. Paul begins with the traditional Roman high ethical rules (for that time and culture) prescribed by Aristotle; Paul, who knows Christ, inserts more responsibility and love into the mix. Whereas the Roman home was held with an iron hand with a whip held out to the wife, children, and servants, Paul switches it for a kind hand outstretched with love. This comes from a crescendo of applications and putting the previous passages of this letter into practice by running the home with love. Anger, pride, and malice that creates our arguments, residing from our behaviors and escalation of the arrogance, criticism, defensiveness, and withdrawing, are put off. It is about placing Christ first and above all, and allowing His work in you to come through you in your family as well (Col. 3:18-21)!

Commentary—Word and Phrase Meanings:

- *Submit/submitting.* This translates from a military term (Greek: *hupotasso*), which means "to place under" or "to subordinate" as a line relationship. This is when and how we respond to Christ with love and service because of His free gift of grace. We do not earn salvation for service; rather, service is a fruit of our gratitude. In the same way, submission is not to be forced, but offered freely in response to love. It is something we replicate, as in responding in kindness so our response to each other is fueling the other's response, and so forth. In this way, we escalate love and kindness instead of repression and dysfunction.
- *Reverence for Christ/as to the Lord/in reverence for the Lord.* Christ loved the church, not *because it was holy, but in order to make it holy!* Thus, we are not only called to find the person who is best for us, but to work at keeping that relationship within the parameters of love, submission, and commitment. Even if you made the wrong choice through impatience, wrong thinking, lust, and/or sin, you still have the call and opportunity to make it right, to make it work with the mate you have! God created something special in you together in, that you can rekindle into a great marriage that glorifies our Lord (Eph. 5:22-6:9).
- *Wives.* Submission is in Christ, then to her husband's loving care and to respond with love and respect. Submission is NOT in subjection or oppression. Sexes--the male and the female--are equal before God. In marriage, the husband is supposed to lead--not domineer. Wives are asked to submit, as in giving respect to their husbands, to listen. The wife is in submission as a response to the husband's love for her and his providing, as well as his having her best interest and care at heart.

- *Husbands.* Husbands are asked to do something greater, to love their wives, to be passionate and committed about their care and personhood, not just rely on feelings. To take the initiative to lead and to listen. In ancient times, marriage contracts would advocate the husband to make his wife submit with absolute obedience. Paul's assertion to his churches and readers to love, and because of love to submit, was very radical. To Paul, love was a duty. (To truly love someone was considered weak by the *macho* mindsets of the times as well as with many people today.) Love is not weak; it is building the strength of a relationship and the bond of a family by creating a mutual partnership (Amos 3:3; Mark 12:38; 1 Cor. 7:3-4; 13; 11:8-9)!
- *Head.* In physiology, the head is in charge of and controls the body. Thus, Jesus is the One who births, gives life, directs, and gives information and direction to the universe and to the Church, too. Thus, we must adhere to Him in this. This is Paul's point in this passage. Christ is the Head of the universe, and for all of humanity and the Church. Therefore, the husband can lead his family in Godly precepts (Rom. 12:3-5; Col. 2:19).
- *Head of the church.* This meant the source of life, as in our ability to know and grow in Christ can only come from Christ. Jesus is the Founder and CEO of the Church, as Christ is the Supreme mediator--pure, Holy, and only! He is the Head; we are the body to take His lead and follow to be His hands and feet in the world. The question is, *Is He leading us and our churches, or are we seeking to lead Him?* Our life in Christ is because of Christ and we must seek to honor Christ (John 15:1-5; Eph. 4:15-16; Col. 1:15-19; 2:9, 16-23; 2 Pet. 1:3; 2:1-22)!
- *Church submits to Christ.* He is the foundation and, in grace and obedience, gave Himself for us; it IS His Church. It is not about what we think it is or should be; it is what it is. He is Head over "our" church; pastors, leaders, trends, and ideas--good or bad--are NOT. We are the tools and means; He is the Means and Reason. When this gets lost or forgotten, He is pushed aside and false teachings and misrepresenting of God continues (1 Cor. 12:4-27; Eph. 1:4, 21-23; 4:15; 5:23; Col. 3:18-4:1)!
- *Love/cherisheth.* The verb for love (Greek: *agapete*) designates a continuous routine of a devoted care action all of the time, not just when we feel like it. Love is "symbiotic" as in mutually loving toward each other to build and improve each one's relationship. Here, a man loves a woman; she then submits because of his love. This submission is a love in itself that becomes as "*one flesh*" (Eph. 2:4-7; 5:21-32; 1 John 4:7-21).
- *Washing/cleanse with water.* This may refer to the preparations a bride did in preparing for her wedding day. She was to be clean, as most people did not bathe more than once a month, and to be a purification ritual.
- *Through the word.* How God speaks His love, promise and grace into His Church and into our lives (Heb. 6:5; 11:3; 1 Pet. 1:25).
- *Radiant/splendor/in glory church.* Perhaps meaning sanctification, the preparations of cleanliness amongst a group of believer's represented a way to glorify God. We received a pardon from God's just wrath for our sin, and we are given grace. This makes us pure in His sight. Such a ritual of the *washing* is ceremonial to this. This is also a call to continue to root out sin and be clean before our Lord. His glory radiates throughout the universe and must also radiate in and through us, too, personally and collectively as a Church pointing to Him (Acts 13:33-34; Rom. 1:4; Eph. 1:20-23; Phil. 2:1-11; Heb. 1:4-5)!
- *Wrinkle/spot... without blemish.* From the Jewish sacrificial system of how animals need to be without blemish--the best of the stock. As Christ was without sin for us. A metaphor to showcase how God makes us right. Christ has the highest standing as Creator, Sustainer, and Head. He reconciles us, gives us our hope, is the Source of all we are and have, and He is our wisdom, our redemption, our empowerment, and our life (Num. 6:14; 19:2; 1 Pet. 1:19; Heb. 9:14).

- *Loves himself.* Meaning our intimacy and permanence in our own body until we are called home. Marriage is designed for permanence (1 Sam.18: 1-3; Mark 12:30-31; Matt. 19:19).
- *As Christ does the church.* Jesus died for the Church! The Disciples were not servants, but friends. Marriage and Christian relationships are communal; we are not just bonded to one another, we are in community with others in the church. Thus, we are called to stick it out (Luke 22:25-27; John 15:12-15).
- *Leave his father and mother.* This means the woman was removed from the care of her father and entrusted to the care of her husband.
- *Be united.* God's perfect plan, even in a corrupt culture, was always oneness and intimacy that were based on commitment and obedience. Christ restores our true intimacy (Gen. 2:19-25; 1 Tim. 2:13-14).
- *One flesh.* Literally, it means our souls are 'joined,' tied together as an inseparable union. So, our union with our spouse is meant to be a permanent as well as an intimate bond. A husband and wife become synergistically tied to one another in unselfish love. Each becomes greater together rather than apart. God's intention from Creation was enduring monogamy. We must see separation off the table, unless there is abuse or abandonment. When we divorce for trivial reasons outside what Scripture allows, like unfaithfulness, we are outside of His will and plan, and that is not a good place to be (Gen. 2:24; Matt. 5:31-32; 19:3-11; Mark 10:7; 1 Cor. 7:10-17)!
- *Profound mystery.* Referring to our community of vow in Christ and as a Church. Jesus calls us to make the most out of our marriage by serving Him and loving our spouse with our whole heart and mind.

Devotional Thoughts and Applications:

The end of Ephesians 5 gives us a picture of walking in a healthy relationships that seems like foolish, archaic and abusive to a worldly perspective. We have to have a chain of authority to keep structure and order, or you will have chaos and dysfunction. This also helps us look to God and accept His authority over all and our lives. Everyone is in submission, even the president of the United States is supposed to be held to account by the people and Congress and the Supreme Court.

However, submission is misunderstood when it is viewed as abuse or subjection. In context, it is what God has for us, His fullness, His love that must be received and played forward to one another. As a family and as a church. We are to walk as people who are wise in the ways of the Lord and who are also on guard to the ways of the world. We are to be careful how we live, so we treat our lives and others with love, dignity and respect. We must not to be careless with what is precious, people who are God's precious children. We are to make the most of our lives, and the opportunities He gives us. To waste it away, and to treat others with disrespect or abuse is what a fool does; so, let us not be fools! When we understand what the Lord wants us to do—and, by the way, this is not hard—we will do better in life. It is not hard because what God is concerned with is our character. We form our character from understanding, and putting into practice this fullness. Then, we will have healthy families in a healthy church.

Church Leadership Tip: Why do we do church? Please a personality? Hear a sound bite? Take in the latest fad? No. we worship Christ as Lord. And what does that look like? Our church *submits to Christ* as LORD! Then, we will have a *radiant church!* *Is Christ leading us and our church, or are we seeking to lead Him?*

The Essential Inductive Questions (for more Inductive questions, see Inductive Bible Study):

1. What does this passage say?
2. What does this passage mean?
3. What is God telling me?
4. How am I encouraged and strengthened?
5. Is there sin in my life for which confession and repentance is needed?
6. How can I be changed, so I can learn and grow?
7. What is in the way of these precepts affecting me? What is in the way of my listening to God?
8. How does this apply to me? What will I do about it?
9. What can I model and teach?
10. What does God want me to share with someone?

Additional Questions:

1. How did this passage make you feel when you first read it?
2. If genders are equal before God, why must there be submission? What are the objections? What are the positive reasons?
3. If you are in a harsh marriage, how can the practice of love and respect help improve things? Remember, we do this even when they do not deserve it.
4. How do you feel when you receive encouragement and support when you have letdowns or problems?
5. What would a relationship be like if you created an atmosphere of trust and affection as well as respect? (As long as there is no abuse)
6. Why is it to be successful in life, in our relationship to God and others, we must respond to Christ with love and then submit?
7. How do anger, pride, and malice create arguments and dysfunctions?
8. How does family dysfunction reside from our behaviors and escalates into arrogance, criticism, defensiveness, and withdrawing?
9. Submission is to Christ, then how can this help a husband and wife be loving and caring? How does this help us with our response to love and respect?
10. What does unconditional love mean to you? Can you give an example? Have you ever felt or experienced it? Have you ever given it?
11. Is Christ leading your church, or are you seeking to lead Him?
12. God created something special in you, as a family, as a church, what can you do to rekindle into a great relationship that glorifies our Lord