

Spirit-Filled Relationships - Part 1

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[0 : 00] A number of years ago now, a Christian journal ran a cartoon that involved the Apostle Paul and the women of the first century city of Ephesus.

In the cartoon, Paul has just arrived at the city gates. Under one arm he has a bedroll, under the other he has some sacred scrolls. He is greeted by women whose faces suggest that they are quite disgusted.

Indeed, they are very angry. And they are carrying protest placards reading, Women of Ephesus Unite. And Paul the Apostle is a male chauvinist pig.

Under Paul's feet is the caption of the cartoon. Paul says, Oh, I see you got my letter. The cartoon got it wrong.

Dead wrong. If anyone in Ephesus would have held a protest rally against Paul, it would have been the men.

[1 : 12] For what Paul writes in his letter, and especially in the section of the letter we're going to read today, turns first century understanding of human relationships on its head.

What Paul writes, or as I should say, what he dares to write, is nothing short of revolutionary. It would have been the men who met Paul at the city gate, getting in his face and saying, What are you doing, Paul?

You are upsetting the established order of things. We've been calling our series of studies in Ephesians, An Alternative Reading of Reality.

An alternative reading centered in Jesus Christ, crucified, risen, and ascended to the throne of the universe. Leading to an alternative understanding of human relationships.

What Paul develops in the section of the letter we're going to read today is so revolutionary. It's so contrary to deeply ingrained patterns of behavior that even after 2,000 years, the church has yet to work out its full implications.

[2 : 34] Our text today, and for the next three Sundays, the rest of October, is Ephesians chapter 5, verse 15, through chapter 6, verse 9. A radically alternative reading of reality.

Now at the heart of this revolutionary text is the exhortation we spent time in last Sunday. Verse 18, But be filled with the Spirit.

Quit wasting your time and energy, Paul is saying, with what is finally dissipation, what is finally waste and emptiness. Quit trying to fill your soul with that which does not fill your soul.

You were created in such a way that what finally fills you is the Spirit, the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity. Be filled with the Spirit of God. Be filled with the breath of God.

Be filled with the wind of God. Be filled with the power of God. Be filled with the fire of God. Be filled with the very life of God. Everything else Paul develops in Ephesians 5, 15 to 6, 9 flows out of that filling.

[3 : 43] Indeed, the whole Christian life flows out of that filling. Now the text begins with a series of not-but phrases.

Walk not as unwise, but as wise. Not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. Not get drunk with wine, but be filled with the Spirit.

And then there are a series of consequences or results. And in the text, they're all participles. They are not imperatives, as some translations have made them out to be.

Participles, the results of the one big imperative, be filled. Speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs. Singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord.

Giving thanks always for everything to God through Jesus Christ. And being subject to one another in the fear of Christ. Not be subject.

[4 : 48] As too many translations have it. It's not in the imperative. It's a participle in a series of participles. And it's not a new sentence, as too many translations have it.

And it certainly is not a new paragraph, as some translators have it. Being subject. A result of being filled. Then there are a series of human relationships in which this being subject is then worked out. Wives and husbands. Fathers and children. Masters and servants. Wives being subject to husbands. And husbands being subject to wives.

Children being subject to fathers or parents. And parents being subject to children. Servants being subject to masters. And masters being subject to servants.

Which is why I have intentionally chosen the words radical and revolutionary. Being filled with the Spirit of God goes to the root of relational dynamics and turns things upside down.

[5 : 52] So that relationships can be right side up again. Because of sin and because what Paul calls principalities and powers in the last part of the letter.

Human relationships get twisted. They get distorted from what God originally intended for humanity. Jesus Christ comes into the world and through his Spirit, through the Holy Spirit, begins to untwist, untangle, and restore those relationships to God's original intention.

Now in this section of Paul's letter to the Ephesians, Paul is working with what many called household codes. Household codes. In the first century, every society had codes of conduct. spelling out what was expected of people in these various relational spheres. And all the household codes of the first century involved these three sets of relationships.

Husband, wife, father, child, master, servant. In most cases, husband, father, and master turn out to be the same person.

[7 : 01] For most people, the home was also the place of work. People lived and worked in the same space, in one building or a cluster of small buildings, as is the case even in many places in the world today.

The husband, wife, father, child, master, servant relationship are all being lived under one roof, so to speak. And Paul says, he dares to say, that when the Holy Spirit comes, when the Holy Spirit comes and fills human beings with God's life, the dynamics of those relationships change.

There is a new household code. There has to be a new code. For in the first century, women, servants, children and servants, were virtually treated as mere objects to be used by husbands, fathers, and masters for their own needs.

I'm sure there were exceptions. I'm sure there were husbands, fathers, and masters who recognized the image of God in women, children, and servants. But for all practical purposes, women, children, and servants were mere pawns on a grand chessboard moved around at the whim of fathers, husbands, and masters.

In the first century, the household was the basic building block of society, and it was argued that if this household ran well, then the larger political reality would run well.

[8 : 38] So, for instance, the great philosopher Aristotle thought much about the dynamics of these households. Major sections of his great book, The Politics, is given over to household management for Aristotle maintained that if husband, wife, father, children, master, servant relationships worked, then the larger political realm would work.

Thus, the codes. And thus, the great need to change the codes. For in the first century political vision, the husband, father, master, the so-called patriarch, patriarch, is the only one who is viewed as truly human.

The husband, father, master, the patriarch, is the only one who is viewed as truly human. Aristotle, for instance, did not think women had the same rational capacity as men, and therefore they needed to be ruled by their husbands.

Aristotle writes, Hence, there were by nature various classes of rulers and ruled. The free rules the slave, the male rules the female, and the man rules the child.

That's just the way it is. William Barclay summarizes it best, or worst, as the case may be, when he writes, The Jews had a low view of women.

[10 : 07] In the Jewish form of the morning prayer, there was a sentence in which a Jewish man every morning gave thanks that God had not made him a Gentile, a slave, or a woman. In Jewish law, a woman was not a person, but a thing.

She had no legal rights whatsoever. She was absolutely in her husband's possession to do with as he willed. The position of persons in the Greek world was worse. In the whole Greek way of life,

made true companionship between a man and wife next to impossible.

The Greek man expected his wife to run his home to care for his legitimate children, but he found his pleasure and companionship elsewhere. In Rome in Paul's day, the matter was still worse.

Again, by God's mercy, there had to be exceptions. But the code, wives subjugated to husbands, children subjugated to parents, and servants subjugated to masters.

It is the way it is. Then, Jesus Christ comes into the world.

[11 : 17] Then, the spirit of Jesus Christ begins to fill people in the Jewish and Greek and Roman world. And the way it is is turned upside down.

Be filled with the spirit, being subject to one another in the fear of Christ. Being subject.

Again, it is a participle, not an imperative. Not be subject. It's not a command in verse 21. Well, someone could say, what about verse 22? In verse 22, it says, in the text you have in front of you, wives, be subject to your husbands.

Is that not a command? Well, look at the text very carefully. Pick it up, hold the paper in front of you, look at verse 22 very carefully. Be subject. Wives, be subject.

Notice that it's italicized. Why is it italicized? To drive it home to the wife? To emphasize? No, it's italicized because it's not in the original text.

[12 : 21] In the New American Standard Version, when you come across italicized words, it's not for emphasis. It's to let you know it wasn't in the text. Paul did not write the words, be subject, in verse 22.

They're inserted by the translators out of goodwill wanting to make the sentence flow more smoothly. But that's not what Paul is getting at in the text. And I'll come back to that in two Sundays. Be filled with the Spirit, being subject to one another. It's a participle. It's not an imperative. It's not a command.

And it's not a new sentence. And it's definitely not a new paragraph. To make it a command or a new sentence or a new paragraph is to distort what Paul is saying.

So a friend of mine in the Philippines, New Testament scholar Bong Minayan, I'm so proud of him, wisely observes that to make it a command or a new sentence or a new paragraph inadvertently communicates something that was never there.

[13 : 30] Being subject. The Spirit fills us with His life, with the life of Jesus Christ, with the life of God, and we find ourselves speaking differently in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, as Paul says, which we find throughout the New Testament.

And we find ourselves singing and making melody in our hearts to the Lord. And we find ourselves giving thanks to God in the name of Jesus. Grumbling and complaining and give way to gratitude because we realize that God is in all we face.

That God is at work in all we face. And that God is using all we face to further shape us into the image of Jesus. And we find ourselves changing the way we relate to each other, especially in the household, in the places where we live and work.

We find ourselves being subject to one another in the fear of Christ. Again, not a command, but a consequence, a result, the consequence of being filled with the Spirit.

Without the filling of the Holy Spirit, it is impossible for a human being to be subject to another human being. The Spirit comes and works this revolution in the human heart, and we find that we're living a new household code.

[14 : 46] Being subject to one another in the fear of Christ. Now, why did Paul add that phrase, fear of Christ? Is it that we're supposed to live afraid of Christ? I don't think so.

Rather, the word that Paul uses, this word fear, means awe or reverence for or respect of. We're to live in awe of Christ. We're to live in reverence of Him and have respect for Him.

And I think we could paraphrase Paul this way. Being subject to one another out of deep respect for Christ, for who He is, for how He lives, for His very different way of being Lord.

Being subject to one another in light of the kind of Lord Jesus is. Being subject, it is literally standing under.

Standing under. Hupotasso. It's made up of two words. Hupotasso. Hupotasso. Hupotasso.

Hupotasso. Hupotasso. Stand. When we are filled with the Spirit, we find ourselves standing under.

[15 : 46] Under Jesus Christ, for sure, in the fear of Christ, and under one another. Wives standing under husbands and husbands standing under wives.

Children standing under parents and parents standing under children. Servants standing under masters and masters standing under servants. under, under, under, under, under, under.

I think that Paul here is working with a text in the gospel according to Mark. Mark. It's Mark 10, 42 to 45. It's a critical text for understanding Jesus and his kingdom.

Two of the disciples, James and John, come to Jesus and they say, Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you. Slightly presumptuous and a little arrogant, isn't it?

And Jesus responds graciously so, what do you want me to do for you? And they reply, Grant that we may sit in your glory, one on your right and one on your left.

[16:55] I love James and John. They just put it out there. Jesus, you're establishing a kingdom. We like this kingdom that you're going to make. And when the kingdom is fully realized, like will you put one of us on your right and one of us on your left?

The other disciples hear this conversation and Mark says they're indignant. So Jesus gathers the disciples, all of them together and he says this, You know that those who are recognized as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them.

And their great men exercise authority over them. Over. Over. That is the instinct of unkingdomized humanity.

Over them. That's the instinct of unspirit-filled humanity. Over them. Need I illustrate?

Go see the movie The Help. Over. Over them. Their great men and women exercise authority over them.

[18:05] Then Jesus says, But. It is not so among you. Not so among you. Not so in the kingdom that I am bringing into the world.

Not so among you. Over. Not so among you. But whoever wishes to be great. Notice by the way that Jesus is not putting down the desire to be great.

He really wants us to be great. Whoever wishes to be great among you shall be your servant and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be slave of all.

Over. Not so among you. Among you it is under. Servant. The greatest. The first. You want to be the greatest and you want to be the first.

The greatest and the first in the kingdom is under. Under. Now linger with me for just a few minutes with these words over and under.

[19:05] Old humanity reading of reality over. Old humanity without the Holy Spirit climbing over. New humanity under.

New humanity with the Holy Spirit standing under. Now the word over in Greek is huper. The word under in Greek is huper.

From huper we get the English hyper. From huper we get the English hypo as in hypodermic under the skin. The Latin for huper is super.

The Latin for hypo is sub or sub as in submarine under the water or subterranean under the earth. The instinct and drive of the old humanity is huper hyper super over.

The instinct and drive of the new humanity is huper hypo sub under. Being subject to one another. Living in submission to one another.

[20:12] Standing under one another. Which as a sideline implies to me that I cannot understand another human being unless I stand under them.

I cannot understand Jesus Christ unless I stand under him. I cannot understand my wife Sharon unless I stand under. I'll never understand you until I stand under you.

Now go back to this event in Mark's gospel. Jesus says not so among you. Those who think themselves great among the Gentiles lord it over them. Not so among you. And then Mark 10 45. It blows the circuits of our understanding of relationships. Mark 10 45. Listen. For even the son of man. Son of man is Jesus' favorite self-designation.

And it turns out that in the first century son of man is one of the most pretentious titles that anyone can ever take to themselves. Found in the book of Daniel son of man refers to ruler over all rulers.

[21:18] King over all kings. Prime minister over all prime minister. President over all president. CEO over all CEOs. For even the son of man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life a ransom for many.

Not even the ruler over all rulers exerts his overness. Even the king over all kings goes under and lives as a servant.

and when the spirit of the son of man comes and fills us we find ourselves moving from that over to under.

Wives standing under their husbands and husbands standing under their wives. Children standing under their parents and parents standing under their children. Servants standing under their masters and masters standing under their servants.

In the kingdom of God when the spirit of the king comes the revolution takes place and we live in mutual submission. We all have equal dignity. We all have equal wealth value different roles different responsibilities but we are all equal before Christ.

[22 : 35] We are all in submission to Christ and we are all in submission to one another. For even the son of man did not come to be served but to serve and give his life all fleshed out on the cross when he gives his life for the life of the world.

Which is why Paul can say to husbands in verse 25 husbands love your wives as Christ has loved the church and gave himself up for her.

Now all of this is lived out most clearly for me the night before Jesus goes to the cross in the upper room when Jesus washes his disciples feet.

I know I've referred to this event a number of times lately and that's because this event haunts me. It's haunted me for years. Jesus rises from the table, lays aside his outer garments, grabs a basin of water and a towel, gets down on his knees and begins to wash his disciples feet.

He then gets up, puts the garments back on, takes his place at the table and asks the disciples, do you know what I just did for you? Of course, you just washed our feet.

[23 : 55] But do you know what I just did for you? He says, you call me teacher and Lord, for thus I am. If I, your Lord and teacher, washed your feet, you ought also wash my feet.

If I, your Lord and teacher, have washed your feet, you ought also wash my feet. Right? Not.

I was waiting for some of you to shake your heads. That's what the disciples and we expect Jesus to say. I washed your feet, now you wash my feet. After all, no one had done that common courtesy for Jesus that night.

No one had bothered to extend that kind of hospitality. I've washed your feet, now wash mine. But he did not say that. If he had said that, the disciples around the table would have been jumping all over each other to get to Jesus to wash his feet.

They would have been wanting to be the first person with the basin and the towel to get down and express their gratitude and love for Jesus Christ. Right? Right? I would have.

[25 : 10] I still want to do it. But he says, does not say, I washed your feet, now wash mine. He says, I've washed your feet, now wash one another's feet.

What? One another's feet? I washed the feet of Jesus by washing your feet. So Leslie Newbigin, the 20th century British Anglican missionary to India, can say this, this is something that subverts and replaces all normal patterns of authority.

It would be impossible to draw a management chart in which A is subject to B and B is subject to A, yet that is what is called for. The disciples are to be literally servants of one another.

This is a kind of equality, but it must not be confused with the egalitarianism which is based on the doctrine of the rights of man. That, in an end, makes everyone a monad, an island, fighting for his own rights, because it is of the essence of our human situation that each of us tends to estimate his own rights more highly than those of his neighbor.

Right? This is a different kind of egalitarianism which is based on the fact that the only one who is truly master has proved himself to be slave to us all equally.

[26 : 37] He has laid aside his life for us. And then, Newbigin writes this, And the debt which we owe to him, to Jesus, is to be discharged by our subjection to our neighbor in loving service.

The debt we owe to Jesus is to be discharged by our subjection to our neighbor in loving service. And then, here's the great sentence. Our neighbor is the appointed agent authorized to receive what we owe to the master.

And that is what Paul is getting at in this text in Ephesians. And that's why the women would not have been at the city gates saying, Paul is a male chauvinist pig. And that's why I'm using these words radical and revolutionary.

Look around at those with whom you've been sitting and worshipping for a time. Just take a look at faces for a little while. Just quickly, don't be shy, just real quickly. These people are the appointed agent authorized to receive the love you want to pour on Jesus.

Wives, your husbands are the appointed agent authorized to receive the love you want to pour on Jesus. And husbands, did I say that wrong?

[28 : 06] No, got it right. And husbands, your wives are the appointed agent authorized to receive the love you want to pour on Jesus. Children, your parents are the appointed agent authorized to receive the love you want to pour on Jesus.

And parents, your children are the appointed agent authorized to receive all the love you want to pour on Jesus. Employees, your bosses are the appointed agent authorized to receive the love you want to pour on Jesus.

And bosses, your employees are the authorized agent authorized to receive all that you want to pour on Jesus. which is why we need the filling of the Holy Spirit the alternative reading of reality is so revolutionary that only the spirit of Jesus the servant Lord can possibly make it happen