

# Male & Female

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Preacher: Harry Robinson

[ 0 : 00 ] Our Father, we have come together to hear your most holy word. And we ask that as we apply our minds to your word and our eyes to the text of the scripture, that you will so work in our hearts as to bring about the obedience of faith.

We ask this in the name of our Lord Jesus. Amen. The text that we're looking at this morning is Ephesians chapter 5 and verse 21 following.

And it says, Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ. Wives, be subject to your husbands as to the Lord.

It says further, As the church is subject to Christ, so let wives also be subject in everything to their husbands.

And it concludes with the words, Let every one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respect her husband.

[ 1 : 18 ] Now, as the rector of the parish, I am to stand before you and tell you that God our Father, through the Lord Jesus Christ, called the Apostle Paul to tell women to be subject to their husbands.

And that is, I think, almost literally a sermon that can't be preached in our society. And we've worked on it and thought about it, and Fran, my wife, and I have discussed it at considerable length. And we've decided this morning that in order to get into the text and to seek to come to some understanding of it, Fran's going to talk about the text first, and then I'm going to talk about it afterwards.

So I'm going to ask Fran, if she will, just to talk about this passage from Ephesians. I'm not scared. I'm not scared. How does this passage make you feel? Probably that's the wrong question.

[ 2 : 39 ] But it's a relevant one, isn't it? I'm sort of going to take just a few minutes. This isn't equal time, but I'm just going to take a few minutes, hopefully to set the stage for our hearing of this passage.

I hope it just won't be a means of confusing you completely. A few weeks ago, Harry and I were asked to give the opening address to a couples workshop on mutual submission in marriage. And I was quite relieved when Harry had an engagement in Toronto that prevented us from accepting this invitation. And this week, I went to my Bible study, and I was confronted again by the same passage.

And once again, I wanted to avoid it. I don't like this passage. There's something in the word submit that makes me squirm.

I had come to this Bible study very tired, as I usually do on a Thursday morning, having spent the previous three days working hard with both men and women separately and together as couples who had been badly hurt and disillusioned by the marriage relationship.

[ 4 : 03 ] So I came to that scripture passage myself that morning, angry and rebellious, with the gut feeling that submission does not work.

So, of course, I shut down, as the people that were there will tell you, and never did discover what the passage might have to say to me.

The only part of the passage I would receive were the words, as unto the Lord, because that was sort of safe. Harry and I have struggled over the past few days over what this passage might be saying.

I've also learned I'm willing to acknowledge that when something makes me uncomfortable in this way, it's usually because I have found a way to avoid dealing with an issue.

We asked ourselves what the opposite of a submissive spirit might be and agreed that it was a rebellious spirit, one that is far more familiar to me.

[ 5 : 15 ] I thought back to the Ezekiel passage we read last week and remembered that that was the same spirit Ezekiel came up against when he was preaching, but the passage highlights the fact that because of this rebellious spirit, people couldn't hear what was being said.

God warned him that it would be that way. When you come to the scripture with a rebellious spirit, even if you think you're justified in having it, you cannot hear what is being said.

Now, this isn't a public confession about the fact that I have a rebellious spirit because there's a lot of evidence that you have the same problem.

So, the obstacle you and I are confronted with even before we come to the scripture is our rebellious spirit that prevents us from hearing what God is trying to say.

The second obstacle that colors our hearing, notice I've moved from my to our, that colors our hearing is society's gospel which squeezes us into a different mold.

[ 6 : 39 ] It's a subtle process and one I'm not often aware of. It was Jesus' intention that you and I should be leavened in the world.

The world should be a different place because you and I are in it. But instead, the opposite, I think, has become our reality. We, you and I, bring the leaven of the world into the church.

Much of the time, I must confess, I'm more often influenced by my studies in psychology or my rights or whatever than I am by the word of God.

A few weeks ago, I did a three-day retreat, hungering for a deeper walk with God. And I was amazed that only at the end of three days was I able to hear what the scripture was saying.

It took that long. I attended Thursday morning communion a few weeks ago and was met by the Lord in really quite a deep and profound way.

[ 7 : 45 ] And Harry asked me why it was different. And I said, because of my brokenness at the time, of my vulnerability, I was given the gift of a submissive spirit and I could hear what was being said.

Now, that doesn't mean something, that doesn't mean being passive, but it was a choice to come before God in a different way. I talked with Steve after the service and was able to tell him how much it meant to worship, not to be entertained.

Society is skilled in entertainment and when I come to worship, I need to meet the scripture probably most when it makes me uncomfortable and I need to come to terms with the heart that I bring to worship, a heart that can accept the concept of submission to one another, not just of master to slave, of parent to child, but of husband and wife and wife to husband.

I don't think the resolution for this passage lies in what's being handed down from the pulpit. The resolution will be found in the struggle that goes on in my own heart.

The greatest gift this passage was to Harry and I was in our sitting down and honestly and prayerfully listening to one another, not talking to one another, listening to one another and to the whole of scripture.

[ 9 : 24 ] We're all at different places in our growing in the Lord but it's the Spirit who's going to lead us to all truth. After 30 some odd years of marriage, there's still untold treasure ahead of me in the ongoing discovery of what God is trying to say to me because up to this point much of it I've been unwilling to hear.

So as we listen to Harry expound on this passage this morning, let's pray for one another that we might hear this old familiar passage which if you're like me you shut down.

let's pray for one another that we might hear it in a new way. The New Testament makes one situation very clear when it comes to this passage.

It says first that in terms of all of history and all of time for the whole of the universe the consummation of history will be when every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus is Lord.

Then if you look at the world in which we live we find that all the human departments of government the governments of this country and that government all the power structures of the world are subject to Jesus as Lord so that when Pilate had Jesus before him and said you not know that I have the power to crucify you and the power to let you go Jesus said you have no power at all except what is given you from above so that in all the human institutions and power structures everything has been put under his feet and he has been given all power and all dominion and all authority in the world our political world Jesus is Lord then if you look at the church you find again the unmistakable reality that Jesus is the head of the church and to belong to the church means to

acknowledge that

[12:12] Jesus is Lord so you have the universe you have the state you have the church and then you have the home and the question that comes to us is how is Jesus to be Lord in our homes we can deal with the fact that Jesus we're told became obedient to his parents when he lived in a home in Nazareth we can concede readily though children don't often that children are to obey their parents we can concede that servants are to be obedient to their masters that husbands are to love their wives but something goes wrong when you say wives subject yourselves to your husbands that's the flash point in our society not only does it say it once it goes on to say let wives be subject in everything to their husbands and it concludes by saying let wives see that they reverence their husbands so what we have to figure out is how you do it how the lordship of Jesus Christ is to affect that God-given institution which is the home or family how is that going to happen now Paul starts with the classical biblical picture that women were made for man in Genesis you know that woman means out of man derived from man he starts with the fact of the curse when Adam and Eve are thrown out of the garden Eve is told your desire shall be for your husband and he shall rule over you is Paul turning the clock back and saying we're going back to the terms of the curse in Genesis chapter three well look at the parallel situation of what it means to be subject when Paul said slaves be obedient to your earthly masters as to Christ was Paul condoning slavery the fact is that Paul put an end to slavery Paul lit a long fuse and by reason of that fuse burning away there came a time when as Paul wrote to Philemon in the letter in the New Testament he said Philemon this your slave is in fact your brother in Christ now Philemon went back to assume the duties of a slave in the household of Onesimus sorry Onesimus is the slave he went back to assume the duties of a slave in the household of Philemon but he went not just as a slave but as a brother in Christ so that what Paul is saying here I take it is categorically that a woman is not subject to her husband that the curse is broken the woman is free she is a person in her own right that's what redemption through Christ means and that's what Paul is affirming that that's

the basic identity that a woman has because of Jesus Christ the question comes how is she to celebrate that freedom she's to celebrate that freedom by being subject to her husband in everything you may think I'm talking in circles but follow this for a minute a man is free to walk out on his wife and many men have rejoiced in that freedom but Paul says the way you are to celebrate the freedom is in reverence for Christ to love your wife it doesn't mean simply to make love to your wife it means to love her totally as part of yourself now this is this is what happens this is the kind of anomaly that lies in the heart of the New Testament with regard to Jesus being Lord that is the early Christians celebrated their victory over death by submitting to death they died as martyrs to the cause they had the freedom to die in Christ's name the reason they had that freedom was because in Christ they had victory over death that's how that worked when Mother Teresa goes to work among the dying of Calcutta it's not as she points out that she is strongly attracted by the stench of death but because she wants to reverence Christ in serving the dying she could not do it out of compassion for the people she could only do it in obedience to Christ and Christ has given her the freedom to do what humanly speaking she cannot do and she tells that quite plainly and quite simply you see because of Jesus Christ there is a double relationship a slave is no longer a slave a wife is no longer a chattel a man is no longer enslaved because in Christ we are made free now this is because of Jesus Christ we have this choice and it's because of the choice that Jesus himself made remember when it talks about him being in the form of God thought it not robbery to be equal with God so here is man who is equal with God choosing to become man and to be subject to death the man over whom death had no control chose to die he who is Lord of all takes upon himself the form of a servant a child in Christ is not required to honor his parents a servant is not required to honor his master a wife is not required to be subject to her husband a husband is not required to love his wife but the whole thing gets turned upside down by Jesus Christ when he turned to his disciples and said to them you call me

teacher and Lord for so I am if I then your Lord and teacher have washed your feet you also ought to wash one another's feet for I have given you an example that you should do as I have done in other words Christ takes the freedom he has as Lord to become a servant now I don't think we all have ears to hear this I mean what it means in effect is that in our world we celebrate our freedom by rebellion against all authority so we consider it a great thing that a man has the right to walk out on a marriage or a woman has a right to walk out on a marriage I have a right to be homosexual I have a right to an abortion I have any of these rights they belong to me and I celebrate this fact by the

exercise of these rights well christians are to celebrate our freedom not by a rebellion against authority but by choosing to give it up and in doing that to follow christ's example you cannot command people to wash other people's feet only but jesus does command us to do that and he does it because that's what he himself did washing somebody else's feet only has meaning if you are free not to being subject to your husband or loving your wife is only significant in your christian discipleship when you know that you don't have to you are not required to i'd like to live in a world where every woman had the right to have an abortion and every woman out of reverence for christ chose not to that would be the kingdom of god very different from the human kingdom that we set up it's it's a world where every man is to be the master of his own destiny because he is a son of god being recreated in the image of christ but the very fact that that is happening means that he chooses to be a servant of jesus christ not a master and a tyrant and you see when paul writes this be subject to one another out of reverence for christ wives be subject to your husbands as in the lord husbands love your wives the reason he does this is because he's pointing to another kind of reality he's pointing to the reality which belongs to a world which acknowledges that jesus christ is lord and we subject ourselves one to another for no other reason but in our lives and in our homes as in our country and our world  
jesus christ is lord amen as is haste the h what