

“Love—A 50-50 Proposition?”—Ephesians 5:21-25

The text for this sermon, the theme of which is, “Love—A 50-50 Proposition?”, is Ephesians 5:21-25 → . . . *submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ. Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, His body, and is Himself its Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands. Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her.* This is the text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ Jesus:

How would you answer this question: “If you were to split up the responsibilities of the marriage relationship into two percentage figures, what would be your idea of the percentage of responsibility for the husband and wife respectively?” I ask this question of couples preparing to get married. The most common answer I’ve received is, “50-50.” It is natural for many people to think of marriage as a relationship where each person needs have an equal investment. However, this answer is interesting in light of all the rest our discussion as they sit before me, goo-goo-eyed in love with each other, expressing their love for each other in the desire to do anything for and share everything with their

fiancé! While equal investment is logical, their love seems to want to express more.

The words of our text are not very popular in our society today . . . but then . . . most of the words of Scripture are not that popular, many times spurned by sinners because of self-righteousness and sinful pride. In fact, Romans 8:7 says: *The mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot.*

In the context, Paul speaks about us Christians striving to live in obedience to Christ in our worship life together, *giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ* (cf. Ephesians 5:20) Then, in verse 21 he personalizes it. He talks about an action which actually “goes against the grain” of our sinful human natures—*submitting* to others. We are to submit *to one another out of reverence for Christ.*

What? Submit?! Submission brings to mind ideas of slavery, inferiority, “giving in,” being “wimpy,” and so forth. *Submitting* doesn't seem to fit the attitudes expressed when spouses, siblings, neighbors, co-workers, students, congregational members and a host of others continually shout, “It's not fair!” when they encounter each other refusing to submit to the rules of the systems within which they must function together. Yet, in order to function together and accomplish anything **in any relationship** everyone must submit in some fashion on a daily

basis. Thus, his words—*submitting to one another*—are basic to life and relationships. The real issue is the basis of and reason for your submission. Thus, his words—*submitting to one another **out of reverence for Christ***.

This section of his letter to the Christians in Ephesus highlights ways this submission *out of reverence for Christ* can display itself in the various individual vocations of life we fulfill as Christians: wives (cf. Ephesians 5:22-24,33), husbands (cf. Ephesians 5:25-31,33), children (cf. Ephesians 6:1-3), fathers (cf. Ephesians 6:4), slaves (i.e. employees) (cf. Ephesians 6:5-8) and masters (i.e. employers) (cf. Ephesians 6:9). Every relationship involves both love and submission.

Wait . . . love in family vocations we can easily understand. But what does love have to do with fulfilling vocations such as employee or employer? Love has everything to do with it! People can readily submit to others in situation in a very superficial manner. One can be cordial and patient with a customer, client, student or boss, smiling and saying the right things, acting and talking in an appropriate manner. However, this same person may hate his job, actually hate the person he's encountering, care nothing for those whom he serves and live a very immoral life of darkness in private. Here submission is practiced on the basis of a love for oneself. It is necessary in the context to submit because "there's something in it for me that I must protect." Such

submission is motivated by love . . . for self.

When submission happens ***out of reverence for Christ*** then it is based upon **His** unconditional love for us sinners. It becomes a who different picture. It is governed by forgiveness and a desire to reflect His lordship in the midst of all these vocations in life. In our text wives are instructed to *submit to their own husbands, as to the Lord* based upon their faith in *Christ as the head of the church, His body, and His being its Savior*. (Verses 22-23) It is not about submitting to your husband as some kind of “supreme dictator” over you. Rather, it is a respect for his God-given headship (cf. Ephesians 5:33), which means he is one upon whom Jesus has placed special responsibility and accountability for the spiritual welfare of his wife and family.

Verse 25 of our text tells husbands to *love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her*. Once again, it is love ***out of reverence for Christ***, based upon His unconditional love for us sinners. It is not a love mustered from his own self-serving desires and lusts. Rather, it is a love willing to give his life to and for her completely. If it is patterned after the love of Jesus, 1 John 3:16 reminds us: *By this we know love, that He laid down His life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers* (husbands, that includes your wives). When a husband is known and captivated by the love of God in Jesus he will truly love his wife properly, wanting God’s desire for her and not

idolizing her for his own desires.

This love of Jesus permeates every vocation of life for you. Ephesians 6:1-3 instructs *children to obey their parents in the Lord*, that is, based upon relationship with the Lord Jesus in obedience to God's written Word. Even fathers are instructed not to *provoke their children to anger* but rather to *bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord*. They are not to bully their children, crush their spirits and react in anger toward them. Rather, they are to break their sinful spirit using *the discipline and instruction* of Jesus. Thus, they discipline out of respect for the Lord Jesus, instruct them through this discipline and lead them to the love of Jesus by practicing confession and absolution together.

Love and submission is also reflected in our vocation as employees or employers. Ephesians 6:5-7 instructs us to *obey our earthly masters with fear and trembling, with a sincere heart, as you would Christ, not by the way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, rendering service with a good will as to the Lord and not to man*. Notice the motivation for doing a quality job for others as you serve them is your love for the Lord Jesus Christ. He produces a "work ethic" of genuine love for others, an "ethic" which is the same in or out of their "eye-shot."

This love of the Lord Jesus which is willing to submit to others is no

50-50 proposition. Rather, it is a 100 percent proposition. It is not easy. It is very challenging because those whom you are serving are sinners who may take advantage of your willingness to submit. You may feel like you're giving 80 percent while the other person is giving only twenty. You will face temptation to give up serving or harbor resentments against that person or any other number of things to manipulate the relationship.

However, you will also be convicted by the Holy Spirit so that you look to Jesus and the ultimate submission in His life sacrificed for the forgiveness of your sins. You will be reminded anew of 1 John 4:9-10 → *In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent His only Son into the world, **so that we might live through Him**. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.* When we live through Jesus our desire is not to reduce love to a 50-50 proposition but rather to bring the 100 percent commitment of Jesus into every vocation, relationship and task of our daily lives, *submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.* Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding,
keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

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