Week 3: Ephesians 5:21-5:33

Introduction

Previously we focused on the topic of "reconciliation" and went through a large portion of Ephesians (2:11-4:16), covering the pursuit of unity with diversity as one body of Christ, and the sharing of good news of reconciliation accomplished by Christ.

This week, we will jump ahead to Eph 5:21-33 and look at marriage and submission. (We will cover the Bible verses in between (Eph 4:17-5:20) in subsequent weeks when we explore the topics relating to "work".)

As mentioned, starting from Eph 4, Paul transitioned from the theology of the gospel to the application of the gospel, i.e. how believers should "live a life worthy of the calling you have received" (4:1). The theme of Christian submission (5:21) runs through 3 major applications: husbands and wives (5:22-33), parents and children (6:1-4), masters and slaves (6:5-9). In particular, Paul used the relationship between Christ and Church to illustrate the relationship between husbands and wives.

Warm-up question

Share your most difficult experience of submitting to someone else's authority/instruction. What makes it so hard?

Read Eph 5:21-24

1-a. How would you define "submission"? According to these verses, why should wives submit to their husbands?

1-b. For men: Do you find the "headship" in Eph 5:23 easy or hard, and why?
For women: Do you find the "submission" in Eph 5:22 & 5:24 easy or hard, and why?

- In those days, women were seen as secondary citizens with almost no rights and often subject to abuse, so what Paul wrote about a husband loving and protecting his wife as Christ did for the church would be seen as almost revolutionary.
- The Greek for "submission" has military origins, but it connotes a voluntary submission to a proper authority rather than a forced submission. "Submitting" does not mean negating one's worth and value – both men and women are created in the image of God (Gen 1:27) and entitled to dignity and respect. Jesus Himself demonstrated the essence of submission – humbling oneself, valuing others above oneself, and willing to sacrifice out of love (Phil 2:3-8). Eph 5:21 also reminds us that everyone should submit to one another (not just wives to husbands), and the primary reason for submission is not because "the other person deserves it", but because of our reverence for Christ, and because Christ Himself did it for us.
- A husband's authority in a household is derivative – as a servant of God, his authority comes from God, so he should not exercise his authority contrary to Scripture. If a wife encounters conflicts between following God and following her husband, she should obey God first. (What about a believing wife with an unbelieving husband? See 1 Pet 3:1-2 for more.)

Read Ephesians 5:25-33

2-a. How should a husband love his wife according to these verses?
What are some similarities between a husband-wife relationship and the Christ-Church relationship?

2-b. Some would say, "I'd rather not get married as it seems impossible to find someone who would love me like that / it seems harsh to demand me to love my spouse like that." How would you respond?

- The Greek word for "love" in Eph 5:25 is *agapate* which means unconditional love – the same word for describing how God loves us by sending Jesus (John 3:16), and how Jesus loves the Church that He gave Himself up (recall how He reconciled humanity to God through His blood (Eph 2:14-18) and became the foundation of the Church (Eph 2:20-21)). How can this "love" be lived out in a Christian marriage/household?
- Eph 5:26-27 was filled with metaphors and theology of our salvation – Jesus (as the groom) sacrificed Himself for the Church (as His bride) in order to set her apart a holy and cleanse her. The cleansing here is spiritual ("through the Word"): when we believe the gospel, God washes our sins away like water washes dirt away – a metaphor for redemption.
- Eph 5:31 was quoting Gen 2:24. Since in marriage two people become one flesh, in a figurative sense a man's wife becomes part of his own body, and so a husband should love and treat his wife as he loves and treats his own body. When Paul said "profound mystery" in Eph 5:32, he meant that Gen 2:24 contained a more profound truth than people previously realised: the husband-wife relationship is the same as the Christ-Church relationship – an Old Testament verse viewed in light of the gospel revealed in the New Testament. This "mystery" is "profound" because it has far-reaching implications.

3-a. For those who are single or dating: How does Eph 5:21-33 guide or influence your pursuit of your future spouse and future marriage?

3-b. For those who are engaged or married: How does Eph 5:21-33 guide or influence your role in your relationship with your spouse?

"Submission involves four responsibilities: First, it begins with an attitude of entrusting oneself to God. The focus of life must be on Jesus Christ. The ability to submit comes from Him (cf. 1 Pet. 2:24)... Second, submission requires respectful behavior (cf. 1 Pet. 3:1-2)... Third, submission means developing a godly character (cf. 1 Pet. 3:3-5). Fourth, submission involves doing what is right (cf. 1 Pet. 3:6). Submission should not extend to participating in conduct that is contrary to Scripture. Every Christian's primary responsibility is to do God's will." **– Dr. T. Constable (Bible teacher)**