

Sunday 28 June 2020

Ephesians 5:21-22, 25, 6:1, 4-6, 9

Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ.

Wives, be subject to your husbands as you are to the Lord.

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her,

Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.

And Fathers, do not provoke, your children to anger, but bring them up in the disciplines and instructions of the Lord.

Slaves, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, in singleness of heart, as you obey Christ; not only while being watched, and in order to please them, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart.

And masters, do the same to them. Stop threatening them, for you know that both of you have the same Master in heaven, and with him there is not partiality.

Let us pray:

Christ, You emptied Yourself and took the form of a slave,

You humbled Yourself and became obedient to the point of death – even death on the cross.

You have invited us to follow Your example,

to become subject to one another as an act of worship.

Help us to as we seek to become more like You today.

We want to be like You, Jesus, in all we do. Amen.

“Being Subject to One Another”

This scripture lesson covers a large section of the letter of Ephesians and helps to explain what Paul means when he asks his readers to “Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ.” This section has been used as a weapon against women, children and slaves, as people with power have sought to keep them in their place. Too often the subjection of husbands, parents and masters were ignored. By looking at the full scope seen in the whole passage, we get a fuller vision for our imitation of Christ. God wants us not to seek to be served, but to live lives of service to one another and to God.

Many have asked me who is the head of my home. My guess is this is because wife is a bishop of the United Methodist Church, I am a pastor, who has promised to obey my bishop. But even when we were both pastors, I was never been the head of my home. I was never been in charge of my wife’s life. God has always been the head of our home, and we have always seen our place as join heirs in Christ Jesus, to be of mutual assistance to one another. We have always been on the same team, where God calls all the shots. Together in prayer we seek to discern the voice of God for our lives.

Patriarchy is a form of idolatry, where men place themselves as rulers instead of God. Men do not have a divine right to rule over anyone. We all have the divine right to served one another, only God has the right to sit on a throne, even on the throne of my own life. The original sin in the garden was when people chose to place themselves in equal footing with God. As Christians, we understand that the greatest among us is the servant of all and that we have no right to lord it over anyone, for there is only one Lord and Master and it will ever be any of us. It has always been one of the temptations of the Devil to inspire us to seek control and seize personal power. The ways of Christ have always been the opposite. The first become last, and the last become first.

What Paul wants wives to be able to do is to trust their husbands to always have their best interest in mind. Their husband is seeking to be like Christ whose focus is upon their salvation, not to dominate them, or use and abuse them. For the husband to become like Christ as the head of the church, they must empty themselves, and not be as a God, but as a servant, obedient to God, even to go to the cross for the sake of their wife.

Husbands are called to love their wives. This means they are to be patient with them, and kind to them. As Christian husbands, they are never to be envious, boastful, arrogant, nor rude around their wives. Husbands never insist on their own way, they are not to be irritable, nor resentful for the things they do to benefit their wives. They bear with their wives, they trust their wives, they hope to be the very best for their wives, and are ready to endure the all the struggles of life for them, they never give up as they serve together in the Lord.

Paul wants husbands to serve their wives with the same passion as Christ serves the church. As husbands, we are to help our wives move on to perfection and be willing to give ourselves up for the benefit of our wives and not our own. This godly behavior helps wives to more fully trust in God. This mutual submission to God builds stronger relationships.

Paul goes on to talk about children and the importance of their obeying their parents in the Lord. This obedience is tied into their growing relationship with God. Just like their parents, they are in a growing relationship with God who has authority over their lives. Parents are servants of the same God charged with the task of nurturing them in their developing faith in God. And parents are not alone in this important nurturing task. All Christian adults are given the task of living lives that exemplify the gospel before them.

Parents are to be focused on the needs of their children. They are to bring them up in the disciplines of the Lord. They are to live before them the disciplines of prayer and fasting; disciplines of caring for the needs of others; the disciplined study of God's word along with the study tradition and reason; not forgetting the important discipline of self-examination. Parents are to instruct their children in the ways of the Lord: of how to be led by the Holy Spirit, how to love their enemies and the importance of being kind and praying for those who persecute them. Christian slaves are to be Christian first and being slaves was secondary. They were to live as Christians, even in their relationship with those who owned them. Just as all other Christians they are to treat others as if they were Christ himself. They were to serve with honor and

respect. They were to seek the best for their masters, because it is how Christians treat others. Paul wanted slaves to know that they were no less Christian than anyone else and were held to the same standards of behavior. For whatever we do to others we do to Christ. However we speak to others we speak to Christ. And Christ always deserves our very best.

Masters were to treat their slaves in the same way, slaves were expected to treat them. When a Christian master looked at one of their slaves they were to treat them just like they were to treat Christ. This is why they had to stop threatening their slaves, because they were actually threatening Christ. Whatever they did to their slaves they did to Jesus. Whatever they said to their slave they said to Jesus, and they were warned that we all have the same master in heaven. We will all have to answer for our behavior.

God is in charge, and we are not. We are not lord over anyone, only Jesus is Lord over everyone. With God there is not partiality. We are all the same as we stand before our Maker and God expects the same behavior from all of us. For in Christ there is neither the chosen nor the unchosen, management or labor, the citizen nor the foreigner, saint or sinner, male nor female, parents or children, we are all one in Christ Jesus our Lord. There is no one greater than us, except God who is over all of us, and there is none who are less important than us. I am no more or less a child of God than you are. And you are no more or less a child of God than I am.

This is why Paul says we are to be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ. God wants us to work together, to build one another in the faith. God wants us to pray for each other. God wants us to be patient with one another. God wants us to listen to each other and learn from each other. God wants us to be an extension of the salvation of Christ for each other: forgiving one another, extending mercy and compassion to each other.

This is why as Christians we repent of the sins pride that is expressed as racism, sexism, nationalism, xenophobia and other ways that we have been tempted to see our lives as more important than the life of someone else. These are sins of idolatry, where we place ourselves, our families, our ethnic group, our nation, above someone else, for when we do we place ourselves above Christ who is in those who are not us. To repent, we must change the way we look at the world. We have to retrain ourselves to see the image of God, to see the very face of Jesus in the lives of every single person.

We must realize that every abused woman, is our Lord Jesus Christ and that such treatment is a sacrilege. We must realize that every abused and neglected child, is our Lord Jesus Christ. We need to learn to respond as the Wise men and not as King Herod. We must realize that when we witnessed the death of George Floyd, we were reliving the crucifixion of Jesus. We need to realize that when we do not pay a living wage, we do not pay Jesus a living wage. Everyone is connected in Christ Jesus.

Paul is inviting us to view our wives differently, view our husbands differently, view our children differently, view our parents differently, view our employers differently and view our employees differently, for in their lives we as Christians must learn to experience the presence of Jesus. On the Damascus road, Paul came to realize what he had been doing to Christ, when he was persecuting the church. Paul wants us to gain the same understanding of what we are

actually doing to Christ, so that we might love and adore Christ, so that we might serve Christ adequately and not treat Christ disrespectfully. So be subject to one another. Embrace the greatness in Christ by becoming the servant of all. Beloved let us learn to love one another as we are all loved by God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Let us pray: Help us Lord, to see You in the lives of those around us. We know we see through the dirty windows of our own corruption and sin. We are so blind to Your holy presence in the lives of others. Heal us. Give us a new vision of the world and our place in it as Your beloved children, as member of Your sacred family, who all bear the holy image of Christ. Help us to see Your face in every life. Help us to cooperate with Your Holy Spirit as You redeem and recreate our world. Amen.

It has been a pleasure to be your pastor during these past six months. May God continue to bless Valley Forge United Methodist Church as you move forward with your new pastor starting next week.

Continue to pray for each other.
Continue to support each other.
Continue to serve your community.

Now may the God who dwells in everyone,
the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,
be with you all, now and always. Amen.