
The Summation of All Things in Christ

Studies in Ephesians with a Local Church Emphasis

LESSON CXV : THE WISE AND SPIRIT FILLED LIFE OF SUBMISSION / THE HAUSTAFEL (5:15-6:9)

Ephesians 5:15 ~ 6:9 —

STRUCTURE — This section could be divided into two main thoughts: ‘wisdom’ (vv. 15-18) and ‘worship’ (vv. 19-20 [21?]). The first thought is grouped around three main exhortations and three ‘not ... but ...’ contrasts. In v. 15 the contrast is added after the exhortation while in vv. 17,18 the contrasts are part of the exhortations themselves.

THEME 1: “WISDOM”

¹⁵ *See, then, how exactly ye walk,* [‘see’ = ye see, ye be careful – 2nd person plural present active imperative verb]

FIRST CONTRAST: UNWISE vs. WISE

not as unwise, but as wise,

¹⁶ *redeeming the time, because the days are evil;*

SECOND CONTRAST: BECOME NOT FOOLS vs. UNDERSTAND THE WILL OF THE LORD

¹⁷ *because of this become not fools, but — understanding what is the will of the Lord,*

THIRD CONTRAST: (NOT BETWEEN TWO ENTITIES, WINE vs. SPIRIT BUT ...) DRUNKENNESS vs. SPIRIT-CONTROLLED

¹⁸ *and be not drunk with wine, in which is dissoluteness, but be filled with the Spirit,*

THEME 2: “WORSHIP” (NOTE: THE THIRD CONTRAST FORMS THE TRANSITION FROM “WISDOM” TO “WORSHIP”) — THIS CENTERS AROUND FIVE PARTICIPLES, EACH DEPENDENT UPON ‘BE FILLED WITH THE SPIRIT’

¹⁹ **speaking**

one to another

in psalms

and hymns

and spiritual songs,

singing and **making melody**

in your heart

to the Lord,

²⁰ **giving thanks**

always for all things,

in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,

to the God and Father;

²¹ **submitting yourselves**

to one another

in the fear of God.

“Household Code of Conduct”

²²⁻³³ *(husbands and wives)*

^{6:1-4} *(children and parents)*

^{6:5-9} *(servants and masters)*

WHERE DOES THIS SECTION DIVIDE? — There are questions about where to make a division, as mentioned in our first lesson in this section. From lesson 23a:

This lesson division is much longer than is typical in my studies, but I have tried to follow the natural divisions within the Scriptures themselves and created by Paul. We must remember these ‘divisions’ are for our study purposes only; when Paul wrote, he wrote one continuous letter without chapter and verse divisions nor with ‘topic divisions.’ Since this section is so long, most of the commentators I read make a division either at v. 20 or at v. 21; 5:22-6:9 is an obvious section dealing with what many call ‘the Haustafel,’ a word coined by Martin Luther for the ‘Household Code of Conduct’ for husbands and wives, children and servants. So what is the problem with making these introductory verses separate from the ‘Household Code?’ The problem is that v. 21 is heavily dependent upon v. 20 while v. 22 is heavily dependent upon v. 21; in other words, there is no real division between these introductory verses and the ‘Household Code.’

For the reason given above, many consider v. 21 to be transitional, linking the two portions together. Here are some reasons for linking v. 21 with the previous verses (following the main points set forth by Ernest Best, 515f; see also Lincoln, 352; Hoehner, 716; Thielman, 365, 372; Salmond, *The Expositor’s Greek Testament: Ephesians*, 364f):

- We have noted the participle in v. 21 ‘*submitting*’ is the last of five participles, all of which is dependent upon the main verb ‘*be filled*’ in v. 18:

¹⁸ *and be not drunk with wine, in which is dissoluteness, **but be filled with the Spirit,***

¹⁹ *speaking one to another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs,*

singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord,

²⁰ *giving thanks always for all things, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, to the God and Father;*

²¹ *submitting yourselves to one another in the fear of God.*

- v. 21 deals with the relationships of all believers to one another whereas 5:22-6:9 deals with relationships of those within a Christian household
- 5:22-6:9 deals with a fresh subject, life in the Christian household; nothing in the previous verses suggests Paul had the household in mind (apart from the fact many churches worshiped in homes)
- mutual submission fits well with v. 19 where all believers mutually address one another with no hierarchical distinctions
- mutual submission picks up the theme of the introductory verses to this exhortation passage (in particular 4:2) and rounds it off before moving to a new area:

‘I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.’ (4:1-6)

Here are some reasons for linking v. 21 with the section that follows:

- v. 22 probably lacks a verb which must be supplied from v. 21 (this depends on the mss used; see notes on v. 22)
- 5:22-6:9 continues the theme of submission, now making specific applications. The term is implied in v. 22 and used as the main verb in v. 24, as well as the concepts of fear / respect (5:33; 6:5), honor (6:2) and obedience (6:1,5).

This is not just a problem with our English translations, even the Greek New Testaments upon which our modern translations are based differ: the United Bible Societies edition (UBS³) makes a break after v. 21, the Nestle-Aland *‘Novum Testamentum Graece’* (*‘The New Testament in Greek’*, NA²⁷) before it. [Best, 502] We will therefore teach the lesson as v. 21 being transitional; the fifth of a series of participles based upon ‘be filled with the Spirit’ but also leading into the ‘household code’ which follows.

PARTICIPLE #5 – SUBMITTING

‘MUTUAL SUBMISSION’ – to one another — ἀλλήλοις [allēlois] — As we begin our look at submission, the place to start would be to note what the commentators all refer to as *‘mutual submission.’* We will see this holds a prominent place not just in our present passage but throughout the New Testament. “Paul’s use of the notion of reciprocity so far in Ephesians leads the letter’s readers to understand the pronoun here in a fully reciprocal sense. The letter has just spoken of bearing with ‘each other’ (4:2), being members of ‘one another’ (4:25), and being kind to ‘one another’ (4:32), using ἀλλήλων [allēlōn] in each case to refer to expectations of all believers. To hear now of ‘submitting to one another’ might seem slightly strange, but it does hint that there is a sense in which everyone is involved in serving others.” [Thielman, 373]

SUBMISSION IS NOT WEAKNESS BUT ‘THE SOCIAL ORDERING OF PEOPLE’ — submitting, submitting yourselves — ὑποτασσόμενοι [hupotassomenoi] — “Although the English term ‘submit’ is viewed in a pejorative way today and is often seen as a sign of weakness or as something one should resist at all costs, it should not be seen in such negative terms here. *In general, the verb ὑποτάσσω [hupotassō, ‘submit’] is widely used for the proper social ordering of people, as, for example, warriors giving their allegiance to their commander (e.g., 1 Chr 29:24). Similarly, people living in a certain political jurisdiction are obliged to respect the authority of their local governor. This carries with it the responsibility to live in an orderly manner and not to be seditious or rebellious.*” [Arnold, 356]

“Mutual subjection is part of a wise, circumspect walk, i.e., mutual recognition of each other’s rights and of our obligations to serve them. In some sense we are all servants, i.e. we are bound to serve others; the very father is, in this sense, servant of his child. So in the Christian Church we are all in a sense servants (‘By love serve one another,’ Galatians 5:15; comp. Matthew

20:26-28; John 13:15, 16). This view is in harmony with the humble spirit of the gospel. **Pride leads us to demand rigorously from others what we fancy they owe to us; humility, to give to others what Christ teaches that we owe to them. The one feeling is to be discouraged, the other exercised and strengthened.** [The Pulpit Commentary]

“‘Be subject’ is from hupotassō, originally a military term meaning to arrange or rank under. Spirit-filled Christians rank themselves under one another. The main idea is that of relinquishing one’s rights to another person.... James said, ‘What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members?’ (James 4:1). Conflicts in the church, in the home, and in marriage always result from hearts that are directed by the self rather than by the Spirit of God. When self insists on its own rights, opinions, and goals, harmony and peace are precluded. The self-centered life is always in a battle for the top, and pushes others down as it climbs up in pride. The Spirit-centered life, on the other hand, is directed toward lowliness, toward subservience, and it lifts others up as it descends in humility. The Spirit-filled believer does ‘not merely look out for [his] own personal interests, but also for the interests of others’ (Phil. 2:4).” [MacArthur, 276]

“The verb ὑποτάσσω [hupotassō, ‘submit’] refers to the ordering of something underneath something else, and ... it often refers to the voluntary ‘submission’ of one person to another. People should place their minds underneath God’s authority (but often do not do this; Rom. 8:7; cf. 10:3); people should place themselves under the divinely ordained governmental authorities (Rom. 13:1, 5; Titus 3:1); the Corinthian church should submit to the household of Stephanas (1 Cor. 16:16); wives should, similarly, submit themselves to their husbands (Col. 3:18; Titus 2:5), and slaves should do the same with respect to their masters (Titus 2:9).” [Thielman, 372]

‘VOLUNTARY SUBMISSION’ AND FOCUSING ON THE NEEDS OF OTHERS IS A CHOICE — “The voice of the participle (ὑποτασσόμενοι, hupotassomenoi) can be either middle (‘submit yourselves’) or passive (‘be submissive’); the active voice is not possible here since it would communicate the idea of subjugating others. Although there is not a great difference between the meaning of the middle and the passive in this instance, the context suggests that the middle is more appropriate. **The middle emphasizes that the Christians addressed here need to actively deny themselves and focus their attention on the needs of others in the body.**” [Arnold, 357] “The middle expresses the idea of cooperation where the subject acts as a free agent.” [Hoehner, 717] “Subordination implies a sense of order in society. Mutual subordination will naturally be voluntary. It is best illustrated by the action of Jesus in washing his disciples’ feet (Jn 13.1ff). Jesus associates this type of behaviour, though not using the word, with the nature of true greatness (Mk 10.43-5) and again his own activity illustrates what he says (Mk 10.45)....

Believers do not fall into mutual subordination easily; the connection of v. 21 with what precedes shows that its attainment is based on the imperative of v. 18b; **only when filled with the Spirit do people willingly submit to another and learn not to insist on their own rights.**” [Best, 517f]

Therefore by His Spirit we choose to put others before ourselves.

THIS IS A FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLE OF CHRISTIANITY — While not using the exact same verbiage, this same theme is repeated throughout the New Testament. **A proud, arrogant, self-seeking and self-willed demeanor is antithetical to the most basic precepts of Christianity!**

If serving
is below
you,
leadership
is beyond
you.

“The primary point in the spiritual ethics of the Gospel is humiliation; self is dethroned as against God, and consequently as against men. Here the special, but not exclusive, reference is to fellow-Christians.” [Moule, 137f]

“In this text a result of believers filled by the Spirit is submission to one another in the body of believers. Unbelievers tend to take great pride in individualism and independence, which leads to selfishness. However, believers are to act differently. Jesus instructed the disciples that the world would know that they are his disciples if they love one another (John 13:34-35). Also, in other contexts Paul instructs believers to love one another with brotherly love and to prefer one another by showing honor (Rom 12:10) and in humility to count the other better than themselves (Phil 2:3).” [Hoehner, 717]

“If believers are filled with the Spirit, this should manifest itself in their mutual submission. There are similarities with the earlier paraenesis in 4:2, 3, where ‘bearing with one another in love’ stands parallel to ‘making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit,’ and in 4:30, where it is clear from the context that what grieves the Spirit are the words and deeds of believers that are disruptive of communal life. The call to mutual submission ‘demands readiness to renounce one’s own will for the sake of others, i.e., ἀγάπη [agape, ‘love’] and to give precedence to others’ The exhortation to all the members of the household to submit to one another (v 21) is [Paul’s] distinctive introduction to the specific duties of the household code which follow. It is a reminder that, whatever roles are appropriate because of the structures imposed by the household, there remains the overarching demand that in all lowliness and meekness with patience believers should bear with one another in love (cf. 4:2).” [Lincoln, 365, 385]

“With this admonition, Paul takes the reader back to the beginning of the ethical section of the letter, where he enjoins the community to ‘make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace’ (4:3). Humility, gentleness, patience, and tolerance (4:2) are all vital community attitudes and practices that preserve the unity brought by the one Spirit. Thus, Paul can say, ‘be filled with the Spirit ... by submitting to one another.’ Mutual submission is not just the result of Spirit-filling; it is prerequisite to the reception of grace from the Spirit-endowed members of the body. Thus, it is easy to see from Paul’s perspective that attitudes and behavior reflecting arrogance, harshness, impatience, and intolerance will not only adversely impact the unity of the community, but will also keep believers from effectively ministering to one another. The work of the Spirit is thus effectively hindered.... He calls for all believers to submit ‘to one another’, not just to those in leadership roles. By expressing himself this way, Paul subverts the normal usage of the term to convey the idea that all believers should defer to one another in the life of the Christian community. This is the same countercultural attitude that Jesus commended to his disciples when they sought positions of preeminence in the coming kingdom. Jesus condemned the mind-set of the Gentile leaders who sought to ‘lord it over’ people and taught that members of his new community need to become servants of one another, following his own example (Mark 10:42-45). Paul’s desire for these believers is similar to what he longs for in the Philippian community, that they ‘do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit,’ that they humbly consider one another in the community as more important than themselves, and that they look not only to their own interests, but also to the interests of others (Phil 2:3-4; see also Rom 12:10).” [Arnold, 355f]

“This command to submit one to another is found in other passages of the New Testament, as in 1 Pet v. 5, ‘All of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility;’ Rom. xii. 10; Phil. ii. 3. The scriptural doctrine on this subject is that men are not isolated individuals, each one

independent of all others. No man liveth for himself, and no man dieth for himself. The essential equality of men and their mutual dependence lay the foundation for the obligation of mutual subjection. The apostle, however, is here speaking of the duties of Christians. It is, therefore, the Christian duty of mutual submission of which this passage treats. *It not only forbids pride and all assumption of superiority, but enjoins mutual subjection of a part to the whole, and of each one to those of his fellow-believers with whom he is specially connected.*” [Hodge, 226]

“He has seen the dangers of individualism in a Christian community, and in 1 Corinthians xiv. 26-33 he corrects this (cf. also Phil. ii. 1ff. and iv. 2). He knew from experience that the secret of maintaining joyful fellowship in the community was the order and discipline that come from the willing submission of one person to another (cf. Eph. iv. 2,3). *Pride of position and the authoritarians spirit are destructive of fellowship. The importance to Paul of the whole concept of submission is evident from the use of the word more than twenty times in his Epistles. He is to apply this in special instances in the next section, but we should note that he first gives it a completely general application. There must be a willingness in the Christian fellowship to serve any, to learn from any, to be corrected by any, regardless of age, sex, class or any other division.*” [Foulkes,153f]

“Christians should not be self-assertive, each insisting on getting his or her own way. As the Philippian believers are told, they should be humble enough to count others better than themselves and put the interests of others before their own, following the example of Christ, who ‘emptied himself,’ ‘humbled himself,’ and ‘became obedient,’ even when the path of obedience led to death on the cross (Phil. 2:3-8). Out of reverence for their Lord, who set such a precedent, his followers should place themselves at one another’s disposal, living so that their forbearance is a matter of public knowledge (Phil. 4:7), even when others are encouraged on this account to take advantage of them (1 Cor. 6:7). *Even those who fill positions of responsibility and honor in the Christian community, to whom their fellow-believers are urged to render submission and loving respect (1 Cor. 16:16; 1 Thess. 5:12-13), earn such recognition by being servants, not lords (cf. 1 Pet. 5:3).* For all his exercise of apostolic authority when the situation called for it, Paul invites his converts to regard him and his colleagues as ‘your slaves for Jesus’ sake’ (2 Cor. 4:5).” [Bruce, 382]

Verses supporting the putting of others before ourselves:

‘But Jesus called them to Himself and said to them, You know that those who are considered rulers over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant. And whoever of you desires to be first shall be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.’ (Mark 10:42-45 || Matt 20:24-28)

‘Fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.’ (Phil 2:2-4) *“[In Phil 2:3,4] the qualities of selflessness and a regard for others that does not insist on one’s own rights that the apostle desires to see are linked to the heart of his gospel by being grounded on the pattern of Christ’s life. He did not insist on the equality with God that was his by rights but became a servant.”* [Lincoln, 366]

‘Now before the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that His hour had come that He

should depart from this world to the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end. And supper being ended, the devil having already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray Him, Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come from God and was going to God, rose from supper and laid aside His garments, took a towel and girded Himself. After that, He poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel with which He was girded.' (John 13:1-5)

'A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.' (John 13:34,35)

'Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another Be of the same mind toward one another.' (Rom 12:10, 16a)

'But God composed the body, having given greater honor to that part which lacks it, that there should be no schism in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another.' (1 Cor 12:24b, 25)

'For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.' (Gal 5:13)

'with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love' (Eph 4:2) 'bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do.' (Col 3:13)

We are to submit to earthly authorities: *'Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God.' (Rom 13:1) 'Therefore submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake, whether to the king as supreme, or to governors, as to those who are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and for the praise of those who do good.' (1 Pet 2:13,14)*

We are to submit to our spiritual leaders: *'I urge you, brethren — you know the household of Stephanas, that it is the firstfruits of Achaia, and that they have devoted themselves to the ministry of the saints — that you also submit to such, and to everyone who works and labors with us.' (1 Cor 16:15,16) 'Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you.' (Heb 13:17) 'Likewise you younger people, submit yourselves to your elders. Yes, all of you be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility, for "God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble."' (1 Pet 5:5) ***"There is an interesting parallel in 1 Pet 5:5, where the exhortation 'you that are younger be subject to the elders' is followed immediately by the further appeal 'clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another.' The latter admonition was not meant to cancel out the former.*** Rather, the writer holds that there is a general sense in which elders are to serve their flock, including its younger element, in a submissive attitude, but that mutuality goes along with a hierarchical view of roles. Thus there is a specific sense in which the flock in general and the younger in particular are to be obedient to the elders."*

[Lincoln, 366]

ORDER DOES NOT MEAN SUPERIORITY /

INFERIORITY — The best illustration of this is the doctrine of the Trinity. None would deny there is order within the Trinity: God the Son is seen in Scripture to be under submission to God the Father. God the Holy Spirit is seen in Scripture to be under submission to both God the Father and God the Son. But orthodox Christianity unanimously holds to the co-equality of each Divine Member of the Trinity. God the Father is not a ‘greater God’ than God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit is not an ‘inferior God’ than God the Father and God the Son. Each Person of the Trinity is co-equal in all the Divine Attributes, yet there is order. **“All believers are**

spiritual equals in every sense. *‘There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus’ (Gal. 3:28).... **As with leaders in government, it is not that church leaders are inherently superior to other Christians or that men are inherently superior to women, but that no institution — including the church — can function without a system of authority and submission.** In the home, the smallest unit of human society, the same principle applies. Even a small household cannot function if each member fully demands and expresses his own will and goes his own way. The system of authority God has ordained for the family is the headship of husbands over wives and of parents over children. But in addition to those necessary social functional relationships of authority and submission, God commands all Christians — leaders as well as followers, husbands as well as wives, parents as well as children — to ‘have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and ... humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross’ (Phil. 2:5-8). As Paul went on to explain (Eph. 5:22-6:9), the structural function of the family, like that of the church and of government, requires both authority and submission. But in all interpersonal relationships there is only to be mutual submission. **Submission is a general spiritual attitude that is to be true of every believer in all relationships.**” [MacArthur, 277f]*

THE BALANCE BETWEEN ‘MUTUAL SUBMISSION’ AND ‘RESPECT FOR THOSE IN AUTHORITY’ —

The tension between two seemingly opposites has long been recognized. *“[The concept of mutuality] is the attitude believers as members of the body should have to one another and is closely related to the humility to which all are summoned. Yet at the same time there are those who are teachers and leaders; all are members of the one body but they have different functions.... Paul would have included himself in mutual love with his converts yet he continually exercises authority over them; he is one among others in the body of Christ yet superior in authority. **Early Christianity contains an unresolved tension between authority and mutuality or, in terms of our passage (taking in 5.22-6.9), between mutual subordination and the authority of some. If this tension has not been thought through by the time of Ephesians (has it ever been?) then it is not surprising to move from mutual subordination in v. 21 to the subordination of one group to another in 5.22-6.9.**” [Best, 516f]*

“[T]here is a sense in which even those in authority ‘submit’ to their subordinates. If Paul, who considered himself to be an authoritative apostle, could speak of becoming a slave to all (1 Cor. 9:19), and could command all the Galatian Christians to ‘serve as each other’s slave through love’ (Gal. 5:13), then he could also speak both of ‘submitting to one another’ and of exercising

True Love

"The husband and wife roles have nothing to do with a lack of equality. When the wife submits to her husband, it doesn't make her "less-than" her husband. If you think that's what the bible says you are destroying the Trinity. Does not The Son submit to His Father? Was the Son less than His Father? If you say "yes" you've just committed heresy. Within the Trinity, The Son submitted to The Father, yet The Son and The Father are one, they are equal" -Paul Washer

authority without contradiction. ‘Even kings and governors,’ says Calvin, ‘rule that they may serve.’ In the household code that follows 5:21, then, there is a sense in which husbands, fathers, and masters submit to those over whom they have authority, although the terms ὑποτάσσω [hupotassō, ‘to submit’] or ὑπακούω [hupakouō, ‘to obey’] are not used of their responsibilities. Although the head of the household retains his position of authority, his use of that authority is tempered by an attitude of service to those over whom he has been placed.” [Thielman, 373]

“Richard Hays summarizes the meaning of this verse in context well when he notes, ‘the hierarchical structure of the relations described is tempered by a comprehensive vision of the church as a people living in humility and mutual submission.’ Over four hundred years ago, Calvin summed it up well:

God has so bound us to each other, that no man ought to avoid subjection. And where love reigns, there is mutual servitude. I do not except even kings and governors, for they rule that they may serve. Therefore it is very right that he should exhort all to be subject to each other.

As Calvin and many other interpreters have noted, the mere fact that Paul calls every believer to an attitude of submission to others does not obviate the truth that we live these relationships out in a set of socially structured relationships — and this by God’s design.” [Arnold, 356f]

‘Therefore comfort each other and edify one another, just as you also are doing.’ (1 Thess 5:11)

‘And we urge you, brethren, to recognize those who labor among you, and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love for their work’s sake. Be at peace among yourselves.’ (1 Thess 5:12,13)

‘I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.’ (Eph 4:1-3)

‘But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ’s gift.... And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ’ (Eph 4:7,11,12)

‘submitting to one another in the fear of God.’ (Eph 5:21)

wives / husbands, children / parents, servants / masters (5:22-6:9)

THIS IS A TRUISM IN ALL AREAS OF LIFE — While this is a fundamental principle of Christianity, it works itself out in all areas of life. Politically, our leaders are called to ‘serve’ and the greatest leaders are those whose first consideration is the good of those they serve. Our political system ‘works’ when we have such leaders. But when a leader forgets that principle and rules out of self-interest, it becomes tyranny. In our churches, the system works when those who lead (pastors, deacons) do so with the best interest of those they are leading is the first consideration. In our families, the system works when those who lead (the husband with the wife, the parents with their children) do so with the best interest of those they are leading is the first consideration. Even in the work force this is true; the system works when those who lead (supervisors, managers) do so with the best interest of those they are leading is the first consideration. This principle is therefore a truism throughout every aspect of life.

How does this truism apply to our Christian life? Consider Jesus – why do we love Him so? One reason would be that although He is our Master and frequently asks that which is demanding of us and contrary to our sinful Adamic nature, yet we love Him / obey Him (however imperfectly) because we know He has our best interests at heart. He is not using us for His own selfish gains!

And He is our Master and Sovereign! Consider these verses:

*‘But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the **Lord** who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction.’ (2 Pet 2:1; similar almost parallel verse = Jude 4) The word for ‘Lord’ in this verse is δεσπότην [despotēn] defined by BADG as ‘(1) one who has legal control and authority over persons, such as subjects or slaves, lord, master; (2) one who controls a thing, owner.’ We get our modern word ‘despot’ from this word, meaning today ‘(1) a ruler with absolute power and authority; (2) one exercising power tyrannically, a person exercising absolute power in a brutal or oppressive way.’ [Merriam-Webster dictionary]*

*‘Now Thou dost **send away** Thy servant, **Lord**, according to Thy word, in peace’ (Luke 2:29 YLT) These are the words of Simeon as he saw the infant Jesus in the temple. The word for ‘Lord’ that Simeon uses is again δέσποτα, [despota], our word in 2 Peter 2:1 / Jude 4. The word Simeon uses for ‘send away’ is ἀπολύεις [apolueis], a word defined by BADG as ‘(1) as legal term, to grand acquittal, set free, release, pardon; (2) to release from a painful condition, free; (3) to permit or cause someone to leave a particular location, let go, send away, dismiss.’ It was used in the military to relieve a soldier at a guard station.*

But while the Lord is presented to us as our absolute Master and Sovereign, we do not cower before Him but willingly submit to Him in love! Whatever He commands is for His glory and for our good! Nothing He does is out of selfish self-interest but for the benefit of those whom He loves. Rom 8:28.

SYNONYMS FOR ‘SERVANT’ — There are several words used in the NT that could be rendered ‘to serve, to minister, to submit.’ It may prove helpful to briefly look at these words and see how they influence Paul’s use of the word he uses here. There are five synonymous words which may be translated ‘to serve’ in our NT: ‘therapon / doulos / diakonos / oiketes / huperetes’ (a form of this last word is used by Paul in our passage as ‘to submit’).

Therapon is only used 1x, in Heb 3:5, “And Moses verily was faithful in all his house, as a servant”, quoting from Num 12:7. The Hebrew word used in Numbers is ‘therapon’ in the LXX (as it does in other places where this Hebrew word is used), but the LXX also translates the same Hebrew word as ‘doulos’ in other places in the LXX. But that does not mean there is no difference between these words; the ‘doulos’ is one that is in a permanent relation of servitude to another, his will altogether swallowed up in the will of the other. The ‘therapon’ on the other hand is the performer of present services either as a freeman or a slave, as bound by duty or love; therefore his service is more tender, more noble, and freer than those of a ‘doulos’. Thus Moses was a ‘therapon’ implying he occupied a more confidential position, a freer service, a higher dignity than merely a ‘doulos’.

Diakonos (from whence we get our word ‘deacon’) is used often in NT. It differs from ‘therapon’ and ‘doulos’ in that it represents the servant in his activity for the work; not in his relation, either servile as the ‘doulos’ or more voluntary as the ‘therapon’. The attendants at a feast (John 2:5; 12:2;

Matt 22:13) were ‘diakonos’, regardless of them being free or servile. At the marriage supper (Matt 22:2-14), the servants used to invite guests to the feast are ‘doulos’, men used to invite their fellow-men into His kingdom; but the servants used to execute the Lord’s judgment acts at the end of the world are ‘diakonoi’, the angels.

‘**Oiketes**’ is used 4x in the NT, often equivalent to ‘doulos’. However the ‘doulos’ emphasizes the servile relation more than the ‘oiketes’, one who was the household servant and possibly even family (though not necessarily one born in the house). Trench says the word was used in the best of times so widely as to include wife and children.

‘**Huperetes**’ is a word taken from military matters; originally the rower as distinguished from the soldier; then the performer of any strong and hard labor; then the subordinate official who waited to accomplish the commands of his superior. In this sense Mark was the ‘huperetes’ (Acts 13:5) of Paul and Barnabas, used to serve in their menial needs. Used in this official sense of the officer in ancient Rome attending to the consul or other magistrate, or the official formerly sent to carry out the orders of a judge or court. Used often in the NT and while the distinction between the ‘huperetes’ and the ‘doulos’ is maintained, ‘huperetes’ is often used indifferently with the ‘diakonos’, the ‘huperetes’ maybe being a more official character and function than the ‘diakonos’. [Trench, synonyms – serve; page 30-34]

Why is this important? The word Paul uses in this passage is akin to the final word for ‘servant’ (‘huperetes’). Thus Paul is not saying the wife is a servant either in the strongest sense of the word (‘doulos’ = ‘bondservant, slave’) or even as a ‘oiketes’ or ‘diakonos’. What Paul is saying is the wife should ‘place herself under, be ranked under in the sense of authority’ of that of her husband.

A BALANCE BETWEEN ‘TERROR’ AND ‘RESPECT’ — in the fear of God. — ἐν φόβῳ Θεοῦ. [en phobō Theou] — *“The connection of fear to Christ follows a trend in which the NT transfers statements made about God in the OT to Christ. It also introduces a new element. [GK phobos] is a word with a wide range of meaning. Here it would be wrong to read into it any idea of ‘terror’. It is instead a reverential fear which needs to be balanced by the motivation of love (Rom 12.1; 15.3f; 2 Cor 5.14; Eph 4.32; 5.2). It carries neither a hidden reference to the day of judgement nor even a threat of judgement. The attitude Christians should have to their Lord is expressed in many other ways in the NT, above all in the idea of trust. Fear cannot be isolated and discussed on its own but must be regarded as part of a total attitude and probably not as the most important part.” [Best, 518]*

“And in the light of this [Christ’s not insisting on His equality with God that was His by rights but becoming a servant], the Philippians are exhorted to live out that sort of pattern of salvation in fear and trembling in the face of God’s activity among them (cf. Phil 2:5-13). Here in Ephesians, the ground and motivation for believers’ mutual submission, the placing of themselves at one another’s disposal for which the writer calls, is more specifically the fear of Christ. Barth is right to insist that translations should not tone down φόβος [phobos] to the weaker notion of respect. ‘Fear’ need not involve fright or terror but conveys a more serious sense of reverence and obligation than ‘respect.’ In the OT, the fear of the Lord was the appropriate attitude of a creature to the Creator, producing obedience to his will. In Paul’s writings ‘fear of the Lord’ or ‘fear of Christ’ is virtually interchangeable with ‘fear of God.’ 2 Cor 5:11 sounds an eschatological note, ‘knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade people,’ while 2 Cor 7:1 exhorts that holiness should be made perfect in the fear of God (cf. also Phil 2:12). Col 3:22 had

talked about ‘fearing the Lord’ as a motivation for slaves, but here it is the attitude all believers are to have. Just as in the OT the guiding principle for wise living within the covenant was the fear of Yahweh, so now [Paul] indicates that the overriding motivation for wise living (cf. v 15) and relationships within the new community must be the fear of Christ. ***This is an attitude that looks to Christ in awe at his overwhelming love and at his power and that also lives in the light of his sovereign claim and righteous judgment (cf. also 6:8, 9). The mutual submission required depends on all parties’ having this attitude to Christ, and the specific relationships within marriage that are set out are also to flow from and be an expression of such fear*** (cf. also the later references to the wife’s fear and to slaves’ fear and trembling in 5:33 and 6:5).” [Lincoln, 366f; see also Hoehner, 717ff, Arnold, 357; Thielman, 374f]

“The discussion in the present context revolves around the believer who, filled by the Spirit, submits to others out of fear or reverence for Christ. Such fear conveys more than just respect. One could have respect for Christ but not be submissive. On the other hand, it is doubtful that it is a fear that comprises terror. Consequently, since the word is used in the context of Christ’s love that is so amply demonstrated in this letter, it is best to view it as a reverential fear or reverential respect. This quality of ‘fear’ motivates believers to submit to others within the body. The practice of mutual submission to one another in the fear of Christ must not be relegated merely to a church service, but rather it is to be applied in daily life whenever and wherever they meet. It may be at a church service, at the workplace, at home, or at a social gathering of two or more believers.” [Hoehner, 719]

“God has bound us so strongly to each other, that no man ought to endeavour to avoid subjection; and where love reigns, mutual services will be rendered. I do not except even kings and governors, whose very authority is held for the *service* of the community. It is highly proper that all should be exhorted to be subject to each other in their turn. But as nothing is more irksome to the mind of man than this mutual subjection, he directs us to *the fear of Christ*, who alone can subdue our fierceness, that we may not refuse the yoke, and can humble our pride, that we may not be ashamed of serving our neighbours.” [Calvin, 316f]

MSS DIFFERENCE — ‘in the fear of God’ (Tyndale, Geneva, KJV, YLT, NKJV) or ‘in the fear of Christ, out of reverence for Christ’ (RV, ASV, RSV, NASV, NIV, ESV, NET) —

Whichever is read is immaterial. “The reading of the TR, θεοῦ [theo, ‘god’], is that mostly of the cursives and a few Fathers. It must give place to Χριστοῦ [christou, ‘christ’], which is given by B & A L P, Vulg., Syr., Boh., etc., and is accepted by LTrWHRV. Other variations occur, *e.g.*, Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ [Christou Iēsou, ‘Christ Jesus’] in D and Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ [Iēsou Christou, ‘Jesus Christ’] in G. The phrase ‘in the fear of Christ’ occurs only this once. Reverence for the Lord Himself was the spirit in which this great duty of mutual subjection was to be fulfilled.” [Salmond, *The Expositor’s Greek Testament: Ephesians*, 365]