



MESSAGE

STUDY GUIDE

GROUP MATERIAL

SONGS

Submission Without Hierarchy

Bible Reading: Eph. 5:15-22

[Watch LIVESTREAM here at 10am](#)

[Join our post-sermon discussion on Zoom at 11am](#)

[Join our citKids Connect discussion at 11am](#)

I. Five Signs of the Spirit's Influence (Eph. 5:18-21)

A. Speaking/Teaching (Eph. 5:19a; Col. 3:16)

B. Singing (Eph. 5:19b)

C. Making Music (Eph. 5:19b)

D. Giving thanks (Eph. 5:20)

E. "Submitting" (Eph. 5:21)—what does 'submit' mean here?

- Submitting: "It is a phrase *too often neglected*...It names a test of spirituality which Christians too seldom apply...Many persons feel that shouts of 'hallelujah' & the utterance of...'unknown tongues' are proofs of being 'filled with the Spirit.'... Submission to our fellow Christians...[is an] *unmistakable proof of the Spirit's power*." [Charles Erdman, *Eph.*, p. 106]

II. Submission – "Submitting to one another in the fear of Christ." (Eph. 5:21 CSB. etc.)

A. The 'hinge' between what came before and what follows i.e., between "*Be filled by the Spirit*" (Eph. 5:18) and "Household relations" (wife/husband; kids/parents; slaves/masters, Eph. 5:22-6:9)

B. General Ethical Directives framed by Mutual Submission (Eph. 4:2; 5:21)

C. Greek: 'Hupotassomai' or 'Hypotassomai' (vb.)— "*to set or place yourself under another*"

1. Is "submission" the best translation of '*hupotasso*'?

2. Some like the hierarchical notion of authority/submission, because it plays into their narrative

– "Eph. 5:21...*does not teach mutual submission at all*, but rather teaches that *we should all be subject to those whom God has put in authority over us*—...husbands, parents, or employers....Eph. 5:21 would be

paraphrased, 'being subject to one another (that is, to some others), in the fear of Christ.' The argument is [based on] the word *hypotasso* itself...[which] *always implies a relationship of submission to an authority.*"—

J. Piper & W. Grudem

3. "*Hypotasso* always implies a relationship of submission to an authority."—J. Piper & W. Grudem

4. Others see submission in its Ephesian context (i.e., in the church, mutuality between all believers)

– "That this verb [*hypotasso*] appears with a reciprocal pronoun [*one another*,'] is very significant...The... pronoun [*one another*] seems to *clash with the concept* behind the English terms of '*submission or subjection*'."—David Bell

5. '*One another*' in Eph 4:2, 25, 32; 5:19, 21 Ask: Do these statements (below) apply to all believers, or some subset?

6. "One another' includes both leaders & followers—all mutually submit

D. "In the fear of Christ" or "out of respect for Christ" (Eph. 5:21b)

III. Mutual Submission without Hierarchy – “defer to one another” (Eph. 5:21) “serve one another” (Gal. 5:13)

A. Reciprocal Deference vs. Top-down Hierarchy

- "Brothers...*serve* [or '*be slaves to*'] one another through love." (Gal. 5:13) "This...adjusts an inherently hierarchical relationship (slavery)...by making it reciprocal...'*One another*' turns a one-way relationship of power & superiority into a mutual relationship of reciprocal deference, where each seeks to promote the interests of the other. Thus, submission ...[is] such that service & honor are continually exchanged." —John Barclay

B. Mutual Submission without Hierarchy

- "Between Christians...there is to be a reciprocal arrangement whereby [all] are considerate & live to meet the needs of the other[s]. Here each member of the body of Christ...accepts a subordinate role in relation to all others. The result is a diminishing of hierarchical roles among members of the community." —Grant Osborne

IV. The Abuse, Challenge, Freedom & Limit of Submission

A. Abuse

- "Of all...'*Spiritual Disciplines*' none has been more abused than...*submission*...The human species has a...knack for taking the best teaching & turning it to the worst ends. Nothing...in religion has done more to *manipulate & destroy* people than a *deficient teaching on submission*." —Richard Foster

B. Jesus' Challenge: "If anyone wants to follow...me, let him deny himself, take up his cross, & follow me." (Mk. 8:34)

C. Freedom

D. Limits

- "The limits of...submission are at the point at which it becomes *destructive*. It then becomes a denial of the law of love...and it is an affront to genuine, biblical submission." —Richard Foster

V. Acts of Submission

A. To God—"Come to me, all of you who are weary & burdened, & I will give you rest."—Jesus (Matt. 11:28)

B. To the Word of God

C. To others

D. In worship

Questions:

1. Eph. 5:18b-21 mentions 5 activities related to "*being filled with/by the Spirit*": [1.] speaking to one another; [2.] singing ...to the Lord; [3.] making music...to the Lord; [4.] giving thanks...to God the Father; [5.] "submitting to one another in the fear of Christ." Consider each of these 5 activities:

- Which of these 5 are (explicitly) directed to the Lord, God &/or Christ?
- Which of these are directed towards fellow-believers?
- Which (if any) are directed to a higher human authority?

2. Eph. 5:21 is often translated as "*submitting*..." However, scholars suggest the "concept of *hypotasso*...is significantly different from...the English term *submit*, which seems to suggest the surrender of oneself directly to the control of another." Below are alternative renderings of Eph. 5:21:

- a. "Place yourselves under each other's authority out of respect for Christ." (GW: "God's Word translation")
 - b. "Be willing to obey each other. Do this because you respect Christ." (ICB)
 - c. "Honor Christ and put others first." (CEV);
 - d. "Be willing to serve each other out of respect for Christ." (ERV)
 - e. "Out of respect for Christ, be courteously reverent to one another." (Message)
 - f. "Give way to each other because you respect Christ." (WE)
- Based on CIT's Video message (& what you've read) which of these (a. to f.) do you feel is preferable? Why? Discuss.

3. J. Piper & W. Grudem assert: "*Hypotasso* ['submit'] *always* implies a relationship of submission to an authority," so, "Eph. 5:21...*does not teach mutual submission at all...*" Yet, Eph. 5:21 says "submitting to one another," which many call "mutual submission."

- a. Do Piper/Grudem deny the straight-forward meaning of the text, or do they have a point? (What's their point?)
- b. Does this passage of Eph. emphasize more "submission to a higher human authority" or "mutual submission"?
- c. Can you reconcile "submission to a higher human authority" & "submitting to one another" (mutual submission)?

4. John Barclay says: the phrase, "*One another*' turns a one-way relationship of power & superiority into a mutual relationship of reciprocal deference." What does he mean by this? How does this help us understand "submission" in Ephesians 5:21?

5. What positive experiences do you have regarding "submitting to one another" in the church?

6. Richard Foster gives a strong warning about the abuse of teaching regarding "authority & submission." He says: "nothing in religion has done more to *manipulate & destroy* people than a *deficient teaching on submission.*"

- Do you have any experience regarding the abuse of teachings on "authority & submission"? Discuss.