

#1796

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Ephesians 5:21-6:4¹
God's economy of submission
in the family.
20th Sunday after Pentecost
Supplementary Lectionary
Series "B," Epistles

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²¹ Be submissive to one another out of reverence for Christ.

²² Wives, be submissive to your own husbands as to the LORD; ²³ because the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the Head of the Church, his Body, of which he is the Savior. ²⁴ Now as the Church is submissive to Christ, so also let wives be submissive to their husbands in everything.

²⁵ Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the Church and gave himself up for her, ²⁶ to sanctify her, cleansing her by the washing with water through the Word, ²⁷ in order that he himself might present the Church to himself as a radiant (glorious) Church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. ²⁸ In this same way, let husbands love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself; ²⁹ after all, no one ever hates his own flesh, but he feeds (nourishes) and cares for (cherishes) it, just as Christ [nourishes and cherishes] the Church— ³⁰ because we are members of his Body. ³¹ "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united (be cleaved) to his wife, and the two will become one flesh" (cf. Genesis 2:24). ³² This is a profound (great) mystery—but I myself am talking about Christ and the Church. ³³ However, let each one of you also love his own wife as he loves himself, and let the wife be respectful to her husband.

^{6:1} Children, obey your parents in the LORD; for this is right. ² "Honor your father and mother"—which is the first commandment with a promise— ³ "that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth" (cf. Exodus 20:12; Deuteronomy 5:16).

⁴ Fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath/anger; instead, nourish them in the discipline and instruction (admonition) of the LORD.

GOD'S ECONOMY OF SUBMISSION ...
I. THE CHURCH SUBMITS TO CHRIST
II. WIVES SUBMIT TO THEIR HUSBANDS
III. CHILDREN SUBMIT TO THEIR PARENTS

In Jesus' Name, Dear Fellow-Redeemed,

When you hear the term "economy," you probably think of something having to do with money and finances. That certainly is an understanding of the word. But there is another meaning associated with the word "economy." The term can also refer to the way in

¹ *The New International Version*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House) 1984. All Scripture references are taken from this translation unless noted otherwise.

which something works or the organizational structure of something.² Thus, in reference to God, one might think of God's economy of creation.

God's economy of creation notes that stars and planets keep to their assigned orbits and courses and do not run into each other – in spite of what some of the science fiction movies depict. God's economy of creation includes how the different seasons work together – times for planting, harvesting and rest; spring, summer, fall, winter - seasons which are then repeated.³ God's economy includes the fact that mankind did not evolve from some primordial swamp that worked up through monkeys and apes and eventually became man, but rather, on the sixth day of creation, God created mankind in his own image as the crown of his creation and appointed man to rule and subdue the earth. There is another economy that is the focus of our text this morning.

The economy with which our text deals is God's economy of submission. GOD'S ECONOMY OF SUBMISSION: I. THE CHURCH SUBMITS TO CHRIST; II. WIVES SUBMIT TO THEIR HUSBANDS; III. CHILDREN SUBMIT TO THEIR PARENTS.

GOD'S ECONOMY OF SUBMISSION:
I. THE CHURCH SUBMITS TO CHRIST

St. Paul writes,

²⁵ Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the Church and gave himself up for her, ²⁶ to sanctify her, cleansing her by the washing with water through the Word, ²⁷ in order that he himself might present the Church to himself as a radiant (glorious) Church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless (5:25-27).

“Christ loved the Church.” What is the Church?

The Church is defined as “the Holy Christian Church, the Communion of Saints,” the Fellowship of all Believers in Jesus.⁴ On this earth, this Holy Christian Church is invisible, for only God looks at the heart (cf. 1 Samuel 16:7b). However, this Holy Christian Church is a

² This aspect of “economy” refers to “the arrangement or mode of operation of something.” Cf. *Merriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, (Springfield, Massachusetts: Merriam-Webster, Incorporated) 1993.

³ Cf. Ecclesiastes 1:4-7; 3:1-8.

⁴ Cf. *The Apostles' Creed, Christian Worship – A Lutheran Hymnal* (Milwaukee, Wisconsin: Northwestern Publishing House, 1993), pp. 19, 41, 146, 150; and, Kuske, David P., *Luther's Catechism – The Small Catechism of Dr. Martin Luther and an Exposition for Children and Adults Written in Contemporary English* (Milwaukee, Wisconsin: Northwestern Publishing House, 3rd ed., 1998), pp. 4&5, 135, 151, 181.

reality and includes everyone who believes in Jesus alone as his or her Savior. Now, concerning this Church, the Apostle Paul states, “Christ loved the Church and gave himself up for her” (5:15b). But Jesus did not give himself up on the cross only for his Church. Jesus is the Lamb of God who took away the sins of the world; Jesus is the sacrifice of atonement for the sins of the world.⁵ Moreover, Jesus’ relationship with his Church continues.

St. Paul says, Jesus “feeds and cares for” his Church (5:29b). Jesus nourishes and cherishes his Church of believers. One of the ways in which Jesus does this, is by seeing to it that all things work together for good for his Church (cf. Romans 8:28). St. Paul wrote earlier in this Epistle to the Ephesians,

¹⁹ [God’s “incomparably great power”] was ²⁰ ... exerted in Christ when [God] raised [Christ] from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, ²¹ far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the [age] to come. ²² And God placed all things under [Christ’s] feet and appointed him to be Head over everything for the Church, ²³ which is his Body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way (1:19-23).

St. Paul is saying that Jesus rules, governs, guides, controls and directs all things in heaven and on earth for the benefit of his Church – all those who believe in him as their Savior. In addition, Jesus sanctified his Church.

Jesus sanctified his Church, “cleansing her by the washing with water through the Word” (5:26). In Holy Baptism, Jesus set his Church – all believers – apart – apart from those who are headed for hell because of their unbelief and rejection of Jesus, and Jesus placed those whom he had chosen among those headed for heaven by faith alone in Jesus. Jesus continues to sanctify his Church by nourishing and cherishing believers with the Means of Grace, the Gospel in Word and Sacrament. Moreover, believers, the Church, are One with and in Christ.

St. Paul says, “we are members of [Christ’s] Body” (5:30). When St. Paul says, “we,” he is referring to all believers in Jesus. And, being “members of [Christ’s] Body,” points to the Oneness that all believers enjoy in Jesus. St. Paul states that “no one ever hates his own flesh, but he feeds (nourishes) and cares for (cherishes) it, just as Christ [nourishes and cherishes] the Church” (5:29). One part of the body cannot be at war with another part of the body; and, the body cannot be at war with its head. Jesus is the Head of the Church, which is his Body. This relationship can only be understood through Gospel revelation. And, in this relationship, the Church submits to Christ.

St. Paul says, “Now ... the Church is submissive to Christ” (5:24). The Church submits itself to Christ Jesus. And, why not! Look at what Christ Jesus, the Head of the Church, the

⁵ Cf. John 1:29b,36b; 1 John 2:1b,2.

Husband of the Church, did for his Church! Jesus gave himself up on the cross for his Church – and not only for his Church – all believers – but also for all people. What love Jesus revealed for the Church in this sacrifice! Believers can be absolutely sure and positive that Jesus gave himself up for them, because Jesus gave himself up for all! Thus, the Church, “the Communion of Saints,” is described in the Bible as “the Bride of Christ” (cf. Revelation 21:2). This Church became the Bride of Christ through Holy Baptism, “the washing with water through the Word” (5:26b).

APPROPRIATION

Through Holy Baptism, dear friends, you are part of the Holy Christian Church, the Communion of Saints, the Fellowship of all Believers and only Believers in Jesus. You are the Bride of Christ. Christ Jesus is your Bridegroom. What joy is to fill your hearts to have such a Husband as Jesus! Yet, too often, we are tempted to overlook that relationship and focus upon what is happening to and in ourselves and in the world around us.

In his High Priestly Prayer for all believers on Maundy Thursday Night – the night Jesus was betrayed – Jesus prayed to his heavenly Father that his believers, though being in this world, were not of this world – did not belong to this world – just as Jesus was not of this world (cf. John 17:16). You and I as believers in Jesus are not of this world – we do not belong to this world. Yet we become engrossed and concerned about this world and things that take place in it.

We have financial concerns. We have familial troubles, trials, tribulations and turmoils. We have sicknesses, illnesses, diseases, and incapacities. We worry and stress ourselves (cf. Matthew 6:25-34). We forget who we really are!

We are who Christ Jesus made us to be – his redeemed; believers in him; his Church. Jesus chose us by sending into our hearts the Holy Spirit through the Means of Grace – the Gospel in Word and Sacraments. St. Paul mentions especially our Baptism, through which Jesus cleansed us from our sins and brought us into that relationship of himself as our Bridegroom and us as his Bride. ♪: “From heaven [Christ] came and sought [us] to be his Holy Bride; with his own blood he bought [us], and for [our] life he died” (cf. CW 538:1). What a relationship into which Jesus has brought us!

Thus, as believers in Jesus, part of his Church, we submit willingly, thankfully, lovingly and joyfully. That means that we can be patient in trials and tribulations, because Jesus, our Head and Husband, is controlling everything for our benefit. This economy of submission to Christ, will then be reflected in our other relationships as well.

GOD’S ECONOMY OF SUBMISSION: I. THE CHURCH SUBMITS TO CHRIST; and, II. WIVES SUBMIT TO THEIR HUSBANDS

The Apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthians, “God is not a God of disorder but of peace” (1 Corinthians 14:33). There is no peace if there is disorder. When there is order, there is

peace. God's order – his economy of submission in which wives submit to their husbands – goes back to creation.

In our Old Testament Lesson (Genesis 2:18-25), you heard of God's order of submission regarding husbands and wives. There was no suitable helper for Adam.

²¹ So the LORD God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and closed up the place with flesh. ²² Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man.

²³ The man said,

***“This is now bone of my bones
and flesh of my flesh;
she shall be called ‘woman,’
for she was taken out of man”*** (Genesis 2:21-23).

In his First Epistle to Timothy, St. Paul pointed to this order and submission: “Adam was formed first, then Eve” (1 Timothy 2:13). This is God's created order for mankind – for man and woman, for husband and wife. The woman was taken out of man (cf. Genesis 2:23b). The woman is the suitable helper for man – the help meet for man. Now, St. Paul makes another application.

“Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the Church and gave himself up for her” (5:25). Previously, it was obvious how Jesus gave himself up for his Church. Jesus went the way of the cross for his Church. In the same way, with the same kind of sacrifice, a husband is to give himself up for his wife. St. Paul points to the absurdity of anything else.

Paul says,

²⁵ Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the Church and gave himself up for her ²⁸ In this same way, let husbands love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself; ²⁹ after all, no one ever hates his own flesh, but he feeds (nourishes) and cares for (cherishes) it, just as Christ [nourishes and cherishes] the Church— (5:25,29&29).

We would rightly say that a person who hates his own body, who torments or tortures his own body, who does not nourish, cherish, and care for his own body – such a person has a deep psychological problem. Not to take care of one's own body is absurd. So it is with husband and wife.

St. Paul quotes a part of our Old Testament lesson. He says, “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united (be cleaved) to his wife, and the two will become one flesh” (5:31; cf. Genesis 2:24). The man (and woman) leaves the former relationship with

parents; the man (and woman) cleave to each other as husband and wife. The man (and woman) weave a new relationship into a new family of which they are primary. And, in this new relationship, this new family, the husband will nourish and cherish his wife just as Christ nourishes and cherishes his Bride, the Church. What joy and willingness then, the wife will have in submitting to her husband in everything (cf. 5:24b).

APPLICATION

So, husbands and wives, how are we doing? Wives, are you submitting yourselves to your husbands “in everything” as St. Paul says? (cf. 5:24b). Or, are you prone to ridiculing your husband? Are you a nagger, to which Solomon refers in Proverbs when he says, “a quarrelsome wife is like a constant dripping” (Proverbs 19:13b & 27:15). Are you argumentative and demanding?

Husbands, St. Paul writes to the Colossians, “Husbands, love your wives and do not be harsh with them” (Colossians 3:19). Is harshness the characteristic of the way in which you typically deal with your wife? Are you prone to “cut down” and belittle your wife? Do you despise – if not outwardly then inwardly – the wife given to you by God?

Husbands; wives; how can you deal with such sinful attitudes and situations? There is only one way for both of you: To the foot of the cross where Jesus died for you to take away your sins. It is only in the forgiveness of sins that Jesus gives you that you have any hope for a peaceful marriage. It is only in the forgiveness of sins that you, for Jesus’ sake, give to each other – announce to each other: “I forgive you and Jesus forgives you too.” Only in the forgiveness of sin do you have any hope for eternal life in heaven. For, if you do not forgive one another when they sin against you, then your heavenly Father will not forgive you (cf. Matthew 6:15; 18:23-35). And, the motivation for this mutual forgiveness is Jesus Christ and him crucified for your sins and for the sins of the world.

We have seen God’s economy of submission in the Church submitting to Christ and in wives submitting to their husbands. There is another economy mentioned in our text.

GOD’S ECONOMY OF SUBMISSION:

- I. THE CHURCH SUBMITS TO CHRIST;
- II. WIVES SUBMIT TO THEIR HUSBANDS; and,
- III. CHILDREN SUBMIT TO THEIR PARENTS

St. Paul says,

6:1 Children, obey your parents in the LORD; for this is right. 2 “Honor your father and mother”—which is the first commandment with a promise— 3 “that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth” (6:1,2; cf. Exodus 20:12; Deuteronomy 5:16).

Here St. Paul does not use the term “submission” but “obedience.” Note that such “obedience” is for the benefit of the child.

God's Old Testament promise for this Fourth Commandment is repeated with application: "That it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth." The warning that "Agur son of Jakeh" (Proverbs 30:1a) gives in the Book of Proverbs, has such an application: "The eye that mocks a father, that scorns obedience to a mother, will be pecked out by the ravens of the valley, will be eaten by the vultures" (Proverbs 30:17). It is a gruesome picture, but how might the toddler end up who is told not to play in the road, who is reprimanded repeatedly for playing in the road, who may be spanked for playing in the road – how might such a toddler end up if he or she continues to play in the road? As "road-pizza" with the birds of the air preying upon his or her carcass until the parents find him. Children who obey their parents are less likely to run into trouble in this life. The opposite is also true. Children whose attitude toward parents is one of constant rebellion are more likely to get into trouble in this life. How are parents to deal with such rebellion?

St. Paul writes, "Fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath/anger; instead, nourish them in the discipline and instruction (admonition) of the LORD" (6:4). The New International Version translation tones down this directive to fathers, when it says that fathers – mothers too – are to bring up their children "in the training and instruction of the LORD." The Greek words are "discipline" and "admonition." At the same time, parents are to be careful and disciplined themselves.

Too often parents may err on the side of the Law rather than the Gospel. What should the toddler be learning on the mother's knee? What should the child be learning from the words, actions and attitudes of the father? Yes, that sin is punishable – punishable ultimately by death. But also that Christ Jesus is the substitute also for children. Parents, reprimand, discipline, admonish; but also forgive and bring your children to the cross through the Gospel of Jesus' full and free forgiveness of sins. Do not entice your children to anger and wrath by a constant harping that really reveals lack of forgiveness.

APPLICATION

So, parents and grandparents, fathers and grandfathers, mothers and grandmothers – how are we doing? How would you describe the atmosphere in your home? Are you indifferent to your children and grandchildren? Are your children constantly confronted with anger, force and threat? Do you expressly and specifically state for your children the forgiveness of sins in Jesus? Do your children hear God's Word in the home? Are "psalms, hymns and spiritual songs" (Colossians 3:16b) heard regularly in your homes? Do your little ones know the words and meaning of ♪: "Jesus loves me, he who died, heaven's gates to open wide.... The Bible tells me so"? Recall what Jesus said, "If anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to be thrown into the sea with an upper millstone tied around his neck" (Mark 9:42).

And children – it probably does not have to be told to you that your parents and grandparents are also sinners. You are probably well awake, alert and aware of that. But what is your reaction?

Is your reaction one of rebellion? Do you obey out of fear or out of love for your parents, grandparents – and love for your Savior? Do you despise your parents and grandparents in your hearts even though you obey? It is well for you to look at Jesus as your example.

Luke tells us that Jesus, a boy of twelve, went with his mother Mary and his stepfather Joseph, and “was submissive to them” (Luke 2:51b). Imagine! Our holy and perfect LORD Jesus submitted himself to his sinful parents, Mary and Joseph! Children, Jesus did that for you. Jesus’ perfect obedience and submission takes the place of your rebellion and my rebellion and the rebellion of your parents and grandparents. Jesus’ death on the cross is the punishment all of us deserve. But God says through the Apostle Peter that Jesus “himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by [Jesus’] wounds you have been healed” (1 Peter 2:24).

Dear children, your motivation for obedience to parents and grandparents is the forgiveness of sins you have in Jesus. Dear parents and grandparents, your motivation for using correctly both Law and Gospel in child-rearing is the forgiveness of sins you have in Jesus.

CONCLUSION

What do you and I learn from God’s economy of submission? Wives, submit yourselves to your husbands in everything as the Church submits itself to Christ. Husbands, love, nourish and cherish your wives as Christ loves, nourishes and cherishes his Church. Parents and grandparents, use Law and Gospel, and not just Law; remember how your Savior Jesus has dealt with you. Children, submit yourselves to your parents and grandparents, forgiving them, and recalling how Jesus submitted himself to his mother Mary and his stepfather Joseph. Jesus did this not only as your example, but also as your substitute for the many times you have rebelled. Finally, dear friends, Christ loves you – his Church, his Bride; Christ loves you, believers in him. Christ loves you whom he washed with the water and the Word in Holy Baptism. Christ loves you for whom he gave his life on the cross. Amen.