

Imitate Jesus in every area of life

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Our Savior is Way Lutheran Church

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We are continuing in Ephesians. This week, we are in chapter 5, and we have been talking about how this book displays for us what God's purpose is for the world and for us. The first three chapters were all about that. And what is God's purpose for us? It is to bring us lovingly back to Himself. That is what He is active in doing each and every day, from before we could remember to the time when we will not know what's even happening, which frankly is tomorrow. I do not know about you, but tomorrow is dicey. What is going to happen? I do not know. But I know that the Lord has it. I know He is in control, and I know that somehow, He is going to work to bring me back to Himself.

How do we actually do that? Paul has shifted in these last three chapters into helping teach us how we are to live. And he starts off by reminding us that we are called to walk the way of Jesus. If you heard that in chapter 5, it says, Imitate. Imitate Him. In all that you do, imitate who He is. So last week, we talked about how we go about doing that. We have been given guides to go along our way. We are not alone in this. You have been given people who can mentor you, coach you, who you can watch, who have been doing this longer than you have, or have done it, well, in deeper ways. You can learn who Jesus is, what He is all about, and what His way of Jesus is. Simply by engaging with the people who are around you, who can help guide you and teach you.

The second thing is to get out of your own way. So many times, we put up with obstacles from the brokenness that is within us, and we cease to see that Jesus is this last thing. He is our leader, right? Stay close to the leader. Who is the leader? It is Jesus, right? That is always the answer. When the pastor prompts you for the answer, if it is a one-word answer, all the time. It is always Jesus because that is, frankly, that is what we want you to remember. We want you to know that Jesus is the answer and that He is the one that we focus on. He is our leader, and as we navigate this life that we have, and navigate this life full of brokenness, full of all these things

that come upon us that we would never have anticipated, He is there, and He is leading us. He is calling us to follow Him, not out of guilt or shame or obedience, but out of great love. Because that is what God's about. He is about reconnecting us with Him each and every day of our lives. So when we stay close to our leader, when we get out of our own way, when we see the people around us, the people who are here to encourage us and help us, we start to understand what it means to live this life as somebody who is greatly and dearly loved by Jesus.

That does not mean it is easy. It does not mean we do not need to take some time and figure out how it works. If you remember, in chapters 1 and 2, God talked a lot about the power that He was going to use to accomplish His purpose. And in this world, there are lots of different types of power that we can use. But God's chosen power is Hope. The way that He said He is going to transform this world and bring His Kingdom on earth as it is in heaven is through the Hope of God-- of Jesus, that changes you, that changes the people around you, and that makes us look at the world differently. And as God uses that different power, it changes the way we look at our relationships. It changes the way that we look at especially the people who are closest to us. So in Chapter 5, we are going to see that this verse is the guiding light for the rest of what we are going to talk about.

In Ephesians 5:21, Paul says, *Submitting to one another out of reverence to Christ*. Okay, submitting to one another out of reverence to Christ. So that primary relationship is with Jesus. We see Him; we follow Him; and we try to understand who He is so that we can imitate that within our world. And the one-way Paul says we are going to do that is by submitting to one another.

Previously, this word, 'submit', has been called the S-word in the Bible. If it was four letters, it would kind of come across that way. Why? Because this word is really difficult. This concept of submitting to one another, mutual submission, flies in the face of pretty much everything that we see out in the world. However, it is the way that God calls us to relate to the people around us. It is how we bring hope. It is how we imitate who Christ is.

So, we are going to talk about this in three pieces that Paul works his way through. Talk about submitting to one another in marriage. In family and in wider society.

Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. What do we think of this? How has this been taken? How have you heard things like this used over the course of your life? This is a difficult one. When we think about it, though, in the context of what God is doing through Ephesians here, what Paul is teaching, he is saying, “Look, different purpose, different power.”

If the purpose is to reconnect people to God and help them see that He is the one who brings true life, He is going to use a different power for that. The power is Hope. The power is Grace. And so as we relate to one another, we get this idea of mutual submission. So Paul has to start somewhere, and he starts with wives. *Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord.* Are wives called to submit to their husbands simply because they’re husbands? Is that what this says? It says, *as to the Lord.* Your primary relationship is with Jesus. He is the one who has called you His own. He gives you gifts and skills and talents and strengths. He gives you people around you to encourage you. And as you follow Him, as you have chosen to be one with another person as husband and wife, submit to them. Submit to them. This follows from mutual submission. Submit to one another as in Christ.

Now, this is where guys get in trouble. Guys, Valentine’s Day is coming up. You do not want to start messing things up right now. This is where you get in trouble because we stop here. So many people stop here. I have heard this from so many people. The Bible tells us that women have to be submissive to their husbands. But what is the context? Mutual submission. And Paul does not stop here. In fact, this is only three verses. He has, like, nine verses for husbands. Husbands, you need to die for your wives. That is what he says. The next thing is, yes, wives submit to husbands, but husbands, you need to lay down your life for your wives. And guys take this so physically, like, “Would I step in front of a car for my wife? Yes, absolutely.” It is great, wonderful. But it is more than that. When he says, give up yourself for your wife, just as Christ did, it is not just physical. It is also emotional. It is giving up your needs, your wants, and your desires, for the good of the one that you have been joined to.

You see, this whole idea of submission is not just physical. It is about giving up your needs, your wants, and your desires, for the good of other people because you understand that Jesus has loved you. He provides you with everything that you need. And he calls you to share that and be that for other people. Marriages work incredibly well when both partners submit to one another. When they put the other's needs above their own. When they seek to serve them at every opportunity. Wives, submit to your husbands. Husbands, love and submit to your wives as Christ has loved His Church. This works together. Why? So that you will be joined as one. Paul goes back to Genesis, to Adam and Eve. Why would a husband and wife be joined together? Why would it be made one? Because that is what God calls this unit to be. Not just one physically, but one in every way, to be together. Through this, we are able to show the world where Hope lives.

Now, I am not going to stand up here and tell you that I have always done this perfectly. Nor will I expect this of you and say, you need to do this perfectly because this is hard. But it is a worthy aim. This is where our eyes need to be pointed. When a husband and wife, a bride and a groom come up to this altar and get married, that is where we point their eyes to be made one.

When you recommit yourselves to one another, that is where our eyes are pointed to be made one. When you are having difficulty in your marriage, and this power dynamic is different, it is really hard to give up anything of yourself because you think you are going to be taken advantage of. The call is back to repentance and back to seeing the way this works best together as one.

Anyone who takes these verses out of context and tells you that wives need to submit to husbands without also putting in the other side of it and pointing you to see that they need to be made one is not preaching scripture correctly. It has to go together. And this is the witness of the entire scriptures. Together, as one, we make up this unit of a husband and a wife, this marriage relationship through which the love of Christ is shown together and through which it permeates throughout the world.

When it is tough, where do you point your eyes? When your relationship goes through those dips, where do you find strength? Well, Jesus keeps

pointing you back to Him. Find it in your leader. Find it in who Jesus has been for you. And in what He has taught you to do, in submitting to one another, in admitting fault, in asking for forgiveness, in giving forgiveness when it is hard, you start to reconnect. You start to come back together again to be that one unit. This is the goal. This is what the scripture is talking about.

Let's go outward from here. We have got this most intimate of relationships, and then we get kind of the next level of intimate relationships, which is family, of kids, and of parents. *Children, obey your parents in the Lord.* This is pretty simple. This is the fourth commandment. *Honor your father and mother.* Yes, it goes back and says that this is the first commandment that is been given with a blessing and a promise. If you obey and honor your father and mother, life will go well. That is what we say to our kids at least, right?

That is what scripture says, so it is good. Just listen to us. We know what we are talking about. A lot of times we know what we are talking about because we have made those mistakes before. We have screwed that up. We have gone the wrong way, and we'd love for you not to experience that suffering and the pain that we did. But our kids are not perfect yet. They're going to make mistakes. Not just the innocuous ones. They're going to make big mistakes. So how do we deal with it? Well, Paul comes back. This is about mutual submission. If children are going to obey their parents and the Lord, what is God setting up between children and parents?

Is it again this dominion, this dominating kind of parenting? No. He says, *Fathers, do not provoke your children. Do not provoke them to anger but bring them up in the instruction of the Lord.* What does that mean? Does it mean that fathers do not talk to them and get angry about them, but be very strict about everything that they do so they follow this path perfectly? Is that what it is saying? You could interpret it that way, but I do not think that makes sense within the context. This is about mutual submission. This is about children obeying and honoring their parents. And so, parents, what do you do? Well, you speak back to them the instruction of the Lord, the ways of the Lord, and where does that start? Where does it start for you?

It starts with you understanding that you are an incredibly loved child of God and that you have been given gifts and skills and talents that He calls you to use and to develop. And He gives you people around you to encourage you in this. Fathers and mothers, this is the call. As your children obey and love and honor you, you are called to teach and love them as the Lord does. The Lord has blessed you with them for only as much time as He has given to you with them. Use it well. Let them know that they are so incredibly loved that nothing could shake that. Together. Mutual submission. Working together. That is how these things work, these relationships. So, let's go even further out.

How does this work within society? Well, Paul goes further on. He says bondservants. Has anybody thought of themselves as bondservants lately? No, it does not. Let's widen this a little bit. What Paul is talking about here is the way that you interact with callings in this world. I do not know what you guys do for a living, but typically that is what we think of as kind of our main vocation or calling. But it is not just what you do for a living and what you get paid for, but it is how you interact with the relationships and the people around you, whether you serve on an HOA board or a PTA, whether you are part of a neighborhood group, wherever that is, this is what it is talking about. The people that are over you, if there's authority there, serve them, obey them, but not as their earthly bondservants, but as people who are connected with Christ.

So, the authority that is given to those on this earth, well, the authority of Christ is superseding. Do all of your work, all the things that you do, as if it was the will of God. Do it from the heart. This is the key. When we do our work, why do we do our work? It is possible to see our work as being serving Christ first, and doing what He calls us to do even though we are under the authority of so many others. Many of you have layers of authority over you as well, and some days you do not know who you are supposed to report to or what you are supposed to do. I get it. Paul says you know who you are reporting to. Go about the way that you do your work knowing that you are following Christ in all of that. That is an incredible gift. Sometimes it is freeing as well. It is also a call to integrity, that even when nobody's watching you do what you do, you are doing the will of Christ in what you do.

It goes both ways, though. So, if we serve and obey authority in this way, well, that means the authority has to do the same thing. Mutually submissive. Mutually submissive. Masters do this same thing with goodwill. In other words, those who have authority in this world do not lord it over others, because you are not the lord. There is only one. You may have authority in some ways but do so knowing that your master in heaven is the master of those you serve, you serve as well.

This means that leadership, authority in this realm, is servanthood. When authority is working well, according to Paul, it is serving the people whom they have authority over. I think that changes our perspective on our jobs, on maybe some of our bosses, on the way that we have other authorities. They're called to serve because we are both serving, not one another. We are serving our Master in Heaven.

This is not easy, right? The way of Jesus is not easy. It is simple in the fact that you are loved, you are called to be with Him, and He is here for you to follow. But it is not easy. Going back to this scripture to see how it makes sense within this perspective of mutual submission gives us a viewpoint, an advantage to look at the world, to look at ourselves, to look at our spouses and our families in a different way than what the world would ask us to do.

When we do this, we see that this idea of mutual submission is what brings Hope and what brings Grace into the lives of the people around us. And that is truly what we are called to do—*Submitting to one another out of reverence to Christ*. This is how we, the church, go into the world to show people who Jesus is, that we are incredibly loved, that we are incredibly gifted, and we are called to bring Hope and Grace, which others do not deserve, to give them better than what they deserve, to bring them Hope in Jesus.

I hope that I do not get in trouble today. I hope that I am able to go home and have dinner and all these things, and I think that this can be a dicey line for all of us to walk because we have experienced this in many and various broken ways. I encourage you to simply let go of those things, those ways in which this has not worked in the past, and try it fresh. Try it new. See how it works in your relationship, and if it does not work the first

time, keep at it. Keep at it. Because at some point, it will. At some point, that light bulb goes on. At some point, that hurt and that long-standing pain will melt away. And what comes out the other side is a relationship filled with joy and with great hope.

Let's close in prayer. Heavenly Father, we thank you for leading us and guiding us today. Through challenging words in your scripture, you open up a pathway for us to see your goodness and your light. Allow us to follow your Son, Jesus, in every way, knowing that in this broken world, it is not possible to do perfectly, but when we are forgiven, when we go astray, Lord, you call us to continue to serve you.

We pray that this challenging way of looking at our relationships through mutual submission, we pray that this would take root and heart in our lives, that we would love one another with sacrificial love, that we would see others around us the way you do, as people who are greatly loved and need to be connected back with you. In all of us, we ask, Lord, that you would keep our eyes focused on you.

In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.