

October 16, 2011
 First Baptist Vancouver

Text: Ephesians 5:15-6:9

Title: “Spirit-Filled Relationships – Part II”

[Series: “Navigating An Alternative Reading of Reality”]

We are going to once again read a revolutionary text. Revolutionary when it was written in 62 AD – as I tried to show the last time we read it.

Revolutionary in the 1st century city of Ephesus. And revolutionary in the 21st century cities of our world. Although the text has been read for nearly 2,000 years now, and worked redemptive changes in many cultures around the globe, no culture has yet to work out its full implications. The text is Ephesians chapter 5, verse 15 through Ephesians chapter 6, verse 9.

At the heart of this revolutionary text is one basic exhortation. Verse 18 – “but be filled with the Spirit.” “Do not get drunk with wine,” says Paul, “for that is dissipation,” waste, emptiness. Quit trying to fill your soul with what finally does not fill. You were created in such a way that what finally fills you is the Spirit: the Spirit of God, the Holy Spirit, the third Person of the Trinity. It is what makes a person a Christian. It is what makes a human being a new creation. “Be filled. Be filled.” Be filled with the Spirit of Jesus Christ, with the very life of the Living God. “This is the air I breathe ... Your holy presence living in me.”

Everything else Paul develops in Ephesians 5:15 to 6:9 flows from that filling. Indeed, what Paul develops in the text is *impossible to live without the filling*. Let me once again highlight how the whole text goes together. Paul begins with a series of “not-but” lines. Not walk as unwise but walk as wise. Not be foolish but understand the will of the Lord is. Not get drunk with wine ... but be filled with the Spirit. Then he spells out a series of consequences, or results, of being filled. All participles. Not imperatives, as some translations render them. Participles. Results of the one big imperative, “be filled.” Speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs. Singing and making melody in your hearts to the Lord.

Giving thanks always for everything in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father. And being subject to one another in the fear of Christ. Not, “be subject,” as too many translations have it. It is not in the imperative. It is a participle in a series of participles. Not a new sentence, as too many translations have it. And certainly not a new paragraph, as some have it. “Being subject.” The result of “being filled.” Then Paul works this

out in three sets of human relationships in which the “being subject” is worked out. Wives and husbands. Children and fathers. Servants and masters. Wives being subject to husbands. AND husbands being subject to wives. Children being subject to fathers, to parents. AND parents being subject to children. Servants being subject to masters. AND masters being subject to servants. Which is why I used the word “revolutionary.” Being filled with the Spirit of God turns our understanding of human relationships on its head...so that relationships can stand right-side-up. Because of our in, and because of what Paul calls “the principalities and powers” in the last part of his letter, human relationships have been twisted, changed from what God had originally willed for humanity. Jesus Christ comes into the world, and through His Spirit, through the Holy Spirit, begins to un-twist, un-tangle, restoring relationships to God’s original design. “Being subject to one another.” Literally it is “standing under one another.” Hypostasso – hypo, under; stasso, stand. “Be filled with the Spirit, standing under one another.”

As I suggested the last time we worked through this text, Paul is working with a passage in the Gospel according to Mark. Mark 10:42-45. Two of His first disciples, James and John, ask Jesus to let them sit on His right and left in the Kingdom Jesus is bringing into the world. Jesus gathers the whole band together, and says to them:

“You know that those who are recognized as rulers of the Gentiles, lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. But it is not so among you, but whoever wishes to be great among you shall be your servant; and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and give His life a ransom for many.”

Humanity not yet drawn into the Kingdom of God – over. Humanity not yet filled with the Spirit of God – over. Humanity taken up into the Kingdom – under, serving one another. Humanity filled with the Spirit – under, serving one another. “Being subject to one another.” “Standing under one another.” Wives, standing under your husbands. Husbands, standing under your wives. Children, standing under your fathers, your parents. Parents, standing under your children. Servants, standing under your masters. Masters, standing under your servants.

Today I want to focus on verses 22-33 of the text, on the revolution taking place in the relationship between wives and husbands, husbands and wives. As we do so, I am aware that not everyone in this sanctuary today is married. Many of you are single. Some of you are wanting to be married, but not yet finding the “right partner.” Some of you

are called to the single life in order to be fully engaged in particular kingdom ministries. Some of you having lost your spouse, either through death or divorce, each excruciatingly painful. I want to say to you not-married that the text about marriage nevertheless speaks to you. In three ways.

1. First, what Paul ...or, as I should say, what the Spirit Who inspired Paul ... says about marriage relationship relates to every relationship. Yes, Paul emphasizes the unique bond between wife and husband – “the two shall become one flesh.” But what he says to wives and husbands works in every other relationship as well. As I trust you will see in a moment.

2. Second, the section on marriage speaks to the non-marrieds, because of the way the text flows from verse 21 to 22. Look carefully at how Paul puts it. “Being subject to one another in the fear of Christ, wives, be subject to your own husbands, as to the Lord.” Look at the translation printed for us today. [NASB] The “be subject” is italicized. See that? Why is it italicized?

Not for emphasis, as one might assume. As though 1st century wives especially needed to be told to be subject! Then why is it italicized? To tell us it is not in the original text! Paul did not write the italicized words “be subject;” he did not write, “wives, be subject...” The verb is not in the original text. It was inserted by translators who wanted the text to read more smoothly. Paul literally says, “Being subject to one another in the fear of Christ, wives to their husbands ...” No verb. Why no verb?

Look also at vs. 24 – “so also the wives ought to be to their husbands...” The “ought to be” is also italicized. Why? To make sure wives get it? No, to tell us that it too has been inserted by translators. Paul does not say “ought to be.” So why no verb – “be subject” - in verse 22, and why no “ought” in verse 24? My scholar friend in Manila, Bong Manayon, asks, “Could it be that Paul had something else in mind?” Bong, or Peter as he likes to be called, suggests, rightly I think, that given the social reality, wives were already submitting to their husbands, to say: “be subject,” would be redundant. Peter Manayon writes, “Considering the bigger picture of where Paul is coming from - the greatest in the kingdom of God is the servant – could it be that he is actually upholding the wives as *the model* [his italics] of servant-hood (48). The model of the Kingdom way? In verse 22 Paul is not telling wives to be subject. He does not need to. They already get it. As do children and servants. In speaking of wives directly on the heels of “being subject to one another,” Paul is telling us what Spirit-filled relating to one another looks like in all the relational spheres. So the German NT

scholar, Marcus Barth, son of the great Karl Barth, argues that there is an implied “e.g.” in verse 22. “E.g. wives to your own husbands.” E.g. meaning, for example. Writes Barth:

“Stylistic and material reasons recommend the addition of ‘e.g.’ in the English translation. ‘E.g.’ communicates exactly what is indicated by the structure of the Greek sentence: the subordination of wives is an example of the same mutual subordination which is shown by the husband’s love, the children’s obedience, the parent’s responsibility for their offspring, the slaves and master’s attitude toward one another.”
[Ephesians 4-6, 1974]

So we could render the flow from verses 21 to 22 this way: “Being subject to one another out of reverence for Christ, just as wives to their husbands.” Wives have been living the “under-ness” of the kingdom for centuries. Now, because of the coming of Jesus Christ and the filling with His Spirit, husbands finally *get to catch up*. So do fathers. And so do masters. All three of the parties who held the power get to also live the way of the kingdom. “The great ones exercise authority over ... it is not so among you.” “Under.” Wives have understood this for centuries. And Paul holds them up to us as models of what “being subject to one another” looks like in all relational spheres.

3. And third, what Paul says to the marriage relationship speaks to all relationships because what he says about the marriage relationship points beyond the marriage relationship to the relationship between Christ and the church. Christ is a husband. To all of us! We are His Bride. All of us... female and male... His Bride. You may not be married to a man or woman right now. But if you believe in Jesus Christ as your Savior and Lord, if you belong to Jesus Christ, you are married! To Jesus Christ!

Jesus often speaks of His relationship with us in terms of Bride and Groom. In the Upper Room, on the night before going to the cross, He says to the first band of disciples, mostly male: “Do not be afraid. In My Father’s house are many rooms. I go to prepare a place for you. And I will come again, and take you to Myself; that where I am you may be also” (John 14:2-3). Jesus is echoing the words of the Jewish Betrothal service. The engaged man would take a cup of wine, and over it say to the engaged woman: “I go to prepare a place for you in my father’s house. When I have prepared the place, I will come again, and take you to myself, that where I am, you may

be also.” In the third chapter of the Revelation of Jesus Christ, the last book of the Bible, Jesus says to the church in Laodecia: “Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with them, and they with Me” (3:20). Jesus is echoing words from the great love poem, the Song of Solomon, chapter 5, verse 2: “The voice of my beloved, he knocks at the door. Open to me my beloved.” We are His Bride. All of us, together, His Bride. Married and non-married. The Bride of Jesus Christ. Which means (!) that when Paul speaks to wives he is speaking to women who were already wives before they married. AND (!) when he speaks to husbands he is speaking to men who were already wives before they married. So, although in verses 22-33 of Ephesians 5, Paul is speaking to the wife-husband, husband-wife relationship, what he develops speaks to all of us in any relationship. Now, there are a number of ways we can proceed at this point. We could simply listen to what Paul says to wives, and then listen to what Paul says to husbands. But I think a more helpful way is to lift up the dynamics of the revolution being worked out in the wife-husband, husband-wife relationship. Paul is turning the relationship on its head! I see four dynamics of the revolution at work.

1. First, Paul speaks directly to those who were powerless in the 1st century. He speaks directly to women, children, and servants. It is unheard of! Why speak directly to wives, children, and servants, when they had no status in the society? Why speak directly to wives, children, and servants, when many did not think they were real human beings? In the 1st century - and in many parts of the world in the 21st century – one speaks to the wife *through* the husband; one speaks to the children *through* the father; one speaks to the servants *through* the master. The ‘proper’ way for Paul to speak would be: “Now husbands, tell your wives to be subject to you.” “Fathers, tell your children to obey you.” “Masters, tell your servants to be subject to you.” But, no, Paul speaks directly to the powerless! That simple act was revolutionary. It elevated wives and children and servants to genuine personhood! Indeed, it elevated the powerless to equal status!

2. Paul can speak directly, because ... and here is the second dynamic of the revolution ... each party of the wife-husband, husband-wife relationship has a relationship that precedes and super-cedes the wife-husband, husband-wife relationship. Each party of the relationship has a relationship with Jesus Christ. And THAT relationship informs and shapes all other relationships.

Notice the phrase in verse 22 – “as to the Lord.” “Wives, to your own husbands, as to the Lord.” Is Paul saying the husband functions as Lord? No.

No one is Lord in any relationship but Jesus the Lord. Is Paul saying the wife should treat her husband as if he were the Lord? As if he were Jesus? No. The husband is not Jesus in any way. “As to the Lord.” Paul is saying that wives are to “stand under” their husbands because they have a relationship with the Lord. They have a relationship with the Lord Who understands His Lordship in terms of servant-hood. “As to the Lord,” means, I think, “because you belong to a different kind of Lord.” “Relate to your husband ‘as to the Lord, in the way the Lord Himself relates to your husband.’” As servant. Paul says the same thing to servants. Chapter 6, verse 7: “With good will render service, as to the Lord, not to humans.” We serve one another because we belong to the Lord Who is the Great Servant. Each party of the relationships Paul addresses in Ephesians has a relationship that precedes and super-cedes all relationships. Thus when I perform weddings, I say to the couple, “Remember: before you belong to one another you belong to Christ.” To the groom: “Before she is yours, she is His” To the bride: “Before he is yours, he is His.” And “being His” shapes the way husband and wife relate.

Maybe you saw the October 10th issue of Macleans. The cover story was entitled: “*The Secret Lives of Wives: The surprising things women do to stay happily married.*” Actually, quite profound. Although I do not agree with everything, one thing was right on target: those who stay happily married have other meaningful relationships beyond the relationship with spouses. For good reason: no one person can be everything to us. We need other relationships. What Paul is telling us is that the other relationship that helps us “stay happily married” is the relationship with Jesus Christ. Before we belong to another human being, we belong to Him. Before we are married to another human being, we are married to Him. What Paul says to wives she says because they first belong to Jesus. A Wife “stands under” her husband not because her husband is inherently worthy of it. Sorry men. A wife “stands under” her husband not because his status as husband deserves it. A wife “stands under” her husband because her Lord calls her to do so. And so too the husband “stands under” his wife because his Lord calls him to do so. She has a relationship that precedes and super-cedes the marriage relationship. And that relationship calls her and frees her, calls him and frees him, to live the way of the kingdom of God. To serve as the great Servant serves.

3. Thus – and here is the third dynamic of the revolution – the model for the wife-husband, husband-wife relationship is the Christ-church, church-Christ relationship. A relationship that transcends all cultural understanding of

marriage. 1st century Jewish, 1st century Greek, 1st century Roman. And 21st century Canadian, 21st century American, 21st Brazilian, 21st century Korean, 21st Chinese, 21st century Indian, 21st Native, 21st Mexican. No culture at any time in history has got it right, fully right. The model for wife-husband, husband-wife is church-Christ, Christ-church. It is what Paul calls “a mystery,” “a great mystery,” “a mega-mystery” (5:32). Something we would have never figured out on our own. Something that God must reveal to us. Wives – “as the church to Christ.” Husbands – “as Christ to the church.” Wives, relate to your husbands as the church relates to Christ. In submission to Him as the Head. As you may know, there is much debate about the meaning of “head.” What does Paul mean by “head”? It seems to me that he tells us in the text. Verse 23 – “Christ is the head of the church, He Himself being the Savior of the body.” In line with what Jesus Himself says in Mark 10:45: “For even the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve, and give His life as a ransom for many.” For Jesus, “being Lord” means “being servant.” For Jesus, “being Head” means “being Savior.” Who would not want to submit to One who understands headship as savior-ship? Wives – as the church to Christ. Husbands – as Christ to the church. Oh mercy me! Love my wife as Christ loves the church? That is what the apostle says in verse 25. “Husbands, love your wives as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her.” He goes to the cross for her! For us! He lays down His life for her, for us. He gives His all for her! For us!

While serving in Manila, I had a weekly Wednesday Bible class. One day we were working through this text, and a woman stood up and said... angrily, “This is crazy. Why are wives told to submit when husbands are told only to love?” My response was, “Only love?” “Only love?” This is revolutionary for the 1st century. And every subsequent century. If wives are called to do “an under,” husbands are called to “a double under.” Husbands, stand under your wives by loving them the way Christ loves the church.

“As Christ also loved the church.” Mercy me! Christ gave Himself up for the church. “That He might sanctify her,” says Paul. That He might make us holy, and therefore, whole. “Having cleansed her by the washing of the word,” says Paul, “that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she should be holy and blameless.” That is how I am to love Sharon? That is how I am to live out “being filled with the Spirit, being subject to one another? Paul is working with 1st century marriage customs. The bride and groom would “cleansed” themselves, sometimes taking semi-sacred baths. They would go to great lengths to present themselves in festive, elegant attire. So Christ does with us, His Bride. He goes to great lengths to make us all He intends

us to be. “Holy and blameless.” The same words we met in the opening paragraph of Ephesians, where Paul blesses God for choosing us before the foundation of the world, that we should be “holy and blameless” before Him (1:3). Husbands are called to love their wives by participating in Christ’s work in their wives’ lives, doing all they can to enable our wives to be all Christ wants them to be. Paul is also working in this passage with what God said long ago through the prophet Ezekiel. Ezekiel 16. God is speaking to the people of Israel, who had drifted off in unfaithfulness; adultery. God, nevertheless, will not give up on Israel. God says: “I also swore to you and entered into a covenant with you so that you became Mine. Then I bathed you ... and anointed you ... and clothed you ... and adorned you ... and you were exceedingly beautiful ... for I bestowed My splendor on you” (16:8-14). Paul takes those same words and applies them to Christ and His church. It is how Christ is loving His church. It is how Christ is loving you and me. And it is how husbands are called to love their wives. Can you feel how revolutionary this was in the 1st century? Can you feel how revolutionary it is right now? “Husbands, love your wives as Christ loves the church.” As NT scholar Frank Thielman puts it: husbands are to “imitate the self-sacrificial, nurturing, and supporting roles that Christ fills” in relation to all of us (379). After working through the text along these lines. The woman in the Bible class in Manila said; “I would be crazy not to be subject to a husband who gets the text!” Indeed.

“Love as Christ loves.” We love because He first loves. Husbands can love their wives because Christ is loving husbands before they seek to love their wives and because Christ is loving their wives before they do. Thus at weddings I will also say, “Before you love each other, you are already being loved.” To the groom: “Before you love her, she is already being loved.” To the bride: “Before you love him, he is already being loved.” Already being loved by Jesus. Join Jesus in His loving. It takes a huge burden off our shoulders. When we cannot, for whatever reason, love the other as Christ loves, we are to look at the other, and realizing she or he is being loved, join Jesus in His loving.

4. One more dynamic of the revolution. “He who loves his own wife loves himself.” Vs. 28 – “So husbands ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies, for He who loves his own wife loves himself.” What does Paul mean? What is he getting at? I am not sure. No where else in the Bible do we find it put just that way. It seems that Paul is working with the second greatest command. The first is “Love the Lord your God” with all your heart. The second is – “love your neighbor as yourself” (Lev. 19:6). Oh, how

the world would change is we could just live that second command! Each of us makes sure that we eat well; now make sure your neighbor eats well. Each of us makes sure we have a place to sleep; now make sure your neighbor has a place to sleep. Each of us makes sure we have a job; now make sure your neighbor has a job.

Now, a husband's closest neighbor is his wife; a wife's closest neighbor is her husband. So the second greatest command starts with: "Love your spouse as you love your self." You make sure you have all you need to be fully human; make sure your spouse has all she or he needs to be fully human; make sure your spouse has all she or he needs to grow in Christ, to live the kingdom life. But Paul seems to be pushing it further, or deeper. "He who loves his own wife loves himself." Not just love "as himself" but "loves himself." Somehow the husband's own well-being is tied up in how well he loves his wife! Yes, her well-being is clearly affected by the way he loves her. But so is his. As the husband loves his closest neighbor somehow he is loving himself. Not just because of the "one flesh" reality of marriage. But because in loving his wife as he loves himself, in loving his wife as Christ loves the church, it turns out he ends up loving himself. As the husband loves his wife it turns out that one of the greatest of human needs, is being met, the need to love. Oh yes, we have the need to be loved. But just as great, if not greater, is the need to learn to love. How often do we hear people say, "well my spouse no longer meets my needs ... I need to move on." When was "meeting my needs" ever part of the deal? Besides, no one human can meet all our needs. No two humans can meet all our needs. Only the one true human, Jesus Christ, can meet all our needs. But more to the point, one of our greatest needs is the need to learn to love. We are not yet truly human until we love. Love another person, especially a person who cannot meet our needs, and we end up loving ourselves into love.

One of my heroes is Robertson McQuilkin. For 30 years he was professor of ethics and hermeneutics and President of Columbia Bible College and Seminary (1960-1990). During the later years of his tenure his wife Muriel developed Alzheimers. At first Dr. McQuilkin tried to care for Muriel and run the College and Seminary. But as the condition worsened he had to make a choice: his ministry or his wife. In his letter of resignation he wrote:

"My dear wife, Muriel, has been in failing mental health for about eight years. So far I have been able to carry both her ever-growing needs and my leadership responsibilities at CBC. But recently it has become apparent that Muriel is contented most of the time she is with me and almost none of the time I am away from her. It is not

just "discontent." She is filled with fear-- even terror--that she has lost me and always goes in search of me when I leave home. Then she may be full of anger when she cannot get to me. So it is clear to me that she needs me now, full-time. Perhaps it would help you to understand if I shared with you what I shared at the time of the announcement of my resignation in chapel. The decision was made, in a way, 42 years ago when I promised to care for Muriel "in sickness and in health...till death do us part." So, as I told the students and faculty, as a man of my word, integrity has something to do with it. But so does fairness. She has cared for me fully and sacrificially all these years; if I cared for her for the next 40 years I would not be out of debt. Duty, however, can be grim and stoic. But there is more; I love Muriel. She is a delight to me--her childlike dependence and confidence in me, her warm love, occasional flashes of that wit I used to relish so, her happy spirit and tough resilience in the face of her continual distressing frustration. I do not have to care for her, I get to! It is a high honor to care for so wonderful a person."

McQuilken was urged by many to search the world over for some kind of cure so he could keep his ministry while caring for his wife. He finally concluded that was not what he was to do. "We would trust the Lord," he said, "to work a miracle in Muriel if He so desired or work a miracle in me if He did not." The Lord chose to do the later – work a miracle in him. He would care for Muriel come what may. It was very hard work. People would say, "But she does not know who she is or who you are." And he would respond, "But I know who she is ... and I love her." Then McQuilken writes:

"My imprisonment turned out to be a delightful liberation to love more fully than I had ever known. We found the chains of confining circumstances to be, no instrument of torture, but bonds to hold us closer. But there was even greater liberation. It has to do with God's love. No one ever needed me like Muriel, and no one ever responded to my efforts as totally as she. It's the nearest thing I've experienced on a human plane to what my relationship with God was designed to be: God's unfailing love poured out in constant care of helpless me."

"He who loves his own wife loves himself." In doing everything he can for his wife, a husband discovers fullness of life. In giving his life away for his wife, a husband finds life. Unheard of in Paul's day. Revolutionary in Paul's day. And in ours. It is what happens when the Spirit comes. It is what happens when the Spirit of Jesus Christ comes. It is what happens when we are filled with the very life of God. I do not know about you, but after giving the text a hearing, I need to pray.

