

Ephesians 5:21

Ephesians  
*The Key To Healthy Relationships*

You know what the major difference is between God and all of us? God never mistakenly thinks He's any of us!

Unfortunately, the opposite isn't true, is it? Too many times in life we think we're God. Too many times in life we think everything revolves around our needs, our wants, our cravings, and our agendas.

We may not be omnipotent, omniscient, or omnipresent, but we still do life with an "I am God" attitude.

God, on the other hand knows exactly who He is, and He makes it real clear. Listen to these biblical statements:

*Ge 17:1 the LORD appeared to Abraham and said, "I am Almighty God"*

*Ge 35:11 And God said to him, "I am God Almighty"*

*Ge 46:3 "I am God, the God of your father"*

*Ps 46:10 "Be still, and know that I am God"*

*Ps 50:7 "Hear O Israel I am God, your God"*

*Isa 43:1 "You are my witnesses," declares the LORD, "that I am God."*

*Isa 45:22 "Turn to me and be saved, all you ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is no other."*

*Isa 46:9 I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me.*

*Ho 11:9 I am God, and not man--the Holy One*

Eric Erikson was born in 1902 as the result of an extra-marital affair by his Jewish mother with a Danish man. His mother and her husband were German Jews who kept the details of his birth a secret. He was a tall, blond, blue-eyed boy who was raised in the Jewish religion. At temple school, the kids teased him for being Nordic; at grammar school, they teased him for being Jewish.

Erickson became a psychologist who is best known for his theory of the 8 stages of life and for coining the phrase "identity crisis."

Interesting how his struggle with his own identity becomes the priority of his life.

You can see why identity was at the heart of everything for Erickson.

God has no problem expressing who He is. God is comfortable with who He is. God's not having an identity crisis. He is God. If you're God you're the sum total of all significance.

The thing is, only God is God. We're not. It's a healthy thing to remember that we're not God.

To say, "I am not God", is to say, "I have weakness and limitations, I am not in control of everything in my universe, I need help from a power far greater than myself."

And as obvious as that sounds this, "I am God" illusion is a spiritual problem that we all share.

It first showed up in the Bible in the Garden of Eden when Satan challenged Eve.

He said, *"You will not surely die. For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."*

"When you eat this fruit, your eyes will be opened, and you'll be like God." That was the first temptation. "You'll be master of your own universe. You don't have to submit to somebody else's ideas, you can make up your own rules, and that makes you like God."

See, this "You'll be like God." temptation has been around a long time and it's at the heart of all sin and spiritual confusion. It defines what we mean by humility and it's opposite character trait, pride:

Pride is not so much bragging as it is this illusion that I am at the center and can manage everything on my own without help. Bragging may be a symptom of pride, but pride itself is much deeper. Even very insecure people who would never be caught dead bragging can demonstrate an amazing amount of pride.

Humility therefore is the opposite of this attitude. It's not a self deprecating sort of thing, humility is just living in the truth about ourselves... and the truth is I am not God, I'm not the center, I have needs, I have things I can't control, I am dependant on God. That's humility.

Proverbs 11:2 *When pride comes, then comes shame; But with the humble is wisdom.*

Understanding humbly that we're not God is so important. The Bible uses the words "humble" and "humility" 53 times. It uses the words "proud" and "pride" 92 times. And that doesn't begin to take into account all the times it addresses pride and humility by using other words.

Now, no where does this recognition that we're not God become more practical than in our relationships.

God has hardwired us to be relational people. We thrive on relationships. But we also struggle with relationships. Sometimes we find out the things that are the most important to us are also the most complicated.

That's why God uses so much page time in the Bible giving us wisdom for our relationships.

### **Open your Bibles to Ephesians 5 page 1041**

Normally, when we're studying a New Testament book like Ephesians we tackle 5, 10 verses at a time. This morning we're going to do something a little different.

We're going to spend our time today looking at 1 verse, verse 21.

Occasionally there are verses that are so crucial to our understanding of the Bible that they rate a more detailed look. Ephesians 5:21 is one of those verses.

The verses in chapter 5 that preceded verse 21 have all been about principles for living. We've seen some general principles like live in love, live in light, and live in wisdom. We've seen that we're to be controlled by God the Holy Spirit and that we're to be imitators of God.

Verse 21 is going to be a transition into the rest of the chapter and on into chapter 6. See, things are going to start to get real specific in the next verses.

God's going to hone in on relationships in marriage, in the family, and in the workplace.

We're going to get specific direction on key relationship issues and so understanding verse 21 is the key to unlocking those verses.

So, let's look at verse 21 together. **Read vs 21**

A couple of verses before this, in verse 18, is instruction to be controlled by God the Holy Spirit. If God's God in our life and we've gotten over the "I am God" syndrome, then there will be some distinctives that will be obvious when people look at our lives.

The key distinctive, here in verse 21, is that we have a submissive attitude.

If God's really on control of your life you'll have no problem serving others.

*1. Submission Is The Identifying Mark Of A Person Who Realizes They Are Not God.*  
The verb that's used here in verse 21 is the verb *hupotasso*. It comes from the preposition *hupo* which means "under" and the verb *tasso*, which means "to order," or "to arrange."

So literally the word means "to place yourself under someone." In early Greek it was a military term which meant "to rank yourself under."

If you still think that you are God, that everything is all about you, and life's about having control, this isn't going to happen.

You're not going to be willing to consider the needs of others and prioritize them above your own.

Allan Bloom says: "Everyone loves himself most, but everyone wants everyone else to love him more than they love themselves."

If you can't even serve God you're sure not going to serve other people. But, if you are humbly submissive to God then this will be no problem.

Verse 21 is setting us up with the right attitudes and here's the motivation, we do it out of a fear of God.

The NIV translates this, "Out of reverence for Christ." The Message says, "Out of respect for Christ." The New Life Version has, "By doing this, you honor Christ."

The motivation to live a life of putting others first is that we want to show respect and honor to God.

It's not the irresistible charm of the people around you. It's not the loving attitude of the people in your relationships.

If that's what it was then as soon as they blew it you'd figure you were off the hook.

The first illustration that follows verse 21 is going to be husbands and wives. We'll see this in detail next week. God commands both husbands and wives to prioritize one another.

Think about it, how many marriages get in trouble because instead of submitting to one another the marriage partners go into marriage thinking I'll do my part if they do theirs.

Inevitably someone fails. Someone always falls short. It's so easy for us to think, "If that's the way he going to act, why should I try?" "If she's going to talk to me like that then she's not getting any love from me!"

We're supposed to be submitting to one another in the fear of God.

It's out of respect and awe for God that we prioritize that other person. Not out of their worthiness.

I'm amazed at the excuses people give me sometimes for their unbiblical actions.

"If he wouldn't have acted like he did to me than I wouldn't have acted the way I did. If she wouldn't have treated me like that then I wouldn't have responded the way I did."

According to the Bible, we love and serve others because we fear God. We do what God says because He's God and He's got every right to tell us what to do.

When people want to justify their actions by pointing out someone else's sins they're just saying, "I'm God. Life's all about me, what I want, and when I want it."

- I. Submission Is The Identifying Mark Of A Person Who Realizes They Are Not God.*
- II. Submission Is The Identifying Mark Of A Person Who Follows Jesus Christ's Example*

**Turn with me to Mark 10 page 894**

Just a minute or two before this James and John came to Jesus and said, "We'd like to ask you a favor Lord." Jesus said, "What is it?"

James and John ask, "When you get your kingdom going can we be at the top of the authority structure, right under you of course. Can we be the most important guys?"

**Read vs 42-45**

The culture says the great people are the ones that have people to serve them. The ones that get to tell everybody else what to do. It's always been that way. But Jesus says, "Listen, My kingdom ethics are revolutionary. The great ones in my kingdom serve others because they follow my example. I came to serve, not to be served."

We're called to pattern our actions and attitudes after Jesus so all through the New Testament we find challenges to think and act like Jesus.

**Look with me at Philippians 2 page 1044**

**Read 3-8**

That's huge, isn't it? The Son of God humbled Himself. The perfect one, the Creator, the Second person of the godhead brought glory to the Father by becoming a servant.

God's challenge to us is, "Have the same attitude."

Jesus was God, but he didn't have an "I'm God attitude." He could have and it would have been completely appropriate. He was God but He had a servant's attitude. And that was all the way through up to the cross.

We wouldn't have a problem submitting ourselves to one another if we followed Jesus' example.

The problem is, we're not God and we have an "I'm God attitude."

The mighty Creator took a step of humility that dwarfs anything that any of us could ever do.

The eternal one took on temporal flesh. The immortal one clothed Himself in mortality. The Creator became one of His creation. The Lord of all became servant. The holy one became sin for us.

That's what we're to emulate. That attitude of humility. God became one of us and sometimes we just blow that off as no big deal.

It couldn't be a bigger deal. How arrogant and pompous it is for us to say that we're not going to yield in our relationships. That we have our rights, and no one's going to ever tell us that we're doing something wrong.

God, who knows us better than we know ourselves, says we're wrong.

God, who knows all our words before we ever say them, all our thoughts before we ever think them, and all our actions before we ever do them has this evaluation of us:

*"... for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God ..."* (Romans 3:23)

*As it is written: "There is none righteous, no not one ..."* (Romans 3:10)

*"But we are all like an unclean thing, and all our righteousness are like filthy rags; we all fade as a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind ..."* (Isaiah 64:6)

We stand condemned before our Creator. If we aren't condemned then the cross makes no sense. If we could earn forgiveness for our wrong doings by being religious, or moral, or sincere then the cross never needed to happen.

All the answers to the questions like:

Does God love the world?

Does God punish sin?

Can I earn my way to heaven?

Is God a merciful God?

Is Biblical Christianity the only way to God?

All of those questions are answered by the cross.

Does God love the world? Unequivocally. There's no question. *God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son.*

Does God punish sin? Absolutely. *The Lord laid on him the iniquity of us all.*

Can I earn my way to heaven? Not a chance! *If righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died in vain.*

Is God a merciful God? *Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us.*

Is Biblical Christianity the only way to God? *I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.*

God forbid that we should be so arrogant and prideful that we would reject a God who would take upon himself the form of a servant.

Have you trusted Jesus Christ as Savior? Today's the day.

And God forbid that we would be so arrogant and prideful that we refuse to submit ourselves to others. That we refuse to put aside selfish ambition and conceit.

There's one more key passage of Scripture that illustrates the servant heart of Christ, **John 13 page 954.**

Putting the gospel accounts together chronologically, John 13 comes right after Luke 22 where Jesus' disciples were arguing about which one of them was the top dog, the greatest disciple.

Jesus could have really blasted them. He could have said, "How blind can you be guys? Here I am getting ready for the cross and you're arguing about who's the most important."

But He did something even more powerful. **Read 13:1-5**



Normally someone who held an event had a household slave washed the dusty feet of his guests.

In this case there wasn't a servant, and a bunch of guys arguing about who is the greatest weren't about to volunteer to wash each others feet.

So Jesus, Lord of all creation, takes a towel and water and begins to wash their dusty feet.

You know, He could have said, "That's it! I pour 3 years of my life into these guys and they're so self-centered they don't even care what's going to happen to me."

He could have done that and we'd have understood. In stead He took a towel and some water and washed their feet.

Why did Jesus do this? Was He trying to humiliate His disciples? Was He upset because they were tracking dirt all over the floor?

No, He was focused on teaching them.

**Read verse 12-17**

In a few hours He was going to face the horror and savagery of the cross. But at that moment He was thinking about the disciples.

Jesus was willing to set aside his own problems and concerns and do a dirty, humiliating job because He cared for the spiritual growth of these men. He even washed Judas' feet.

This is the mind, or the attitude, that God wants us to have. An attitude of *submitting to one another in the fear of God*.

*I. Submission Is The Identifying Mark Of A Person Who Realizes They Are Not God.*

*II. Submission Is The Identifying Mark Of A Person Who Follows Jesus Christ's Example*

*III. Submission Is The Identifying Mark Of True Biblical Christianity*

**Back to Ephesians 5:21**

We've spent a lot of time on verse 21 for a good reason. The reason is, the number of people who struggle with the rest of Ephesians 5 on into chapter 6.

There's going to be scriptural commands for wives to submit to husbands, children to obey parents, and servants to serve their masters.

Some commentators say that the author of Ephesians, Paul, was just writing out of his background as a Jewish man in the 1st century and what he says has no bearing on us today.

You start doing that to the Bible and there's no end to the distortions you can come up with.

The truth is, none of these passages say anything about culture. Everything they say about relationships is based on the command to submit to one another.

### **Read 22-23, 25**

When Jesus washed the disciples feet that was only a prefiguring of His ultimate act of service, the cross. Wives are to submit to their husbands and husbands are to love their wives like Christ loves the church. He loved the church by giving Himself. So husbands submit to their wives, not by abdicating their responsibility of leadership, but in the sense of putting her needs before his. Jesus put our needs over His comfort and so does a husband. Sacrificing his own desires for what fulfills his wife's needs.

In chapter 6 children are to submit in obedience to parents. But in verse 4 parents are to submit their agendas to the well being of the children. They're to do what it takes to disciple their kids. A godly parent literally invests his life in his children. That's submission, putting someone else's need before your own.

We all submit at some point. A servant (which was a 1st century slave) was to submit to his master. But masters were to treat their slaves with the same respect that God has for all people.

See, submission is a humble recognition of the divine ordering of society. God is a God of order and so he designed order into human life. But that order never oppresses one group.

So even though we're all equal in the sight of God and we're to submit to one another, God still has incorporated authority as a means of preserving order.

Galatians 3:28 sets up the principle of equality. *There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.*

Believers who have trusted Christ for the forgiveness of sin are all equal. But when it comes to specific roles God has given certain responsibilities.

But in every case, whether it's husbands and wives, parents and children, citizens and government, the biblical stress is never on the privilege of leadership but always on the responsibilities of leadership.

Submission is the identifying mark of true biblical Christianity. When Jesus said to His disciples in John 13, "You call me Teacher and Lord, and you say well, for so I am." He used the definite article before both "teacher" and "Lord."

You could translate that "You call me *the* Teacher and *the* Lord, and you say well, for so I am."

You're identifying me as as the Lord God Almighty. You're right. That's exactly who I am. *"If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you."*

Some churches think that what Jesus was saying was we should practice foot washing in our church services. They say it's an ordinance like baptism and communion. Jesus was saying literally wash each other's feet.

Actually, it can be a very beautiful ceremony. Katie Ladny and her groom washed each other's feet as part of their wedding ceremony. It was a beautiful act showing that they viewed themselves as servants to one another.

But see, Jesus wasn't establishing a new ordinance. A church ordinance is introduced in the gospels, explained theologically in the epistles, and practiced by the early church in the Book of Acts.

There are only two that fit that description, communion and baptism.

What Jesus was saying was this. "I am God. I am the Lord. You guys get that part. Now listen closely."

“If I’m God and I love you by serving you then do the same thing. Love each other by serving each other. You’re not God. Why is it such a big thing for you?”

The identifying mark of true biblical Christianity isn’t titles, authority, positions, buildings, organs, steeples, or whatever.

The identifying mark of true biblical Christianity is a willingness to submit to one another in the fear of God.

Jesus said in John 13:35 *By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.*

Do you have trouble serving others? There are only 3 reasons why we would rebel against a command of God.

- 1) We Haven’t received Christ as Savior so we have no power to obey.
- 2) We are a believer but we don’t know what God says about how to live for Him.
- 3) We know what God says but we’re rebellious and disobedient.

Which of those 3 explain why you aren’t submitting to others? If you need to make changes, what are you going to do today to begin that change process?