

God's Family In our family
Eph 5:21 - 6:9

Brothers and sisters, Is there a person that you admire and respect for their faith and life as a Christian?

I remember when I started university, seeing this fourth year student who really exuded a quiet Christian confidence.

You could tell from the way he talked and what he did that he truly knew what the Christian life was about – and not in an awkward or legalistic or preachy sort of way.

You just got the sense that his Christian life went beyond being saved and struggling daily with the sinful desires a young man would have. I really admired him for that and I wanted to be able know the Christian life in that way as well.

In fact it was only by seeing what he had that I realized what I didn't have – and began to desire that. And maybe you've also experienced this dynamic with someone that you've really admired as well.

Perhaps you admired their marriage relationship or their parenting skills, or maybe you admired how they respected their boss and treated their subordinates...

And when you know that these good things come from their relationship with Jesus, and it begins to make you desire this for your own life as well – you are experiencing the Light exposing the darkness, so that darkness can become light.

And in the section of Ephesians that we've read this morning, Paul is instructing us on how we can conduct ourselves in marriage and parenting and work relationships so that our conduct will shine the Light of Jesus Christ and cause others to desire what we have, so that darkness can become light.

Now I need to acknowledge that parts of what Paul teaches in this passage have been twisted and taken out of context and they have been used to produce relationships which we do not admire, and do not in any way shine the light of Christ, and may have even caused some of our light to become darkened through abuse and hurt.

So my prayer is that the Holy Spirit would work in a gentle yet powerful way this morning to bypass the hurt and abuse which may be connected to this passage of scripture.

Then we can understand what Paul says about submission and slaves in proper context and any darkness of misuse, abuse or misunderstanding can be illuminated by the truth Paul wants us to receive and change that darkness back into light again.

In fact clearing up the misunderstanding of what Paul teaches here is a good example of what Paul says earlier in Ephesians 4:17 that we must *“no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking”* as their minds are darkened.

So towards this end, Paul instructed us in chapter 4 on how to treat fellow Church members. But he didn't just tell us how to act – he also provided the Christian reasoning for our behavior, so that our actions can be connected to and develop out of proper Christian thinking.

And I want to show you how Paul is doing that here as well.

He starts in vs. 21, addressing us as a group, as a Church – because everything in the letter of Ephesians is always about BEing the Church together as a group – and he instructs us to *“Submit to one another”* and then he gives us the reason or the motivation why, which is *“the fear of Christ.”*

And it's important to note that Paul speaks about our relationships to each other as Church members before he instructs us on our individual domestic relationships, because this helps further define the relationship actions we take from BEing the Church together and bring into our homes, but I'll say more about this later on.

So with this precedent established Paul outlines for us the relationship actions required for our domestic relationships.

In vs 22 he says *“wives submit to your own husbands”* this is the action, and the reason for it is *“as you do to the Lord.”* Then Paul expands on what this means by this and takes an opportunity to offer some teaching about the relationship

between Christ and the Church by way of analogy with regards to wives and husbands – again I’ll say more on this a bit later.

Then Paul addresses the husbands saying *“husbands love – agape - your wives”* this is the action... and the reason why is that *“Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.”*

Then Paul expands on what this means and takes this as another opportunity to give more teaching about the relationship between Christ and Church by way of the analogy of how husbands relate to their wives.

Which then leads to a second instruction for the husbands; *“Love – agape – your wife as you love your own body”* and the reason why is because Christ feeds and cares for His own body – The Church.

Paul then moves on from the marriage relationship to the parental relationship. In 6:1 he instructs children in the church to *“obey your parents.”* Why this action? Because they are *“in the Lord and it is right...”*

Now, Paul knows that children obeying parents is **so** foundational to God’s created order that it’s obvious, even to Gentiles who have had not previously known God’s Law.

But Paul wants children who have come into the Church to understand even common sense is grounded in God’s Law, and it has benefits! So he provides the “why” from the Ten Commandments *“Honor your father and mother - which is the first commandment with a promise - so that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth.”*

Then Paul tells Fathers *“do not exasperate your children,”* this is the action, and it pertains to both the method and the content by which Fathers trained their children. Instead Paul says *“bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord”*

And the “why” is implied here as Paul’s reference to training reminds us of God’s command in Deuteronomy 6:6 *“Impress [these commands] on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.”*

And God's commandments as content are not burdensome instead as it says repeatedly in Psalm 119 *"they are a delight."*

So Paul has addressed the husband wife context, the parent child context and now he finishes by addressing the final members of a Greco-Roman household – the slaves.

Paul says to them *"obey your earthly masters with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart..."* this is the action, and why do they do this? Because this is a reflection of how they obey Christ and *"the Lord will reward each one for whatever good they do..."*

Paul wants them to understand that their earthly service may not seem to bring much reward to them as slaves... there is a higher master whom they serve who will reward them for their faithful service, which they demonstrate in how they serve their earthly master.

And Paul continues this line of thinking as he instructs their earthly masters to *"treat your slaves in the same way. Do not*

threaten them..." Why refrain from this action? Because *"he (Christ) who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no favoritism with him."* That's pretty self-explanatory 'Why' for that action isn't it, and we can easily see how that applies to our modern day work situations can't we?

So in each of these relationship contexts Paul describes how we are to act and also why we are to act this way.

And brothers and sisters, what Paul has done is to take the primary social relationships which define us, and link them to the truth and teaching about Jesus Christ and the Church.

Submit to each other – because of Christ, wives to your husbands – because of Christ, husbands love your wives – because of Christ, parents and children relate to each other in this way – because you are in the Lord, slaves serve your masters – because of Christ and masters treat your slaves well... because of Christ.

So our actions in these defining relationships - now define our Christian identity – because this is how we show we are In Christ and part of the Church when we are not together with the Church.

Christians take the way they relate to each other IN Christ, as the Church, and they export this into the rest of their basic social relationships as a way of being the Church – apart.

So our own family and workplace is a context where we grow into a deeper identity of belonging to God’s Family through how we relate to others, even those outside the Church and witness to them through our actions so that darkness might become light.

Now this is where we start to encounter some difficulty with what Paul is teaching us to do here, because at first glance what he says in this passage about marriage seems to be advocating for very traditional authoritarian roles in marriage based on the relationship between Christ and the Church.

And we have to acknowledge that what Paul seems to teach here **really** contradicts what most people believe about marriage today and how husbands and wives ought to relate to each other.

But friends I would like to suggest that this passage actually has more to say about our relationship to the Body of Christ and what it means to be committed to the Church than it does about our roles in marriage?

If we approach this passage seeking to discover what we can learn from marriage about our commitment to Christ’s Body - we’ll find that Paul isn’t really instructing us to adopt traditional authoritarian roles for our marriages instead he’s teaching us what it means to be part of the Body of Christ.

Now please understand I’m not suggesting this in order to “soften” a scripture which challenges the status quo.

We can’t just go changing the meaning of scriptures passages which make us feel uncomfortable because they challenge our

cultural beliefs and practices, especially when there are areas where our culture believes and does things that are wrong.

But we know that letter of Ephesians is about all the Church and what it means to be a part of it, so it makes perfect sense to consider what Paul is saying about marriage in that context.

And we should take note that Paul's teaching about the church in this letter starts out with a wide scope pointing out all the things the God has been doing, and then gradually over the next four chapters Paul narrows that scope down so that by chapter five we are dealing with very specific applications.

And this parallels the progression that we experience as we grow in our understanding and connection to Christ's Body in our day to day life doesn't it?

We start out with a vague sense of connection and knowledge about belonging to Christ and His Body and that gradually begins to change into something that is more concrete and very real – and then it starts to bump up into the other parts

of our life – like our marriage and work and school and so on - and then what happens?

There's conflict. We don't know how to combine what it means to be part of two institutions which define us – like the Church and our family or our work.

So we find ourselves torn between our commitment to our family and our work and our growing realization of the commitment required by being IN Christ to those who are IN Christ with us - just as the first recipients of this letter did.

So in his teaching about marriage, Paul is explaining to us how believers can be members of God's family - the Body of Christ – with all its cosmic, eternal significance and also still function as members of the Roman society and their family – as husband, wife, children and servants or slaves.

And he does this by using truths about the church like; *Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. (vs 23) The church submits to Christ. (vs.24)*

Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. (vs. 26-27)

Christ feeds and cares for his body (vs. 29)

And he connects these truths to how a traditional Roman family functioned with the husband as the head of the family.

And through marriage the Roman wife gained property rights, citizenship, and legitimate children who would also have citizenship. In return she was expected to submit to the husband as the head of the household and manage the affairs of the household.

So Paul is using the reality of Roman marriage in his day to help husbands and wives who had become Christian grow in their understanding of what it meant to be a part of the Body of Christ...

And at the same time He is undercutting and replacing Roman mythology and religion as the basis for their Roman marriage.

Instead of submitting to their husbands because of whatever the myth of Romulus and the Sabine women said about submission... they were to submit because the Church submits to Christ!

And husbands ought to love their wives not just because a happy wife meant a happy life, and it was a noble aspect of being a good Roman citizen... but because Christ loved the Church and gave himself up for it...

Do you see what Paul is doing here?

This is less about defining the roles of men and women in “Christian marriage” and more about showing husbands and wives how their Roman marriage roles can teach them about Christ and the Church – and in doing that Paul also brings their Roman marriage into the Church and redefines what their marriage is based on – thus making it Christian.

And this is possible because marriage is God's idea – He created it!

That's why Paul refers to the Genesis 2 passage we read in 5:31 *“For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.”*

So – you can see that if we consider Paul what is teaching in light of what it says about our relationship to the Church – it makes more sense, and it still challenges us in significant ways.

First, this passage challenges us to base whatever we think and believe about marriage and gender roles on biblical truth that reflects our relationship with Christ and how our sinfulness is overcome by the new life of the Holy Spirit in us.

And the scriptures teach us that we inherited this sinfulness from our first parents when they rebelled against God and usurped his authority to determine what was right and wrong by eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil –

but what we might not realize is that their marriage – and all marriage as an institution was also affected by their sin.

God recognizes this when He declared the consequences of Eve's rebellion to her. Since she had overturned her role of helping Adam fulfill his obedience to God's command - and instead facilitated his disobedience against it, God declared that *“her desire would be for her husband and that he would rule over her”* (Gen 3:16) there is a curse on marriage.

The word for 'desire' here in Gen 3:16 is the same word used later on in Genesis to describe how sin 'desires' to have us and enslave us – not a good dynamic for marriage, and the result of the husband also being affected by sin is that he will respond to this 'desire' with dominance and control – another bad dynamic for marriage – and part of the curse upon it.

And so all the fighting, dysfunction, abuse and harm that can take place in a marriage are all the ways in which marriage is cursed because of sin.

Now it's important to know this – because if you don't you will miss the significance of Paul's choice of words as he instructs wives and husbands on how they should relate to each other.

Paul deliberately chooses 'submit' for the wives because it is the redeemed and Holy Spirit empowered opposite action of the curse which makes her 'desire' the husband.

And he deliberately chooses 'agape love' for the husbands because it is the redeemed and Holy Spirit empowered opposite action of curse where he 'rules over' the wife.

So Paul wants to teach us that IN Christ and IN the Church not only is the division between Jew and Gentile overcome... but the curse upon marriage between husband and wife is overcome as well!

So – practically speaking this is a huge help in understanding and differentiating what Paul means by the word submit from all the negative ways that we tend to understand it and blame it for what are really the consequences of the curse.

For wives to submit to their husbands is a Holy Spirit empowered return to God's original intention in creating the role of a wife – the man needed a partner capable of working intimately with him to rule over and steward the creation in loving obedience to God and create more stewards.

This is what scripture teaches God created marriage to be – A man and woman joined together in mutual complementarity to help each other fulfill God's creational mandate - to be fruitful and multiply and rule over the earth – together, and there is a lot of freedom in that job description for a wife in relation to her husband in marriage and vice-versa.

Now that might not sound very romantic and sentimental, but it's the solid foundation upon which we can build a very romantic and appealing and lasting marriage.

Because aside from the fact that it must be male and female, and there must be some sort of "leave" that occurs from the parents – there is a great deal of freedom within these boundaries for different cultures and societies to develop

marriage in different ways; traditional Roman marriage, Asian marriages, East Indian marriages, or modern Canadian inter-cultural marriages...

But for any of those marriages to become “Christian,” the husbands and wives must be IN Christ and re-interpret their roles, responsibilities, and base why they are committed to each other on the Christian truths that we’ve just outlined – not social convention, sentiment, romanticism or practicality.

And these are the kinds of marriages that people admire, these are the kinds of husbands and wives who make good parents for their children and raise them up in the ways of the Lord, and these family members are good stewards in their work – serving others regardless of circumstances, because they are serving the Lord.

And this is the kind of life that people admire, this is the kind of life which shines the light of Christ - and causes people to want that life for themselves as well, so that the light shines on the darkness and the darkness can become light.

Brothers and sisters may the light of this scripture shine upon us and change any darkness in us – in our marriages, in our parenting, and in our work relationships – into light.

For the glory of Jesus Christ and His Church – amen!