



THE COMMUNITY

Submission | CHRIST-CENTERED RELATIONSHIPS

What Do I Need to Know About the Passage?

Ephesians 5:22-6:9

We saw last week in v. 18 and following that a Spirit-filled life results in: “addressing one another with psalms and hymns, singing and making music in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks for everything, and submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.” In this week’s passage it is as if Paul double-clicks on “submitting” and elaborates with instructions for various relationships.

He describes three sets of relationships, each displaying a certain order in family or society: (1) husband/wife, (2) parent/child and (3) slave/master. Paul wants the Ephesians to see that their new life in Christ should transform their relationships. Becoming a Christian means re-orienting the most basic aspects of life together.

As the leader, you should be aware that this passage may arouse some difficult, charged and personal conversation. It would be useful to understand that slavery during the first century was not like slavery in more recent western history. Furthermore, Paul’s lack of explicit prohibition of slavery could be misunderstood to condone it. Read Philemon to see Paul’s response to a slave holder who is also a brother regarding a slave who has become a Christian. Or look at 1Tim 1:9,10 for his general perspective on the slave trade.

The section on children and fathers may be difficult for people who have unhealthy relationships with their parents.

The section to wives and husbands could unfortunately be seen as archaic at best and chauvinistic at worst. Careful study of the passage will go far to correct this misunderstanding and, even more importantly, to expose the riches of God’s mercy, as the gospel is portrayed in Christian marriages. Because this section can so quickly be charged and reaction-driven, it will be important to show what fuels marriage from a biblical perspective. That is why the lead question in the marriage section below focuses our attention on relationship between Christ and the church, which is not only the inspiration of marriage but also the goal of marriage.

Marriage is a theme that runs through the entire Bible. In Gen 1:26-28 and 2:21-24 we see that God made Adam and Eve for each other. They were two individuals but they were united as one flesh.

What’s the Big Idea?

When we relate to each other and with those outside of the body, we do so as new people who have been made alive with Christ. The gospel demands and transforms our interactions with each other. Fundamentally, we live out our relationships with God as the center of our lives, expressing respect and care in appropriate ways.

What’s the Problem?

The fall ruined our ability to relate to each other. Those in authority tend towards dominance or abdication. Those under authority tend toward rebellion or disrespect. We need reorientation from Christ on how to interact.

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The union pictured in marriage is used by God to mirror His relationship to His people. Whenever you read God saying something like, “I will be their God, they will be my people,” He’s saying He is in a special, exclusive, and covenanted relationship with us. This is why God can refer to idolatrous Israel as a prostitute who is unfaithful to her husband (Hosea 3:1). In the New Testament we see that Jesus Himself is to be the groom of God’s people, the bride (John 3:29). He promises the celebration of all celebrations when He is united perfectly and permanently to them in the new heavens and new earth (Rev 19:7; 21:1-3). Until then we wait patiently and longingly as Jesus prepares to present the church to Himself as glorious bride (v. 27)

In our passage Paul is not just searching for some analogy that will help conceptually connect God’s love for His people to something tangible. No, what we learn is that marriage was instituted from the beginning to eventually reveal the ultimate marriage and union, perfectly seen and experienced in Christ’s one flesh relationship to the church. Human marriage was only a blueprint intended to sketch out the final, intended reality.

Understand submission in light of this relationship. The church submits to the one who not only created her but also gave His life for her (v. 25). Therefore, one sees the intention of human marriage in mirroring this unfathomable love story of Christ and the church. The relationship between a husband and wife should be a picture or a rehearsal of the gospel.

Marriage after the fall was distorted. A wife’s desire was to undermine her husband’s leadership. Unfortunately, the husband’s response was not that of tender correction but of domineering rule (Gen 3:16). In Christ, however, marriage becomes what it ought to be. No longer does the wife undermine her husband’s place as head, but she submits to him in all things (v. 22). No longer does a husband use his authority and strength against his wife and for selfish gain, but he sacrificially loves her and cares for her as part of his own body (v. 25). Their respect and love for one another is part of their worship and response to Christ’s love as members of his body.

What’s Our Response?

You want to help your group demonstrate love and respect in all their relationships, being compelled by God’s love for us in Christ.

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What Are the Questions?

Ephesians 5:22-6:9

Launch

If you were describing to a non-Christian friend how your relationship with God changed the relationships in your life, what would you say?

Explore

Read 5:22-33

1. What do we learn about Christ and the church from this passage?
2. How does Paul's teaching about the relationship between Christ and the church shape the way that husbands and wives are to relate?
3. Are Paul's instructions to husbands and wives interchangeable? Why or why not?
4. Which is easier for you to do: to sacrifice yourself or to submit yourself?
5. How does Christ transform a marriage relationship?

Read 6:1-4

6. Paul commands children to obey their parents "in the Lord." Which of the following seems to make more sense of "in the Lord" and why? (1) Obey your parents as long as they are Christians -OR- (2) Obey your parents as part of your new life in Christ.
7. Look up Exodus 20:12. Paul cites Exodus 20:12 in vv.2-3. How does "honor" relate to "obedience"?

8. Why do you think Paul addresses only "fathers" in v.4?
9. How does Christ transform the parent/child relationship?

Read 6:5-9

10. What instructions does Paul offer to Christian slaves? How are they to serve their masters?
11. What does Paul want them to understand about their identity?
12. What instructions does Paul offer to masters? What do you think Paul means when he says "do the same things"? What is Paul requiring of masters and why?
13. Notice all the references to "Lord" in vv.5-9. How does Christ transform the slave/master relationship? In light of 5:22-6:9
14. What common element does Paul include in his instructions to each group?
15. How would you summarize Paul's vision for Christ-centered relationships in this passage?

Apply

16. How does a relationship with Christ transform relationships in our lives?
17. Which of these instructions is most difficult for you to hear and obey? Tell us about it.
18. Remembering that this passage flows from Paul's instruction on appropriately submitting to authority, would you say you are more tempted to oppose or to abuse authority? How so?
19. What would it look like for Christ to be at the center of your relationship with your parents?
20. How might completely seeing Christ as the ultimate husband, the perfect father or the heavenly master bring joyful willingness to that difficult command?
21. Which of these hardest for you to believe? Why?

**The Husband, who lovingly sacrifices himself for his bride.
The Father, who leads his children into eternal life.
The Master, who rewards his slaves for their good work.**

22. Where do we find the power to live out this vision for Christ-centered relationships?

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What Are the Answers?

1. See “What Do I Need to Know About the Passage?” Christ sacrificed Himself for His church when He died to provide all she needed. The church submits to Christ as the head.

2. Marriage was designed to be a picture of Christ’s relationship to the church. The submission and love seen between Christ and the church should be imitated by wives and husbands.

3. They are not interchangeable. The Christ/church comparison makes it impossible to blur the distinction into a general command like “be nice to each other.” Christ does not submit to the church, but uses His leadership sacrificially.

4. Allow the group to discuss.

5. See note in “What Do I Need to Know About the Passage?” Through the gospel, Jesus gives us an example of love and a personal experience of it. In addition, He invites husbands and wives to indirectly proclaim the gospel through their own marriage.

6. It’s the latter. Christian children should obey their parent, even if they are non-Christians, as long as their parents are not requiring them to sin.

7. Obedience is required while under our parents supervision. Honor is required all our lives.

8. Fathers in this culture had absolute authority which was easily abused. Children may have been seen as property.

You could imagine the possibility for cruelty.

9. Allow the group to discuss.

10. Paul focuses on their heart response to Christ.

11. He wants them to see themselves primarily as slaves of Christ.

12. Masters are to treat their slaves with respect and fear and with sincerity of heart as to Christ. He wants them to understand that they have a master in heaven to whom they will give account.

13. Allow the group to discuss.

14. Each instruction relates to, is assumed, or is derived from Christians’ relationship to Christ, the Lord. In one sense, every relationship becomes a Christ-centered relationship.

15. When we relate to others, we do so as new people who have been made alive with Christ. All our interactions are transformed. We live out our relationships with God as the center of our lives, expressing respect and care in appropriate ways.

16.-21. Allow the group to discuss.

22. Take them back to Ephesians 5:18ff and show them how the filling of the Spirit is necessary to live out these relationships.

Memorize

Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.

Ephesians 5:21



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