



## **Lesson 12: Walking with Others – How Being In Christ Affects Our Relationships**

### **Teacher's Edition**

**Overview:** Paul continues describing the changes that should be seen in the individual lives of the members of a church so that they can do their part to help the body grow together in unity to the fullness of Christ. They do this by individually imitating God through love and wisdom, which will radically change the way they interact with other people.

**Purpose:** Believers should realize that living for God will require them to live rightly with those closest to them. Walking wisely and Spirit-filled change not only how we act with others, but how we think about our interactions with them.

**Passage:** Ephesians 5:22-6:9

**Introduction:** Paul has spoken in a lot of generalities. He has talked about our glorious new position in Christ. He has discussed the need for unity and community within the church. He has shown us our need for personal growth. Now Paul gets uncomfortably specific. He starts messing around in our personal lives. He hits us where our sin nature is often seen the clearest: at home and at work. While church is often dotted with fake smiles and false

pleasantries, no one is able to keep that act up at home or even at work if there are deeper problems.

***Why is it that people often have a different persona in public and in private? What should someone do if they realize that what others see is not what God and those closest to them see?***

But being in Christ, having a new identity and resurrection power within us, and surrounded by a new community of people who love and live for God means that we don't have to be dominated by old, sinful life patterns. God's goal for us is that we live out our new identity in Christ by submitting to those around us, and by living out our faith amongst our friends and coworkers.

## **I. The General Command: Walk in Submission (5:22)**

**Explanation:** As one commentator pointed out, it can be easy to live submissively in a church context a few times a week, but Paul makes explicitly clear that this radical, countercultural way of living should extend throughout all of one's life.<sup>1</sup> Whether work or home life, wise, Spirit-filled living that looked like speaking, singing, thanksgiving, and submitting should dominate every minute, not just those when we are with other Christians.

Paul tells us to walk wise by knowing God's will, using our time well, and being filled by the Spirit. Being filled by the Spirit is further described by the results it produces, the final result being submitting to one another. The command given here is as straightforward as it is unpopular. All Christians are to submit to one another. The word originally meant subjecting oneself to the rule of another, often in a military context. The idea was often "falling into rank" underneath a superior.

---

<sup>1</sup> Donald Hagner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary*, 720.

***Why does being Spirit-filled result in an attitude of submission? [cf the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22-23]***

***How does this compare with the dominant mindset of America? What would it look like for everyone to submit to everyone else?***

**Application:** Philippians 2:3-8 gives us a radical picture of what a submissive Christian looks like. It describes those who consider what others need and want to be more important than what they need or want. These Christians are pointed to the Creator of the universe who submitted to his Father and sacrificially sought to serve others.

***What are some specific ways that you can consider other people's needs and wants to be more significant than yours?***

Often, it's in the little things that this attitude is seen or not seen. The look of frustration when someone sits next to the person we wanted to sit next to. The car that cuts us off on the highway. Being overlooked for a ministry we thought we should have had. Sacrificing what we want and feel like at the time to do what someone else needs or wants, whether that be where we eat out, what we do with our evening, or other such things.

## **II. The Specific Examples**

[These first couple of examples may be difficult to cover, especially if some of your table feels frustration with being single. However, this passage is important for everyone to hear for two reasons 1) some of them will be married and need to have their thinking shaped biblically about marriage, and 2) God uses marriage as a picture of Christ and the church]

### **A. Wives (5:22-24)**

**Explanation:** The first example of submission in this passage is probably the most unpopular today. If you want to rile

people up, take them to a conservative Christian wedding and let them hear God's perspective on marriage roles. But God's Word is explicitly clear: men are to lead and women are to submit to the leadership of the husband.

***Why does the world hate the idea of a wife submitting to her husband?*** [often they feel that it devalues the woman to be in a place of submission]

***What does 1 Corinthians 11:3 teach about the value of those who submit to another's leadership?***

A husband should be very gracious in the way he leads [guys, this command was written to the women, not to you]. But godly women should realize that God has designated husbands to be the leader over the wife, and should joyfully submit to that.

***What happens when a Christian wife submits to her husband, according to Ephesians 5? What happens if she doesn't? Compare with 1 Peter 3:1-6***

Those who submit to God by submitting to their husband demonstrate the beauty and glory of the gospel, because they are showing how the church can joyfully and trustingly submit to and fully trust a leader who has their best interest at heart.

## **B. Husbands (5:25-33)**

**Explanation:** Husbands might "seem" to get off easy here, but that's only if you don't give careful attention to what is meant by the love that he is supposed to show. The love of a husband is supposed to be self-sacrificial, even to the point of imitating the love that Christ had for his church.

***As you look through the descriptions of Christ's love for the church, how does Paul describe Christ's love and how should husbands reflect that?***

In both the Old and New Testaments God uses the picture of marriage as a picture of his relationship with his people. Paul even goes so far as to say that the Genesis instructions on marriage were talking about the church. Husbands and wives are being called on to do something extraordinary in Ephesians: they are being called upon to reflect and represent the love of God for his people and his people's trusting submission to him. That way the world around us sees the gospel lived out in a way that is totally contrary to their self-focused and often miserable marriages. By this, we have an opportunity to expose the works of darkness.

### **C. Children<sup>2</sup> (6:1-3)**

**Explanation:** Here we come to a tricky passage for our group. This passage is pretty straightforward if you are ten or even fifteen. But what about the college student or young professional who is working a job? Relationships between parents and young adults can often be rocky, but God's Word is sufficient to give guidance in these areas. What do you do when your parents want your help at home but you want to go to a church activity? How do you handle it when you're feeling burned out and your parents try to add something else to your plate.

As MacArthur points out, *honor* has to do with attitude, *obey* has to do with action. Young adults (and for that

---

<sup>2</sup> Check out <http://www.singlefocusindy.org/honoring-your-parentswhile-living-at-home.html> for a fuller discussion of this topic by Pastor Andy.

matter all adults) are called upon to honor their parents. But at what point do they no longer have to obey them?

***At what point does Scripture teach that a child no longer has to obey?***

The question comes down to a matter of definition. What does “children” mean in Ephesians 6:1? Does it mean little kids, or can it include young adults? The English word for “children” carries the idea of young age. No one in this group is a “child.” But what does the Greek word mean? The Greek word is *teknon*, and carries no connotation of age. In fact, the word is often used for full grown adults (Luke 16:25; Matthew 9:2; 2 Timothy 1:2, Philemon 10, sometimes translated as “son”). So does that mean that every adult must obey his parent?

The obvious distinction point is when a person gets married (Genesis 2:24). At that point, a young woman (and a young man) must leave their father and mother and start a new life together. But what about those who enter adulthood but aren’t yet married? *While they may not cleave, they still may leave.* When a young adult leaves home, when they become independent, at that point they are no longer required to obey their parents (though they still should honor them). While living at home, though, the wisest, most submissive option would be to continue obeying their parents’ wishes until they move out.

Hopefully, parents recognize the greater maturity of their young adults and therefore also give them greater freedom. A wise parent treats a 12 year old and a 21 year old very differently. It is also entirely appropriate for a 21 year old to be respectfully open and honest about frustrations with

certain expectations their parents have. But a 21 year old who is still living at home still has the responsibility to obey their parents whether their parents are reasonable or not.

No doubt, in some cases this will be very difficult. But a young adult who sacrifices his or her own will to show submission to the authority God has placed over them will ultimately be honoring God, and God honors those who honor him.

#### **D. Parents (6:4)**

**Explanation:** Ephesians 6 and Deuteronomy 6 are the two great parenting passages of the Bible. They both teach a crucial lesson: Parents are to be the primary disciplers of their children, not the community.

***In what ways can youth groups and Christian schools distract from this principle? How can this be avoided?***

Some of you may one day be parents. Realize now that then you will be called upon to be the one responsible for their growth in holiness. It will be your job to bring them up in the nurture and admonition in the Lord. Some people forsake the faith despite the best upbringing, but from a human perspective, if we wonder why someone grows up to reject the faith, the answer from God's Word is the parents.

#### **E. Slaves (6:5-8)**

**Explanation:** Even though slavery no longer exists in America, at least not as a public, normal occupation, these verses may seem to be obsolete. But the principles taught here apply very quickly and easily to those in the workforce.

***Compare this passage with Titus 2:9-10; 1 Peter 2:18-19; and Colossians 3:22-25. What major principles arise that should govern the way an employee looks at his boss?***

- Serve your boss as you would serve God
  - Cheerfully
  - Submissively
  - Diligently
- Serve well regardless of how your boss treats you
- Serving well reflects well on the gospel
- God rewards those who serve their earthly boss well

#### **F. Masters (6:9)**

Paul ends this section with a relatively short address to masters: treat your servant/slaves well since God will judge them and you. Those who have power over others in the workforce should remember that God will treat all fairly, and should be very careful not to take advantage of those working under them. In a culture that is rightly outraged by the abuse of some against the powerless, we must as Christians do our part by reminding everyone that God plays no favorites. Everyone will one day give an account to the true Master.