

Walking Together

#8 Ephesians 5:21-6:9

Introduction

Paul specifies five ways we can demonstrate that our lives are being filled with the Holy Spirit (5:18). The first three are found in verse 19 and they center on joyful worship. The next is his reminder to always give thanks. And then he turns to relationships and tells us to submit to one another.

Submit (vs. 5:21)

This is a military term than means to line up the troops. It is an order of authority: “to be under rank.” Paul calls for “mutual submission.” He is asking us all to be team players. (Not with equal rank, but equal loyalty to the leader.) Our motivation is our reverence for Christ. Submitting is a form of worship and obedience.

One writer wrote: “Our mutual Master causes us to have a special deference for one another.” This deference leads to the unity and harmony Paul is emphasizing in the book of Ephesians (see 4:3).

Note too that the power to submit comes from within, it is not the result of pressure from without.

Wives (vs. 5:22-24)

Note the situation for women in the Roman, Greek and Jewish first century cultures :

Roman: The law provided no rights for women. In the law, she remained a child forever. Her father’s power (over all things) was transferred to her husband at marriage.

Greek: A respectable woman had no “kind of independent existence and no kind of mind of her own.” She lived a secluded life, was not seen in public and often lived in rooms apart from her husband.

Jewish: A woman was her husband’s possession. She was owned in the same way that sheep and goats were owned. He could do with her as he wished. She had no legal rights. And a Jewish man gave thanks every day that God “had not made him a Gentile, a slave or a woman.”

In general, wives had obligations to their husbands, but nothing was expected from the men. Into this world, God’s standard for marriage was revolutionary!

Recognizing that submission is an order of authority, wives are to submit, to adapt themselves to their husbands as a service to the Lord.

Marriage was to be a picture of the relationship Christ has with His church.

It is important to note what this submission is NOT:

1. Biblical submission does not mean that there are no differences between the genders (Gen. 1:27). There is still an order of authority.
2. Biblical submission does not imply inferiority. It has nothing to do with abilities or gifts.
3. This kind of submission does not require silence (although there is an unfading beauty in a "gentle and quiet spirit"-see I Peter 3:4)
4. This Godly submission is directed to the sphere of the home, not society in general. A wife is to submit to her husband, in the sphere of her home. This order is for the home, not necessarily society as a whole.
5. Biblical submission does not require the wife to obey her husband as a child would obey a parent or a slave would obey his master. There is a different term to convey that kind of relationship.

These are two people who are equal in God's eyes, not inferior to each other. It is just that the wife, as an equal chooses to place herself under the spiritual authority of her husband so there can be order and function in the family. She is not releasing her dignity. She is expressing that lofty role so her family can meet the design God has ordered.

Her reasons or motives to submit:

1. Her obedience and respect for Christ
2. Her recognition that her husband is the spiritual head, under the leadership of the Lord
3. She wants to model the union that Jesus has with His church

Husbands (vs. 5:25-33)

"Love your wives:" This is AGAPE love. This love is "more of a decision rather than the response of a spontaneous heart." The husband is commanded to continually decide to practice self-denial for the sake of his wife. It is a special, unselfish and constant love.

Two kinds of headship:

1. Worldly headship: "I am your head, so take your orders from me. You must do what I want. There are some things I want you to do for me."
2. Godly headship: "I am your head, so I must take care of you and serve you. Here are the things I want to do for you."

The motive for the husband to behave this way is threefold:

1. Because that is what real love is like (I Cor. 13:4-7)
2. Because it is God's pattern for order in the home
3. Because the husband and the wife are one flesh (unity)

A special note about "washing with water through the word" (vs. 26): the term used for "word" here is different than "logos." This term means the spoken word. It is referring to the power of a husband's spoken words to his wife. (Notice how the bride describes herself in Song of Solomon 1:5-6 ("dark"/sun-bleached/swarthy/unattractive). Her husband begins to tell her how beautiful she is. Then notice how she describes herself in 2:1 ("I am the rose of Sharon, the lily of the valley." She now sees herself as beautiful!). A wife's self-esteem is greatly affected by the spoken words of her husband.

Children (vs. 6:1-3)

This is the first commandment with a promise. The command is to obey, to do what you are told. (See Ex. 20:12) When a child obeys, they are honoring their parents. Jesus gave the example of this kind of obedience. (See Luke 2:51)

Honor: this is an affectionate respect for the people who stand for God as spiritual authorities before their children.

"Honoring our parents includes respect, love, and obedience, as long as childhood and youth continue, and the gradual modification and transformation of these affections and duties into higher forms as manhood and womanhood draw on." (Biblical Illustrator)

Dishonor: Notice that the penalty for cursing a parent is the same penalty for blaspheming God (see Ex. 21:17 and Lev. 24:9).

Note that the scope of their obedience is EVERYTHING. (See Col. 3:20)

Fathers (vs. 6:4)

"Do NOT exasperate your children:" To exasperate means to intensely irritate or frustrate. Fathers need to use Eph. 4:31 as their guide and avoid yelling or excessive, reactive discipline.

"Instead," (on the other hand) DO:

1. "Bring them up:" provide for them, care for them, show the heart of love to them. It is the idea of "nourishing" children.
2. "In the training/ discipline:" give your children the abilities, skills and character they need for life. Remembering that all scripture is God-breathed and useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training (same word). See II Tim. 3:16
3. "Instruction:" this is the term for "warning"-pointing out needed course corrections

4. "In the Lord:" Our entire focus on parenting is the guidance towards living a life that is pleasing to the Lord (Eph. 5:10)

Slaves (vs. 6:5-8)

There were some 60 million slaves in the Roman Empire. They constituted about one third of the population.

The pattern established by Paul for the behavior of slaves, can be used as a pattern for modern employees:

1. "Obey "your masters-do what is expected of you. Follow instructions. Do it their way.
2. Perform with a "sincere heart"-give your work real effort.
3. Obey them like "slaves of Christ" would-check your motives.
4. "Serve wholeheartedly"-the volume, quality, and creative touches of our work should reflect our whole hearted devotion to the Lord.

Masters (vs. 6:9)

Paul wants the masters to recognize there is no fundamental difference, as it related to value and worth, between them and their slave. Slaves should be treated in a manner that the master himself would appreciate.

The pattern for modern work relationships:

1. Bosses should not threaten workers-fear must not be a part of a work relationship
2. Those in authority cannot show favoritism-workers should be evaluated and appreciate for their work, not their status or position

So What?

Walking together requires order and good discipline. Paul's comments are meant to be a practical guide for how Godly relationships should work. Remember the goal is UNITY (harmony) within the context of the home, the church and the workplace.

How are your relationships at home? If you are married, is Christ the head of your house? How is that displayed by the parents and the children? Any attitudes need some improving?

How are your relationships at work? Is your response to your boss given with a sincere heart and is your work given "wholeheartedly?" And if you are the boss, do you relate to your workers/staff as Christ would?

"Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ." (Eph. 5:21)