

Lesson 12 | November 21, 2021

Relationships in Christ

Study Text: Ephesians 5:18,21 through 6:9

Central Truth: Living for Christ has a powerful, positive impact on human relationships.

Key Verse: Ephesians 5:21

Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God (KJV).

Submit to one another **out of reverence for Christ** (NLT).

Learning Objectives

- The student will be able to describe a biblical understanding of the first century regarding relationships.
- The student will learn **what it means to value all people, regardless of social class.**
- The student will be equipped to grasp the scriptural command that believers submit to one another based on love and respect for God.

Introducing the Lesson

Say: Today's lesson examines our relationships with others as we live together in the body of Christ. The key biblical word in focus as we look at these relationships is "submission."

Opening Activity—Submission

Ask these questions (allowing for brief discussion between them):

(1) *Why do you think the term "submission" is often viewed as a negative term?*

(2) *What are some examples to submission to authorities that we encounter regularly, and why is submission to authorities so challenging? **Doing what our boss says at work. Following speed limits. Doing what God tells us to do through his word daily.***

(3) *How would you define submission?*

Provide the following definition: **Submission is the willful decision to place oneself under the authority of others in recognition of God's ultimate authority over us.** (Have the class respond to this definition of submission.)

Willful acceptance of another's authority over you understanding God's authority over you requires you do so.

Say: Submission, as we are discussing it today, is the willful decision to place oneself under the authority of others in recognition of God's ultimate authority over us. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Relationships will look different when people exist together in Christ. In both the Jewish and Roman cultures, there were clear hierarchies of authority. Men were seen as superior to women and given special treatment. Masters were likewise given preferential treatment in the culture. Paul challenged the cultural norms by stating that all segments of the Christian community must submit one to another. In this lesson, we will discover the impact one's faith must have on one's relationships.

[Gal 3:28-29 KJV] 28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. 29 And if ye [be] Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

Are there consequences of not being in submission? Do we teach our children about these consequences?

Part 1—Husband and Wife

A Christian Wife

Ephesians 5:18b; 21–24

[Eph 5:18, 21-24 KJV] 18 And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit;

21 Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God. 22 Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. 23 For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body. 24 Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so [let] the wives [be] to their own husbands in every thing.

Say: The key to successful Christian relationships is for individuals to be continually being filled with the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit equips individuals to see people the way God sees them and have passion to minister to them. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Serving and ministering to others can leave a person spiritually depleted. This is why it is important for Christians to maintain spiritual strength by continually being in right relationship with God, including continuing to be filled with the Holy Spirit.

Resource Packet Item 1: Be Filled With the Holy Spirit

Distribute the work sheet and have one student read each of the Scriptures aloud to set the tone for the need to rely on the Holy Spirit to fulfill all that Paul discussed in the rest of this lesson.

Ephesians 5:18 opens this lesson by outlining two important points about Scripture's command to be filled with the Spirit. These points are rooted in how this phrase is written: First, the command is passive: "Be filled." That is, we don't fill ourselves with the Spirit, but God fills us. We are only the recipients. Second, it is written as a present, ongoing action. It is not only for the future or the past, and it is meant to be an ongoing reality in the life of the believer.

Then, beginning in verse 21, Paul taught that, in order to minister effectively within the church, Christians must relate to one another properly—and that relationship can be summarized in the word submission. Paul stated that Christians submit to each other, and this submission comes not out of obligation or because of prescribed positions of authority. Christians submit to others out of reverence to the position that Jesus holds. He is the Head of the Church and everyone else is on a level playing field under Him.

The command to submit to one another does not mean that all roles and responsibilities are wiped away, of course. Without some structure, life would be chaotic. So, Paul did not call Christians to dismantle family and social structures. Rather, he sought to adjust one's attitude toward others, and he provided a road map to follow. In doing so, Paul laid out the way relationships are to naturally work when Christians are living in Christ.

After declaring that all Christians are to submit to one another in verse 21, Paul began a detailed discussion of relationships beginning with wives. He told them, "Submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord" (verse 22, NLT). This statement has been the subject of much debate over the course of Church history.

The key to understanding Paul's statement is to comprehend the meaning of submission and the motivation behind it. Submission can be forced and imposed, or it can be given freely. Some Christians have taught that a wife is subject to her husband's whims. This is not submission, but subjugation. The husband becomes in effect the king of the family, and everyone does what he says without question. This is a clear abuse of power justified by a distorted interpretation of Scripture. It demonstrates that the husband is not following verse 21: "Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ" (NLT).

It is important to keep in focus that Paul instructed Christian wives to voluntarily submit to their husbands, not as though the husband were her king, but as the spiritual head of the family, just as the Church chooses to submit to Jesus (verses 23–24). As the Church, we voluntarily submit to Jesus because we know that

Jesus will always care for us. It is this attitude toward husbands that provides Christian wives the confidence to submit to their husbands.

Discuss

? How do Christians submit to one another?

? Why do you think the idea of submission is seen as negative in many ways?

A Christian Husband

Ephesians 5:25–33

[Eph 5:25-33 KJV] 25 Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; 26 That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, 27 That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish. 28 So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself. 29 For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church: 30 For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones. 31 For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. 32 This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church. 33 Nevertheless let every one of you in particular so love his wife even as himself; and the wife [see] that she reverence [her] husband.

Say: Paul next turned to the husband. Paul's words would have seemed quite foreign to a man in the first century. **He did not tell the husband how to command his wife, but rather he told the husband how to love his wife.** Paul used the Greek word *agape* (the word for love that Scripture uses of God's love for humanity) to describe the type of love a Christian man must have for his wife. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Jesus' sacrificial love for the Church is an illustration of the type of love Christian faith demands of a husband (Ephesians 5:25). A man must not use his role as a weapon to force his wife to perform tasks for him, any more than Jesus sought to extract benefits from His followers to demonstrate His authority over them. Jesus demonstrated His love by sacrificing for the well-being of His Bride.

In verses 26–27, Paul made a brief detour away from the husband-wife relationship to explain the motivation behind Jesus' sacrificial death. **Paul stated that Jesus made this selfless decision to provide a means to sanctify the Church, to cleanse the**

Church, to do the work that would make the Church an acceptable Bride. He did everything for the bride of Christ that the Bride could not do on her own.

Then, in verse 28, Paul returned to his thoughts concerning the husband's relationship with his wife. **Just as Jesus was willing to do whatever was necessary to make the spiritual Bride ready to meet Him, husbands must work at developing a relationship with their wives that makes a wife better in ways that she may not be capable of, given the restrictions of matters such as culture and society.**

In verse 31, Paul quoted Genesis 2:24 to connect the marriage relationship to the relationship of Christ to the Church. **Just as a man leaves his parents to be married, an individual has to leave his or her past relationships to enter a new covenant with Jesus through salvation. The new bond replaces the old.**

Paul concludes this segment of his teaching on relationships, in verses 32–33, by calling both the Christian husband and wife to live out their faith through their actions and attitudes toward one another. When they do, they testify to a proper understanding of Christ and the Church. It is important to note that Paul reminded both husbands and wives of their duties and not the rights they should expect to receive. Equality as persons and submission to one another are the underlying principles emphasized by Paul in this passage.

Discuss

? How might a Christian husband misuse his authority in the home?

? How does lack of commitment in marriage impact one's commitment to Jesus?

Resource Packet Item 1: Marriage Motif in Scripture

Distribute the work sheet and encourage students to discover the greater context Paul was basing his theology of marriage on by studying the passages contained in the resource. If you have time to do this in class, divide your class into small groups and assign one passage to each group, then have the groups report back to the class.

Part 2—Children and Parents

A Christian Child

Ephesians 6:1–3

[Eph 6:1-3 KJV] 1 Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right. 2 Honour thy father and mother; (which is the first commandment with promise;) 3 That it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth.

Say: A second critical human relationship is that which exists between parents and their children. As with his instructions to wives, Paul taught that children were to obey with

correct motives. Christian children have responsibilities to their parents, but Christian parents have obligations to their children as well. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

In Ephesians 6:2–3, Paul quoted the Fifth Commandment from Exodus 20:12 to help children understand that when they obey their parents, they are not doing so simply to make their parents happy. They obey their parents as an act of worship and obedience to their God (Ephesians 6:1).

Paul was quick to add that not only will an obedient child avoid unnecessary punishment, but they will also receive rewards from God. **This statement, “This is the first commandment with promise,” can be challenging to understand. Some commentators have linked this to eternal life (rather than life on earth), but such a link is not strongly present anywhere else in the New Testament. As a result, others see this as Paul emphasizing that by obeying parents—and therefore obeying God—children’s lives will demonstrate that their true welfare depends upon God. In other words, God watches over all His people like the “Great Parent.”**

Discuss

? What are some keys to raising children that parents can learn from Scripture? (Invite testimonies from those who have raised children.)

? What was your attitude toward your parents when you were a child? How do you think your attitude compared to that of most children??

A Christian Parent

Ephesians 6:4

[Eph 6:4 KJV] 4 And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

Say: Some people might be surprised at Paul’s statement to parents, as it seems to be the reverse of what we normally expect to hear. Paul instructed parents that they are to treat their children with respect. He specifically addressed fathers in this passage, but other biblical passages (e.g., Hebrews 11:23) indicate that both mothers and fathers could be included in this statement. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

In Ephesians 6:4, Paul acknowledged that it is possible for parents to provoke their children into bad behavior by treating them wrongly. Obviously parents expect obedience from children, but a rash exercise of authority in a way that is overbearing or exasperating, or even harmful, is not appropriate as well. Earlier in the Epistle, in chapter 4, Paul mentioned anger as a sign of the flesh—and as something destructive to the body of Christ. Parents must not act in anger toward

their children any more than they would act in anger toward another Christian outside the home. The underlying principle is that children are to be cherished and respected.

In God's eyes, children have equal spiritual status with their parents. Just as Paul told wives and husbands to submit one to another, submission also exists between parents and children (see Ephesians 5:21); a key component of submission, then, is recognizing that even when we have a role of authority, our call to submission is not suspended. We still must value others for who they are in Christ; this means there are times when we defer to their needs above our own concerns.

Children who are in Christ are brothers and sisters to their believing parents. Just as an adult would disciple another adult in the faith, parents should disciple their children in the faith. Discipline is much different from punishment. The words "discipline" and "discipleship" come from the same root. Discipline should redirect a person toward positive growth, while punishment is a matter of making a person pay consequences for an action. Parents must focus on discipline, then, more than punishment. Christian faith calls for mutual respect between parent and child.

Discuss

? How difficult is it to view your children as your brothers and sisters in Christ?

? Why is punishment sometimes used with children rather than discipline?

Part 3—Employees and Employers

A Christian Employee

Ephesians 6:5–8

[Eph 6:5-8 KJV] 5 Servants, be obedient to them that are [your] masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of your heart, as unto Christ; 6 Not with eyeservice, as menpleasers; but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart; 7 With good will doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men: 8 Knowing that whatsoever good thing any man doeth, the same shall he receive of the Lord, whether [he be] bond or free.

Say: The final relationship Paul highlighted as affected by one's faith in Jesus is that of master/servant and slave. No relationship had a larger gap in power than this one. Bondservants had no rights. Masters owned the bondservant. Today we have no acceptable master/servant relationship in our culture. We do have a parallel relationship, however. The principles shared by Paul can, to some degree, be applied to

the employer/employee relationship in the work place. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Paul began by telling bondservants to do what was already expected of them—to obey their masters. Once again, Paul addressed the motivation beyond simple obedience. Note that he used the phrase “deep respect and fear” (Ephesians 6:5, NLT). **This is the same phrase Paul used to instruct all Christians to have with regard to working out their salvation (Philippians 2:12). He also added to the phrase the qualification of having a sincere heart. Paul was clear that bondservants were to show respect to their masters; the Christian faith was not to be used as an excuse to not be faithful in service.** This concept is difficult for us to grasp in the modern world, where slavery has been abolished in most places. It can be helpful to keep in view that the Christian mindset and worldview of submission and deference is at the heart of this command. **We who work for employers can apply this principle.**

In writing these words, Paul indicated that some slaves were not giving full effort when working for their masters. Since some slaves did receive some money, Paul indicated that **Christian slaves must look at work differently—from a Christian perspective.** As Christians, any degree of selfishness must be replaced by selflessness. **When Christians work, they must work from the perspective that they are working directly for God.**

Paul explained that selfless work rendered as unto God will be rewarded by God (verses 6–8). Rewards are not reserved for the masters. No matter a person’s status, if individuals do their work with a view of God as their ultimate employer, they will see personal spiritual benefit.

Resource Packet Item 3: Slaves in the Roman Empire

Distribute the information sheet and review the highlights. Encourage students to understand the life of a slave and how Paul addressed the issues of Christianity and slavery in his context.

Discuss

? While we surely don’t face the challenges a first-century slave would face, what are some examples of why we might be tempted to be disrespectful or halfhearted in our work? How can Ephesians 6 help us regain a right perspective?

? How would your work habits change if you truly believed you were working directly for Christ?

A Christian Employer

Ephesians 6:9

[Eph 6:9 KJV] 9 And, ye masters, do the same things unto them, forbearing threatening: knowing that your Master also is in heaven; neither is there respect of persons with him.

Say: As with previously mentioned relationships, Paul challenged the powerful in a relationship to adjust both their perspective and their behavior. It is important for Christian bosses to treat employees with the love and respect they would want for themselves. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Ephesians 6:9 indicated that Paul addressed Christian masters who were threatening their servants to get them to work harder. Paul explained that this was inappropriate behavior for a Christian. Paul challenged the masters to demonstrate their love for God through the way they treated those who served them.

Paul based his teaching on the fact that even though on earth the master is considered to be superior to the servant, God views all of His followers alike. God is the Master of all who are a part of His kingdom. He expects the same attitude whether the person is the boss or the worker. Paul, then, leaned on the reality that in God's eyes there is no preference or class divisions (see also Galatians 3:28–29).

Discuss

? How would you like those in authority to treat you?

? How do you treat those over whom you have authority?

What Is God Saying to Us?

Say: A relationship with Jesus Christ should positively impact our relationships with one another. Our love for Him is seen in our love for the people that He created. As Christians, we should view people the way God views them and treat them the way we would want to be treated. There are no “haves and have-nots” in the kingdom of God. We are called to submit to one another as we submit to God. We must recognize the roles that the Holy Spirit assigns to others and be willing to submit to them as if they were Jesus himself. Those holding roles that traditionally have been seen as superior must treat with love and respect those in roles traditionally seen as subservient.

Living It Out

Ministry in Action

- Evaluate your relationship with your immediate family to ensure that you are treating them with honor and respect.
- Examine your attitude and performance in your job to be sure you are applying the principles of this lesson.

- Ask the Holy Spirit to help you make any needed adjustments in any of your relationships.

Daily Bible Readings

Monday:

God Establishes Marriage.
Genesis 2:18–25

[Gen 2:18-25 KJV] 18 And the LORD God said, [It is] not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him. 19 And out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air; and brought [them] unto Adam to see what he would call them: and whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that [was] the name thereof. 20 And Adam gave names to all cattle, and to the fowl of the air, and to every beast of the field; but for Adam there was not found an help meet for him. 21 And the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept: and he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof; 22 And the rib, which the LORD God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man. 23 And Adam said, This [is] now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man. 24 Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh. 25 And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed.

Tuesday:

Children Should Obey Their Parents.
Proverbs 1:10–19

[Pro 1:10-19 KJV] 10 My son, if sinners entice thee, consent thou not. 11 If they say, Come with us, let us lay wait for blood, let us lurk privily for the innocent without cause: 12 Let us swallow them up alive as the grave; and whole, as those that go down into the pit: 13 We shall find all precious substance, we shall fill our houses with spoil: 14 Cast in thy lot among us; let us all have one purse: 15 My son, walk not thou in the way with them; refrain thy foot from their path: 16 For their feet run to evil, and make haste to shed blood. 17 Surely in vain the net is spread in the sight of any bird. 18 And they lay wait for their [own] blood; they lurk privily for their [own] lives. 19 So [are] the ways of every one that is greedy of gain; [which] taketh away the life of the owners thereof.

Wednesday:

Disciplined Children Bring Honor.
Proverbs 29:15–18

[Pro 29:15-18 KJV] 15 The rod and reproof give wisdom: but a child left [to himself] bringeth his mother to shame. 16 When the wicked are multiplied, transgression increaseth: but the righteous shall see their fall. 17 Correct thy son,

and he shall give thee rest; yea, he shall give delight unto thy soul. 18 Where [there is] no vision, the people perish: but he that keepeth the law, happy [is] he.

Thursday:

Jesus Submits to the Father.
Matthew 26:36–44

[Mat 26:36-44 KJV] 36 Then cometh Jesus with them unto a place called Gethsemane, and saith unto the disciples, Sit ye here, while I go and pray yonder. 37 And he took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be sorrowful and very heavy. 38 Then saith he unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death: tarry ye here, and watch with me. 39 And he went a little further, and fell on his face, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou [wilt]. 40 And he cometh unto the disciples, and findeth them asleep, and saith unto Peter, What, could ye not watch with me one hour? 41 Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed [is] willing, but the flesh [is] weak. 42 He went away again the second time, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if this cup may not pass away from me, except I drink it, thy will be done. 43 And he came and found them asleep again: for their eyes were heavy. 44 And he left them, and went away again, and prayed the third time, saying the same words.

Friday:

Honor Others Above Yourself.
Philippians 2:1–8

[Phi 2:1-8 KJV] 1 If [there be] therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels and mercies, 2 Fulfil ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, [being] of one accord, of one mind. 3 [Let] nothing [be done] through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. 4 Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others. 5 Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: 6 Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: 7 But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: 8 And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.

Saturday:

Submission Within a Household.
Colossians 3:18–21

[Col 3:18-21 KJV] 18 Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as it is fit in the Lord. 19 Husbands, love [your] wives, and be not bitter against them. 20 Children, obey [your] parents in all things: for this is well pleasing unto the Lord. 21 Fathers, provoke not your children [to anger], lest they be discouraged.

