

The Chapel

Who Do You Think You Are? • You Are Led • Ephesians 5:21-6:9 • August 5, 2018

Main Point

The Holy Spirit helps us to submit humbly and serve one another in a way that honors Jesus.

Introduction

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

- **As a child, what was the biggest thing you ever did to disrespect or disobey your parents?**
- **How big of an issue is lack of respect today between parents and children? What about between supervisors and employees?**
- **Why might it be difficult for us to honor Jesus as a child honors a parent, or serve Him as a servant serves a master?**

Based on our past, our family upbringing, life circumstances, or even bad bosses at work, it can be difficult to serve and honor Christ the way He calls us to. Exhibiting the same attitude of submission that He showed isn't easy. As spouses, children, parents, workers, and supervisors, Christians are to show respect for Christ as well as for others. The Holy Spirit helps us humbly submit and serve one another in a way that honors Jesus.

Understanding

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

God established the family as a representation of His relationship with His followers; He is our Father and we are His children (1 John 3:2). Whether or not we are married or have children, God's design for the family teaches us about how we are to relate to one another.

Have a volunteer read Ephesians 5:22-33.

- **How would you define submission? Why does the word tend to stir up controversy?**
- **What does true submission look like? What does it not look like?**
- **How does the church submit to Christ? Wives, how might this help you submit to your husbands?**

Submission doesn't imply losing your sense of worth or self. It is a voluntary and loving choice to follow in a way that displays how Christians follow Jesus. Christians don't submit because someone forces them to do so; they submit voluntarily. A wife isn't forced to think of herself as her husband's property. She should see herself as his partner and receive from him sacrificial love.

- **Read Ephesians 5:25 again, along with 1 John 3:16. What do we learn about submission from Jesus' example in these verses?**

- **How does a relationship centered on sacrificial love and submission reflect the gospel? How can you and your spouse keep these ideas as a common part of your marriage?**
- **What value does a passage like this have for you if you aren't married?**

Though Ephesians 5 is often quoted to remind women of their struggle of submission, it is the husband who actually receives the greater challenge from God. She must submit. He must love with the love of Jesus. It is clear, though, that each action serves the other. The wife, in submitting, encourages her husband to Christ-likeness and the husband, in loving like Jesus, makes it easier for the wife to submit. Mutual love and respect offers the best chance for a successful home. Paul then transitioned to the relationship between children and parents.

| Have a volunteer read Ephesians 6:1-4.

- **How can children of all ages and family situations give their parents the respect God commands?**
- **Read John 15:9-10. What do we learn about submitting to our parents from Jesus' example? What are specific situations that might make submitting to your parents more challenging?**
- **When is it appropriate for parents to submit to their kids?**

No Christian ever grows beyond the responsibility to show respect for his or her parents by honoring them. If children are to honor their parents, then parents have a reciprocal responsibility to be submissive to their needs in ways that will lead them to maturity. Growing up in a Christian home is to be a positive, encouraging experience for both parents and children.

| Have a final volunteer read Ephesians 6:5-9.

- **Why do you think Paul emphasized the importance of an employee's attitude so much? What makes it especially challenging to practice biblical submission in the workplace?**
- **Read John 13:12-17. What do we learn about submission in the workplace through Jesus' example?**
- **How would your workplace be different if people willingly submitted to their bosses and coworkers?**

These verses in their first setting were a call to Christian slaves to obey their earthly masters, to always do good work, and to serve as if they were doing it for Christ. As Christian employees, we show respect for those who employ us by getting along with them, by doing good work all the time, and by keeping in mind our relationship with Christ.

Application

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

- **In which of these relationships—with God, your spouse, your parents, your children, or in the workplace—do you find it the most challenging to submit? Why? What step can you take to practice biblical submission in that area of your life this week?**
- **In your own words, how would you explain God’s plan for relationships?**
- **What happens in relationships that lack love and respect? What is something you can do this week to show love and respect to someone in your family or your workplace?**

Pray

Ask that God would help you live out Jesus’ example of submission in each of these relationships in your life. Thank Him for Jesus’ example of submission at the cross.

Commentary

Ephesians 5:21–6:9

Paul laid out the implications for Christian living in his letter to the Ephesian church. Chapter 5 focuses in on Christian living in the world. As Paul wrote about how God expects His people to behave, he came to consider family relationships.

5:21 Paul ends a list of actions that show the Holy Spirit’s presence in a believer’s life by commanding submission to one another. In today’s society, the idea may seem odd. Yet in Christian fellowship we must be willing to learn from others, even from those who differ from us in age, gender, or station in life. We are also called on to serve one another and be willing to accept counsel and correction from others. An aggressive, arrogant attitude is the opposite of being careful in the way we live.

5:22 Paul then transitioned to marriage. In the ancient world, women were often oppressed by men. Women also had few legal rights and were considered unworthy of education. Husbands often treated their wives as fit only for keeping house and raising children. Paul gave Christian wives great dignity by speaking to them as moral agents capable of good decisions. On the basis of their personal relationship with Jesus, wives were to submit to their husbands. He viewed this as an act of service to Christ.

5:23-24 Paul noted a parallel between the role that Christ has as Head of the church and husband has as head of the wife. The essential characteristic of Jesus’ headship is not so much dominating as it is delivering. Christ’s headship over the church is that of care more than control. Paul implied that wives who see their husbands exhibiting sacrificial care will be more willing to submit to their leadership.

5:25-28 Husbands in the first century were used to the culturally acceptable pattern of demeaning their wives. Therefore, Paul had to take a firm hand in instructing the men of Ephesus. Most of them probably had never seen the example of a home in which the husband truly loved his wife sacrificially. This fact may explain why Paul went to Christ’s love for the church as the example of love that husbands are to follow. The best love-pattern to follow is Christ, who gave Himself in sacrificial death for His beloved. These verses apply not only to husbands, but also to their friends and families. They are to support and honor a husband’s love for his wife and do nothing to challenge, diminish, or otherwise interfere in his relationship with her.

5:29-31 As Paul finalized his instructions to husbands and wives, he emphasized that the expression of unity in a marriage goes far beyond sex. It includes every area of a couple’s life and relationship. A couple’s unity is based on recognizing that previous family ties are to

be reprioritized after marriage. Husbands and wives are intentionally to leave their parents. Their primary human loyalty is to each other.

5:32-33 It was no mystery that husband and wife join together as one flesh. That teaching went back to Genesis. The mystery was that the redeemed and the Lord Jesus are joined together in one body, which a godly marriage reflects. Thus on the one hand, Christian husbands (and wives) look to Jesus' sacrificial self-giving as the supreme example of love. On the other hand, a godly, "one-flesh" marriage visibly models the one-flesh relationship between Christ (the Bridegroom-Head) and His people (the bride-body).

6:1 Instructions for children follows Paul's instructions for marriage. Homes are the building blocks for every society. Children growing up in a Christian home need to learn to be obedient to their parents, just like all other kids need to learn this. The verb "obey" is stronger than the verb "submit," which Paul had used to speak of the response of a wife to her husband's love (5:22). Although the apostle no doubt thought of a child's obedience as absolute, he laid a foundation for obedience in the phrase "this is right." It's simply the right thing for the survival of humanity for children to learn to do as they are told.

6:2-3 Not only is children's obedience proper, it is stated in the Ten Commandments to be God's law. The Fifth Commandment uses the verb "honor" (Ex. 20:12) in regard to parents. "Honor" includes respect and admiration, which all children are to continue giving to their parents as long as they live—long after they have moved out from their parents' home and have become independent.

6:4 If children are to honor their parents, then parents have a reciprocal responsibility. In effect, parents are to be submissive to the needs of their children. Though addressed specifically to fathers, this verse has application for all parents, both mothers and fathers. The verb "stir up anger" can also be translated "exasperate" or "provoke to anger." It refers to discipline so harsh that it evokes bitterness and resentment. It may even encourage disobedience. No parents ever have a "right" to taunt or be unreasonable with children. Growing up in a Christian home is to be a positive, encouraging experience for both parents and children.

6:5-9 The New Testament, as well as the Old Testament, includes guidelines for slaves and slavery. These guidelines do not condone slavery, but provided ethical guidance for times and places where slavery existed. Paul's claim that slaves and masters are equal before God would have shocked his contemporaries. Where the Roman law unfairly discriminated between master and slave, heavenly law does not. Paul's words in this context provided groundwork for a new sense of brotherhood between races, and were later used to help inspire the anti-slavery movement.