

-Relationships

Ephesians 5:21-6:4

DT- Do your relationships reflect Christ?

This week our text in Ephesians is all about relationships. The relationship between a husband and a wife, and the relationship between parents and their children. Paul also speaks about the relationship between masters and slaves. I want to approach that text in a later sermon series when we will discuss difficult subjects in scripture like slavery.

God has a lot to say through Paul's inspired writing today so let's pray and get right into it.

PRAY

Do your relationships reflect Christ? Do your relationships reflect the relationship that Christ has with the church? Those kinds of questions seem to be what Paul is really trying to drive home in this text. Yes this text is about relationships and we will talk about how we should operate in these 2 specific ones, but what he really wants to know, what Paul really wants them to understand is that all your relationships should be a reflection of who Christ is. When people look at your relationships do they see Christ? Do they see the love that Christ had and still has for the church?

Every relationship you have should be a reflection of the relationship Christ has with the church. I'm not talking to just you men this morning, although we are going to have a few discussions just between us today, this text is for everyone. It is for anyone who has a relationship with another follower of Christ. We are going to focus on 2 specific relationships but before we get started let's lay out some ground rules.

First I want to say that this is my best interpretation of what I believe Paul's intended meaning was in this text. You may have a different view or simply heard a different view. I'm more than happy to discuss this text with you anytime. Secondly, we must stop taking our cues for how relationships should operate from the world around us. Unless someone is speaking biblical truth a 15 to 30 second clip on Instagram or TikTok should not be your source for biblical marriage advice, parenting advice, or job related issues. Lastly, we have to be careful not to bend the text to make it fit what we want, or what our presuppositions are.

Remember that the goal in these relationships should be a reflection of Christ. Let's start where Paul starts; the relationship between husband and wife.

1. Husband & Wife.

We must remember that these letters originally had no chapter or verse divisions. Paul approaches this topic of marriage from a larger topic about what the Spirit filled life looks like. The Spirit filled marriage looks like this; Ephesians 5:21-33, "And further, submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. For wives, this means submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For a husband is the head of his wife as Christ is the head of the church. He is the Savior of his body, the church. As the church submits to Christ, so you wives should submit to your husbands in everything. For husbands, this means love your wives, just as Christ loved the church. He gave up his life for her to make her holy and clean, washed by the cleansing of God's word. He did this to present her to himself as a glorious church without a spot or wrinkle or any other blemish. Instead, she will be holy and without fault. In the same way, husbands ought to love their wives as they love their own bodies. For a man who loves his wife actually shows love for himself. No one hates his own body but feeds and cares for it, just as Christ cares for the church. And we are members of his body. As the Scriptures say, "A man leaves his father and mother and is joined to his wife, and the two are united into one." This is a great mystery, but it is an illustration of the way Christ and the church are one. So again I say, each man must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband."

You may notice in some versions of your bible that verse 21 is separated by a heading, making it seem as though it does not belong with verse 22. I understand why they do that. This submission to one another has to do with what Paul was previously talking about. However, as Paul moves on to this next thought dealing with marriage, he borrows the word submission at the beginning of the text. The word submit in verse 22 is not there in the original Greek. Paul borrows the word submission from verse 21 to make his point in verse 22 and following. The Greek word for submission is there later in the text in connection with how the wife should operate inside the marriage, but verse 22 literally says, wives to your husbands, because he is the head of the family just like Christ is head of the church.

That doesn't change what the context of this verse is saying. There is still some kind of submission from wife to husband, just as there is an incredible call upon husbands to love their wives like Christ loved the church. I wanted to be sure and explain that so that you understand why verse 21 is sometimes before the heading in your bible and sometimes after the heading in your bible. Let me give you a few observations from this text about the relationship between husband and wife. First, husbands and wives have unique rolls to play within a marriage.

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The husband should be the head of the house, but his headship is exercised or implemented with love. Specifically, Paul says a love that reflects the love that Christ has for his church. A husband's duty is not to enforce his wife's submission, his duty is to love her. That call or duty to love is repeated 3 times in this passage. The only way that the headship of the husband is tolerable is if he loves his wife with a Christlike kind of love.

Obviously Paul is trying to make a connection between how Christ's loved the church and how a husband should love his wife. Christ gave up his life for what would be. The church didn't exist when he died. The church would be built from the triumph of his resurrection. His voluntary sacrifice sets the pattern for husbands to follow. John Westcott once wrote, "Christ loved the church not because it was perfectly lovable, but in order to make it such."

A great question to ask yourself if you are a husband would be this; does the way I love my wife cause her to look more like Christ? Do you lead in such a way that your wife is an improved follower of Christ in part because of your leadership and love for her?

The husband has a unique roll to play within a marriage but so does the wife. A wife should submit to her husband. But what does that look like? The submission is limited because your husband is not God. Like our submission to the government, once it crosses a line that God would not approve of we no longer submit. For instance, the apostles said this to the authorities in Acts 4:19-20, "Do you think God wants us to obey you rather than him? We cannot stop telling about everything we have seen and heard."

There is a limit to the submission because God is ultimately the one we submit to. It's also important to mention that the word obey is used for children and slaves in the upcoming passages but not for wives. Christian wives are submissive to their husbands as one aspect of their obedience to Christ, not their obedience to the husband's authority. When the husband's greatest desire is for the growth and joy of his wife, and when the wife's greatest desire is to support the leadership of her husband, a very harmonious and successful marriage will be the result.

Paul establishes these unique rolls at the beginning of the passage and then reiterates them again towards the end with the same call for a husband to love his wife, but a different call for the wife. Instead of submission he uses the word respect. God's plan and strategy for marriage with these unique rolls works so well to sustain and support a marriage. Kenny Boles in his commentary on Ephesians 5 says this, "The more a wife submits to the man she respects and admires, the more he will love her. The more a husband loves his wife and sacrifices himself for her well-being, the more she will respect him and submit to his headship."

Understanding these unique rolls is crucial for the health and longevity of your marriage, but there's something else in this passage that is just as important. My second observation is that marriage exists for something bigger than itself.

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Your marriage, my marriage should be a sign of God's love for his people. When people look at your marriage they should catch a glimpse of the love Christ had for his church. Does your marriage relationship reflect Christ?

Paul goes into great detail to make sure we are aware of this. Christ was the savior of his body the church. Just like the church submits to Christ, wives submit to your husbands. Husbands love their wives like Christ loved the church. Christ gave up his life for her to make her holy and clean. He did it to present the church without a spot or blemish. Paul tells the husbands they need to love their wives like they love their own bodies. Eventually saying that everyone cares for their body, just like Christ cares for the church.

He ends his thought of marriage existing for something bigger, marriage existing to be a sign of God's love, marriage being a reflection of Christ's love when he says this in Ephesians 5:32, "This is a great mystery, but it is an illustration of the way Christ and the church are one."

Sometimes marriage is a mystery. It's mystery how 2 people can put up with each other for so long in such closer proximity. But it's less of a mystery when you start to realize that your marriage is an illustration of the way Christ and the church are one. What kind of illustration is your marriage painting? Marriage is bigger than just the two of you because marriage is not just the two of you. God should be at the center of your marriage because he created it. Paul quotes Genesis 2 where God first institutes the covenant of marriage.

There is a hidden purpose within the institution of the marriage relationship. God ordained marriage and this relationship is a preview of the fellowship that will one day be shared between Christ and his church. This is why the church is sometimes referred to as the bride of Christ. No doubt this passage should be applied to husbands and wives, but the primary application seems to be about the relationship between Christ and his church. For those of us who are married, our relationship with our spouse must reflect Christ. From the husband and wife relationship Paul moves on to the children and parents relationship.

2. Children & Parents.

There's no gradual transition here, Paul just moves directly into his discussion about the relationship between parents and children. Someone once wrote that, "If our faith in Christ is real, it will usually prove itself at home, in our relationships with those who know us best."

In other words, your kids know the real you. This relationship too should be a reflection of Christ. Paul says this in Ephesians 6:1-4, "Children, obey your parents because you belong to the Lord, for this is the right thing to do. "Honor your father and mother." This is the first commandment with a promise: If you honor your father and mother, "things will go well for you, and you will have a long life on the earth." Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger by the way you treat them. Rather, bring them up with the discipline and instruction that comes from the Lord."

Again, I want to make a few observations about this passage. First, Paul sees children as responsible moral people.

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Because they are responsible and capable to be moral people Paul calls children to do two specific things. Children are called to obey and honor their parents. The Greek word for children here means a young child. God requires young children to obey their parents because they need to rely on the wisdom of their parents. Even Jesus submitted to his earthly parents in Luke 2:51 it says, "Then he returned to Nazareth with them and was obedient to them. And his mother stored all these things in her heart."

The reason Jesus obeyed is the same reason children should obey today, they belong to the Lord. When a child obeys the authority of their parents it carries over into their obedience and recognition of God's authority. Within the family structure those relationships should be based on respect, obedience, submission, and love for one another.

Because children are responsible moral people Paul says not only should they obey their parents, but they must honor them as well. Obedience and honor are two different things. To obey means that you will do what someone says, but to honor means that you will love and respect them in the midst that obedience. Children obey their parents while they live under their roof, but they honor their parents their whole life.

What your parents did for you when you were young, you may do for them when they begin to age. That's what it looks like to honor them. 1 Timothy 5:3-4 talks about this where it says, "Take care of any widow who has no one else to care for her. But if she has children or grandchildren, their first responsibility is to show godliness at home and repay their parents by taking care of them. This is something that pleases God."

To honor your parents means that you may at some point repay them by watching over them and taking care of their needs just like they took care of yours. 1 Timothy 5:8 also says, "But those who won't care for their relatives, especially those in their own household, have denied the true faith. Such people are worse than unbelievers."

If you choose not to honor your parents by caring for them as they age, you are denying the faith. Certainly you would be denying this text here in Ephesians. Within this discussion on the relationship between children and parents Paul calls out the father yet again. In Ephesians 6:4 Paul says, "Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger by the way you treat them. Rather, bring them up with the discipline and instruction that comes from the Lord."

Paul addresses fathers, by which he probably means parents, but by which he absolutely means fathers. Paul has a Greek word for parents. He used it in verse 1. This is not the same word, which means we fathers need to pay special attention to this. Men, you set the tone for your household when it comes to matters of obedience, honor, respect, and love. I don't believe that Paul is excluding mothers from this command to not provoke your children, but he knows that the relationship a father has with his children are different from the relationship a mother has with the same children.

Mothers tend to have a natural instinct to care for their children. Because that child came from her womb the mother just has almost a natural pull to care for the child that isn't always there with the father in the same way. Perhaps he says fathers right here so that dads won't look at childrearing as the job of the mother alone. I think he is telling fathers to take an active roll in the raising of your children. We got enough issues with absentee fathers and passive fathers out in the culture, let's not bring that into the church.

Study after study shows that the best chance for a child to grow up and have a healthy relationship with God and the church happens when the father of that child is emotionally available for his children, and takes an active role in their spiritual development as well as his own. That is the recipe for children who will follow Jesus their whole lives. That leads me to my second observation within this relationship between children and parents, and that is that fathers and mothers use their authority in the home toward Christ center ends.

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What this means first is that children are not in charge. They are not the boss, and you shouldn't even joke about them being the boss. Although you have authority, that authority should be used in a specific way. Proverbs 22:6 says, "Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it."

It's the parent's job to raise the children in the training and instruction of the Lord. Even this relationship between children and parents should reflect Christ. I wonder if we sometimes care more about our child's education, our child's social status, or their athletic prowess, than we do about their spiritual health and depth. Do we spend more time and money on making sure they can kick a ball, catch a ball, shoot a ball, or hit a ball, then we do on whether they look like Christ?

Listen, it's good to focus on your child's education. It's fine to encourage them and help them train for the sport they enjoy, but those things should never supersede your training and instruction to further them along in their spiritual walk with God. If parents have an apathetic view of church, or an apathetic view of discipleship, then they shouldn't be surprised when their children want nothing to do with either. You are the authority in the home. Specifically, Paul calls out the Father to be the leader of the home, but that leadership must be used towards a Christ center end. Do your relationships within the home reflect Christ?

My Father-in-laws favorite verse was 3 John verse 4, "I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth."

He died knowing that every single one of his biological children, along with many of the children he shepherded while at Cookson Hills, are at a church every single Sunday. Not only do they attend a church but they are engaged in the life of that church, and contribute to that church with their time, talent, and treasure. Fathers, when it comes to our God given position in the home to lead and guide our children, that verse should be our calling every day. Our greatest joy when we come to the end of our lives should be to hear that our children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren are walking in the truth.

For that to happen our relationship within a marriage and our relationships with our children must be a reflection of Christ. A reflection of the gospel. When they see you, they should see Jesus. The love and respect you have for your spouse, and the desire and effort you put in to raising your children in the Lord should look like the love Christ has for the church, and the desire he has to see it grow. Do your relationships reflect Christ?