



**Adult Sunday School Lesson Summary for May 24, 2009
Released on Wednesday, May 20, 2009**

"New Life in the Home"

Devotional Reading: 1 Corinthians 1:4–17.

Background Scripture: Ephesians 5:1–6:4.

Lesson Text: Ephesians 5:21–6:4.

Ephesians 5:21–33

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.

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.

Ephesians 6:1–4

1 Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right.

2 Honor 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.

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

LESSON AIMS

After participating in this lesson, each student will be able to:

1. List Paul's commands for wives, husbands, children, and parents.
2. Evaluate his or her family relationships in light of Paul's commands.
3. State one change to make to align his or her family with God's Word.

INTRODUCTION

Serious Problem

"I hate divorce." Do you ever hear anyone say that? Children of divorced parents may say it with their actions, if not literally with their words. People who have been divorced may say it with their misery. So do their friends and loved ones who watch the misery unfold. Ministers and counselors who help couples are certainly no fans of divorce. God himself hates divorce (see Malachi 2:16, where it is called "putting away").

As painful as divorce is, many families who stay together don't do much better at modeling God's love for one another as the Scriptures command. As a result, children may reject their parents' values after experiencing such dysfunction. For the sake of our children and the future of the church, we need to make sure our family relationships conform to Scripture rather than to cultural norms.

Note: Some in your class may be single and/or childless, either voluntarily or involuntarily. Be sensitive to these as you teach today's lesson. However, don't shy away from the topics at hand because of oversensitivity.

Lesson Background

Paul knew the families of the Ephesian church well. After all, he had spent about three years among them (Acts 20:31). It was the Ephesian elders who had given him such an emotional farewell as he set sail for Jerusalem (Acts 20:13–38).

That farewell was about five years in the past when Paul wrote to his beloved Ephesians. The families of that church were under pressure (compare Revelation 2:1–7). Parents had to bring up their children in the shadow of the great pagan temple to Artemis. Much of the economy of the city revolved around that edifice (Acts 19:23–41). The temptation of "to get along, you have to go along" is not new to the twenty-first century.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN WIVES AND HUSBANDS—Ephesians 5:21-33

1. How will the Spirit's control be evident in human relationships (Ephesians 5:21)?

Our lesson text isn't really the opening line of Ephesians 5:22 and following. Rather, verse 21 sums up some of Paul's thoughts leading to Ephesians 5:20.

In verse 18 Paul urged his readers to be filled with the Spirit, yielding to His control as completely as a drunkard succumbs to the control of the wine in him. He then began to enumerate the results of the Spirit's control: praise (v. 19), thanksgiving (v. 20), and now mutual submission in human relationships (v. 21).

Submitting ourselves to one another implies humility. Paul expressed the same thought elsewhere as preferring one another in honor (Rom. 12:10) and esteeming others as better than ourselves (Phil. 2:3).

This can only be done "in the fear of God" (Eph. 5:21). Submission to the Lord is necessary for us to cultivate submission to one another. Our relationship with Him always influences our relationships with others.

2. What does Paul command Christian wives to do in relation to their husbands (vs. 22-24)?

The meaning of this verse has been hotly debated. That word *submit* strikes a raw nerve in many. Genesis 3:16 reminds us that Paul is not coming up with something new. And 1 Peter 3:1 is similar. The reason for the instruction we see here is the subject of the next verse.

Why should *the wife* submit? Because "*the husband is the head of the wife*" (v. 23). The word *head* is often symbolic in the Bible for authority (examples: 2 Samuel

22:44; Ephesians 1:22). Even today we talk about someone being "head cheerleader" or "heading up a project."

Some say this is degrading to women. Yet are we demeaned if we submit to other authorities such as the police, church elders, or the boss at work?

We would never question whether *the church* should follow the leadership of Jesus *Christ* (Eph. 5:24). In the same way, the phrase "as unto the Lord"(v. 22) means the wife is to submit in the same spirit that she would submit to Christ. This would be a spirit of love and humility, not chafing at the prospect of being coerced.

We should remember two points: first, Paul was addressing believers, who are to be noted for their love and humility, and second, he had an equally demanding requirement for husbands. This combination guards against abuse.

3. With what kind of love is a husband to love his wife (v. 25)?

The husband is not to become a tyrant. Paul commanded, "Husbands, love your wives." The word for "love" indicates a devotion that results in actions that benefit the other person. It does not depend on how attractive his wife is or what mood he happens to be in on a given day. Even if she should fall short of her duty, his devotion to her must continue. This love includes sacrificial actions.

So that there would be no question of the devotion this love entails, Paul compared it to the love Christ demonstrated for the church in giving Himself for us (v. 25b). So constant and sacrificial was Jesus' love for His spiritual body that He went to the cross for it. This is the model for the Christian husband. He should be prepared to make any sacrifice for his wife, even laying down his life. This standard thus protects the well-being of the Christian wife.

4. What has Christ done for the church? What further goal for it does He have (vs. 26, 27)?

Christ's example goes beyond His sacrifice to save His church from hell. He purposes to make the church into something clean, holy, glorious, and without blemish for Himself. "Sanctify" speaks of setting it apart for Himself. "Cleanse" gives the means by which He has made it fit for Him. This cleansing was done "with the washing of water by the word."

Some commentators have tried to connect this washing imagery with water baptism, but it need not mean this. God's Word itself is considered a cleansing agent (cf. John 15:3; 17:17). Paul was most likely referring to the Spirit's cleansing as He applies the spoken Word to the lives of His people.

But Christ has an even greater goal in mind—claiming the church as His spot-less bride at His coming (Eph. 5:27). It will then be "glorious" because every "spot" and "wrinkle" will be erased. All imperfections that now hinder God's people from glorifying Him will be gone. They will be "holy and without blemish" (cf. 1:4).

5. Why should husbands care for their wives as they do for themselves (vs. 28-30)?

Paul carried forward the thought of Christ wanting the absolute best for His bride. After all, it is His body, inseparably joined with Himself. To glorify the church is to glorify Him. "So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies," lavishing the same care and concern on them that they would on themselves. Whoever loves his wife is merely demonstrating his love for himself, for they have become "one flesh" (v. 31). They are "heirs together of the grace of life" (1 Pet. 3:7). In God's plan, each is incomplete without the other.

Paul argued further that it is unnatural to hate one's own flesh (Eph. 5:29). When we are commanded to love our neighbor as ourselves (Matt. 22:39), it is assumed

that we naturally love ourselves. This is also Paul's assumption here. We nourish and cherish our own bodies, so husbands should extend this same care to their wives, who are one with them.

Even in advising husbands, Paul continued to think of Christ's care of the church. All that it needs for spiritual life and growth is provided in abundance (cf. Eph. 4:7-16). Christ does so because "we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones" (5:30). While many Greek manuscripts do not include "of his flesh, and of his bones," these phrases do reinforce the unity between Christ and His own. They recall Adam's delighted comment when he first saw Eve (Gen. 2:23).

6. What are some ways a husband and wife can continue to see one another as attractive as the years take their toll?

Although physical appearance may attract our attention initially, the decision to marry will (or should) depend on a variety of factors. Finding someone with a strong commitment to the Lord, someone whose personality is compatible with ours, and who shares similar interests will be important factors in choosing a life mate. These enduring qualities will allow husband and wife to continue to find one another fascinating.

Physical beauty, like flowers, fades with time. A marriage that is based solely on the physical element won't last more than about two years. Time needs to be spent learning about the inner person that your spouse is and coming to appreciate his or her God-created uniqueness.

7. What is God's pattern for marriage in every generation (vs. 31, 32)?

Paul now quotes Genesis 2:24, the decree that established the marriage bond. "For this cause" (Eph. 5:31) gives the reason for the bond: Eve was taken from Adam and thus became an extension of him. Thus, God's pattern for marriage ever after was that a man shall leave his parents' home and be joined to his wife in a new home. The two of them then be-come one flesh and as such propagate the human race. Husband and wife thus belong to each other and should treat one another according to this truth.

In speaking of this great creation principle, Paul added, "This is a great mystery" (Eph. 5:32). By this he meant that Genesis 2:24 contains more divine truth than appears on the surface. Male and female becoming "one flesh" in marriage is itself something that transcends understanding. But Paul seems to say that God had even deeper truth in mind to be illustrated by marriage.

For his part, however, Paul was con-tent to reveal just one aspect of that truth: "I speak concerning Christ and the church" (Eph. 5:32). God had given Paul special insight concerning the church as the body of Christ (cf. 3:3-13), and the marriage relationship is an apt illustration of this truth.

8. Why does Paul repeat himself in verse 33?

Paul's now summarizes his exhortations. To husbands he says, "Nevertheless let every one of you in particular so love his wife even as himself." If we think Paul's emphasis is a bit redundant at this point, let us remember that ancient pagans and even Jews usually regarded wives as inferior. This is an exhortation men today need constantly as well.

Paul's admonition to wives is that she should reverence, or respect, her husband. She should not fear him as a tyrant, but respect him as a leader.

Perhaps you have admired the skill of a couple performing a waltz in a motion picture. The man leads confidently and lovingly; the woman follows gracefully and beautifully. Jesus Christ wants to take our marriages and turn them into a beautiful

dance that illustrates His love for His bride. When Christian husbands and wives love each other, the world says, "Look at that beautiful couple!" And God gets the glory.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PARENTS AND CHILDREN—Ephesians 6:1-4

9. Why are children to obey and honor their parents (Ephesians 6:1-3)?

As relations between couples are to be controlled by the Spirit, so also are those between parents and children. Paul stated children's duty two ways, adding a reason for each. "Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right." There is only one qualifying phrase in this command—"in the Lord."

Paul was addressing Christian families, where parents and children both are living in the bonds of salvation. This command is certainly most difficult for the child whose *parents* do not know God or who are not exhibiting the fruit of the Spirit. So many excuses seem legitimate: my father is a jerk; my mother's demands are unrealistic; he's not even a Christian; she drinks; he's a hypocrite; she's not even my real mom; they don't care about me.

Even so, children are to obey their parents. Only one reason for this command is given: it is the right thing to do. Since God established the family with this order of authority, it is *inherently* right.

The duty of children is restated in the next verse: "Honour thy father and mother" (Eph. 6:2). This principle from the Old Testament law is broader than childhood obedience. It demands giving honor to one's parents at every stage of life, including care for them in the weakness of old age. This is "the first commandment with promise."

The promise is twofold: it will go *well* with you, and you will *live long on the earth*. Does it not go well with children when they obey their parents, and does it not go poorly with them when they disobey? Consider a teenager who comes to his parents requesting permission to go out with his friends that evening. If he has been sour, complaining, even outright disobedient throughout the day, he is less likely to be granted his request. If on the other hand he has been pleasant, obedient, and industrious, his parents are more likely to trust him with privileges.

The promise *thou mayest live long on the earth* should be seen in the original light as given to the nation of Israel. If the Israelites were a people who respected and obeyed their parents, then their days "in the land" would not be cut short. Ezekiel 22:7 reveals that a refusal to honor parents was one reason the people of Judah were exiled to Babylon, cutting short the nation's life. We reap what we sow (Galatians 6:7). Those who are rebellious and violent invite the same in return. Absalom is a good example (2 Samuel 15-18).

This is not a blanket guarantee of long life to every obedient child, for some die young. It is a general principle that the child who follows the sound teaching of godly parents lays a foundation of restraint, industry, sobriety, and godliness that will, apart from God's intervention, prolong his life.

10. How does Paul tell parents to bring up their children (v. 4)?

Fathers will give account before God for how they handled (or didn't handle) their parental duties. The father's responsibility is summed up with two commands, one negative and one positive.

The negative command is to *provoke not your children to wrath*. Have you ever seen a child embittered toward his or her father? This tragedy does not usually happen overnight. It happens when a series of emotional wounds go unattended, and the wounds fester until they become an infected pool of emotions. Consider some of the ways a father can embitter his children: belittling them; disciplining too strictly; setting unrealistic expectations; breaking promises; being uninvolved at home—the list goes on.

Paul moves on to the positive command: *bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord*. The word translated "bring them up" is translated "nourisheth" in Ephesians 5:29. Fathers are to nourish their children, but this is talking about spiritual rather than physical nourishment.

The two words translated *nurture* and *admonition* have to do with loving discipline and correction. Fathers are to be involved in their children's lives, with the goal that their children will be brought up under the discipline of God's Word. However, they are to do this lovingly, not harshly lest they embitter their children (compare Deuteronomy 6:7; Colossians 3:21).

PRACTICAL POINTS

1. By God's design, it is proper for family members to show submission (Eph. 5:21).
2. A wife can submit more easily to her husband when she recognizes his God-given authority and accountability (Eph. 5:22-24; 1 Pet. 3:7).
3. Loving one's wife as Christ loves the church calls for the greatest level of submission (Eph. 5:25-27).
4. Husbands gain their wives' respect by loving and caring for them as they do for themselves (vs. 28-33).
5. God honors those who properly honor and obey their parents (6:1-3).
6. Fathers, your words and actions can either help or harm your children, so choose wisely (v. 4).

CONCLUSION

Our culture today demonstrates how our families are falling apart because we have not followed God's plans for new life in the home. When we follow His Word, we can restore our homes with new life.

Imagine that the elders of your church came to you and said, "We are beginning a new discipleship program, and we believe you are the perfect candidate to lead a small group of people in this new program. We want you to prayerfully consider investing a significant portion of your time into three disciples we are going to assign to you."

Later, you tell your spouse what the elders have asked of you. "I have thought and prayed about this all day," you say. "I'm thinking that perhaps God is leading me to say yes to this opportunity. It will mean I will have to make some sacrifices. I will need to cut out some activities so that I can have time to spend with these three people. I'll have to get my own spiritual habits in order so that I can be an example. We'll have to let them come into our home so they can witness a godly marriage. It's a little frightening to think of this kind of responsibility, but I really think we can do it. Imagine what it would be like to really make a difference in the lives of these three individuals!"

Perhaps the elders have not come to you asking you to lead a discipleship group. But if you are a husband/wife and/or father/mother, Jesus Christ has commissioned you to "love your wife as Christ loved the church" or "respect your husband" and "bring your children up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord." You have your marching orders. Will you make the sacrifices necessary to succeed?

PRAYER

Father, thank You for creating the family. We pray for our marriages. Forgive us when we are a poor illustration to the world of Christ's love for the church. Empower us with Your Spirit that we will love one another with the sacrificial love that You

demonstrated when You were on this earth. Help us to live in such a way that our children will want to follow our Lord Jesus. In His name (Jesus) we pray. Amen.

THOUGHT TO REMEMBER

Illustrate Christ's love by loving one another.

ANTICIPATING THE NEXT LESSON

Our lesson next week will show how we can equip ourselves for the new life. Study **Ephesians 6:10-18 "Equipped for New Life."**

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