

## CHRISTIAN HOUSEHOLDS

Ephesians 5:22–6:9

Key Verse: 5:33

“However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.”

What’s most important to you? Is it your job? Your studies? Ministry? Your children? Your marriage? We all have various priorities. But they might not be the ones God wants us to have. It’s best to live by our Lord Jesus’ words, “...seek first the kingdom of God...” (Mt6:33). But he didn’t mean to ignore everything else God teaches us in Scripture. God never tells us to ignore our marriages or family life. In fact, Apostle Paul devotes this large part of the letter teaching about relationships at home. Why? It may seem unrelated to unity. But Paul wants us to see how our relationships at home are crucial to unity in our church. What kind of relationships at home does God want us to have? How can we have them? And why should we? May God open our hearts and speak to us personally through his word today.

In the first half of Ephesians Paul described God’s vision for us. God raised Christ from the dead and made him our head (1:22; cf. 4:15; 5:23). As our head, he’s our source of life and wisdom. Now, by God’s rich mercy and grace, each of us is made alive in Christ and is God’s “workmanship” (2:10). Our differences can cause hostilities between us, but through the cross of Christ we’re all created in him into “one new man” (2:15–16). It’s amazing! In him we’re all members of the household of God (2:19). “Together,” we’re a holy temple in the Lord, a dwelling place for God by the Spirit (2:21–22). We’re all “fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel” (3:6). In Christ, God’s “mystery” and “eternal purpose” for our unity were realized (3:6,11).

In the second half of Ephesians Paul urges us to live out this faith practically. He repeatedly uses the verb “walk” (4:1,17; 5:2,8,15; cf. 2:2,10). Specifically, we’re all called to walk like Jesus our Lord (4:1–2). In him, we’re

eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit he's given us (4:3–6). In him, we start “working properly,” using our gifts to build up his body among us. When we're “joined and held together” in him, we can grow together in maturity, all the way up to the fullness of Christ (4:11–16). To do that, we've got to put off our old self and put on our new self every day (4:24). We've got to be walking in love (5:2), walking in light (5:8) and walking in wisdom (5:15–17). We can walk this way when we're filled with the Spirit (5:18–21). Now in 5:22–6:9 Paul shows us how to walk in wisdom in one more important way. It involves our private life: our marriage, our family, and what we do at work.

Paul is saying that walking in wisdom means submitting to each other out of reverence for Christ (5:21). But why does walking in wisdom require submission? When we hear the word “submit,” we can cringe. But we need to submit because of who God is. In 4:6 Paul wrote: “...one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.” God is “over all.” This means God created everyone. It also means he's the God of order. To all of us, God should come first. Because God is “through all and in all,” we all submit to him as our God. Also, in his wisdom God created all things with a specific order. God created marriage and the family. God's created order in these things is his wisdom. If we're going to walk in wisdom, we all need to accept God's order. There's one more important point here. The Greek word for submitting (5:21,24) literally refers to soldiers lining up under a leader. It means being eager and willing to cooperate for the sake of unity.

Paul first addresses those who need to submit, then, those who are submitted to: wives, then husbands; children, then fathers; bond servants, then masters. Some think Paul is telling us to conform to a patriarchal culture, where some are superior and others inferior. But that's not true. Paul is simply saying to submit based on God's order. Even within the Trinity there's order and submission. The Son submits to the Father, but the Son is God, just as the Father is God. The Father loves the Son; the Son willingly submits to the Father (Jn3:35; 5:20a; 10:17–18). So Jesus says, “I and the Father are one” (Jn10:30).

Still, it's hard to submit. So Paul begins with those who have to do it. First is wives. Read 5:22. Why do wives tend to find it hard to submit to their husbands? It might be because of the sinful nature in us all. But there are other reasons. In practical household matters wives often know better than their

husbands. And spiritually, women, created in the image of God, are fully equal to men in their knowledge of God. They have every spiritual blessing in Christ. Because Jesus respected and valued women and included them in his inner circle, the early church embraced women. Many women found a safe haven there and flourished. These women could worship and serve God freely, and some, like Priscilla (Ac18:26), engaged in the ministry of God's word and co-worked with Paul. In spreading the gospel Paul also worked with Lydia (Ac16:14–15), Euodia and Syntyche (Php4:2–3a) and Phoebe (Ro16:1–2). In his letters Paul recognized the many women who worked hard in the Lord, serving the needy, taking care of the sick, doing many good deeds and praying fervently for the gospel to spread (e.g. Ro16). But after serving in such a community, these women had to go home and be with their husbands. What kind of relationship should they have with them?

Read 5:22 again. Paul isn't saying all women should submit to all men; he's teaching Christian wives to submit "to their own husbands." It implies that while serving many people, they shouldn't forget about their own husbands. Paul adds how wives should submit to their husbands; he says: "...as to the Lord." He means not reluctantly, or superficially, but willingly, wholeheartedly. Why do we submit to Christ? It's not just because of his authority; it's because we're so grateful for his grace. Because he died for us, we're eager to serve him, ready to do anything for him. This is the spirit with which Christian wives should submit to their husbands.

Paul explains further. Read verse 23. This is God's order in marriage. In his own wisdom God made husbands to be the head of their wives. This headship doesn't mean wives are inferior in any way. It simply means God created order in the marriage relationship. The husband should be the leader. To explain, Paul again turns our attention to Christ. Verse 23b says, "...even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior." What is Christ's headship like? He's the head of the church, his body. But it's not about his exercising authority over the church; it's about his giving of himself fully to be our Savior. As we'll see later in this passage, it's the same kind of headship Christian husbands need to learn. The point here is that women need to remember how God ordained husbands to be the head of the family, the leader, and what a great blessing this actually is.

Based on this headship, Paul draws a conclusion. Read verse 24. The church submits to Christ because of his grace. So also, wives should submit to their husbands because of God's grace. We all would like some boundaries on how much we have to submit. But here Paul adds the words "in everything." Of course, wives shouldn't follow their husbands into disobeying God. But in everything else, wives should lovingly let their husbands be the head and be submissive to him. This kind of submission "in everything" isn't possible with human strength or willpower. This is why wives need to be filled with the Spirit (5:18b).

Next, Paul addresses husbands. Comparing the number of words he uses to wives and husbands, Paul uses twice as many to husbands. It suggests that husbands need much more instruction on how to lead a Christian household. And what does Paul say to Christian husbands? Does he say, "Be the leader! Exercise your headship!" No. Read verse 25. Love. He says it again in verses 28 and 33. "Husbands, love your wives." Why is he repeating this again and again? Hmm. Maybe...it's because husbands are not so good at this.

What kind of love is Paul talking about? He says, "...as Christ loved the church..." This love is way more than romantic feeling or physical attraction. And this love is rooted in action. Honestly, it's a love that people don't often learn before getting married. Then, after the wedding, when reality sets in, things start to get ugly. We all want to be loved by our spouse. But Paul is teaching men here not to *expect* love, but to *give* love. The church didn't love Christ first; Christ loved us first. In the same way, husbands need to *initiate* loving their wives. This initiative isn't about making some superficial gestures. Paul adds, "...and gave himself up for her." He's describing Jesus on the cross. He totally sacrificed himself. He loved so much, he died. He did it willingly and wholeheartedly, holding nothing back. Not even a tiny bit of complaints.

Paul is telling husbands to love their wives with the greatest love ever known (Jn15:13). He's setting the bar really high. Even a little self-sacrifice can seem so hard for us. We think we can do it, but if we start trying, we find we just don't have it in us. It's kind of like trying to lift heavy weights. We need to build up to it gradually. This is why discipleship before marriage is so important. We men need to keep learning the self-denial required to really love like Christ. Loving like Christ means loving even when we're not loved in return, loving sinners who use and sometimes even abuse us, even loving our enemies. This is real ministry.

And this is why husbands, too, need to be “filled with the Spirit” (5:18b). The more practice we get in such Spirit-filled love before marriage, the more prepared we’ll be to be a good husband.

Read verses 26–27. Paul is describing Christ’s goals for his church. Christ wants his church to be sanctified, holy. He wants his church to be splendid and perfect. It’s not about outward appearance, but about our souls. Why is Paul describing all this to husbands? He wants us to learn to have Christ’s goals for our wives. He wants us to eagerly desire to see our wives grow in Christ and become spiritually so beautiful.

But how? It says, “with the word.” As Christ gave his word to his disciples so that they might be sanctified (Jn15:3; 17:17), husbands should find practical ways to help their wives receive God’s word. One way is for a husband to schedule time to take over family duties so that his wife can deeply study the Bible. It can be hard to make happen, but it can help wives, both stay-at-home moms and working moms, to be spiritually renewed and grow.

Read verses 28–29a. Paul gives husbands another illustration of how to love their wives. It’s like loving one’s own body. Men usually take pretty good care of their own bodies. At least they’re aware of when their body is sick, or hungry, or tired. It’s a simple example of how to help our wives. To love our wives, we need to be mindful of their needs each day, nourishing and cherishing. Fallen men use and drain their wives, but men in Christ nourish and cherish their wives. Paul again adds, “...just as Christ does the church...” (29b). Husbands should stop and reflect on this truth. When we experience how Christ nourishes and cherishes us, we in turn can learn how to nourish and cherish our wives. Paul says in verse 30, “...because we are members of his body.” What a beautiful truth this is! Christ considers us members of his own body. We husbands need to apply this faith to our wives and see them as members of Christ’s body.

In verse 31 Paul quotes from Genesis 2:24: “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” This is actually a man’s great act of love for his wife. Paul goes on to say, “This mystery is profound” (32a). He’s talking about the profound mystery of two people actually becoming one. But he immediately adds, “...and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church” (32b). What is Paul trying to say? He’s saying

that when Christian husbands really love their wives and really become one with them, they reveal the profound mystery of the union of Christ and his church.

Read verse 33. Paul is emphasizing how each Christian husband needs to truly love his own wife, and how each Christian wife needs to truly respect her own husband. The word “respect” here literally means “revere.” This is God’s wisdom for marriages, and it helps couples grow ever closer. As husbands love their wives, the wives respect them more. And as wives respect them more, husbands love them more. Both husbands and wives need to follow this wisdom.

In 6:1–4 Paul addresses children and fathers. Read 6:1. It’s clear. But Paul then reminds children of one of the Ten Commandments: “Honor your father and mother” and adds, “(this is the first commandment with a promise)” (2). Finally, he mentions the promise. Read verse 3. He’s speaking to believing children. They can exercise their faith in God’s promise by obeying their parents. Read verse 4. Christian fathers shouldn’t abuse their authority, but build their children up in Bible study and spiritual discipline. This builds unity in the home.

Finally, Paul addresses bondservants and masters, which today can mean employees and employers. Look at verses 5–8. It’s so easy to just perform “eye-service” or be “people-pleasers.” But God calls Christian workers to practice our faith in Christ at our workplace. We should serve “with fear and trembling, with a sincere heart, as you would Christ.” We should be “doing the will of God from the heart.” And we should be “rendering service with a good will as to the Lord and not to man.” Paul concludes in verse 8 with another promise: “...knowing that whatever good anyone does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether he is a bondservant or is free.” God does not show favoritism. God sees what we’re doing, especially our inner life and motivation. And God rewards. Faith in this God enables us to serve with such reverence, sincerity and good will. Look at verse 9. Paul is well aware of what masters or employers tend to do. They have a bad habit of intimidating their employees with threats, spoken or unspoken. Instead of doing that, Christian employers should also live before their Master in heaven, who cares for both employers and employees, with no partiality, as real shepherds.

Read 5:33 again. May God help us bring our faith in Christ into our marriages, families and workplaces. Especially in our marriages, may God help

us learn how to love and respect one another in Christ. In this way, may God help us walk in wisdom and reveal the profound mystery of Christ and his church.