



Walking as Family

Ephesians 5:22-6:4

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FIRST THOUGHTS

Like Jewish society, Greco-Roman political leaders understood the household to be the basic building block of the state. Their philosophers wrote heavily about the relationships of authority and subordination in the home. They believed that order in the home created an ordered society. The Roman Empire was a paternal society, with the rights of the man elevated far above that of the women, children, and slaves.

We know not to discuss politics or finances at a dinner party. In church settings we often want to avoid the topic of submission. Believers are to cultivate submission, not avoid it. We are to set aside ourselves for others so they can flourish and thrive. After Paul said Spirit-filled believers submit to one another ([Eph. 5:21](#)), In this week's lesson Paul describes how submission plays out in the family: Submission is how families walk together the way God intends.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

Wives

[Ephesians 5:22–24](#) (ESV)

²² Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. ²³ For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. ²⁴ Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands.

What's a Christian wife's motive for submitting to her husband?

Paul begins his instructions to the family by encouraging wives to submit to their husbands. This submission is not a blind submission but a submission of respect. Christ places the husband as the head of the family just as Christ is the head of the church. This submission does not mean that the wife is inferior to the husband. We are all created in the image of God and are equal before Christ. However, in the overall scheme of things, God has placed all of us in differing positions of authority and submission. The man may be in authority at home but submissive at work. The woman may be in submission at home and in authority at work. The point is all social order depends on people's willingness to work together and ability to determine who is the head of certain endeavors. God's intention is that the husband be the head of the relationship with his wife.

It is worth noting that Paul is not speaking of male-female roles in general but only of those in marital relationships. Within marriage wives are to place themselves under the headship of their own husbands and are to both respect them and follow their leadership within the family.

Paul encouraged wives to submit as to the Lord. He was not implying that the relationship of the wife to her husband is directly comparable to her relationship with her Lord, but rather it is a duty she assumes not for her husband alone but for her Lord. These parallels [Colossians 3:18](#), which says, "Wives, submit yourselves to your husbands as is fitting in the Lord." She submits because it is an act of service to her Lord.

Husbands

[Ephesians 5:25–33](#) (ESV)

²⁵ Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, ²⁶ that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, ²⁷ so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. ²⁸ In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. ²⁹ For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, ³⁰ because we are members of his body. ³¹ "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." ³² This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. ³³ However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.

How does Christ serve as the model for husbands?

Paul, after instructing wives to be subject to their husbands, he instructs husbands to love their wives so completely and so righteously that the wife need never fear or suffer from her life of submission. In Roman society, it was recognized that wives had obligations to their husbands, but not husbands to their wives. Christianity was revolutionary in that it submitted the characteristic of godly love into the home. Instead of using the words for love that meant sexual love or friendship love, Paul used the word that described the love of God for His children.

The purpose of Christ's death was to make the church holy. The word literally meant "to set apart," and the purpose of Jesus' death was to set apart a people for Himself. Jesus longed for His bride as a husband long for his wife, and Jesus sacrificed Himself to make that bride all that she should be in His eyes. Jesus set apart His bride by washing of water by the word. By the word of the gospel believers were transformed from their old way of life to the bride of Christ. Then they were baptized with water, demonstrating an inward transformation. By virtue of Christ's love, He cleansed and sanctified the believer to make them His own bride. Paul expected a sacrificial attitude of husbands toward their wives.

God said that when a man and woman were married, they became one flesh. The husband is to love his wife because the marriage relationship makes the wife a part of his own body. It is like the church is the body of Christ and Christ is the head of that body. On this basis the husband is the head of the wife. It is unnatural for a man to hate his own flesh, so the husband is to love his wife because she is his own flesh. The husband and wife are one flesh in every sense—spiritually, emotionally, relationally, and physically.

Children

[Ephesians 6:1–3](#) (ESV)

¹ *Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.* ² *"Honor your father and mother" (this is the first commandment with a promise),* ³ *"that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land."*

What responsibilities do Christian children of any age have toward their parents?

The one word that described a child's relationship with parents was the word obey. This obedience is not based on the parents' worthiness but on the children's relationship with the Lord. Obedience to the parents is right, meaning that it is a part of God's divine pattern for children. Paul reminds us that the fifth commandment was for children to obey their parents.

The children he addresses are old enough to make choices while still young enough to remain in the household. In the first-century Jewish world a boy was considered a man at the age of thirteen, at which time he was called *bar mitzvah* or "son of the commandment," *Teknon*, the Greek word translated "children," refers to anyone of any age living under his parent's roof. One could be nineteen, twenty-three, or thirty-two years of age and still fall under the category of *teknon*. Thus, as long as you choose to live with your parents you are to obey them.

We should remember Jesus submitted to His parents even though He knew more than they did. And because He submitted to them, we read that He grew in favor with God and man.

Parents

[Ephesians 6:4](#) (ESV)

⁴ *Fathers do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.*

Children are not to be "provoked to anger." This doesn't mean that they are to be treated as if they were a cross between an orchid and a piece of Dresden China. I think that the discipline should be applied whenever it is needed. However fathers are not to discipline to the point that the child becomes angry and frustrated and ultimately discouraged because they are unable to please their father.

Children have the responsibility to obey, and parents have the responsibility to teach obedience. Parents have the responsibility to discipline and instruct them in the ways of the Lord. They are not called to be the child's best friend but

the parent that helps the child to grow into a mature and godly adult. Parents must bring into submission their desire to always be liked by their children and say “no” at times.

APPLICATION

- A Christian home is where everyone submits to one another according to God’s order, and in so doing, presents a picture of the gospel.
- Accepting submission is yielding to the Lord and His Word.
- Believers can joyfully submit to Christ, knowing His authority over us is always according to God’s will and in our best interest.

Personal Challenge: Do you avoid submission or embrace it? How will you put the needs of family members above your own desires so you can help them flourish and thrive physically, spiritually, and emotionally?

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