

Group Study Outline

Ephesians 5:21-6:9 Theme Sentence

Maintain unity by submitting to some as we do to Christ & leading others as Christ does.

Launching Question

What does the world think about authority?
Why is it so hard to put others before ourselves?

READ Ephesians 5:21-6:9

How should wives relate to their husbands?
How should husbands relate to their wives? What goals should he have?
How should Christians relate to Christ? How does this help wives understand their role?
How does Christ relate to His church? How does this help husbands understand their role?

Thinking it through

Why is this so unpopular? How can we counteract this?
What specific ways can husbands lay down their lives for their wives?

Re-READ Ephesians 6:1-4

How should children and their parents relate?
Why should children obey their parents?

Thinking it through

Why do you think fathers are singled out?
Is it ever right to disobey your parents?
What specific ways do parents exasperate their kids? How can they change?

Re-READ Ephesians 6:5-9

How should workers act toward their bosses? Why? (6:5-8)
How should bosses act toward their workers? Why? (6:9)

Thinking It Through

What implications will this have tomorrow morning at work?

Wrapping it up

In what way is behaving as Paul describes here going to help "maintain the unity of the Spirit" (4:3)? After all, that's Ephesians' big application.
What is the main area in which you have been challenged and why?
What changes will you make?

Ephesians 5:21-6:9



The gist of it...

This section of Ephesians is infamous. You know, it's that controversial bit about domineering husbands and slavery. Or at least that's how it's often portrayed. We need to remember the big idea of Ephesians (and the whole of history come to think of it!) that God will unite everything under Christ to the praise of His glorious grace. He is doing that even now in the church as people come under Christ's lordship and unite with His people.

But what will this look like in our relationships? The key two verses to bear in mind for our section are 5:1 ("be imitators of God") and 5:21 ("submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ"). We've already seen that imitating God means forgiving, loving, etc. Here we see that certain people are to imitate God by leading & instructing others as God does. For that to work as it should, others need to joyfully acknowledge this authority, just as we should when it comes to God. Maintaining our blood-bought unity is key (4:3), and we see here that unity does not mean uniformity. Unity under Christ is acted out in the home & the workplace as some people take a headship role & others submit. These relationships display the gospel.

Already it's clear that this is a tricky passage. People might balk at it, but it is beautiful in practise. When we see a God worth imitating and a Christ worthy of submitting to, this whole thing becomes a joy. If really want to be a rebel nowadays, submit! It goes against everything our culture tells us we need. But who should we submit to? Who should we imitate? The world or God?

(NB)

Ephesians 5:21-6:9 Theme Sentence

Maintain unity by submitting to some as we do to Christ & leading others as Christ does.

Application

- For some the big application will be to submit to their husband, their parents, and their boss like the church submits to Christ.
- For others it will be to lead their wives, children and employees like Christ leads the church.
- This passage still applies to single, childless, unemployed people! It sets their expectations if their situation should change, and shows how to encourage their married, working, parent friends. Also tons to learn about how Jesus relates to His people!

Commentary

5:21 The previous section ends with a call to submit to one another. There is something about submitting to each other that honours Jesus. Submission is a very unpopular idea today, just as it was in Paul's day. The following verses are often misunderstood, misrepresented and misapplied. So we need to work extra hard to clear away the baggage to hear it afresh.

The first thing to say is that "submitting to one another" doesn't simply mean that everybody is always to submit everybody. Nothing would ever happen! We'd be like people constantly stuck in a doorway insisting, 'After you', 'No, after you!' After all, Paul is obviously *not* suggesting that parents submit to their children, or bosses submit to their workers, or Christ to the church! "Submitting to one another" means that the right people submit to the right people! So who should submit to who...?

5:22-24 Wives should submit to their husbands. We've spent a long time in Ephesians seeing how Jesus is head over the church. One application of this truth is that husbands should be the head over their wives and that wives should willingly respond to this leadership. Submission does not imply inequality, since Jesus submitted to the Father. v23 is not saying that husbands 'save' their wives, but hints towards how husbands should lead with their wives best interests at heart, like Jesus.

5:25-33 Many people claim that submission is dangerous & demeaning, but not if husbands acted as Paul outlines here! They are commanded to love their wives. They are not to be dictators or tyrants demanding submission to their every whim. What does loving someone look like? v25 says that loving looks like dying (see 5:2). Jesus wanted the best for the church, to present her to himself perfect (v27). To do that he gave up his life on the cross, so that she might be sanctified (or 'made holy'), cleaning her up with the gospel truth.

"In the same way" that's what husbands loving their wives should look like. Self-sacrifice for the ultimate good of their wives. Much is made of the demand placed on wives, but don't underestimate the call to husbands; if your wife is meant to submit to you like she does to Jesus, you'd better start acting more like Jesus!

The logic in v29 is that we naturally look after our own bodies. The church is Jesus' body & that's how He looks after us. Husbands should imitate Jesus & do the same for their wives; their problems & joys becoming his. This is much of what is meant back in Genesis 2:24 quoted here. In marriage, a new family unit is formed, two actually becoming one flesh. This is more than just sex, but certainly not less. See also that Paul does what Jesus does when asked about marriage (Matt 19:5) and takes us back to creation. Gender roles are not arbitrary or created by men. God made men & women to relate in this way perfectly before the Fall.

This is a "mystery", but actually when Paul talks about the "one flesh" connection between husbands & wives, he is talking about "Christ and the church." Ephesians is all about our unity with Christ & with one another; the two are intrinsically linked. The "mystery" here is that God didn't look around for a good illustration of what marriage is like & come up with the relationship between Jesus & Christians. God wanted a dramatic visual aid to describe His

relationship to His people, so He invented sex & marriage *for this reason!* Now that *is* profound.

6:1-3 The next group of people Paul addresses are children & parents. Kids are to obey their parents. This is primarily aimed at children as they are being brought up, not once they are adults (see v4 referring to 'bringing them up'.) Honouring parents, however, is a command for Christians of all ages, Paul citing the fifth commandment. There is an incentive given here; a long life! There are tragic exceptions to this, but generally speaking we live long & happy lives when authority structures in the family are observed. The phrase "in the Lord" shows that children are not to obey their parents if their parents tell them to sin. As with wives too, ultimate submission is to God.

6:4 Again, much is made of the potential dangers of children simply obeying what their parents say. But, as with husbands, parents are not to be tyrants. They are to be careful not to provoke their children to anger, or "exasperate" them as the NIV colourfully puts it. Don't be unnecessarily harsh with them.

Note that the father is the one addressed as the representative of both parents. Just as the husband is to be the head of his wife (v23) the same applies to his role over the children. And there is an aim for parenting. Kids are to be brought up "in the discipline and instruction of the Lord." Parents are to imitate God in that their instruction should be God's instruction. It is parents, not youth workers or Sunday School teachers who bear this responsibility. What should we want for our kids? The greatest desire should be that they submit to Jesus as Lord.

6:5-8 Next Paul deals with slaves & masters. This might seem irrelevant to us in 21st century England. When we think of slaves, we think of the despicable African chattel slave trade. But slavery here is analogous to modern day employment, which accounts for the majority of most people's waking lives! Paul assumes that both slave & master are Christians. Although being a Christ-like worker for an unbeliever won't express Christian unity, you can't disrespect them! (Refer to 1 Peter 2:13-3:7 for when these relationships are hard.)

Workers should obey their bosses (you guessed it) just like they obey Christ. In Philippians 2:12 "fear and trembling" is how we should put our salvation into practise. It's about a "sincere" respect for our boss, as they have a God-given authority over us. v6 says the test is how we behave when we know our bosses can't see us! You are serving God not people (v7) so look for your reward from Him.

6:9 As with husbands & parents, masters or employers are not to be tyrants. They mustn't threaten but "do the same" as the Lord who rewards good work in v8. The reason is that bosses & workers have the same Master, the Lord Jesus, and He shows no favouritism between you. The dividing walls are gone (2:14)! God is a boss & earthly bosses should imitate God in this way.

In each case, Paul highlights the thing which each group would most struggle with, be that submitting or loving or obeying or instructing or working hard or rewarding good. When we relate to each other in the right way, our relationships reflect something of Jesus & bring honour to Him. The plan for the end of time is unity under Christ to the praise of His glorious grace. So let's get with the programme & display godly unity for the sake of Jesus!