

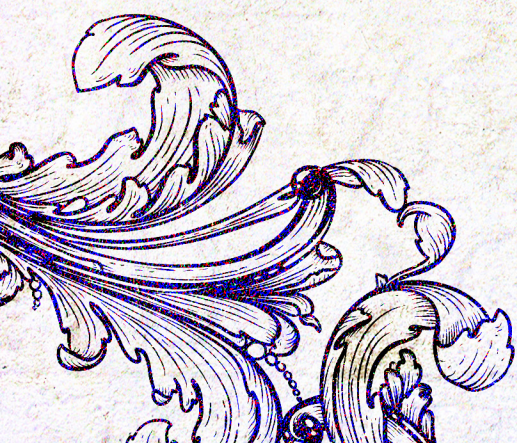


A COLORFUL MYSTERY

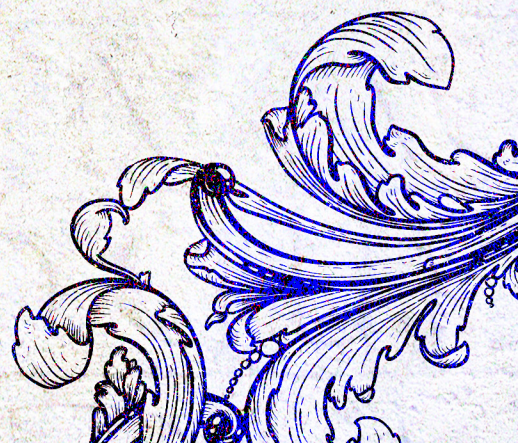
CHURCH

.....
A STUDY IN EPHESIANS
.....

a field guide



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FAMILY MATTERS



DRAWING NEAR

Before You Read

There are certain passages of Scripture that have historically been twisted to approve and reinforce systematic oppression of specific people groups. As a believer in 2019 it can be tempting to “check out” when reading this passage of Ephesians that addresses relationships because it may seem irrelevant, outdated, or even evoke unpleasant emotions and memories of faulty teachings we’ve heard. If we ignore this passage or if we approach the passage expecting to hear what we have always heard, we might miss what God has actually been trying to say all along. Ask God to give you fresh eyes and a renewed mind as you dive into His word this week.

Rank the following descriptions 1–10 (with 1 being the most reliable indicator of a person who is pleasing to God and 10 being the least reliable indicator of spiritual maturity):

- Has one-hour daily quiet time**
- Serves on church missions committee and goes on annual short term mission trips**
- Teaches a popular Sunday school class on biblical theology**
- Loves God and loves others**
- Graduated from seminary with highest honors**
- Regularly pays tithes and offerings**
- Seldom misses a church function**
- Has a strong marriage and lots of healthy relationships**
- Has a heart for worship and can go 3-4 hours easily in the presence of God**
- Feeds the homeless every week**

What is the mark of true spiritual maturity? In other words, what kind of external behaviors and human activities are most pleasing to God?

Q THE CONTEXT

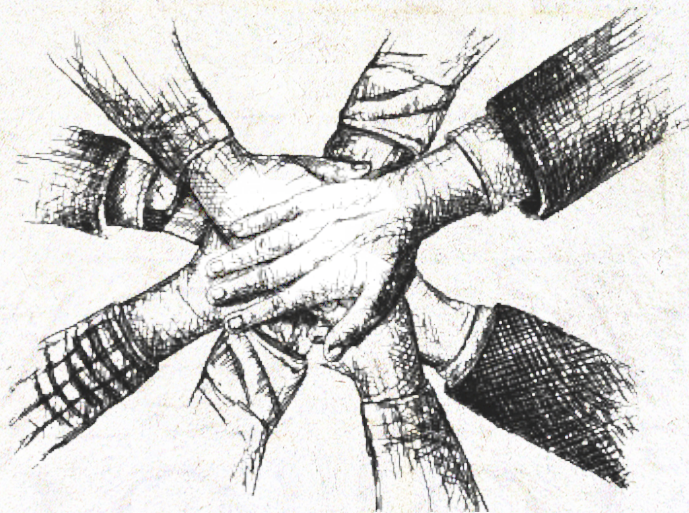
Paul's letter to the Ephesians began with three chapters of critical New Testament theology, emphasizing the believer's wealth in Christ. But Christianity is not a collection of abstract doctrines, an ivory tower religion of the mind. Paul contends in chapters 4–6 that true spirituality always reveals itself in the rough and tumble of everyday life.

Jesus simplified God's law to two commands to love—to love God and to love others (Matthew 22:25–29). This is the true measure of our faith. How fully do we love God? Is He uppermost in our affections? Not only that, but how well do we care for our spouses, children, and neighbors? How well do we get along with our co-workers? If our faith doesn't show itself vividly in our interactions with other people, the onlooking world has every right to question the validity of our confession (John 13:34–35). With the imperative to love in mind, chapters 5 and 6 address how we should act in our various relationships.

KEYS TO THE TEXT

To voluntarily surrender one's rights, not out of subservience of servility but out of willingness to function under the other's leadership. Paul introduces his teaching about specific relationships of authority and submission among Christians by declaring unequivocally that every Spirit-filled Christian needs to be a humble, submissive Christian. This is foundational to

all the relationships in this section. No believer is inherently superior to any other believer. In their standing before God, they are equal in every way (Gal 3:28). Proper submission is a key theme of Spirit-filled living. Paul calls all believers to submit to their parents (Eph 6:1-3). Believers must submit to government laws and ordinances (Rom 13:1, 1 Pet 2:13). Younger men should submit to older men (1 Pet 5:5). God requires every believer to be submissive in the ways He has ordained. In the matter of submission, our primary concern should not be about whom we should be over but whom we should be under. Humility will prevent the submitting person from becoming burdened, and the person submitted to from becoming overbearing.



UNLEASHING THE TEXT

Read 5:1–16, noting the key words and definitions to the right of the passage.

Ephesians 5:17-33¹

Walk In Love

17 Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. **18** And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, **19** addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, **20** giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, **21** submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.

Wives and Husbands

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. **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

Key Terms

EPHESIANS 5

DO NOT GET DRUNK WITH WINE (V. 18) —a reference to the drunken orgies commonly associated with pagan worship ceremonies in Ephesus

DEBAUCHERY (V. 18) —excess; that is, a dissolute, debauched, profligate way of living

BE FILLED WITH THE SPIRIT (V. 18) —to be under the influence of God's Spirit; to be dominated and controlled by the presence of Christ through His Word

PSALMS (V. 19) —Old Testament psalms put to music

HYMNS (V. 19) —Songs of praise, different from Old Testament psalms in that these likely praised the Lord Jesus Christ by name.

SPIRITUAL SONGS (V. 19) — probably songs of testimony

GIVING THANKS ALWAYS (V. 20) — Showing appreciation for who God is and gratitude for what He has done should mark the children of God.

SUBMITTING (V. 21) — humbling oneself before others—a characteristic of Spirit-filled believers.

SUBMIT (V. 22) — To voluntarily surrender one's rights, not out of subservience or servility but out of willingness to function under the other's leadership.

HEAD (V. 23) — This word speaks of God-ordained authority and leadership.

LOVE YOUR WIVES, AS CHRIST LOVED THE CHURCH (V. 25) —unreserved, selfless, sacrificial, unconditional love

¹ESV Gospel Transformation Study Bible: Christ in All of Scripture, Grace for All of Life: English Standard Version. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013.

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.

Ephesians 6:1-6:9¹

Children and Parents

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

Slaves and Masters

5 Slaves, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, with a sincere heart, as you would Christ, **6** not by the way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but as servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, **7** rendering service with a good will as to the Lord and not to man, **8** knowing that whatever good anyone does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether he is a slave or free. **9** Masters, do the same to them, and stop your threatening, knowing that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and that there is no partiality with him.

SANCTIFY ... CLEANSED ... HOLY ... WITHOUT BLEMISH (VV. 26–27) — The husband has a divine obligation to help lead his wife in purity to conformity with the image of Christ.

NOURISHES AND CHERISHES (V. 29) — warm and tender affection, attentiveness, and care for needs

HOLD FAST TO HIS WIFE (V. 31) — literally to be glued or cemented together

EPHESIANS 6

OBEY (V. 1) — literally “to hear under”; that is, to listen with attentiveness and with the intent to respond positively to what has been said

HONOR (VV. 2) —to value highly, hold in the highest regard

DO NOT PROVOKE YOUR CHILDREN TO ANGER (V. 4) — Do not rule with domineering and authoritarian practices that crush the spirit of a child and cause him or her to lose heart.

FEAR AND TREMBLING (V. 5) —not actual fright but deep respect for authority

EYESERVICE, AS PEOPLE-PLEASERS (V. 6) —conscientious labor performed only in the boss’ sight, but laziness when his back is turned

STOP YOUR THREATENING (V. 9) — to loosen up, not throw one’s weight around in an abusive or inconsiderate manner

¹ESV Gospel Transformation Study Bible: Christ in All of Scripture, Grace for All of Life: English Standard Version. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013.

1] Is it possible to live a Spirit-filled existence apart from the Word of God (1:23). How do you know?

To be filled with the Spirit involves confession of sin, surrender of will, intellect, body, time, talent, possessions, and desires. It requires the death of selfishness and the slaying of self-will. When we die to self, the Lord fills us with His Holy Spirit. ... "The filling of the Spirit is not an esoteric, mystical experience bestowed on the spiritual elite through some secret formula or other such means. It is simply taking the Word of Christ (Scripture) and letting it indwell and infuse every part of our being. To be filled with God's Spirit is to be filled with His Word. And as we are filled with God's Word, it controls our thinking and action, and we thereby come more and more under the Spirit's control.

2] What statements in 5:22–24 spark controversy? How does a careful reading of this entire section (vv. 22–31) reveal God's heart for our relationships?

3] Why is the marriage bond sacred?

4] What is the God-given role of a Christian husband? What about the Christian wife?



GOING DEEPER

Paul expounded often on what it means to walk in the light. Look for further insight as you read Galatians 5:16-26,

Colossians 3:18-25¹

Rules for Christian Households

18 Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. **19** Husbands, love your wives, and do not be harsh with them. **20** Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord. **21** Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged. **22** Slaves, obey in everything those who are your earthly masters, not by way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord. **23** Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, **24** knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ. **25** For the wrongdoer will be paid back for the wrong he has done, and there is no partiality.

EXPLORING THE MEANING

5] What do you think it means to submit according to the Scriptures? How has this theme been abused?

7] Is there a biblical pattern for parenting? What are some of the primary ways parents tend to provoke and discourage their children when their leadership is not Christ-centered?

TRUTH FOR TODAY

Sometimes we are annoyed that Paul did not attack slavery more directly. But we should not forget that these few sentences were not meant to address the institution of slavery itself. Pastors do not counsel someone struggling in their marriage by discussing weddings or marriage-related laws in society. We do not counsel someone struggling with drugs by discussing the legality of drugs, the international sources of drugs, and so forth; we try to help the person deal with their drug problem. Larger structural issues matter, but they are not the immediate subject of our counseling. In the same way, Paul's letters to real congregations addressed slaves in the situation they were in. These letters do not reveal Paul's views on the larger question of slavery. Ephesians may, however, imply his views.¹

Paul not only believes here that slavery is against nature; he calls for Christian ethics that ultimately subvert it. After Paul calls slaves to submit to slaveholders, he calls on slaveholders to "do the same things to them" (Eph 6:9). This is how he expects Christian mutual submission (Eph 5:21) between slaves and slaveholders. One wonder what such instructions would ultimately do to slavery, if anyone paid attention to them. Who would invest money to buy a fellow master? Latching on to principles in Paul and other biblical writers, Christian abolitionists, both black and white, later in history forcefully demanded the end of slavery. Some devoted entire manuals to biblical arguments against slavery.²

The Bible is clear, there are no classifications of Christians. Every believer in Jesus Christ has exactly the same salvation, the same standing before God, the same divine nature and resources, and the same divine promises and inheritance (Acts 10:34; Romans 2:11; James 1:1–9). But in matters of role and function God has made distinctions. Although there are no differences in intrinsic worth or basic spiritual privilege and rights among His people, the Lord has given rulers in government certain authority over the people they rule, to church leaders He has given authority over the church, to husbands He has delegated authority over their wives, to parents He has given authority over their children, and to employers He has given authority over employees.³

REFLECTING ON THE TEXT

8] Growing within our culture is a widespread rebellion against and distrust of authority. How do you think we as the church should respond to this? How are you personally grappling with this?

¹Keener, Craig. "Slaves and Slaveholders-Ephesians 6:5-9." Bible Background, October 17, 2013. <http://www.craigkeener.com/slaves-and-slaveholders-ephesians-65-9/>.

²Ibid.

³MacArthur, John. Ephesians: Our Immeasurable Blessings in Christ. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2007.

9] How can authority be a wise and good thing? How can authority be harmful and abusive?

10] Given what you've studied about God's intention for husbands, wives, children, and parents, what encourages you? What challenges you?

NO LONGER A SLAVE¹

The historic and contemporary reality of slavery is never far away from how we think about the Bible. Instead of a frontal attack on the culturally pervasive institution of slavery in his day, Paul took another approach, for example, in his letter to Philemon.

Onesimus was a slave. His master Philemon was a Christian. Onesimus had evidently run away from Colossae (Colossians 4:9) to Rome where Paul, in prison, had led him to faith in Jesus. Now he was sending Onesimus back to Philemon. This letter tells Philemon how to receive Onesimus.

In the process, Paul does at least 11 things that work together to undermine slavery.

1 Paul draws attention to Philemon's love for all the saints. "I hear of your love and of the faith that you have toward the Lord Jesus and for all the saints" (1:5). This puts Philemon's relationship with Onesimus (now one of the saints) under the banner of love, not just commerce.

2 Paul models for Philemon the superiority of appeals over commands when it comes to relationships governed by love. "Accordingly, though I am bold enough in Christ to command you to do what is required, yet for love's sake I prefer to appeal to you" (1:8-9). This points Philemon to the new dynamics that will hold sway between him and Onesimus. Acting out of freedom from a heart of love is the goal in the relationship.

3 Paul heightens the sense of Onesimus being in the family of God by calling him his child. "I appeal to you for my child, Onesimus, whose father I became in my imprisonment" (1:10). Remember, Philemon, however you deal with him, you are dealing with my child.

4 Paul raises the stakes again by saying that Onesimus has become entwined around his own deep affections. "I am sending him back to you, sending my very heart" (1:12). The word for "heart" is "bowels." This means, "I am deeply bound emotionally to this man." Treat him that way.

¹Piper, John. "How Paul Worked to Overcome Slavery." Desiring God, November 26, 2019. <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/how-paul-worked-to-overcome-slavery>.

5 Paul again emphasizes that he wants to avoid force or coercion in his relationship with Philemon. "I would have been glad to keep him with me...but I preferred to do nothing without your consent in order that your goodness might not be by compulsion but of your own accord" (1:13-14). This is pointing Philemon how to deal with Onesimus so that he too will act "of his own accord."

6 Paul raises the intensity of the relationship again with the word forever. "For this perhaps is why he was parted from you for a while, that you might have him back forever" (1:15). In other words, Onesimus is not coming back into any ordinary, secular relationship. It is forever.

7 Paul says that Philemon's relationship can no longer be the usual master-slave relationship. "[You have him back] no longer as a slave but more than a slave, as a beloved brother" (1:16). Whether he lets Onesimus go back free to serve Paul, or keeps him in his service, things cannot remain as they were. "No longer as a slave" does not lose its force when Paul adds, "more than a slave."

8 In that same verse (1:16), Paul refers to Onesimus as Philemon's beloved brother. This is the relationship that takes the place of slave. "No longer as a slave...but as a beloved brother." Onesimus now gets the "holy kiss" (1 Thessalonians 5:26) from Philemon and eats at his side at the Lord's Table.

9 Paul makes clear that Onesimus is with Philemon in the Lord. "[He is] a beloved brother...in the Lord" (1:16). Onesimus's identity is now the same as Philemon's. He is "in the Lord."

10 Paul tells Philemon to receive Onesimus the way he would receive Paul. "So if you consider me your partner, receive him as you would receive me" (1:17). This is perhaps as strong as anything he has said: Philemon, how would you see me, treat me, relate to me, receive me? Treat your former slave and new brother that way.

11 Paul says to Philemon that he will cover all Onesimus's debts. "If he has wronged you at all, or owes you anything, charge that to my account" (1:18). Philemon would no doubt be shamed by this, if he had any thoughts of demanding repayment from his new brother, because Paul is in prison! He lives off the gifts of others. Philemon is the one who is to prepare a guest room for Paul! (1:22).

The upshot of all this is that, without explicitly prohibiting slavery, Paul has pointed the church away from slavery because it is an institution which is incompatible with the way the gospel works in people's lives. Whether the slavery is economic, racial, sexual, mild, or brutal, Paul's way of dealing with Philemon works to undermine the institution across its various manifestations. To walk "in step with the truth of the gospel" (Galatians 2:14) is to walk away from slavery.¹

¹Piper, John. "How Paul Worked to Overcome Slavery." Desiring God, November 26, 2019. <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/how-paul-worked-to-overcome-slavery>.

