

**UNIT 5 EPHESIANS LESSON 9****"TO BUILD CHRISTIAN HOMES"****STUDY PASSAGE: Ephesians 5:21 - 6:9**

In the pre-industrialised society of the New Testament era, the household was a much more inclusive institution than it is today. So it was, that within the context of the home, lay all the basic relationships of life. This is no longer true, and so, although the application of this passage includes the relationships found in the home, its application is more general, reaching out to include members of a person's extended family, and his employer-employee relationships. It concerns the basic relationships of life.

A GENERAL STATEMENT - v21

This statement describes the character of the basic relationships of Christians. The key word "be subject" or "submit", is a present participle, indicating a continuous activity. This is to be an attitude of life for the Christian.

The word "subject" conveys the idea of being submissive to one another. But this is modified by the phrase "to one another", which indicates not a one-way submission, but a mutual submission. Phillips has the idea when he puts it as "fit in with each other". This command to the Christian is in direct contrast to the individualism of our western culture, which has as its ideal "success" and excelling over others. Paul says that we should live our lives with full consideration of each other, not living for self-fulfilment, but in a way that will bring about the fulfilment of each other. In the specific cases that follow, Paul tells us how to do this, and thus in all cases, he gives us statements of our duties within these relationships, not our rights.

We are to be subject to each other out of reverence for Christ. The great regulating factor in our human relationships is our relationship with Christ. You will notice that this is referred to, in some way or another in each specific case (see 5:22,25,30; 6:1,5-9). That this should be so is obvious when we consider that our relationship with Christ is one of obedience and is reconciling and healing in its quality.

In the first century, Jews considered wives as articles of property with few legal rights. In Greek and Roman societies, the kind of fidelity in marriage taught by the Bible was unknown. This passage in Ephesians called for nothing short of a revolution in the basic relationships of that society. A revolution that was largely brought to pass as the gospel conquered paganism.

The circumstances have changed, but the general call to be subject to one another is still a revolutionary call. Christians of this generation are to put it into effect within the Church and in their lives.

**THE MARRIAGE RELATIONSHIP - vs22, 23**

How to be subject to one another in marriage:

Verse 12 The duty of the wife = be subject to your husband as the church is subject to Christ.

Verse 25 The duty of the husband = love your wife as Christ loved the church.

In this passage the marriage relationship and the relationship between Christ and the church are used to mutually illustrate each other. The result is, on the one hand, a high view of marriage and on the other, a revelation of the intimate nature of the relationship of Christ and his church.

THE CHRISTIAN VIEW OF MARRIAGE

1. A true unity. The passage shows that husband and wife are to be considered as one unit, just as a human body is considered a unit though it has various parts.
2. A relationship of mutual need fulfilment. The goal of Christian marriage is not that each partner should find the fulfilment of his or her own needs, but fulfil the needs of the other. The basic need of the husband is to be a man and of the wife, to be a woman; and each of these will be met as husband and wife play the roles described by Paul. This in no way negates the teaching of the New Testament of the equality of the sexes, but rather spells it out. Equality does not exist in ignoring differences but in each partner submitting to the other according to the nature of the differences.

THE REVELATION OF THE RELATIONSHIP OF CHRIST AND THE CHURCH

1. The Unity of Christ and the Church
 - a) The unity as between the head and the body.
 - b) The unity as between a man and his wife. A unity that supersedes and surpasses all past relationships.
2. The Love of Christ for the Church
 - a) Love which gave itself.
 - b) Love which purifies.
 - c) Love which nourishes and cherishes.

**THE PARENT/CHILD RELATIONSHIP - 6:1-4**

How parent and child are to be subject to each other:

- The child's duty - obedience that honours the parent.
- The father's duty - must not provoke children to anger. This means that his rule of the child must not be tyrannical, but a rule that respects the child as a person.
- bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

THE MASTER/SERVANT RELATIONSHIP - 6:5-9

How employer and employee are to submit to each other:

- The servant's duty - to serve as genuinely as if he were serving the Lord.
- The master's duty - to respect the servant as a person.

As we read this passage and consider its meaning for our basic relationships, we cannot help being impressed that it fits in so well with what modern students of relationships are saying as they grapple with the sicknesses that beset our modern society. For example, Dr Paul Tournier says almost the same sort of things in his book, Escape From Loneliness. This can make us glad that modern scholarship vindicates the Bible, but it also ought to remind us that the answers to our problems of human relationships in the world today, do not have to be discovered, but only applied. It is up to us to make a start. "Submit yourselves to one another because of your reverence for Christ."

QUESTION 1:

The truth about Christ and the Church is applied to husbands in 5:25-27. In which ways did Christ love the Church? Now apply these ways to how a husband should love his wife.

QUESTION 2:

In 6:2, 3, Paul quotes from Deuteronomy 5:16 and Exodus 12:20, the Old Testament Law. Define what "respect" or "honour" means, as used here (i.e. put it in practical terms that spell out some action). What is the significance of this promise to us now?

QUESTION 3:

The advice to parents, 6:9, is both negative and positive. What does he say? How can these two commands be kept in balance? Refer also to Colossians 3:21.

QUESTION 4:

To whom did Paul direct his remarks in 6:5-8? To whom could they be applied today? How?



QUESTION 5:

The command in 6:9 is again both positive and negative. What is it? What statement does Paul then make which was revolutionary when he presented it? Why does it still have great impact?

QUESTION FOR GROUP STUDY:

In 5:21-33, Paul ends with a mutual admonition. What does this imply about the responsibility for keeping a Christian marriage in balance?