SESSION 12
WALKING AS FAMILY

EPHESIANS 5:22–6:4

5:22 Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord, because the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church. He is the Savior of the body.

5:23 Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives are to submit to their husbands in everything. 25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself for her to make her holy, cleansing her with the washing of water by the word.

5:26 He did this to present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or anything like that, but holy and blameless.

5:27 In the same way, husbands are to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself.

5:28 For no one ever hates his own flesh but provides and cares for it, just as Christ does for the church, since we are members of his body.

5:29 For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.

5:30 This mystery is profound, but I am talking about Christ and the church.

5:31 To sum up, each one of you is to love his wife as himself, and the wife is to respect her husband.

6:1 Children, obey your parents in the Lord, because this is right. Honor your father and mother, which is the first commandment with a promise, so that it may go well with you and that you may have a long life in the land.

6:2 Fathers, don't stir up anger in your children, but bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.

EXPLORING KEY WORDS

A Wives should “understand and support” (The Message) their husbands, both freely and devotedly following the godly leadership of their husbands.

B A wife’s submission to her husband is done as part of her relationship with Christ and never includes anything unbiblical.

C Paul paralleled the marital relationship with Christ and the church. Using this analogy, he said the husband serves “to take care of” (TLB) the wife, “not by domineering but by cherishing” (The Message).

D Everything that’s holy and righteous and doesn’t violate the Word—just as Christ wouldn’t ask that of the church.

E Husbands must love their wives completely, selflessly, and humbly. The model for this is Christ.

F The Christ and church analogy applies to wives as well as to husbands (Mark 10:44-45; 1 Cor. 11:3).

G Christ made us holy so that we can be united to Him in faith and receive His righteousness.

H As a husband and wife are “one flesh” (v. 31), a husband’s love for his wife involves caring for her on a deeply personal level.

I A quote from Genesis 2:24, Jesus reiterated it in the Gospels as well in Mark 10:7-8.

J “Do what your parents tell you” (The Message), echoing the fifth commandment

K “Esteem, value as precious” (AMP; Ex. 20:12)

L “Scolding and nagging your children, making them angry and resentful” (TLB)
TALKING POINTS

1. WIVES (Eph. 5:22-24)
   - Paul addressed all Christian wives, calling them to submit to their own husbands. He pointed to the local church submitting to the leadership of Christ as the standard.
   - Emphasize that the local church submits to Christ, knowing that His leadership is always in accordance with God’s will and in their best interest.

2. HUSBANDS (Eph. 5:25-33)
   - Paul addressed all Christian husbands, calling for them to love their own wives.
   - He pointed to Christ and His sacrifice on the cross as the standard for men.

3. CHILDREN (Eph. 6:1-3)
   - Paul addressed children, calling on them to honor their parents.
   - Paul reminded his readers of the Old Testament command, pointing out that God promises blessings on those who honor their parents.
   - Explore ways adult children can continue to honor their parents.

4. PARENTS (Eph. 6:4)
   - Paul addressed parents (fathers in particular), calling on them to demonstrate godly discipline and wisdom to their children.
   - Parents are to train their children in God’s ways.

SUMMARY STATEMENTS

Believers are to demonstrate God’s love in their family relationships.
- Godly wives submit to the leadership of their own husbands.
- Godly husbands sacrificially and unselfishly love their own wives.
- Godly children follow the direction provided by their parents.
- Godly parents lovingly provide direction and discipline to their children.
FOCUS ATTENTION
What topics does etiquette say to avoid in polite society?
• 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), he described how that plays out in the family: Submission is how families walk together the way God intends.

EXPLORE THE BIBLE
EPHESIANS 5:22-24
What are the limitations and scope of Paul’s command to Christian wives?
• Wives submit to their husbands, not to all men. God gives godly husbands headship over wives for their good, just as He gave Christ headship over the church for her good.
• While husbands and wives are equal in dignity and value, they have different God-ordained roles in marriage.
• Paul called for a voluntary, not coerced, submission in everything.
• A wife is never to disobey God’s standards to comply with a husband’s ungodly demands, which includes many things, especially abuse of any kind.
What’s a Christian wife’s motive for submitting to her husband?
• Submission isn’t based on a husband’s qualities. Christian wives honor and love Jesus by respectfully submitting to their husbands.
• A marriage will almost certainly be happier and healthier when a wife is her husband’s greatest cheerleader, respecting him and yielding herself to help him flourish and thrive.

EPHESIANS 5:25-33
How does Paul’s command to Christian husbands call for submission as well?
• Being completely counter-cultural, Paul didn’t emphasize a husband’s authority but his responsibility to love his wife.
• Since God placed the husband as head of the family, he is to submit to the needs of those under his authority, so he can protect and care for them.
How does Christ serve as the model for husbands?
• The way a believing husband treats his wife proclaims to the world how Christ treats His bride.
• When a husband sacrificially loves his wife like Christ, he helps her flourish and thrive spiritually, physically, and emotionally.
• God intends a husband and wife’s relationship to have priority over every human relationship, even to self.

EPHESIANS 6:1-3
What responsibilities do Christian children of any age have toward their parents?
• Believers obey and honor Jesus when they submissively obey and honor their parents.
• It’s right for young children to obey their parents. It’s how they’re protected and prepared to face life as responsible adults.
• Adult children owe their parents honor and respect, and they should help their aging parents flourish and thrive.
• Adults who were abandoned or neglected by their parents should look to honor their parents in a healthy way, perhaps through healing steps such as praying for them, forgiving them, or seeking to understand them.

EPHESIANS 6:4
How does disciplining children require submission?
• Children have the responsibility to obey, and parents have the responsibility to teach obedience.
• There’s no such thing as godly remote-control parenting. Parents must submit what they’d like to do—sit, sleep, shout—to actively engage in consistently training their children, so they can flourish and thrive.
• Christians are to parent gently. Don’t embarrass, abuse, over-indulge, or have unreasonable expectations of children.
• Parents must bring into submission their desire to always be liked by their children and say “no” at times.

SUMMARIZE & CHALLENGE
How can every believer—married or single—apply Paul’s commands?
• 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?
A DOORMAT

Place a doormat at the entrance of your meeting space so everyone walks on it when they enter. After everyone is seated, pick up the doormat and place it in front of you where everyone can see it. Ask: How does this doormat illustrate what people often think of when they hear the word submission? Why must we gain a more accurate view of biblical submission if we’re going to embrace and apply it, especially in our families?

Guide the group to list what submission isn’t (doesn’t mean being a doormat and allowing others to walk all over us; doesn’t imply inferiority; isn’t forced; doesn’t let people trample on biblical truth; doesn’t mean silence or passivity).

Open a door in your meeting space. Guide the group to explore how submission is better illustrated by an open door than a doormat. Submission voluntarily says, “After you,” putting others first. This creates an opening for families to walk into positive relationships with each other.

Ask: How can our submission to one another in our families fulfill our ultimate mission of glorifying God? When family members determine God’s mission is more important than personal desires, they put one another first. Wives respectfully submit to husbands, husbands unselfishly care for their families, and children obey their parents. That reflects God’s good nature and design.

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As you consider submitting to your spouse, children, and parents, think of it as opening a door and saying, “You go before me.”

THE PROMISE OF THE FIFTH COMMANDMENT

In Ephesians 5:22–6:4, Paul taught how the gospel should impact our relationships. One of the relationships he mentioned is between parents and children. To demonstrate how parents are to relate to their children, he used the fifth commandment, expressing it as the first commandment with a promise” (Eph. 6:2). What’s the significance of the fifth commandment, and how is it the first commandment with a promise?

In Exodus 20 we have the Ten Commandments—words from God given to His people to show them how they, as God’s chosen people, are expected to live. In the fifth commandment God says, “Honor your father and your mother so that you may have a long life in the land that the LORD your God is giving you” (v. 12). The fifth commandment is the first one that doesn’t deal directly with how we’re to relate to God. That honoring our parents comes next “follows logically because it is concerned with honoring parents, who have the awesome role in the family of representing God to their children.”

The task of honoring your parents is linked to children fulfilling their God-given obligations of respecting and caring for them as they age. This commandment “requires children to honor their parents in all sorts of ways large and small, there can be little doubt that its most basic insistence from the point of view of establishing a responsibility that might otherwise be shirked is to demand that children take care of their parents in their parents’ old age, when they are no longer able to work for themselves.”

God expects that children will take the responsibility of being there for their parents, just as their parents were there for them. If Israel would live out this commandment, God gives them a promise: “so that it may go well with you and that you may have a long life in the land” (v. 3). In other words, if they will fulfill their obligation to their parents, God will take care of them, making sure they’re cared for as well. At the same time, if they refuse to honor their parents, God doesn’t promise to provide for them or allow the people to stay in the land He has given them.

For the community of God’s people to have a fruitful life, they should strive for healthy family dynamics. Our situation is different, in that there isn’t land that geographically defines God’s people. Yet Paul said the commandment and the promise holds true. If God’s people neglect to care for and honor their families, they can’t expect it to “go well” (v. 3). Yet, if they honor their parents, God promises to honor that commitment of faithful children.