

EPHESIANS

GOD'S PLAN FOR GOD'S CHURCH REVEALED

SERMON TITLE: Gospel-Informed Relationships

DATE: December 5, 2021

SCRIPTURE: Ephesians 5:21-6:9

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The Book of Ephesians is a beautiful picture of the spiritual blessings we have in Christ and as members together in Jesus' Church. When he arrived, Jesus revealed what was once hidden from us throughout the ages through the power of the Holy Spirit. As a result, we're introduced to something new—a life in Christ where we find THE answer to the brokenness of this world. But what should this look like? How should we, in the power of the Holy Spirit, live this new life? Jesus' church is meant to be a source of wholeness and life amidst a world of brokenness and death. What does this entail? What does it mean practically? In this letter to the Ephesians, Paul explains the mystery of the church and gives us practical insight into living as believers who have been raised from death to life by faith in Christ.

We are continuing in our series through the book of *Ephesians: God's Plan for God's Church Revealed*. The God of the Universe is up to something big in this world—he's making spiritually dead people alive and he's bringing them together into his church—a unified community of people from different ages and stages in life, different ethnicities, different socio-economic backgrounds, and he is creating a new humanity out of them. And all these different people come together under the name of Jesus and they/WE are meant to partner with God in his life-changing, world-changing business by the way live with each other and love each other. ...We are in a section of the book where Paul is breaking all this down into easy-to-understand life-principles that helps us better understand what living with each other and loving each other looks like. And most important of all, Paul tells us in 5:18 that the new life God has called us to live is a life lived *under the influence of the Spirit*. He says, "*And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit*"—and then he begins to unpack what a Spirit-filled, Spirit-led, Spirit-influenced life looks like. First, he talks about—Spirit-filled worship (5:19-20), then he talks about Spirit-influenced relationships (5:21-6:9), and he concludes with Spirit-empowered warfare (6:10-20) often called "*spiritual warfare*." Today, we're going to *continue* to look at *Spirit-influenced relationships*. And by the way, Jim did a fantastic job unpacking what a Christ-shaped marriage looks like last week. ...Now, 99X out of 100 when preachers teach through the book of Ephesians and when they come to this section, they'll typically do a *sermon on marriage*, a *sermon on parenting*, and a *sermon on work*, which is exactly what I did when I taught through Ephesians back in 2004. And I'm not saying that's wrong, but I've come to see that Paul has ONE BIG IDEA in mind as he applies *Spirit-filled living* to wives and husbands, children and parents, slaves and masters—he's *making one point*—he's not going into detail about each one of these pairs, but there is a reason he centers in on these three relationship pairs. The question is: *What is that one point? What does he want us to see? ...*

READ 5:1-2; 18, 21-26; 6:1-4, 5-9. Summary—We are to love others the way Jesus loved us and gave himself up for us by being filled with the Spirit and as we lived Spirit-influenced lives, we will lovingly submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. This is the one big idea that Paul is driving home and he applies it specifically to three pairs of home-based relationships—wives/husbands, children/parents, slaves/masters. As modern readers of the Bible it's easy for us to cringe at some of the things written here—wives submitting to their husbands, masters and slaves?—and we're like, "See, Paul is anti-women and pro-slavery! No thank you." But we need to understand that, "The Bible was written FOR us, but not TO us." Meaning, we're not the first audience. Like, Ephesians was written FOR us—people living in the 21st century (or any century for that matter), but Ephesians was written TO people living in the 1st century. So, if we don't get our minds around how life worked in the 1st century we will conclude that the Bible is out of date and out of touch and/or we'll end up twisting the Scripture all kinds of ways to make it say what we think it ought to say. We need to take off our 21st century lens and see this passage through a 1st century lens in order to understand what Paul was really getting at when he talked about these subjects that can cause us to cringe in disgust today. In 1st century Roman cities everybody lived by what was known as the Household Code which described the relationships that existed in the homes of urban city dwellers. Those relationships were husbands/wives, fathers/children, and masters/slaves. Everyone living in larger Roman cities had slaves back in that day. You need to picture this in your mind—all of these people are sitting in the same house church, worshipping together—listening to the words that Paul has written to be read aloud to the congregation. And you need to understand that Paul is writing in a way that he hopes will change the culture of that time (read that again). Now, at every level within that society—within culture, within family, within politics—in every level of relationships, there was hierarchical domination and abuse. It was accepted as normal. Everyone—wives, children, and house slaves—lived as subordinates to the family patriarch (the male head of the family). The order of a typical home followed the order of the Roman Empire itself, and for all intents and purposes, the male patriarch of the family was Caesar to his family. So, when Paul begins by saying, "submit to one another, out of reverence for Christ," it's radical, very counter-cultural. The people in that house church would've been looking at each and they'd be going, What? What is he talking about? ...It

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was as hard for them to understand as it is for us. But what he's doing is this—he wants to give the people in that church a Gospel lens through which they would view these three, home-based relationships—a lens very different from the hierarchical culture of that day—b/c remember—hierarchical abuse was just normal in that day and age—and so—he jumps into the marriage relationship. And when Paul begins to explain what it “submitting to one another” looks like, he starts with those who were seen as subordinates—wives, children, and slaves. That, in and of itself, was radical because these were all people of much lesser importance than the master of the household. So, when Paul begins by publicly addressing these people first, he was bestowing on them dignity and honor they never had before. He was addressing everybody in the room as equals.

Now, the sermon fleshes out what this looks like with each pair so I'm not going to go into all that in these notes. But I do want you to understand this. Paul was not writing to start a revolution to overthrow the order of Roman society. Had he done that, the Gospel would have been dismissed out of hand, and not just by the Roman government, but by all of Roman society. No, Paul's purpose was not to *overthrow* Roman society, but he was working to *undermine* by subversively applying the Gospel to the wrong-headed idea of hierarchical domination and abuse. So, for example, when he says that the “husband is the head of the wife just as Christ is the head of the church,” he cannot possibly be endorsing male domination in the home. That is exactly what he is writing against. ...When he tells fathers to “not provoke their children to anger,” he's saying, “Don't discipline your children in anger, but find loving ways to discipline them in a way that nurtures their faith. ...And, when he addresses the issue of slavery, he's helping those Ephesians Christians see what it means to live as a follower of Jesus within that broken society, with the hopes that, over time, it would change the culture which, thankfully, it eventually did, thanks to Christian abolitionist movements. Think about this—if you were the male head of a household sitting in church that day, and you heard Paul's instruction here about being led by the Spirit to submit to those who society places under you, you would no doubt have had an “aha” moment—“Oh, you're saying that my wife, my children, my slaves are my sisters and brothers in Christ so I can no longer view them as my property.” —WOW!— Do you see, the person who is most in Paul's crosshairs are the patriarchs in the room? He's trying to get those men to see that b/c they live under the authority of Christ; they must treat others the way Christ treats them—meaning they are to love and care for those under them by seeing them as equals and fellow heirs of the grace of Christ.

So, the one big idea for wives, husbands, children, parents, slaves, and masters is this—Paul is saying—“All of you are to live a life of loving others the way Jesus loves you. This life is only possible as you are filled with the Spirit who will lead you to submit yourself to other believers out of reverence for Christ.” ...Think about Jesus: *As one IN authority*, he lowered himself to lift us up. *As one UNDER authority*, he came to serve, not be served, by submitting to the Fathers' will to give us new life. *So, if you are IN authority*, lower yourself to lift up those who are under you. *If you are UNDER authority*, serve those above you wholeheartedly as if you were serving Christ himself. That's the ONE BIG IDEA I'm taking away from this passage. And think about this, if we were to live this way, if we were to live out Gospel-informed relationships, we would show the world and experience ourselves the abundant life Jesus promised us.

Community Group Questions

READ 5:1-2; 18, 21-26; 6:1-4, 5-9.

1. What are the things in the passage that cause people today to cringe in disgust? ...
2. How do 5:1-2, 18, and 21 fit with 5:22-6:1-9? How does it all fit together?
3. To what 1st century reality is Paul applying the Gospel in this passage?
4. Who is Paul's target audience here and why? What does he want them to see?
5. Why is Paul not writing to overthrow Roman society? ...What is he trying to do?
6. How does this passage apply to you if you are someone *IN* authority? ...How does this passage apply to you if you are someone *UNDER* authority?
7. What else did you take away from this passage and this message?