Walking as Family

Believers are to demonstrate God’s love in their family relationships.

Ephesians 5:22–6:4

Frequently, a relationship is described in these terms: “Well, it’s complicated.” What does that really mean? It could indicate the absence of a genuinely committed relationship. On the other hand, a truly loving relationship isn’t always easy; it may indeed be complicated. Nowhere do we need this clarification more than our closest family relationships—between a husband and a wife, and between parents and children.

What factors make a marriage relationship complicated? How do these factors impact other family relationships?
UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

EPHESIANS 5:22–6:9

Paul began the fifth chapter of Ephesians with a call to “walk in love” (Eph. 5:2). In 5:22–6:9 he applied the virtues of holy love to relationships.

Household codes existed in the ancient world, with such philosophers as Aristotle setting forth their ideas about how families should function. However, the foundations for those instructions were much different than Paul’s, not just in origin but also in substance. The philosophers appealed to nature or reason as the basis for their counsel; Paul’s teaching was grounded in the Lord.

In Ephesians 2:11-22, Paul explained that Christ brought together Jew and Gentile, creating a new people through the gospel. Because of the reconciling work of Jesus on the cross, there is a new people of God—a new community of faith—which we call the church. This new community is called to a new lifestyle, a new walk in Christ. Paul began the unfolding of this distinctive behavior at the beginning of chapter 4, and we continue to read about it in this week’s passage.

Living as part of God’s new people involves our family relationships. If our relationship with God through Christ is genuine, then inevitably it will greatly impact the home. If the great defining characteristic of a disciple is love (John 13:34-35), then we would also expect to find that relationships in a family of believers would be marked by love.

In addition to instructing believers on family relationships, Paul also set forth guidelines for the interactions between slaves and masters. This proximity of this section (6:5-9) with the previous makes sense, given the fact that slaves were part of a household. In our cultural setting, the application is not specifically in the family, although it contains principles that are certainly relevant. Today, we can most appropriately apply these teachings to the employer-employee relationship.

Circle the repetitive phrase(s) you discover in Ephesians 5:22–6:4. How does Paul’s criteria of “in the Lord” impact family relationships?
WIVES (EPH. 5:22-24)

22 Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord, 23 because the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church. He is the Savior of the body. 24 Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives are to submit to their husbands in everything.

VERSES 22-23

What Paul taught in these verses applies to the husband-wife relationship, not the male-female discussion. Nothing is said here or in the verses to follow about any general responsibilities of men and women to one another. It is a marriage relationship that is in view here.

The mandate for all Christian wives is clearly stated here: submit to your husbands. Submission involves respecting one’s husband and following his leadership. This is to be done as to the Lord, indicating an expression of devotion to Christ because He is the Savior of the body. Without this, it is impossible to possess the strength or even the motivation to obey this command. In addition, the failure of one spouse to fulfill his or her role doesn’t excuse the other to abdicate theirs.

The standard for a wife’s submission to her husband is Christ’s functioning as the head of the church. All that Paul said about the relationship between Christ and His followers comes into play at this point. We should recall that the apostle previously taught about God’s purpose and will being located “in Christ” (1:5,9-10). The degree to which the church submits to Christ stems from her understanding of God’s will and His best interests for them. There is blessing to be experienced in Christ and in obedience to Him. The command in these verses is undergirded by this truth.
How has modern society misunderstood this command for wives to submit to husbands? What does Christ’s leadership in the church say about the husband’s leadership in the home?

VERSE 24
Paul reminded his readers of the relationship between Christ and the church. What would a church look like without its voluntary submission to Christ? That church would be in chaos. Each member would be seeking his or her own way and doing what he or she pleased. A healthy church is a church where its members submit to Christ.

This is the same way for marriage. Paul reminded wives that they should submit to their husbands in everything. He did not use the word obey as he did later in 6:1 and 6:5. The wife was to submit to the husband as he himself submitted to Christ. If the husband was asking her to engage in sinful activities or behaviors, or if he were asking her to be victimized by abuse, that would negate the equation of her submitting to her husband as unto Christ.

BIBLE SKILL: Reflect on a passage.
Reflect on Ephesians 5:22-33, focusing on the imagery. What does the imagery communicate about the importance of marriage? What does it indicate about the permanency of marriage? How can a person safeguard a marriage from outside threats?
Christian marriage is to reflect the glory and goodness of God. In patterning the relationship of a husband and a wife after that between Christ and the church, we are given the opportunity to let family relationships reflect the amazing love of God. In this way, we live the gospel before a watching world.

**HUSBANDS (EPH. 5:25-33)**

25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself for her 26 to make her holy, cleansing her with the washing of water by the word. 27 He did this to present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or anything like that, but holy and blameless. 28 In the same way, husbands are to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. 29 For no one ever hates his own flesh but provides and cares for it, just as Christ does for the church, 30 since we are members of his body. 31 For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two will become one flesh. 32 This mystery is profound, but I am talking about Christ and the church. 33 To sum up, each one of you is to love his wife as himself, and the wife is to respect her husband.

Some ancient writers, like Aristotle, described the responsibility of the husband as that of ruling, and obedience as the responsibility of the wife. He maintained that nature itself is the authority for these behaviors. Paul’s approach was quite distinct from that of the ancient philosophers. He appealed to the example of Christ to illustrate how a husband should act in marriage.

Christ’s sacrifice on the cross is the barometer for a husband’s love for his wife.

**VERSES 25-27**

It should be noted that the husband’s fulfillment of his duty is not dependent on the wife’s fulfillment of hers. While hers is to submit, his task is to love, not to rule. While admitting the challenge of submission, the call to **love your wives, just as Christ loved the church** is equally difficult. This love is not mere emotion, for Christ’s example is found in the fact that He **gave himself for her**. This is an active love, and to fulfill this command requires a
husband to reject passivity toward his wife. Christ’s sacrifice on the cross is the barometer for a husband’s love for his wife.

VERSES 28-33
Some misinterpret the command for husbands to love their wives as their own bodies as an expression of self-love, but this overlooks Paul’s basic premise. In marriage, God brings a couple together and the two will become one flesh. Rather than some calculated, self-serving pretense, love for one’s wife is a recognition of the unity between married couples. Awareness of this essential unity between a husband and a wife is foundational to obeying the command of love.

Failing to love’s one wife is not merely a failure of marital responsibility but a denial of the gospel.

The marriage relationship is a beautiful picture of the church’s union with Christ and therefore should be characterized by love. Failing to love’s one wife is not merely a failure of marital responsibility but a denial of the gospel. A Christian husband who loves His wife as Christ loves the church gives credibility to what he claims to believe about the gospel. Paul’s summary of the mutual responsibilities of husbands and wives is also a restatement of how the church should live before those who do not know Christ. In this way, we validate the truth of God.

How does a marriage demonstrate a couple’s understanding of Christ’s love and the gospel?

CHILDREN (EPH. 6:1-3)

1 Children, obey your parents in the Lord, because this is right.
2 Honor your father and mother, which is the first commandment with a promise, 3 so that it may go well with you and that you may have a long life in the land.

VERSES 1-3
Paul encouraged children to obey their parents. Obedience to the parents is right, meaning that it is a part of God’s divine pattern
for children to realize that they are living both under the authority of their parents and the authority of Christ. *In the Lord* means children are obeying the Lord when they obey their parents.

Paul most likely had in view younger children when he wrote these words regarding obedience. Regardless of our age, however, it is always appropriate to *honor your father and mother*.

Honor is a broader word than obey. To honor is to value. Honor calls for respect. Adults with aging parents honor their parents by caring for them. In Paul’s instructions to Timothy he directed children to show proper respect to parents by giving special care to them when they get older. “This pleases God,” Paul said (1 Tim. 5:4).

**Children who learn obedience and respect of authority tend to live better lives and tend to live longer.**

Honoring parents is not always an easy thing to do because unfortunately some parents do not raise their children well. It is good to be reminded that Paul attached a *promise* to this command. The promise, *that it may go well with you and that you may have a long life in the land*, comes from Deuteronomy 5:16. This promise originally was tied to the old covenant and to the occupation of the promised land. It would be wrong of us to deduce that all obedient children will live a long life. When children in any generation learn respect for authority, their lives will be made better and the stability of the community will be strengthened.

*What did it mean to obey your parents when you were a child? Which of those actions would be inappropriate as an adult? Which would be appropriate?*

**PARENTS** (EPH. 6:4)

4 Fathers, don’t stir up anger in your children, but bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.

**VERSE 4**

After addressing wives, Paul addressed husbands. After addressing children, he addressed the parents. A family that demonstrates love
in their relationships is a family in which everyone seeks to fulfill what God expects them to do within that family.

Paul addressed fathers specifically. In the Greco-Roman and Jewish world, fathers carried the responsibility for the training and disciplining of children. We can safely assume, however, Paul’s instruction applies to mothers as well.

Parents are not to stir up anger in their children. Stir up anger means “to provoke to anger, exasperate, or rouse hostility.” This admonition means parents are to avoid actions, words, and attitudes that would drive children to exasperation and resentment, thus destroying their confidence, wounding their spirit, and repelling their love for God and family.

Further, the parents’ responsibility is to bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord. The word used by Paul that is translated bring them up is a one that was used in the sense of nourishing. The same word was used in 5:29 to denote how Christ provides for the church.

It is parents’ responsibility to nurture their children in the faith.

The phrase of the Lord implies that Christian parents are to provide for more than just their children’s physical health and intellectual well being. The meaning of Paul’s instruction is clear: it is parents’ responsibility to nurture their children in the faith. If you are a parent, answer this sobering question Puritan preacher John Flavel asked, “If you neglect to instruct [your children] in the way of holiness, will the devil neglect to instruct them in the way of wickedness?”

In what ways will Christian parenting will be different from secular parenting? What are some important ways that parents can bring up their children in the training and instruction of the Lord?

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IN MY CONTEXT

- Godly wives are to submit to the leadership of their own husbands.
- Godly husbands are to sacrificially and unselfishly love their own wives.
- Godly children are to follow the direction provided by their parents.
- Godly parents lovingly provide direction and discipline to their children.

As a group, discuss how the group can encourage godly marriages in your community. What actions do you need to take as an individual to encourage godly marriages?

What do you need to do to honor your parents at this point in your life?

Prayer Needs