



RELATIONSHIP

SMALL GROUP VIDEO SERIES

Essentials

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How to Imitate Jesus

"Whoever claims to live in him must live as Jesus did." (1 John 2:6)

Imitation involves not only copying external behaviour but also replicating internal motivation. When we imitate Christ, we not only do what He did, such as praying, but also do it for the same reason. Jesus prayed because He loved His Father and those He prayed for (see John 17). We can make the mistake of trying to mimic Christ in actions, but without His motives and character.

Imitation involves not only copying external behaviour but also replicating internal motivation.

We are to have a deep relationship with Christ – a living relationship marked clearly by our obedience, submission, and love for the Lord. Without love, all our actions – no matter how impressive or persuasive – will amount to nothing; they would simply be mimicry. The motivations behind our actions will determine whether we are truly imitating or simply mimicking Jesus. Mimicry arises when there is no living relationship with the Lord – when people try to do things for Him without coming to Him, taking up His yoke, and learning from Him.

How can we grow this living relationship with Jesus? By drawing close to Him; knowing Him, His voice, His character, and His will; seeking to be like Him; and being obedient to Him. That is what it means to love Jesus with all of our hearts.

In all that we do, we are to display the love of Jesus.

Our love for Jesus begins as something that no external circumstances can overcome, then grows into constant communion with Jesus, and finally finds fulfilment exclusively in Christ. In other words, our love for Jesus grows when we do not allow external circumstances or internal thoughts and desires to distract us, such that our deepest focus and joy come from our relationship with Him. That is how He loved His Father. When we learn to love Jesus in this way, we will be able to let His love flow out and touch all our relationships with others.

In all that we do, we are to display the love of Jesus. It is this love that enables all our actions to be true imitations of our Lord's. Jesus said, **"As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love" (John 15:9)**. He also said, **"As I have loved you, so you must love one another" (13:34)**. These two instructions make it clear that we are to love the way Jesus loves us, which is the same way the Father loves Him. It is this standard of love that validates all our acts of righteousness and piety.

In order to imitate Christ, we must draw close and walk with Him. We must come under His authority – to submit and obey Him. True obedience arises from and marks the growth of a loving relationship with Jesus (14:15, 21, 23; 1 John 2:3).

The motivations behind our actions will determine whether we are truly imitating or simply mimicking Jesus.

Jesus invites you to come close to Him so that you can observe Him carefully. When you read the Gospels and meditate on them deeply, you get a front-row view of Jesus' life, and you will gain an understanding of how He related to His Father and others, what He prioritised, how He prayed and handled the Scriptures, how He viewed sin and the world, and how He lived selflessly and loved sacrificially. You can then draw upon lessons and examples from His life when examining your own. Are you being criticised? Do you feel isolated? Are you misunderstood? Are you penned in by a hostile crowd? Jesus' example can help you: soon you will be imitating Him, doing what He did, and feeling what He felt. When enemies torment you, you will be able to pray for them and show love for them. When you are tired, you will find the strength to pray. You will be able to go through life trusting deeply in God. When you are suffering, you will be able to endure, just as Jesus the Suffering Servant endured for your sake.

Intimacy with Christ, identification with Him through baptism (Romans 6:5), and instruction from Him will help us to imitate Him. If we learn well and are true apprentices of Jesus, we will live and act like our great Teacher. As Matthew 10:25 puts it, **"It is enough for students to be like their teachers."**

Jesus invites you to come close to Him so that you can observe Him carefully.

Jesus expects of us what He himself demonstrated in His own relationship with the Father. He imitated His Father perfectly, and is our primary role model. He watched the Father work and did the same. He said, **"My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I too am working . . . whatever the Father does the Son also does"** (John 5:17, 19). He also said, **"What I have heard from him I tell the world . . . I do nothing on my own but speak just what the Father has taught me"** (8:26, 28). What makes Jesus such a remarkable Teacher is that He perfectly and consistently demonstrated what He taught. He is not just a lecturer, but a Teacher who leads us personally and by example.

Consider this:

What is the difference between imitation and mimicry? In what ways might you be mimicking Jesus rather than imitating Him? Review your words, actions, and thoughts, and see if there are changes you can make in order to truly imitate Jesus in your daily life.

Be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us.

By Ted Tripp. August 24, 2013.
ligonier.org

This call to love in the first verses of Ephesians 5 is unique. It not only commands love for others, but it reminds us that loving others finds its origin in God's love for us—for His beloved children. The Greek word translated as "imitate" comes into English as the word mimic. We are to mimic God or mirror Him. We are to be a reflection, the image of God in our love for others.

Romans 1 reminds us that the entire creation reflects God. His eternal power and divine nature are seen clearly in the creation (v. 20). The creation reflects God like an object is reflected in a highly polished stone, but mankind is uniquely designed to bear God's image.

How can we imitate God? We must know what He is like. Theologians speak of God's communicable and incommunicable attributes. By analogy, it is like diseases; some are communicable and others are incommunicable. The communicable ones are the ones you can get. Likewise, some of God's attributes are incommunicable—things such as eternity, omnipotence, omniscience, and omnipresence. God also has communicable attributes such as holiness, justice, goodness, compassion, or, according to Ephesians 5, love.

Paul reminds us that we have experienced the love of God. We are beloved children. Therefore, much growth takes place by imitation. We imitate those whom we look up to and admire. Boys learn to be men as they imitate worthy men. They see their father's love expressed in his care for the family. They see his tenderness toward mother and how he strives to save her steps, and they imitate what they see. Children grow as they pretend to be adults, as they imitate the adults in their lives.

That's the process of growth that we are called to in Ephesians 5. We must imitate God. We ask how would God show love in this situation? How would God's love be demonstrated in acts of kindness? How would the forbearance of God encourage me to speak to God before I speak to others? How does God receive me when I have sinned? Does He withhold Himself? Does He require me to work it off? How does God in love rescue me when I have been foolish? How does God treat my lack of thoughtfulness about Him? How does God show compassion, kindness, tenderheartedness, and mercy? How does God love?

The issue of imitation is crystal clear in this text. We are to walk in love as Christ loved us. Through the sinless life and sacrificial death of Jesus Christ, we are beloved children. We are not orphans. We are sons and daughters. God is our Father. He loves us as father loves his child, but perfectly. I am never an orphan. I am a dearly beloved son. In my greatest need I can come to Him, praying, "Our Father in heaven . . ."

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS



IMITATORS OF CHRIST

Pastor Darrell Bozeman

INTRODUCTION

In this video, Pastor Bozeman kicks off the Relationship Essentials small group sermon series. He discusses Paul's directive to be imitators of Christ and not the world. And that we are called to be imitators of Christ in all arenas of our lives. As part of a new family, we yield the old (sinful) nature and take on the new (holy and righteous) nature of Christ. So that non-believers would know us by our love.

QUESTIONS

1. Pastor Bozeman described how he took on certain characteristics of his family of origin, and that this is a common phenomenon across human cultures. How do you think this process is similar (or dissimilar) to how we as Christians take on the characteristics of Christ in our faith walk?
2. Read Ephesians 5:1-21 - Paul reminds us that we were in the darkness, but now we are in the light and should act like we are in the light. What clues does Paul give us as to what this should look like?
3. Eph 5:8 says, "Try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord." How do you discern what is pleasing to the Lord? Is there one "way" to please the Lord?

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4. Recall that RC Sproul warns against a doctrine being advanced in which all you need to do is accept Christ then do whatever you want. Pastor Bozeman challenged that our lives must change as well: our thoughts, our speech, our habits, our character. How has your character, etc. been transformed since becoming a Christian? What areas of your life do you continue to need to seek Christ to transform?

 5. As light bearers and “children of the light”, what is our responsibility as defined in Eph 5:1-14 to be a light and to expose darkness? Ask God to reveal to you a tangible way in which you can show Christ’s love to an unbelieving world. If you are comfortable, share this with your group.

CLOSING PRAYER

Thank you, Lord, for giving us your Word. Thank you for the encouragement, instruction, and warning from Paul in this chapter. Please help us to live out his teachings. Help us to be imitators of you, Lord, and not the worldly culture we see around us. Fill us with your love so that we can be better imitators of you to those who you place in our lives.

NOTES

Be Filled with the Spirit

And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit. (Ephesians 5:18)

The apostle Paul commands in Ephesians 5:18 that we be filled with the Spirit. Therefore, I want to try to answer two questions today: What does it mean to be filled with the Spirit? And, how can we be filled with the Spirit? I think it might help you follow me if I tell you at the outset where I am going. So I'll start with my conclusions and then give the biblical support. I think being filled with the Spirit means, basically, having great joy in God. And since the Bible teaches that "the joy of the Lord is our strength" (Nehemiah 8:10), it also means there will be power in this joy for overcoming besetting sins and for boldness in witness.

But, basically, it means radiant joy, because the Spirit who fills us is the Spirit of joy that flows between God the Father and God the Son because of the delight they have in each other. Therefore, to be filled with the Spirit means to be caught into the joy that flows among the Holy Trinity and to love God the Father and God the Son with the very love with which they love each other. And then, in answer to the second question, the way to be filled with the Spirit is by trusting that the God of hope really reigns — that not a sparrow falls to the ground apart from his will (Matthew 10:29) — and that he runs the world for you and for all who trust his word. In believing that, you will be filled with the Holy Spirit and with joy.

"To be filled with the Spirit means to be caught into the joy that flows among the Holy Trinity."

With the spread of Pentecostalism in this country and in the third world, there has been a lot of discussion about the New Testament phrases "filled with the Spirit" and "baptized with the Spirit." I feel some obligation, therefore, today not merely to interpret Ephesians 5:18 in its immediate context, but also to orient what I say in the wider New Testament teaching.

What Does 'Baptize in the Holy Spirit' Mean?

The phrase "baptize in (or with) the Holy Spirit" was apparently coined by John the Baptist. All four of our gospels record that he said, "I have baptized you with water, but he (i.e., Jesus) will baptize you with the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 3:11; Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16; John 1:33). The only two writers in the New Testament who refer elsewhere to the phrase "baptize with the Spirit" are Luke in the book of Acts, and Paul in 1 Corinthians. Luke refers to it twice, quoting John each time (Acts 1:5; 11:16), and Paul refers to it once (1 Corinthians 12:13). But I don't think Paul and Luke use this phrase to refer to the same thing. For Paul, it is virtually identical to regeneration or new birth (conversion). For Luke, it is essentially the same as being filled with the Spirit and refers to that first introductory experience of this fullness.

I'll try to show very briefly why I think this. First, we must never assume that a particular phrase means exactly the same thing every place it occurs in Scripture. Good interpretation lets a word or phrase mean whatever the immediate context demands. What really matters in Scripture is not that a phrase everywhere has the same meaning, but that the reality which a phrase describes does not contradict other descriptions of reality in the Bible. So Paul and Luke need not use the phrase "baptized with the Spirit" in the very same sense. Paul uses the phrase only once.

He says in 1 Corinthians 12:12, 13:

Just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body – Jews or Greeks, slaves or free – and all were made to drink of one Spirit.

According to this one reference, Paul conceived of Spirit-baptism as the act by which the Spirit made us members of Christ's body. Once we were alienated from God, cut off from Christ (Ephesians 2:12), but then the Holy Spirit swept over us and brought us to life by uniting us to the living Christ and thus to his people in one body. This is a once-for-all event. It is never repeated, and nowhere does Paul (or Luke) ever admonish a Christian to be baptized by the Spirit.

But Luke seems to mean something different by the phrase, namely, something essentially the same as being filled with the Spirit, which is not a once-for-all event (for Luke and for Paul) but an ongoing or repeated occurrence. The evidence for this comes from the book of Acts. In Acts 1:4-5, Luke reports that Jesus, just before he ascended to the Father, told his apostles to stay in Jerusalem and wait for the promise of the Father, which **"you heard from me, for John baptized with water, but before many days you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit."** This was a clear reference to Pentecost. But when Pentecost comes in chapter 2, listen to how Luke describes it:

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly a sound came from heaven like the rush of a mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared to them tongues as of fire, distributed and resting on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance. (Acts 2:1-3)

Jesus promises in chapter 1 that they will be baptized by the Spirit, and Luke describes the fulfillment of that promise in chapter 2 in terms of the filling of the Holy Spirit. Yet we know from Acts 11:15-17 that Luke does see Pentecost as a baptism with the Spirit. He reports there how Peter described his preaching to the Gentiles, in Cornelius's house:

As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell on them just as on us at the beginning. And I remembered the word of the Lord, how he said, "John baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit." If then God gave the same gift to them as he gave to us who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could withstand God?

So this later outpouring of the Spirit on the Gentiles (in Acts 10:44) is equated with the first Pentecostal outpouring, and both are explained as a baptism with the Spirit. Therefore, Luke sees what happened at Pentecost as both a baptism with the Spirit and a filling with the Spirit. Since Luke refers later on to the disciples being filled again (Acts 4:8, 31; 13:4), but never refers to them as being baptized again with the Spirit, it seems to me that for Luke “baptism with the Spirit” refers to that initial filling by the Spirit after a person trusts in Christ.

I don’t think Luke equates “baptism by the Spirit” with regeneration like Paul does. That would mean that all the apostles, who, with God’s help, had confessed Jesus to be the Christ (Luke 9:20; Matthew 16:17) and had seen him alive after his resurrection and had their minds opened by him to understand the Scriptures (Luke 24:45), were in fact dead in trespasses and sins and enslaved to the flesh during all their time with Jesus and up till Pentecost morning.

If we asked Luke, “Is that what you mean?” I think he would say, “Oh no, they had already been born of the Spirit, just like all the great saints of the Old Testament, but they hadn’t yet experienced to the full what God could do through them by his Spirit. But now that Christ has come and through his death and resurrection purchased all the blessings of God, it is God’s purpose to call all his people to experience the fullness of the Holy Spirit.” When a person first experiences this fullness of the Spirit, that is what Luke means by being baptized with the Spirit. And that is different from Paul who, I think, uses the phrase to refer to regeneration (new birth or moment of conversion).

Pentecostal Theology

Now we are right at the heart of the charismatic controversy, and I want to try to sort out some things and let you know where I stand and why I think this stance is biblical. What is clear so far is at least this: if anyone ever asks you, “Have you been baptized with the Holy Spirit?” your first response should be to say, “What do you mean by baptism with the Holy Spirit?” So many of our arguments could be avoided if we just started off defining our terms. Suppose the definition they gave was this: “Baptism with the Holy Spirit is an experience you have with God after conversion in which the Holy Spirit falls upon you in such a way that your heart bursts forth in the utterance of tongues (some ecstatic speech or unknown language).”

What would our answer be, then? Some of us would say, “Yes, I have experienced that.” Others would say, “No, I never have spoken in tongues.” But both of us should then say, “But, you know, that definition of baptism with the Spirit is not a biblical one.” There is no way to argue rightly from the book of Acts that God intends for baptism with the Spirit always to be accompanied by speaking in tongues. And Paul teaches plainly in 1 Corinthians 12:10 that God does not give the gift of tongues to everyone. Being baptized with the Holy Spirit may or may not result in glossolalia (tongues-speaking) and, therefore, speaking in tongues is not a necessary part of either Luke’s or Paul’s definition of baptism with the Spirit.

“It is not wrong to insist that tongues are a possible part of our Spirit-filled experience today.”

I want to stress here, though, that I do not reject the validity of the gift of tongues for our own day. It is wrong to insist that they are a necessary part of the baptism of the Spirit; it is not wrong to insist that they are a possible part of that experience today. When I was in high school, I listened to Mr. DeHaan on the radio. I was standing in my bedroom one morning, listening to him try to argue from the New Testament that the so-called sign gifts, like tongues and miracles and healing, were intended by God to come to an end at the close of the apostolic age, so that they are no longer valid today.

And I can remember even in those early years saying to myself, "Mr. DeHaan, those arguments are not valid. All you are able to show is that if there are no tongues today, you can see some possible reasons for it. But nothing that you have said proves that God intends for these gifts to end before this age closes." And now after twenty years of Bible study and friendships with charismatic believers I will say with even more assurance: let us not reject or despise any of God's gifts, including tongues.

But now back to the person who is asking if you have been baptized with the Spirit. If he uses Paul's definition and means, "Have you been united to Christ by the Spirit so that you are part of his body (1 Corinthians 12:12)?" — then the answer of all believers should be, "Yes, I have indeed been baptized with the Spirit." If he uses Luke's definition and means, "Have you ever once been so filled by the Holy Spirit that you overflowed with joy, had victory over besetting sins, and were made bold to witness?" — then the answer should be and could be, "Yes," for all Christians, but probably won't be.

The apostle Paul taught that there is such a thing as a babe in Christ, and he contrasted with the babe in Christ the person who is spiritual (1 Corinthians 3:1). Now, both Luke and Paul would have agreed that what this new, faltering babe in Christ needs is a great outpouring of the Holy Spirit into his life. Paul would have called this experience "being filled" with the Spirit. And Luke would have agreed, but then would have also called this first experience of the Spirit's fullness the "baptism of the Holy Spirit." So while the phrase "baptized with the Spirit" is used differently by Paul and Luke, they view man's need and God's action as basically the same.

Perhaps one other clarification of some Pentecostal teaching should be mentioned. We are sometimes urged to seek a "second blessing" or second experience of the Spirit after our initial conversion experience. Two things need to be said. First: the blessing of the fullness (or baptism) of the Holy Spirit may occur at the moment of conversion and leave nothing to be sought but its preservation and growth or repetition. Second: even if one does not experience the fullness of the Spirit at conversion, the thing to be sought is not "the second blessing," as if that experience would be the end of our spiritual quest.

What we should seek (and this applies to all Christians) is that God pour his Spirit out upon us so completely that we are filled with joy, victorious over sin, and bold to witness. And the ways he brings us to that fullness are probably as varied as people are. It may come in a tumultuous experience of ecstasy and tongues. It may come through a tumultuous experience of ecstasy and no tongues. It may come through a crisis of suffering when you abandon yourself totally to God. Or it may come gradually through a steady diet of God's word and prayer and fellowship and worship and service. However it comes, our first experience of the fullness of the Spirit is only the beginning of a life-long battle to stay filled with the Spirit.

Don't Turn to Alcohol, Turn to the Spirit

And that brings us to Ephesians 5:18, where the present tense of the verb in Greek means just that: "Keep on being filled with the Spirit." Let's look at the context to see more specifically what this means:

Look carefully how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, redeeming the time because the days are evil. Therefore, do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. And do not get drunk with wine for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord, always and for everything giving thanks in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God the Father. (Ephesians 5:15-18)

The contrast with drunkenness is the key here. What do people go to alcohol for? For a happy hour. We all want to be happy, but there is a problem: "The days are evil." Notice the logic of verses 16-18:

The days are evil. Therefore, do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. And do not get drunk . . . but be filled with the Spirit.

Where do you turn when the days are evil, when you are frightened or discouraged or depressed or anxious? Paul pleads with us: "Don't turn to alcohol; turn to the Spirit. Anything of value that alcohol can bring you, God the Holy Spirit can bring more."

"Anything of value that alcohol can bring you, God the Holy Spirit can bring more."

There are people who can't begin to whistle a happy tune or sing a song at work because they are so tense and anxious about life. But later in the evening at the tavern with a few drinks under their belt they can put their arms around each other and sing and laugh. All of us long to be carefree, uninhibited, happy. And the mounting tragedy of our own day, as in Paul's, is that increasing numbers of people (even Christians) believe that the only way they can find this child-like freedom is by drugging themselves with alcohol or other mind-benders. Such behavior dishonors God, and so Paul says: there is a better way to cope with the evil days — be filled with the Spirit, stay filled with the Spirit. And you will know unmatched joy that sings and makes melody to the Lord.

The fundamental meaning of being filled with the Spirit is being filled with joy that comes from God and overflows in song. And Luke would agree with that, too, because he says in Acts 13:52, "The disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit." To be sure, one of the marks of a person filled with the Spirit is that he is made strong to witness in the face of opposition (Acts 4:8, 31; 7:55; 13:9). But the reason for this is that "the joy of the Lord is your strength" (Nehemiah 8:10). When you are happy in God, you are a strong and brave witness to his grace. So I repeat, whatever joy or peace you find in alcohol, the Spirit of God can give you more. Even the psalmist of the Old Testament had experienced this. He says in Psalm 4:7-8:

You [O Lord] have put more joy in my heart than they have when their grain and wine abound. In peace I will both lie down and sleep; for you alone, O Lord, make me dwell in safety.

How to Do What Can Only Be Done for Us

And that psalm leads us now to our final, all-important question of how we can obey this command to be filled with the Spirit. We are in the same predicament we were in last week. We are commanded to be full, and yet we are not the filler; the Spirit is. The answer to this predicament in the New Testament is that God has ordained to move into our lives with fullness through faith. The pathway that the Spirit cuts through the jungle of our anxieties into the clearing of joy is the pathway of faith. Luke says of Stephen in Acts 6:5, that he was **“a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit,”** and he says of Barnabas in Acts 11:24 that he was **“a good man full of the Holy Spirit and of faith,”** The two go together. If a person is filled with faith, he will be filled with the Spirit, the Spirit of joy and peace.

The most important text in Paul’s writings to show this is Romans 15:13, **“May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.”** Notice that it is in or by believing that we are filled with joy and peace. And it is by the Spirit that we abound in hope. When we put those two halves of the verse together, what we see is that through our faith (our believing) the Spirit fills us with his hope and thus with his joy and peace. And, of course, since hope is such an essential part of being filled with joy by the Spirit, what we have to believe is that God is, as Paul says, the God of hope. We have to rivet our faith on all that he has done and said to give us hope.

Nobody stays full of the Spirit all the time — no one is always totally joyful and submissive to God and empowered for service. But this should still be our aim, our goal, our great longing. **“As a deer pants for the flowing streams, so my soul pants for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God” (Psalm 42:1-2).** But in order to slake that thirst, we must fight the fight of faith. We must preach to our souls a sermon of hope:

Why are you downcast, O my soul, and why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God. For I shall again praise him. He is my help and my God. (Psalm 42:5, 11; 43:5)

We must set before our own soul the banquet of promises that God has made to us and feed our faith to the full. Then it may be said of us as it was of Stephen and Barnabas: “They were filled with faith and with the Holy Spirit.”

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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS



RELATIONSHIP WITH HOLY SPIRIT

Josh Nestor

INTRODUCTION

In this video, Josh reminds us that as Christians we can ask Him to fill us with His Holy Spirit to give us the power to live for the Lord and love others.

QUESTIONS

1. In the t-shirt illustration, by itself, the t-shirt is not able to do the tasks that Josh asked it to do. But when Josh put the t-shirt on, he gave it power and filled it with himself, then the shirt was able to do the things he had asked it to do. How is this similar to each of us and the Holy Spirit's work in our lives?
2. Read Ephesians 5:15-21 - Paul describes our walk with Jesus Christ. What stands out to you? Explain why.
3. How does Paul contrast wisdom and foolishness in this passage? What role does the Holy Spirit play in living wisely?
4. Josh reminds us that the Holy Spirit is a big deal and can often be overlooked in our day-to-day happenings. Why can it be easy to ignore the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives? How can we pay better attention to His work in our lives?

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4. In the video, Josh reminds us that for us to be filled with the Holy Spirit, all we need to do is ask. Share a time with your group when this has been the case for you in your walk with Jesus Christ.

 5. What does it mean to be “submissive to the Holy Spirit”? What does that look like in our daily lives?

CLOSING PRAYER

Thank you, God, for giving us the gift of the Holy Spirit in our lives. Thank you that we can be filled with the same powerful, life-giving spirit that filled Jesus Christ himself during his time here on earth. Help us to remember to ask you to be filled with His Holy Spirit so that we can do the work that you have asked us to do, each and every day, in all aspects of our lives. Amen.

NOTES



The Basis of a Christian Marriage

R.C. Sproul

Some years ago, I attended an interesting wedding. I was especially struck by the creativity of the ceremony. The bride and the groom had brainstormed with the pastor in order to insert new and exciting elements into the service, and I enjoyed those elements. However, in the middle of the ceremony, they included portions of the traditional, classic wedding ceremony. When I began to hear the words from the traditional ceremony, my attention perked up and I was moved. I remember thinking, "There is no way to improve on this because the words are so beautiful and meaningful." A great deal of thought and care had been put into those old, familiar words.

Today, of course, many young people not only are saying no to the traditional wedding ceremony, they are rejecting the concept of marriage itself. More and more young people are coming from broken homes, and as a result, they have a fear and suspicion about the value of marriage. So we see couples living together rather than marrying for fear that the cost of that commitment may be too much. They fear it may make them too vulnerable. This means that one of the most stable and, as we once thought, permanent traditions of our culture is being challenged.

One of the things I like most about the traditional wedding ceremony is that it includes an explanation as to why there is such a thing as marriage. We are told in that ceremony that marriage is ordained and instituted by God—that is to say, marriage did not just spring up arbitrarily out of social conventions or human taboos. Marriage was not invented by men but by God.

We see this in the earliest chapters of the Old Testament, where we find the creation account. We find that God creates in stages, beginning with the light (Gen. 1:3) and capping the process with the creation of man (v. 27). At every stage, He utters a benediction, a "good word." God repeatedly looks at what He has made and says, "That's good" (vv. 4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31).

But then God notices something that provokes not a benediction but what we call a malediction, that is, a "bad word." What was this thing that God saw in His creation that He judged to be "not good"? We find it in Genesis 2:18, where God declares, "It is not good that the man should be alone." That prompts Him to create Eve and bring her to Adam. God instituted marriage, and He did it, in the first instance, as an answer to human loneliness. For this reason, God inspired Moses to write, "Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh" (v. 24).

But while I like and appreciate the words of the traditional wedding ceremony, I believe the form of the ceremony is even more important. This is because the traditional ceremony involves the making of a covenant. The whole idea of covenant is deeply rooted in biblical Christianity. The Bible teaches that our very redemption is based on a covenant. Much could be said here about the character of the biblical covenants, but one vital facet is that none of them is a private matter. Every covenant is undertaken in the presence of witnesses. This is why we invite guests to our weddings. It is so they will witness our vows—and hold us accountable to keep them. It is one thing for a man to whisper expressions of love to a woman when no one will hear, but it is quite another thing for him to stand up in a church, in front of parents, friends, ecclesiastical or civil authorities, and God Himself, and there make promises to love and cherish her. Wedding vows are sacred promises made in the presence of witnesses who will remember them.

I believe marriage is the most precious of all human institutions. It's also the most dangerous. Into our marriages we pour our greatest and deepest expectations. We put our emotions on the line. There we can achieve the greatest happiness, but we also can experience the greatest disappointment, the most frustration, and the most pain. With that much at stake, we need something more solemn than a casual promise.

Even with formal wedding ceremonies, even with the involvement of authority structures, roughly fifty percent of marriages fail. Sadly, among the men and women who stay together as husband and wife, many would not marry the same spouse again, but they stay together for various reasons. Something has been lost regarding the sacred and holy character of the marriage covenant. In order to strengthen the institution of marriage, we might want to consider strengthening the wedding ceremony, with a clear, biblical reminder that marriage is instituted by God and forged in His sight.

The Importance of Theology In Marriage

Published Thursday, March 2, 1995 By Tim & Beth Brewer

Most readers of Modern Reformation are well aware of the steady “drift” by evangelical Protestants in this country away from their historical moorings. And, sadly, the widespread doctrinal ignorance within the church today is not the only proof that American evangelicalism has become, for the most part, a ship without a rudder. Despite all the banter about traditional family values, it would seem that marriage and family life among American evangelicals does not fare much better than our theology. Recent surveys show that evangelicals are just as likely to divorce, and almost as likely to have engaged in extramarital affairs, as their non-believing neighbors. Two-thirds of the Christians surveyed considered “divorce a reasonable solution to a problem marriage,” and almost half thought divorce to be an acceptable solution in spite of the consequences that it would have upon their children. (1) Even more lamentable is the fact that born-again Christians, while remaining staunchly opposed to abortion ideologically, nevertheless still opt for it—and at a rate no less frequent than those who profess no faith at all. So much for our “family values.”

As shocking as these statistics may sound, though, perhaps they should not surprise us. For what affects ethics as much as theology? Indeed, as an evangelical pastor, I am convinced that it is no accident that both our theological convictions and family values have become equally bankrupt in the modern church. This is not to suggest that sound doctrinal belief and happy, fulfilling marriages are coterminous (after all, there are many non-Christians who enjoy the latter without the former); nor is it to say that the Bible should be treated as a prepackaged marriage manual (indeed, Scripture warns that “if for this life only we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men”). (2) It is merely to point out that, even with good intentions, it is still very questionable whether a fallen creature can “glorify God and enjoy him forever” when he takes his views of God, self, and the world—including his primary assumptions about marriage—from the precepts of the self-esteem gurus. Yet this is exactly what many professing Christians attempt to do.

What appears to some to be a harmless blending of the “best of both worlds” is, in fact, anything but harmless. In terms of a genuinely Christian world view, such an approach is tragic—since our assumptions about God invariably affect our understanding of the “chief end of man.” If, for example, one embraces a view of God that suggests the redemptive value of the Cross is to be found primarily in its moral utility (i.e., God wants to show us how much He loves us, and really only wants to make us “happy”), can we honestly expect that person, having already defined redemption in such a manner, to be any more than superficial and self-serving in his own human covenants? In short, how can we expect a person with a man-centered theology to produce a God-honoring marriage?

“But,” someone may object, “marriage is an ordinance of creation, not redemption.” That is absolutely correct! One does not have to be a Christian in order to enjoy the fruits of God’s common grace in this “holy estate.” Nevertheless, as believers in Christ, if we begin with faulty notions about the Creator, how can we ever hope to gain an accurate understanding of his purposes in creation—whether it be in marriage, family life, work, government, or culture—or to fathom the deeper meaning behind why God has placed these institutions into his world in the first place?

Yet when it comes to marriage, most of us want to jettison theology altogether and run straight to the “practical.” Think, for instance, of how many sermons the average parishioner has had to endure on Ephesians 5 in which the minister waxes authoritatively on the proper “roles” within marriage; yet, more often than not, this is done without ever so much as mentioning the first two-thirds of that book, which spell out the entire theological basis for our relationship to God and one another! This fact is even more remarkable, when one considers that Paul himself states explicitly that he is “talking about Christ and the church” in this standard text on marriage (Eph 5:32).

What, exactly, is the “mystery” to which Paul refers in this passage? Throughout the New Testament epistles, Paul uses the word *mysterion* (moos-tay’-ree-on) to refer to truths which cannot be discovered through general revelation, but rather are kept hidden, i.e., secrets or “mysteries,” until God chooses to make them known through special revelation (cf. Eph 3:4-6). (3) A *mysterion*, therefore, pertains not merely to those things that we do not understand in this life but, specifically, to God’s purposes in redemption that one can never understand apart from special revelation. Surely, the “mystery” of marriage is no exception. To be sure, when Paul uses this word he is normally referring to something being revealed through the common medium of ink and paper about God’s eternal purposes. In this case, however, something is being revealed about God, not in words, but through another aspect of the created order: the ordinance of marriage.

The implications of this are profound. Among other things, it explains why Paul contends that the proper relationship between husband and wife is one which typifies the relationship between Christ and His bride, the church. Marriage is a “mystery” insofar as this temporal, earthly covenant between a man and a woman foreshadows God’s eternal, holy covenant with those who are the objects of his special love. For example, the Divine promise in creation that the man will be “united to his wife,” and by so doing will become “one flesh” with her (Gn 2:24), corresponds—in typological fashion—to the believer’s union with Christ. Hence the institution of marriage, while wholly “common” in one sense, is nevertheless a “holy estate” insofar as it can teach us, when viewed within the covenantal framework, about God’s saving purposes in Christ.

“But what,” you may ask, “does all of this have to do with how I relate to my spouse?” Simply this: what we believe to be true about God and his purposes in this world will not only affect our ultimate convictions about the “chief end of man,” but also the way in which we seek to relate to others. Like it or not, our theology does matter—even in marriage! As the great Reformed minister Martyn Lloyd-Jones once remarked: “A Christian is something before he does anything...the gospel puts a much greater weight upon what we are than upon what we do.” (4) Does this imply that our behavior in marriage (or the Christian life) is irrelevant? Of course not!

If that were the case, the second half of Ephesians would not have been written. Nevertheless, one must be in Christ before he can live out the implications of his faith. In short, even in the process of sanctification, “it is not I, but Christ who lives in me.” (5)

To be sure, Scripture is also full of many “practical” exhortations regarding human marriage. For example, Paul states that marriage is to be based upon mutual submission (Eph. 5:21). Mutual submission implies mutual service, as evidenced by the fact that the wife vows to honor and obey someone who has committed himself to laying down his life for her welfare. So, too, the husband vows to love unconditionally someone who has committed herself to following him. (6) Apart from the obvious parallels to our faith in Christ, what could be more “practical” than a life-long relationship based upon mutual love and submission? In Christian marriage, the husband and wife are called to be, first and foremost, the servants of one another.

Admittedly such practical exhortations are not unique to Christian marriage. Indeed, in the last two chapters of Ephesians, Paul applies the exact same principles of love and mutual submission to virtually every relationship imaginable—man, woman, child, slave, and master. Nevertheless, the marriage relationship is unique in one sense. For while the problems that one encounters in marriage may not be any different qualitatively (for the most part) from those of other interpersonal relationships, they are certainly more “revealing,” due to the unique demands placed upon the parties involved. (7) In that sense, Christian marriage is “revelatory” in almost the same sense as the Law. For even as Paul asserts that “before the law came I did not know sin,” (8) marriage can be a very convincing tutor.

Let me explain. The Christian—as virtually every pagan knows—is called to serve God with all of his heart, mind and strength, and also to love his neighbor as himself. Nevertheless, as every true believer must learn (eventually), it is not until one actually tries to fulfill this command that he discovers the depth of his own depravity. In this sense, marriage is a great “lab practical.” Nothing shatters the illusion of our own decency quite like the intimacy of marriage. After all, it is easy to deceive ourselves into thinking that we are basically “good,” loving people, until we are forced into a situation where we really must sacrifice our own self-interest for that of another. It is no accident that the first years of marriage can be so “difficult.” For every son of Adam and daughter of Eve are born self-centered by nature, and perhaps nothing illuminates this fact better than the day-to-day reality of having to share one’s most intimate space with another human being. This is especially true when the “other” becomes one flesh with us! Caring for one’s spouse even as we “love and cherish our own bodies” (Eph 5:28-29) goes against every grain of our fallen condition.

No doubt this is why, in his first letter to the Thessalonians, Paul places his instructions regarding the marital covenant within the context of Christian sanctification. The apostle states:

Finally, brothers, we instructed you how to live in order to please God...Now we ask you and urge you to do this more and more. It is God's will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality; that each of you should learn to live with his own wife in a way that is holy and honorable." (9)

This verse does not guarantee that marriage will inevitably produce sanctified people; nor does it imply that a single person cannot grow in godliness. But it does suggest that at least one of God's many purposes in marriage is the growth of the Christian believer. To overlook or deny this fact is to make a serious mistake in learning how to live "lives that are pleasing to God." Indeed, when all is said and done, perhaps the most important question that can be asked of any marriage is simply this: how much more does our spouse reflect the image and glory of God because of it?

TIM & BETH BREWER

FOOTNOTES:

1 [Back] As cited by George Barna, 1993 Church Report.

2 [Back] 1 Corinthians 15:19.

3 [Back] Cf. Ranald Macaulay and Jerram Barrs' discussion of this text in *Being Human: The Nature of Spiritual Experience*, (InterVarsity Press: Downers Grove, IL, 1978), p 173.

4 [Back] Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Studies on the Sermon on the Mount*, Vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959), p. 96.

5 [Back] Galatians 2:20.

6 [Back] See Dick Keyes' excellent treatment of this topic in *Beyond Identity: Finding Yourself in the Image and Character of God* (Ann Arbor, MI.: Servant Books, 1984), pp. 211-225.

7 [Back] Ibid.

8 [Back] Romans 7:7, 7:9.

9 [Back] 1 Thessalonians 4:1, 3-4. See NIV footnote for variant reading.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS



MARRIAGE PART I - UNITY

Pastor Brian Tweedie and Debbie Tweedie

INTRODUCTION

In this video, Pastor Tweedie and his wife Debbie encourage us to have oneness in our marriage and live out God's design for marriage. We can love each other as Christ loved us by: (a) accepting each other; (b) forgiving each other; and (c) serving each other.

QUESTIONS

1. Why can accepting one another be so challenging in a marriage?

2. Debbie shared her realization that Brian's weakness had a corresponding strength. Think about your spouses or loved one's weakness and consider what a corresponding strength may be. Share this with your group if comfortable.

3. Read Romans 15:7. Why do you think accepting one another as Christ accepted you brings God glory?

4. Pastor Tweedie Shared that even though we live in a fallen sinful world, and we will sin every day in our marriages, we can still keep our oneness by forgiving one another as Christ forgave us. He gives the following suggestions:
 - a) Remove the log from our own eye/ do some self-examination before the Lord
 - b) Go to person w humility and confront them about what happened
 - c) The offender should own offense and ask for forgiveness
 - d) The hurt or offended spouse/person needs to extend forgivenessShare your thoughts about this approach to forgiveness with your group

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5. To seek to serve our spouse or loved one, we can consider daily:
 - a) What is their greatest need today? How can I take something off their plate?
 - b) What can I pray about for them today? What are they currently struggling with or anxious about?
 - c) Is there a goal (short or long-term) I can support or make easier?How is God calling you to serve your spouse or loved one this week? Share with your group.

 6. Read Ephesians 5:21-33. How does acceptance, forgiveness, and serving one another compliment Paul's picture of marriage and the church? Why does Paul say that two becoming one flesh is a profound mystery? How does Christ's relationship to the church inspire your marriage?

 7. Pastor Tweedie reminds us that seeking oneness in marriage is not easy, but God provides the ability to carry this out. How is this an encouragement to you?

CLOSING PRAYER

Thank you God for sharing your design for marriage with us and for giving us the ability to cultivate oneness in our marriages. Lord, please help us to love each other as Christ loved us. Help us to accept each other, forgive each other, and serve each other as you call us to do. Lord, we pray you would receive the glory for our efforts and that our marriages would point others to you. Thank you, Lord, for the gift of marriage.
Amen

NOTES

A Biblical View of Marriage

Christopher Ash

DEFINITION

The biblical view of marriage is of a God-given, voluntary, sexual and public social union of one man and one woman, from different families, for the purpose of serving God.

SUMMARY

Marriage was first instituted by God in the order of creation, given by God as an unchangeable foundation for human life. Marriage exists so that through it humanity can serve God through children, through faithful intimacy, and through properly ordered sexual relationships. This union is patterned upon the union of God with his people who are his bride, Christ with his church. Within marriage, husbands are to exercise a role of self-sacrificial headship and wives a posture of godly submission to their husbands. This institution points us to our hope of Christ returning to claim his bride, making marriage a living picture of the gospel of grace.

This study will comprise three main parts. First, we consider what kind of “thing” marriage is. This may seem a strange beginning, but it is foundational to our study. Next, we discuss the point or purpose of marriage. Finally, we ask the definitional question: what is marriage?

The Nature of Marriage

Marriage is an Institution of God’s Creation Order

When cultures debate marriage-related questions and discuss the ethics of sexual relationships, there is a fundamental divide between those who consider marriage to be, in its essence, a thing “given” from God, and those who regard it as a cultural construct. In Matthew 19, when Jesus is asked a question about divorce, he begins by affirming the teaching of Genesis 1 and 2:

“Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female [Gen. 1:27] and said, ‘Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh’ [Gen. 2:18]” (Matt. 19:4-5).

By taking us back to Creation, Jesus affirms what Genesis teaches, that the two-part sexuality of humankind (created male and female) and the institution of marriage are a “given” from God. This is “given” in the double sense of “given and non-negotiable” and “given as gift.” Professor Oliver O’Donovan writes that created order is “not negotiable within the course of history” and is part of “that which neither the terrors of chance nor the ingenuity of art can overthrow. It defines the scope of our freedom and the limits of our fears” (Oliver O’Donovan, *Resurrection and Moral Order*, 2nd ed., 61). Marriage is a good and stable institution. Human cultures may seek to reinvent it or reshape it, but under God it stands as an unchangeable foundation for human life.

Marriage has, of course, many culturally variable expressions. People enter marriage through varied ceremonies and engage in marriage in different ways. But, in its essence, the institution is a part of the Created Order. For this reason, we may explore from the Bible its purpose and definition (see G.W. Bromily, *God and Marriage*).

The Purpose of Marriage

Marriage is created that we may serve God through children, through faithful intimacy, and through properly ordered sexual relationships.

It is both theologically important and pastorally helpful to ask the question, “For what purpose has God created marriage?” We naturally begin by asking what hopes and ambitions a particular couple may have as they enter into marriage. But before we do this, it is foundational to ask why God has created the marriage institution. The Bible teaches three main answers to this question. But before we consider them, we should note one over-arching theme: the service of God in his world.

In Genesis 2:15, “The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it.” The man is the gardener; his is the guardian and the farmer in God’s garden. In this context we read in Genesis 2:18, “Then the Lord God said, ‘It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make a helper fit for him.’” A careful study of Scripture establishes what the context here suggests, which is that the problem with the man’s aloneness is not a relational loneliness but rather that there is too great a task to be achieved; the man needs, not so much a companion or a lover (though the woman will be those) but a “helper” to work alongside him in the guarding and farming of the garden (see ch. 7 of Christopher Ash, *Marriage: Sex in the Service of God*).

To acknowledge this transforms the study of marriage from a consideration of what pleases us or what we enjoy into a focus upon what will serve the purposes of God. Paradoxically, the most secure and happiest marriages are those that look outwards beyond their own (often stifling) self-absorption (or introspective “coupledom”) to the service of God and others in God’s world, through love of God and neighbor.

Under this over-arching heading of the service of God we may place the three traditional biblical “goods” (or benefits) of marriage: procreation, intimacy, and social order.

Procreation

In Genesis 1:27–28, the creation of humankind as male and female is immediately linked with the blessing that we are to “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over” it. That is to say, the first way in which marriage leads to the service of God is through the procreation, and then the godly nurture, of children. Children are a blessing from God. Not every married couple is given this blessing. When they are not, it is a cause of sadness. A marriage is still a marriage, and can honor God deeply, without children. But we are to esteem the procreation of children as a costly and sacrificial blessing. Our prayer is that children will grow up in “the discipline and instruction of the Lord” (Eph. 6:4) and become—in the language of Genesis 2—fellow-gardeners under God to care for his world.

Intimacy

Sexual desire and delight within marriage are wonderfully affirmed within Scripture (e.g. Proverbs 5:18–19; Song of Songs). To deny the goodness of marriage is to side with the snake in the garden of Eden, when he questions the goodness of God (Gen. 3:1; 1 Tim. 4:1–5).

The relationship of the covenant God with his people is portrayed as a marriage in which the Lord is the husband and the people of God are his bride (e.g. Isa. 62:5). In the New Testament this theme moves into a new key as the marriage of Christ the Bridegroom with the church of Christ, his bride (e.g. Eph. 5:22–33).

Sexual intimacy within marriage is designed to serve God by building a relationship of God-honoring delight and faithfulness, an intimacy that portrays the eschatological intimacy that the whole church of Christ will enjoy with Christ her bridegroom. It would be hard to imagine a higher calling for couples embarking upon marriage (see Timothy and Kathy Keller, *The Meaning of Marriage*).

Social Order

The Bible is realistic about the power of sexual desire, both male and female (with all their differences), and the possibilities of chaos and disorder that arise from those desires when they are not channeled in God's proper order. The seventh commandment's prohibition of adultery (Exod. 20:14) functions as the tip of an iceberg of teaching in both Old and New Testaments that forbid sexual immorality of all kinds. All sexual intimacy that lies outside of the covenanted union of one man with one woman in marriage comes under the biblical definition of sexual immorality. The Bible protects "nakedness" (sexual nakedness, in the context of sexual arousal) and thereby prohibits pornography, rape, the abuse of women, sex between a man and a man, between a man and many women, between a woman and a woman, between a woman and many men, and between human beings and animals.

This boundary around sexual expression is a good and necessary protection of sexual order in any society. When it is broken, and especially when it is broken by a whole culture, sexual chaos ensues, and lives are desperately damaged.

The Definition of Marriage

Marriage is the voluntary sexual and public social union of one man and one woman, from different families. This union is patterned upon the union of God with his people who are his bride, Christ with his church. Intrinsic to this union is God's calling to lifelong exclusive sexual faithfulness (see chs. 11–15 in Christopher Ash, *Marriage: Sex in the Service of God*).

We may summarize the Bible's definition in terms of the following elements.

Consent

Marriage is a voluntary union. The Bible condemns rape and forced marriage (e.g. 2 Sam. 13:14). A man and a woman need to give their consent to be married. With this consent they agree each to give to the other all that they are as sexual beings (1 Cor. 7:2–4). Such consent ought to be given with some understanding of the nature of the institution into which they both enter.

Public

Marriage is a public union. While the intimacy is, and must be, private, the nature of the union is to be public. The man and the woman promise before witnesses that each will be faithful to the other until one of them dies.

Unmarried cohabitations labor under an ambiguity about what exactly the man and the woman have consented to. Often there are different understandings between the two of them. But when a man and a woman marry, there is no such uncertainty. Each has publicly pledged their lifelong faithfulness before the wider society in which they live. In a healthy society, this means that societal support is given for a married couple. There is a social cost to pay by a husband or a wife who breaks a marriage.

One man and one woman: heterosexual

Marriage is between a man and a woman. This is how God has created humankind. A society may call a relationship between two people of the same sex “marriage”; but in the sight of God it can never be so.

One man and one woman: monogamous

Marriage is between one man and one woman. Polygamy in the Old Testament is recorded but never affirmed. Jesus explicitly affirms the Genesis order of one man and one woman (e.g. Matt. 19:5-6 “no longer two, but one flesh”).

From different families

The Bible consistently condemns incest, which is sexual intimacy between those who are too closely related, whether by blood (kinship) or through marriage (affinity). Leviticus 18 is the clearest and most sustained Old Covenant text addressing this question. 1 Corinthians 5 condemns the sexual relationship of a man with his stepmother.

Christians have not always agreed either about the rationale underlying the incest prohibitions or about just where the incest lines ought to be drawn. The most likely answer is that the rationale is to protect the family circle from the destructive confusions arising when someone views a near relative (other than their spouse) as a potential sexual partner. If this rationale is correct, then the precise extent of the incest prohibitions may depend on what counts, in a particular culture, as “close family” (See Christopher Ash, *Marriage: Sex in the Service of God*, 266-271).

The pattern of Christ with his church

Three New Testament passages explicitly address husbands and wives: Ephesians 5:22-33; Colossians 3:18-19; 1 Peter 3:1-7. In these we are taught that husbands are to exercise a role of self-sacrificial headship and wives a posture of godly submission to their husbands. Such a pattern is widely derided and dismissed in much contemporary culture and in some of the church.

In considering this question, we ought to begin with the idea of “order” or “arrangement” (Greek *taxis*) from which the word “submission” is derived. In the New Testament this concept is applied to (a) the submission of all things to God and to Christ (e.g. Eph. 1:22), (b) the submission of Christ to God (1 Cor. 15:24–28), (c) the submission of the believer to God (e.g. James 4:7), (d) the submission of the believer to the civil authorities (e.g. Rom. 13:1–7), (e) the submission of slaves to masters (e.g. Titus 2:9), (f) the submission of church members to their leaders (e.g. Heb. 13:17), (g) the submission of children to parents (e.g. Eph. 6:1), and (h) the submission of wives to husbands (e.g. Eph. 5:24). Submission of slaves to masters is the odd one out in this list, for it has no theological grounding in creation, and in fact the Bible radically undermines the institution of slavery.

The submission of a wife is to be a voluntary submission, an expression of her godly submission to God. The headship of a husband is to be a costly headship, patterned on Christ’s love for his church. At its best this pattern is beautiful and life-giving. It may be subverted (1) by a tyrannical husband, (2) by a wife who fails to be a partner with her husband but is simply passive, (3) by a rebellious wife, and (4) by a husband who abdicates his responsibilities.

Lifelong faithfulness

Faithfulness, or faithful love, is to lie at the heart of the marriage relationship. Marriage is not at root about our feelings (which come and go) but about keeping a promise. Scripture speaks of marriage as a covenant to which God is witness (e.g. Mal. 2:14). When a man and a woman marry (whether or not they are believers), they are joined together by God (e.g. Mark 10:8,9). Neither one of the couple nor any other person is to break what God has joined.

Conclusion: Marriage and the Grace of God

The gospel of Jesus offers grace for sexual failures. After a list that focuses especially on sexual sins, Paul writes, “And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God” (1 Cor. 6:11). We are all scarred by sexual sins, whether our own, in what we have thought, what we have seen, what we have read, or what we have done. In the gospel we find forgiveness and the joy of being washed clean. Joyfully, we hold out to others the cleansing we ourselves have found in Christ.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

MARRIAGE PART 2 - TRUTH AND LOVE

Pastor Brian Tweedie and Debbie Tweedie

INTRODUCTION

In this video, Pastor Tweedie and Debbie discuss the importance of balancing love and truth in your relationships, especially marriage. In Jesus, we see that there is an order, as Jesus often approached people first with love and then with truth.

QUESTIONS

1. Read Ephesians 4:15-16 and Ephesians 5:21-33. How do these passages relate to one another? How is a healthy marriage an expression of the body of Christ functioning properly? Why do you think wives are encouraged to respect their husbands and husbands are encouraged to love their wives? Why is speaking the truth in love necessary for each dynamic?
2. Which side of the love/truth seesaw do you think you tend to fall on? What about your spouse?
3. When we are skewed more towards love, we tend to want to sweep things under the rug, desire peace and avoid conflict. When someone tends to lean towards truth, their message may be hard to receive, and the individual may be (or come across as) critical and judgmental. How does your tendency (either towards truth or love) play out in your relationship?

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4. For the truth-tellers, is there an area of your communication style that could use adjusting (e.g., tone of voice, choice of words, timing, tact)? If so, what? How do you think this shift would bring God glory?
 5. Recall that for those of us on the love end, without truth, we are seeking to appease the other person. We tend to give into arguments and apologize prematurely. Are there any of Pastor Tweedie's suggestions (e.g., being intentional and vulnerable with communication, addressing conflict right away) that would benefit your relationship(s)?
 6. As Debbie said, love opens the door for truth to walk in. Imagine this and share how that may play out in your own relationships and conversations

CLOSING PRAYER

Dear God, Thank you for not leaving us where we are. Thank you for showing us where we need to learn and grow. Help us to be intentional about our spouse's growth and maturity. Please give us a humble and willing spirit to do this hard work.
Amen

NOTES



Parenting Is Hard, but God Is Gracious

Erik Raymond

The gospel changes everything. It changes individuals, husbands, wives, parents, and kids. In the previous article, I focused on the negative part of the command, do not exasperate your children. Now I'll focus on the positive side. Paul instructs parents in Ephesians 6:4 to bring up their children in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

This verse should have a parent's attention. We can package Paul's teaching in three words: **gentleness**, **discipline**, and **instruction**.

Gentleness

This phrase "bring them up" doesn't really communicate the personal nature of what the text is after. The idea is more about nurturing. In fact, it's the same word is translated as "nourish" in Ephesians 5:29. There's a calculated gentleness and carefulness involved with parenting.

God knows our frame. He knows children are vulnerable. They can be easily crushed. Or they can blossom and bloom. Calvin translated this command as, "let them be kindly cherished," and then goes on to emphasize that the overall idea is gentleness and friendliness.

This is a sharp contrast to the common practice in Paul's day. Fathers were quite insensitive, running over their children without a second thought. However, Paul shows the requirements of the new creation to be one of gentle nourishing. It's the new order breaking through and shining in.

Along these lines, I like what Kent Hughes says: "Men are never more true men than when they are tender with their children, whether holding a baby in their arms, loving their grade-schooler, or hugging their teenager or a grown son or daughter."

Before rushing on to anything else in their parenting, Christian parents must have a gentle hand and nourishing spirit. This reflects the Lord Jesus, who does not break the bruised reed (Matt. 12:20). What a convicting word for parents. You may not be a gentle person, but you must be a gentle parent. You can't nourish someone carelessly or harshly.

You may not be a gentle person, but you must be a gentle parent. You can't nourish someone carelessly or harshly.

Discipline

On the other hand, there needs to be ongoing care given to guard the children against developing patterns that would be harmful to them and others, and dishonoring to the Lord. The word “discipline” means training and even punishment. It involves correcting the wrong behavior. It’s the overall, comprehensive instruction of the life of the child.

It’s not God’s will that parents, in the name of kindness and love, should spare their children of discipline. Clearly, to do this would be to harm the children in their development and training. And so we have the Bible speak of the need for parents to love their children, even with discipline:

Whoever spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is diligent to discipline him.
(Prov. 13:24)

Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it.
(Prov. 22:6:)

Kindness does not neglect discipline and correction.

God knows that children need kindness, but he also understands that they need correction. Christian parents, you must see the difference between what our culture holds forth as parenting and what God says is parenting. You must discipline your children. They will not grow, mature, and gain wisdom on their own. God has appointed you in their life to discipline and train them.

Instruction

This word means placing before the mind. It’s verbal instruction that corrects, admonishes, or confronts the behavior. But notice, it has everything to do with the Bible. It is the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

Parents cannot neglect this. Remember Eli and his sons (1 Sam. 2:22-27). We must teach the Word of God to our children and apply life to the Word. Remember Deuteronomy 6:7:

You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise.

The Word of God should always be in the air, in the conversation. Like bread on the table or water in the pitcher, the Bible is to have its placemat on the table. To properly instruct, there needs to be a verbal and visible commitment to the Bible in the home.

When you put these together, you have instruction and discipline with a disposition of kindness and gentleness. Without instruction, discipline looks like abuse. Without a nurturing gentleness, instruction is unfeeling. Without discipline, parents are not fully instructing.

I've often thought of Luther's balancing comment to parents: "Spare the rod and spoil the child — that is true. But beside the rod, keep an apple to give him when he has done well."

Like bread on the table or water in the pitcher, the Bible is to have its placemat on the family table. In order to properly instruct there needs to be a verbal and visible commitment to the Bible in the home.

This puts the burden on parents. How can parents raise their children like God says unless they know what the Word of God teaches? How can they teach with wisdom unless they've personally learned in Christ's school? Parents must be growing in personal godliness if they want to faithfully care for their children.

Yes, parenting is hard. Thankfully, God is gracious. The Bible is sufficient. And, the Holy Spirit indwells believers, making us more and more like Jesus. This encourages discouraged parents to be faithful and prideful parents to be humble.

How to Exasperate Your Children

Erik Raymond

The reality of submitting your life to Jesus, and living under his authority has massive implications. When you become a Christian, all of your relationships are redefined by your relationship with Jesus.

In Ephesians 2-3, we see that people who had substantial personal differences because of the color of their skin or their country of origin were to be set aside in light of their shared relationship in Christ. Being a Christian takes priority. Now in God's family, we are to be loving, gentle, forgiving, and gracious to one another. Later in Ephesians 5, marriage gets a facelift. A Christian marriage should look much different from other marriages in the world around us. This is because of the relationships the husband and wife have with Jesus.

But this isn't all. Even the relationships between parents and children are different. They don't march according to the drumbeat of the world around us but rather according to the tune of heaven. We salute the King, even in our parenting. When the gospel comes to the home, there are changes. God gives specific instructions for the family to reflect his authority. In verses 1-3, instructions for children. And in verse 4, instructions for parents.

Notice in verse 4 that it's addressed to fathers. The word translated here as "fathers" is the common word for father. (Although, in Hebrews 11:23, it is used to describe both parents.) In light of the revolutionary and counter-cultural way Christian dads were to treat their kids, it is likely addressed to fathers to make the point about their accountability to God and the need for something different to take place.

He says, in Ephesians 6:4: **"Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord."**

Pretty straight-forward, don't do this, do that. In this article let's think about what not to do. Do not provoke your children to anger. The word here translated "provoke" has the sense of exasperating, instigating, or inciting. It's the idea of pushing the children's buttons and getting under their skin. Calvin says parents mustn't "irritate their children by unreasonable severity." In a parallel passage in Colossians 3, we read, **"Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged."**

Don't exasperate your kids, lest you discourage them.

How can you exasperate your children? Here are 11 ways.

Bullying: Parents are generally bigger, stronger, and more intelligent than their kids. Combined with the authority of parenting, this could be wielded with harsh and intimidating words that greatly discourage children.

Showing favoritism: If parents favor one child over another discouragement is inevitable (think about Jacob and Esau).

Question their salvation every time they mess up: Saying, “Are you even a Christian?” when your kids do something wrong will reinforce the (erroneous) view that Christians never do anything wrong and that the gospel is not for them.

Unclear standards: Kids need to know and understand the standards they are being held to. If not, then they’ll be confused, surprised, and discouraged.

Unexplained discipline: Discipline requires instruction. Even in Ephesians 6:4, there is a don’t do this and a do this. There is a need to explain what is right and what is wrong.

Inconsistency: Parents need to be consistent with their kids. If something is wrong on Tuesday, it should be wrong on Thursday. Inconsistency sends mixed messages, and, when punished, they lose trust.

Excessive or unreasonable discipline: Just as there are levels of rebellion, there should be corresponding levels of discipline. Also, parents can’t discipline for every single thing that the child does that is wrong. (Otherwise, they would never stop correcting.) Be careful of punishing too often or excessively. Discipline should be reasonable.

Discipline out of anger: Parents who are out of control and losing their temper will hurt their children and discourage them. Think of how twisted it is to inflict harm in the name of love. It will also most certainly damage the child and the relationship. Be careful, parents. (Sometimes we may need a time out.)

Humiliation: Parents are seeking to build up their kids. If they are humiliating them (in public, in front of their siblings, or even one-on-one) with words or discipline, they will most certainly exasperate them.

Never admit you are wrong: Kids live with their parents. They see when they mess up. If the parent never admits they are wrong, especially when the offense is toward the child, then they will soon see through all of the Bible talk. Humility is required by parents who don’t want to exasperate their children.

Over-protection and smothering: Well-meaning overprotection can cause discouragement and resentment. Remember, kids are people who need to grow. Their wills should be shepherded, but they can’t be controlled absolutely.

I’m sure there are a dozen more ways to do this, but you get the idea. God loves children. And so Christian moms and dads should too. This means not exasperating them. In the next article, I’ll address the positive side of the command.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS



PARENT AND CHILD RELATIONSHIP

Pastor Brandon LaFontaine

INTRODUCTION

In this video, Brandon discusses Ephesians 6:1-4 concerning the parent and child relationship. Brandon reminds us that although parenting can be very challenging and we may feel inadequate at times, we are not alone in our parenting. We can look to our Father in heaven for wisdom and guidance to make the most of every opportunity to care, disciple and train our children.

QUESTIONS

1. Read Ephesians 6:1-4 – What stands out to you? Discuss as a group
2. In Eph 6:1-4 Paul uses phrases "in the Lord" and "of the Lord" to refer to children obeying their parents, and fathers bringing up their children in discipline and instruction, respectively. How are each of these an expression of submitting to the Lord (5:21)? Discuss your experience of these phrases in rearing your own children.
3. Thinking about how mother and father parenting roles differ – what about a father's role in a child's life is unique and why is it significant?

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4. In the video, Brandon suggests rather than making your child feel terrible for acting up in public, come alongside your child and coach them through the situation. That is, presenting consequences of their decisions and guiding them as to what to avoid and why. How does this approach compare to your own parenting style?
 5. If your father was in your life in the teenage years, did he engage or did he tend to disengage when things got frustrating? Share what that experience was like for you.
 6. In what area of your parenting is it tempting to dis-engage? How can you bring this parenting struggle before the Lord and seek Him to engage with your child in a meaningful way?
 7. In what areas of your parenting do you need to own up to your limitations, fears, or confusion and look to the Lord for guidance and wisdom to care, disciple and train your children in the ways of the Lord?

CLOSING PRAYER

Dear Heavenly Father, please help us to look to you for guidance in our day-to-day interactions with our children. Help us to not frustrate our children, but rather to train them up to know, love and obey you.

Amen

NOTES



Working for God (Ephesians 6:5-9)

Steven J. Cole

Have you ever thought about how a slogan like, “good help is hard to find,” ever got started? It must have started because, in fact, good help is hard to find! And, why is good help hard to find? Because people are basically self-centered and self-serving. They usually don’t put the interests of their employer first, unless it somehow benefits them. And so employers everywhere complain that good help is hard to find.

It works the other way, too. Good jobs are hard to find. Why? Because employers are basically self-centered and self-serving. They do not often put their employees’ interests first. And so it is rare to find a job where the employer genuinely cares about your welfare.

The apostle Paul wrote our text to show how Christian workers and bosses should treat each other. Granted, it is addressed to slaves and masters, not to employees and employers. Slavery was an accepted institution in the Roman world, where it has been estimated that between one-third and one-half of the population were slaves. Critics of the Bible attack Paul because he did not condemn slavery directly. But if he had done so, it would have led to armed revolt and the Christian faith would have been stamped out as an anti-slavery movement.

Instead, Paul, inspired by the Holy Spirit, did something else: he addressed both slaves and masters directly and showed how their faith should radically change the way that they related to one another. As Charles Hodge observes (Commentary on the Epistle to the Ephesians [Eerdmans, p. 370]), as both sides treated one another in this Christian manner, “first the evils of slavery, and then slavery itself, would pass away as naturally and as healthfully as children cease to be minors.”

But although our text was written to slaves and masters, it applies directly to employees and employers. It shows practically how those filled with the Holy Spirit, who subject themselves to one another in the fear of Christ (5:18, 21), should relate to one another in the workplace. Paul is saying,

Your relationship to Christ and the fact that you live primarily for heaven should transform your relationships at work.

There are two foundational principles in the passage that provide the base for the third principle:

1. Your relationship with Christ is the primary thing in life.

Paul drives home through repetition the centrality of our relationship to Jesus Christ as Lord. Note: (6:5), “as to Christ”; (6:6), “as slaves of Christ,” “doing the will of God from the heart”; (6:7), “as to the Lord”; (6:8), “receive back from the Lord”; (6:9), “their Master and yours is in heaven....”

You can’t miss it: as a believer, your relationship with Jesus Christ as Lord is the primary, governing fact of life. Paul is expounding here on what he said (5:21), that we are to submit to one another “in the fear of Christ.” Nothing that we do should be done apart from that consideration. Every believer should live every day with the focus, “I fear Christ. I am no longer my own. I belong to Christ as my Lord. I must do His will. I must live to please Him. Someday I will stand before Him to receive the reward for my faithful obedience.” Christ must be at the center of all that we think and do.

This is the emphasis of the entire Bible. The first and greatest commandment is (Matt. 22:37), “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.” The second greatest commandment is that we love one another. But the Lord does not put that command first. It is deliberately second, because the primary thing in life, the foundation for everything else, is that you love the Lord God, who has manifested Himself to us in the person of Jesus Christ. Relationship with Christ is primary!

Is it primary for you? Did your schedule last week reflect that fact? Did you meet alone with God in His Word to learn more about Him and how He wants you to live? Did you submit every thought, every decision, every word that you spoke, and every deed to the test, “Does this please my Lord Jesus Christ?” Did you take your needs to Him in prayer? You can’t begin to have the right perspective towards your job or your boss or your employees until you first get right with Jesus Christ. As Paul makes clear, you work primarily for Him. As he puts it in the parallel (Col. 3:24), “It is the Lord Christ whom you serve.”

2. Your relationship with Christ should put your focus primarily on heaven, not on this world.

Slaves in the Roman world often were treated terribly. They could be whipped, branded, mutilated, or killed. As punishment a slave could be sold so that he was forever separated from his family. Augustus crucified a slave who accidentally killed his pet quail. Juvenal wrote of a slave owner whose greatest pleasure was “listening to the sweet song of his slaves being flogged” (William Barclay, cited by John MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary, Ephesians* [Moody Press], p. 323).

So when Paul tells slaves, in effect, “be good slaves and you will be rewarded in heaven,” critics viciously attack him: “That’s just ‘pie in the sky when you die.’ That’s cruel disregard for the hardships that these poor victims are suffering right now! How dare you promise them reward in heaven when they die! We need to organize a slave protest! Slaves of the world, unite! Stand up for your rights!”

But you've got to decide at this point, do you go with the world's way or with God's way? The two could not be much more opposed to each other than they are here. The world says, "Fight for your rights! Don't take this abuse!" God says (6:5, 8), "Slaves, be obedient to your masters according to the flesh" [emphasizing the temporality of the situation] ... "knowing that whatever good thing each one does, this he will receive back from the Lord...." The world's focus is on the here and now. God's focus is on rewards in eternity.

An old song goes, "This world is not my home, I'm just a passin' through; my treasures are laid up, somewhere beyond the blue. The angels beckoned me from heaven's open door, and I can't feel at home in this world anymore." I wonder how many believers today could sing that song truthfully?

Paul repeats a phrase twice (6:8, 9) that reveals something that he had taught these believers: "knowing that...." The slave asks, "Why should I toil day after day in a difficult job that has no financial rewards for me?" Paul says (6:8), "knowing that whatever good thing each one does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether slave or free." The master asks, "Why should I treat my slaves decently and not threaten these no good, lazy bums when they don't work hard?" Paul answers (6:9), "knowing that both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no partiality with Him." Both verses point to eternity. Because of their relationship with Christ, both slave and master should have their focus on laying up rewards in heaven, not on rewards in this life.

This is a neglected doctrine in our day. I wonder how many of you did something this past week because you were consciously motivated by the thought that the Lord would reward you for it in heaven? If you're not living to lay up treasures in heaven, your focus is wrong. In Hebrews 11, the great faith chapter, the emphasis is on the fact that these great men and women of faith died without receiving the promised reward. They were seeking "a better country, that is, a heavenly one" (Heb. 11:16). Moses left the riches and power of Pharaoh's court and endured ill treatment with the people of God, "for he was looking to the reward" (Heb. 11:26).

There is a story about an old missionary couple who had spent their lives working in Africa. They were returning to New York City to retire. They had no pension, their health was broken, and they were discouraged and afraid. When they went down to the wharf to board the ship, they discovered that they were booked on the same ship as President Teddy Roosevelt, who was returning from a big game hunt.

When they boarded the ship, no one paid any attention to them. Then they watched the fanfare as the President arrived, with the band playing and people waiving and straining for a glimpse of the great man.

As the ship moved across the ocean, the old missionary said to his wife, "Dear, something is wrong. Why should we have given our lives in faithful service for God in Africa all these years, and yet no one cares about us? Here this man comes back from a big game hunt, and everybody makes much over him." His wife replied, "Dear, you shouldn't feel that way. Try not to be bitter about it." But he said, "I just can't help it. It doesn't seem right."

As the boat neared America, he became more depressed. When the ship docked, a band was waiting to greet the President. The mayor of New York plus a bunch of national leaders were there. The papers carried the story on the front page. But no one noticed the missionaries, as they slipped off the boat and went to find a cheap flat and to look for work.

That night the man's spirit broke. He felt that God had abandoned them. It just wasn't fair. "We don't have anyone to help us and no where to go," he told his wife. "Why doesn't God meet our need?" His wife replied, "Why don't you go into the bedroom and talk to the Lord about the whole thing?"

A short time later he came out of the bedroom, but now his face was happy. His wife asked what happened. He said, "I told the Lord the whole thing. I told Him that it's not fair. I told Him how I was bitter because the President received this tremendous homecoming, when no one met us when we returned home. And you know, as I finished, it seemed as though the Lord put His hand on my shoulder and said simply, "But, you're not home yet." (There are several versions of this story. This one is from Ray Stedman, *Jesus Teaches on Prayer* [Word], pp. 30-31.)

Do you have a boring job? Maybe it's even oppressive. Do you look on each day with dread, thinking, "What a hassle" as you grind through work? Paul says, "Get the eternal perspective! Put your focus on heaven. Even if your earthly boss doesn't reward you, your heavenly Master will." This doesn't mean that you should not look for a better job or try to better your circumstances. But it does mean that your relationship with Christ should put your focus primarily on heaven, not on this earth.

So we have two foundational principles for approaching the third principle that deals specifically with work. First, your relationship with Christ is primary. Second, because of that, your focus should primarily be on heaven, not on this world.

3. Your relationship with Christ should make you the best employee or employer on the job.

A. Your relationship with Christ should make you the best employee on the job.

The key concept is, you do not work primarily for your employer. You work primarily for Jesus Christ, who sees your every motive and action, even when your earthly boss is not there. Paul gives five qualities that should characterize every Christian worker:

(1). A Christian employee should be obedient.

Don't ignore your boss. Don't say yes and then not do what he asks you to do. Don't roll your eyes and then piddle around because you think that what he asked is stupid. Rather, obey "with fear and trembling, in the sincerity of your heart, as to Christ" (6:5). In the Greek text, Paul says to obey from the heart (6:5), from the soul (6:6, NASB, "heart"), and from the mind (6:7, NASB, "good will"). In other words, it is to be a total person thing, not half-hearted obedience.

(2). A Christian employee should be conscientious before the Lord.

Paul says to obey “with fear and trembling” (6:5). This does not mean cowering in fear before your boss. Paul uses this expression frequently with the idea of fearing that you will misrepresent the Lord and the gospel. It refers to fearing God in light of the final judgment (Peter O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians* [Eerdmans/Apollos], p. 449-450). It means doing your job well so that your boss will not think poorly of your Lord. If you would not do shoddy work for Christ, then don’t do shoddy work for your boss.

(3). A Christian employee should be focused in purpose.

Paul says to be obedient “in the sincerity of your heart” (6:5). Sincerity is often used to refer to generosity in Christian giving (Rom. 12:8; 2 Cor. 8:2; 9:11, 13). It has the nuance of singleness of focus, along with liberality. It means that you give it your all, with undivided attention and effort. You don’t waste time on the job. You don’t share your faith with other employees on company time, unless your boss has given you permission to do so. Rather, you are focused on the task that you have been assigned.

(4). A Christian employee should be genuine, not hypocritical.

Paul says (6:6), “not by way of eyeservice, as men-pleasers.” In other words, you don’t just work hard when your boss is looking, in order to get his approval, and then slack off when he’s not around. A man-pleaser worries about what people think, but he’s not concerned with what God thinks. He tries to make a good impression, so that he can get a raise or promotion, but his heart is not in the work. He is manipulative for his own gain, but not sincerely concerned about pleasing his boss as a testimony for Christ.

(5). A Christian employee should enthusiastically serve Christ from the heart on the job.

As I said, in the Greek text, Paul says to obey from the heart (6:5), from the soul (6:6, NASB, “heart”), and from the mind (6:7, NASB, “good will”). This implies having an enthusiastic, positive, cheerful spirit on the job. It’s easy to fall in with other employees that complain about the boss or the low pay or the poor working conditions or the lousy benefits. The list goes on and on!

As the boat neared America, he became more depressed. When the ship docked, a band was waiting to greet the President. The mayor of New York plus a bunch of national leaders were there. The papers carried the story on the front page. But no one noticed the missionaries, as they slipped off the boat and went to find a cheap flat and to look for work.

But remember, the slaves to whom Paul was writing didn't have any rights, any benefits, any time off, or any pay beyond board and room! If they goofed up, they could be beaten or worse! If they did well, there were no raises or promotions. And yet Paul tells them to be obedient in the sincerity of their hearts, doing the will of God from the soul, and rendering service with good will, which has the nuance of zeal, eagerness, and wholeheartedness (O'Brien, p. 452). Why? Because they were doing it for the Lord Jesus Christ, not for their earthly masters. Christians should be the best employees on the job!

B. Your relationship with Christ should make you the best employer on the job.

Paul lists two things for the Christian master or employer:

(1). A Christian employer should treat his employees as he would wish to be treated.

Paul's word to Christian masters would have been shocking in those times, when the laws and the culture were slanted completely towards the masters, even to the point of brutality and death for the slaves (O'Brien, p. 454). When Paul says, "do the same things," he does not mean that the masters were to serve their slaves. Rather, as Charles Hodge explains (Commentary on the Epistle to the Ephesians [Eerdmans], p. 368), "Masters are to act towards their slaves with the same regard to the will of God, with the same recognition of the authority of Christ, with the same sincerity and good feeling which had been enjoined on the slaves themselves."

In other words, Christian employers should treat their employees as the employer would want to be treated if he were an employee. He should be fair, reasonable, and understanding. He should not play favorites, because his Master in heaven does not show partiality (6:9).

(2). A Christian employer should give up threatening.

This also would have been a shocking command in that day! Paul is not saying that a master could not give a proper warning to a disobedient or lazy slave. Rather, he means that he is to treat him with respect, not demeaning him or threatening him with terrifying punishment. During the same time that Paul wrote Ephesians from prison, he had met and led to Christ a runaway slave named Onesimus. Runaway slaves were usually executed or at least punished so severely that it served as a lesson to other slaves not to try the same thing. But Paul wrote to Philemon, the Christian slave owner, telling him that he should now treat Onesimus as a beloved brother in Christ. This was radical stuff that went against the culture of the day! But that's how Christian employers should treat their employees, knowing that they both have the same Lord in heaven, and there is no partiality with Him (6:9).

Conclusion

On February 22, 1899, Elbert Hubbard, an editor of a small magazine, needed some filler for the next issue. He sat down after dinner and in an hour banged out an article that was run without a title. He didn't think much more about it. But a few weeks later, requests began to come in for that issue of the magazine: a dozen, fifty, a hundred, and then a thousand copies were requested. The editor was puzzled over the interest. He asked a helper, who told him it was the title-less article.

Then an order came for 100,000 copies from the president of a large railroad company. The editor replied that it would take him at least two years to fill that order. The railroad president asked for and received permission to print it himself. He distributed at least a million and a half copies. Then a Russian railroad executive touring the U.S. saw it. When he got home he had it translated into Russian and gave a copy to every railroad employee in Russia.

It spread into Germany, France, Spain, Turkey, India, and China. During the war between Russia and Japan, every Russian soldier was given a copy of this article. The Japanese, finding the booklets in possession of the Russian prisoners, concluded it must be a good thing, and translated it into Japanese. A copy was given to every man working for the Japanese Government. In all, it was translated into 37 languages and sold over 40 million copies, becoming one of the best selling items ever printed.

Why was there such a demand for this article? It later gained the title, “A Message to Garcia.” It was about an incident in the Spanish-American War. President McKinley wanted a message delivered personally to General Garcia in the interior of Cuba. An American officer, Lieutenant Rowan, had simply received his orders, taken the message, and without complaint, without procrastination, and without fanfare, in spite of great difficulty and danger, delivered the message to Garcia. The article extolled the faithfulness of this man who simply took the initiative and did his job well. The demand for the article stemmed from the fact that there is such a lack of diligent, faithful employees who do what they are supposed to do – who take the message to Garcia. Good help really is hard to find!

That’s where your opportunity as a Christian employee or employer comes in. Your relationship to Christ and the fact that you live primarily for heaven should transform your relationships and performance at work. You should be the best employee or employer on the job. While you reserve verbal witness for breaks or after work, your attitude and performance testify to your Savior. Your attitudes and work ethic may be the only Bible that your fellow workers ever read. Let it point them to the Savior! Even if you are never rewarded in this life, your Master in heaven will reward you throughout eternity.

Application Questions

Why must your relationship with Christ be the primary foundation for how you relate at work? Give practical examples of how this works.

Where is the biblical balance between having your focus on heaven and yet providing for necessities on earth? Do savings accounts, investments, etc. violate the heavenly focus?

When is it right and when is it wrong to seek to better yourself financially through a job change? Give biblical support.

To what extent should rewards in heaven motivate us? Is this motivation selfish? Why/why not?

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http://feeds.bible.org/steve_cole/ephesians/cole_ephesians_54.mp3

Christian Masters (Ephesians 6:5–11)

Bible Commentary / Produced by TOW Project

It is cruel for a master to force a slave to choose between obedience to the master and obedience to Christ. Therefore, Paul tells masters to “stop threatening” their slaves (Eph. 6:9). If masters order slaves to do good work, then threats should not be necessary. If masters order slaves to do evil work, then their threats are like threats against Christ. As in the letter to the Colossians, Ephesians agrees that masters should re-member that they have a Master in heaven. But Ephesians underscores the fact that both slaves and masters “have the same Master” (Eph. 6:9). For this reason, Ephesians says that masters are to “do the same for your slaves” (Eph. 6:9) — that is, to give orders to slaves as though they were giving the orders to (or for) Christ. With this in mind, no Chris-tian master could order a slave to do evil work, or even excessive work. Though the earthly distinction of master and slave remains intact, their relationship has been altered with an unprecedented call to mutuality. Both parties are subject to Christ alone “in singleness of heart” (Eph. 6:5). Neither can lord it over the other, since only Christ is Lord (Eph. 6:7). Neither can shirk the duty of love to the other. This passage ac-cepts the economic and cultural reality of slavery, but it contains fertile seeds of abolitionism. In Christ’s kingdom, “there is no longer slave or free” (Gal. 3:28).

Slavery continues to flourish in our world today, much to our shame, though it’s often called human trafficking or forced labor. The inner logic of Ephesians 6:5–9, as well as the broader story of Ephesians, motivates us to work for the end of slavery. Most of us, however, will not experience slavery in a personal way, either as slaves or as masters. Yet we do find ourselves in workplace relationships where someone has authority over another person. By analogy, Ephesians 6:5–9 teaches both employers and employees to order, perform, and reward only work that could be done by or for Christ. When we are ordered to do good work, the issue is simple, though not always easy. We do it to the best of our ability, regardless of the compensation or appreciation we receive from our bosses, customers, regulators, or anyone else in authority over us.

When we are ordered to do evil work, the situation is more com-plicated. On the one hand, Paul tells us to “obey your earthly masters . . . as you obey Christ.” We cannot lightly disobey those in earthly au-thority over us, any more than we can lightly disobey Christ. This has even caused some to question whether whistleblowing, work stoppages, and complaints to regulatory authorities are legitimate for Christian employees. At the very least, a difference of opinion or judgment is not by itself good enough cause to disobey a valid order at work. It is important not to confuse “I don’t want to do this work, and I don’t think it’s fair for my boss to tell me to do it” with “It is against God’s will for me to do this work.” Paul’s instruction to “obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling” suggests that we obey the orders of those in authority over us unless we have strong reason to believe doing so would be wrong.

Yet Paul adds that we obey earthly masters as a way of “doing the will of God from the heart.” Surely, if we are ordered to do something clearly against God’s will—for example, a violation of biblical commands or values—then our duty to our higher master (Christ) is to resist the ungodly order from a human boss. The crucial distinction often requires finding out whose interests would be served by disobeying the order. If disobeying would protect the interests of another person or the larger community then there is a strong case for disobeying the order. If disobeying the order would protect only our personal interests, the case is weaker. In some cases, protecting others could even jeopardize our careers or cost us our livelihoods. No wonder Paul says, “Be strong in the Lord” and “Put on the whole armor of God” (Eph. 6:10, 11).

Yet surely we express compassion for those—including maybe ourselves at times—who face the choice of obeying a genuinely ungodly order or suffering personal loss such as getting fired. This is especially true in the case of workers near the bottom of the economic ladder, who may have few alternatives and no financial cushion. Workers are routinely ordered to perform a variety of petty evils, such as lying (“Tell her I’m not in the office”), cheating (“Put an extra bottle of wine on table 16’s tab—they’re too drunk to even notice”), and idolatry (“I expect you to act like this job is the most important thing in the world to you”). Do we have to resign over every one of them? Other times, workers may be ordered to do serious evils. “Threaten to drag her name through the mud if she won’t agree to our terms.” “Find an excuse to fire him before he uncovers any more falsified quality control records.” “Dump it in the river tonight when no one is around.” Yet the alternative of losing a job and seeing our family slide into poverty may be—or seem—even worse than following the ungodly order. Often it’s not clear which alternatives are more in accord with biblical values and which are less. We must acknowledge that the decisions can be complex. When we are pressured to do something wrong, we need to depend on God’s power to stand firmer against evil than we ever believed we could. Yet we also need to bear Christ’s word of compassion and forgiveness when we find that Christians cannot overcome all the evils of the world’s workplaces.

When we are the ones in authority, then, we should order only work that Christ would order. We do not order subordinates to harm themselves or others in order to benefit ourselves. We do not order others to do what in good conscience we will not do. We do not threaten those who refuse our orders out of conscience or justice. Though we are bosses, we have bosses of our own, and Christians in authority still have a heightened duty to serve God by the way we command others. We are Christ’s slaves, and we have no authority to order or obey anyone else in opposition to Christ. For each of us, no matter our position in the workplace, our work is a way of serving—or failing to serve—God.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

EMPLOYEE AND EMPLOYER RELATIONSHIPS

Jim Proos

INTRODUCTION

In this video, Jim teaches about the relationship between employer and employee and what the Bible has to say about this relationship. Ultimately, we are called to work as though working for the Lord.

QUESTIONS

1. Read Ephesians 6:5-9. What is Paul's overarching concern for both workers (slaves) and employers (masters)? What is the difference between a people pleasing worker and an employer who shows partiality?
2. Col 3:23 says, "Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters". We all work, be it paying jobs, as homemakers, around our own homes, etc. Is this a challenging command for you to keep? Why or why not?
3. Jim reminds us that work is a good thing that God has blessed us with. God gave work to Adam and Eve in the very beginning of time before sin entered the world. How have you found this to be true in your life?

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4. Jim also reminds us that our attitude in the work environment is a witness, whether we are employees or employers. Is this easy or hard for you to keep in mind while working? Why or why not?
 5. Have you ever considered work to be a form of worship? How could this perspective impact you, your work, and those around you?
 6. Take time to pray over any challenging work situations you may be facing.

CLOSING PRAYER

God, thank you for the gift of work. Thank you for your Word and the freedom we can experience when we obey and live out your precepts. Help us to work as though working for you. Help us to view the work you have set before us as a form of worship. We pray that our attitudes and behavior in our work settings would bring you glory and praise.
Amen

NOTES



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 **small
Groups**

A special thank you to all who contributed to the Relationship
Essentials Small Group Video and Devotional Series.

Pastor Chris Winans
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Emily Mihocko-Bowling
Jonathan Bowling
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Small Group Servant Team

"Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God."
Ephesians 5:1-2

The most essential relationship followers of Jesus have is with our God (Father, Son, and Spirit). Every relationship we have is informed first and foremost by our relationship to God given by grace through faith in Jesus.

In this devotional and study series we explore Ephesians 5:1-6:9 as this portion of Scripture calls us to imitate God and be filled with His Spirit as we live out our faith in our families and workplace.

The Relationship Essentials study is a personal devotional and a group discussion guide designed to be used in conjunction with video lessons available on our website.

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