

Ephesians 5:21-6:9

Week 10 - Submission Out of Reverence for Christ

Learning Objectives

- To understand what it means to submit to one another out of reverence for Christ
- To view submission and authority in Christian relationships through the lens of Christ's love for the Church rather than the typical (and often abusive) relational power structures encountered in society.

Materials

- Make sure that there are writing utensils for everyone, and printed handouts. There is a note-taking activity.

Icebreaker

? We all play different roles in our daily lives. How many "hats" did you wear this week? (example: friend, spouse, coworker, employee, son/daughter...)?

? Optional icebreaker (Leaders, you know whether this will land with your group or not): What is your favorite role to play in League of Legends? (Warrior, off-tank, support, mage, dps...)

Leader's Note: This passage can be contentious. Throughout history, lots of ink has been spilled over what 'submit' means. It would serve the discussion well for everyone to take 5-10 minutes to read the passage and note the key words (in the chart following the passage) that Paul uses to make his points. This will hopefully get everyone on the same page as you move into group discussion. Also, please note that the questions are intended to explore the ideas Paul communicates at a higher level before going deeper; guide the discussion with that in mind!

Ephesians 5:21-6:9 (NIV)

²¹ Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.

²² Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord. ²³ For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. ²⁴ Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.

²⁵ Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her ²⁶ to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, ²⁷ and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. ²⁸ In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. ²⁹ After

A note on verse 21: Ephesians 5:15-21 is actually all one sentence in the original Greek. Verse 21 connects the thoughts in that sentence to what follows in this passage.

all, no one ever hated their own body, but they feed and care for their body, just as Christ does the church—³⁰ for we are members of his body.³¹ “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.”³² This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church.³³ However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.

^{6:1} Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.² “Honor your father and mother”—which is the first commandment with a promise—³ “so that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth.”

⁴ Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.

⁵ Slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ.⁶ Obey them not only to win their favor when their eye is on you, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from your heart.⁷ Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not people,⁸ because you know that the Lord will reward each one for whatever good they do, whether they are slave or free.

⁹ And masters, treat your slaves in the same way. Do not threaten them, since you know that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no favoritism with him.

Section	Key Words
5:21-33	
6:1-4	
6:5-9	

Part I: Ephesians 5:21

? How does our culture view the word 'submit'? What do you normally think of when you hear this word?

Possible answers: being a doormat, never getting your way, slaving away at home for the husband/family, gender or racial oppression

? What are some ways that Jesus demonstrated submission? Why should we be so focused on Jesus when we submit to one another? (See Philippians 2:1-11 for help)

Possible answers: was obedient to His parents, worked as a carpenter prior to His ministry, cleaned His disciples' dirty feet, endured mockery, was crucified for our sake. Our Servant Lord indwells us, and we ought to consider how to be like Him (as Philippians 2 instructs)

Part II: Ephesians 5:22-33

? What is your initial reaction to this section about husbands and wives? What thoughts come to mind?

Possible answers: submission, loving as Christ loves us, feeling like husbands and wives aren't equal...

Leader's note: you should be prepared to answer this question of equality. Different roles does not imply inequality, and truly the husband's command to love sacrificially is a tall order even as the wife is instructed to submit.

? Are there limits to a wife's submission to a husband?

Possible answers: the husband is called to Christ-likeness. The husband is also a flawed human. In questions of potential abuse, where Christ-like love is not being exercised, lines should certainly be drawn! This is certainly not an absolute command without restriction.

? Why is the husband commanded to love his wife, yet the wife is commanded to respect her husband?

Possible answers: though both love and respect should be shared, it can seem like men and women are wired differently to more greatly desire and value either demonstrated love or respect.

Part III: Ephesians 6:1-4

? What responsibilities do parents and children have toward one another?

Possible answers: children are to obey and respect their parents, parents are to discipline and instruct their children.

? What does it mean to obey your parents ‘in the Lord’? What does it mean to honor your parents?

Possible answers: Christian parental instruction should align with God’s word, and be rooted in love for the child. Obedience to parents reflects our obedience to the Lord out of faith, even when we do not fully understand His purposes. Commands that overtly contradict God’s word should not be blindly followed.

? How does this change as a child becomes an adult? Is it possible to honor your parents without obeying them? What if your parents aren’t believers?

Possible answers: Honor is an expression of love that requires acknowledging the profound sacrifices made by parents for their children. Reliance on parents changes as a child grows into adulthood and ultimately becomes independent. No parent is perfect, but it is possible to demonstrate honor without respecting sinful choices or obeying instructions that contradict God’s commands.

Part IV: Ephesians 6:5-9

Leader’s note: Slavery in the first century was different from our American understanding influenced by the race-based southern plantation slave system in the United States before the civil war. In contrast, slaves in the Roman era could accumulate wealth, marry, run a business, and purchase their freedom. It may be helpful to know that the word slave could also be translated ‘servant’ or ‘bondservant.’ While some slaves were captured as spoils of war and abuse was common, Cicero noted that a slave could usually be set free within seven years; under Roman law a slave would normally be set free by age 30. It is estimated that up to 2/3 of the Roman population were slaves.

? What is a modern-day American parallel to the servant/master relationship?

Possible answers: boss/employee, teacher/student

? How does God feel about slaves? (Hint: think Israel’s deliverance from slavery in Egypt) Does this influence your view of these commands?

Possible answers: softens the blow a bit, that God’s ‘favorite’ type of people to save are called to holiness rather than seeing it as the lowest rung in society being asked to go lower.

? What do servants and masters have in common v.9? How does this shape the biblical dynamic between a slave and master?

Possible answers: both are creatures under God’s mastery. This is the basis for the ‘in the same way’ phrase that Paul uses, and shows that this isn’t to be a unilateral deal.

Part V: Summary

? What is the ultimate goal, mission, or purpose of the husband/wife, child/parent, and master/servant dynamic?

Possible answers: to reflect Christ and the Church, to display God's design, to bring unity to the human race, etc.

? How can Jesus serve as an example for you in your interpersonal relationships? (See v29, Mark 10:45, Phil 2:5-7)

Possible answers: putting my own preferences aside, trusting the authority above me, taking a step back from my immediate wants for the sake of obeying God

For Discussion and Accountability

? Is there a particular role in which you often struggle to achieve Paul's ideal as listed in the passage? How can you look to Christ for help to obey God in that role?