

May 5/6, 2001

**The Truth About Our Life in Christ**

*A Study in the Book of Ephesians*

**“In Christ” at Home and Beyond**

**Ephesians 6:1-9**

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I'm going to do a little psychological test on you—a word association. When I say a word, you think about the first word that comes into your mind: *Red... Fast... Wet... Submit...*

Okay, now let's be honest. When I said the word *submit*, did the first thing that came into your mind have something to do with marriage or wife? Isn't it interesting how automatically that's where we go? Even though, when you stop and think about it, we submit in dozens of ways every single day of life. Just in coming here this morning, think of all the ways you were in submission. Hopefully, you were in submission to the traffic laws; you drove on the right side of the street, drove the speed limit, stopped at the right light. Can you imagine pulling up to the intersection and saying, “Nobody's going to tell me what to do,” going through the light, and the consequences of that? You hopefully have a license for your car, a license for you to drive, and your car is insured.

When you came in this morning, you walked by a sign on the door, which says, “No Coffee in the Auditorium.” I don't know if anybody threw down their coffee cup and said, “I can't believe these people tell us what to do here.” During our worship time you stood up; you sat down; you started singing; you stopped singing. Those are all acts of submission. When you go into a restaurant, the sign says, “Please Wait to be Seated.” You don't kick that sign down and say, “Nobody's going to tell me what to do!” You're in submission to the city council, to the government, to the school board, to your employer, and to the agencies that govern how you run your business.

We are all in submission in dozens of ways everyday, but for some reason we seem to go to this one role and, in my opinion, just blow it way out of proportion. Maybe that's because of what that role represents. It represents the church's submission to Christ, and the enemy hates that more than anything, so maybe that's why he has tried to really make it a point of conflict. But we'll see, as we go through Ephesians 6, that Paul isn't talking about just one specific category of people who submit—such as the wife to the husband—but he's talking about six categories of people who submit.

Turn to Ephesians 5 and we'll do a short review, and then go on into chapter 6. Remember, we're talking about Spirit-filled behavior, and Spirit-filled behavior leads to a mutual submission to one another in the body of Christ (verse 21). With that, there is a reminder that the body of Christ is made up of male and female; it's made up of all different races; and it's also made up of all different ages. Have you ever stopped to consider the fact that if a 10-year-old child trusts Jesus as Savior, that child is as much “in Christ” as a 40-year-old? Everything that is true in chapters 1, 2, and 3 of a 40-year-old is true of a 10-year-old, because that 10-year-old is part of the body of Christ. That 10-year-old has a part in the body of Christ, has a role to fulfill, and should be equipped to serve. Children are not the church of tomorrow. They are the church of today, and they should be treated that way. They, too, have a role and a calling. Therefore, verse 21 applies to us, as well—between adults and

children. We submit to them and they submit to us, in a sense, to understand calling and role and value, and all that goes with the implications of being part of the body of Christ.

We talked about the first category that Paul goes to—wives submitting to husbands. But the word *submit* doesn't even show up in verse 22. It is implied from verse 21. So, just in terms of the grammar, you can't even interpret verse 22 without going back to verse 21. Therefore, Paul makes it impossible to discuss what it means for a wife to be submissive to her husband without first noticing that we submit to one another. A husband submits to his wife; a wife submits to her husband—that's what it means to be part of the body of Christ.

As this goes beyond wives, notice how Paul lists six different categories of people, and with each category he just names them at the front of the sentence. So notice the structure of the passage. After verse 21, when he talks about this mutual submission as a result of being filled with the Spirit, verse 22 says: wives; verse 25: husbands; chapter 6:1: children; verse 4: fathers; verse 5: slaves; and verse 9: masters. It isn't just that there is one category of people (wives) and they're supposed to be in submission. But he is saying: wives, husbands, children, parents, slaves, and masters. All of those are just applications of what he has said in verse 21.

One other thing to notice about the passage itself, before we get specific, is that Paul is speaking directly to everyone of these categories of people. In other words, he doesn't say, "Husbands, go home and tell your wives." He doesn't say, "Masters, go home and tell your slaves." He doesn't say, "Parents, go home and tell your children." He is speaking to them directly. Remember, in the 1<sup>st</sup> century they didn't have printing presses, and they didn't have multiple copies of the Bible. Instead, what happened was that the letter arrived, and someone would stand up and read it to the congregation, and that was their corporate worship. So Paul is implying who is going to be in the audience—wives, husbands, children, parents, slaves, masters.

What's interesting is that half of the people mentioned weren't even allowed to be in a teaching environment previous to the establishment of the church. When they stood up to teach, women weren't welcome; children weren't welcome; and slaves weren't welcome. Paul is, again, breaking an old paradigm and saying, "It's not going to be that way in the church. We are all one people; we're one family; we're all together in Christ." Paul is assuming who is going to be in the audience—women, men, children, adults, slaves, masters. And just the way Paul is approaching this subject is fairly radical in that 1<sup>st</sup> century culture.

Last week we talked about wives representing the submission of the church to Christ. We talked about husbands loving their wives as Christ loves the church, providing an environment where that wife can flourish just the way God has made her. Let's move into chapter 6 and talk about children and parents. When Paul says, "Children, obey your parents," *children* would be defined, in this case, as anyone who is under the authority of that parent, living at home with their parents as primary caregivers who pay the bills. So both children and teenagers would be in that particular category. Again, it is worth noting that Paul is speaking directly to these children. He is assuming the children are in the congregation and assuming they are being taught. But he's also assuming they can be Spirit-filled people in Christ, because that is where all this is coming from.

Spirit-filled behavior leads to these behaviors, and now Paul is saying in essence, "Children, when you are Spirit-filled, this is what it looks like: You obey your parents in the

Lord, for this is right.” “In the Lord” would be another way of saying “in Christ.” In other words, chapters 1-3 are just as true of you as children, and you can be just as Spirit-filled, and this is what it looks like in the home. Obey your parents—why? Because your parents are always right? No, that’s not quite what it says. Because your parents are always fair? No, it doesn’t say that either. It says, “because this is right.” He is saying that God has established an authority structure in the home, and the parents are responsible to God. Because they are responsible, they have been given the authority to carry out their responsibility, and the children are to be in submission to that. That is the way God has set it up.

You know, sometimes I think we make this parenting thing too complicated. We get into all these little formulas and all these cute little techniques and all this psychology. A lot of times, what it boils down to is just a very clear understanding from the beginning, “I’m the parent. I’m in charge—you’re not.” And we need to establish that is the way it is going to work in our home. I know that sounds rather simple, but it seems to me some parents have forgotten that. That is really the way it works: “I’m in charge—not you.” And that is really important, because that is a child’s first understanding of authority. If a child does not understand your authority as parents, that child will not understand God’s authority, so it’s very important that it is clearly established.

Paul goes on in verse 2: “Honor your father and mother (which is the first commandment with a promise) that it may be well with you and that you may live long on the earth.” For those of you who are children or teenagers under your parents’ authority, the word *honor* means to esteem. It means to value—to understand your parents’ God-given role and submit to that. They will answer for how they parent you, and you are to work in cooperation to honor and value that. This is taken from the fifth of the Ten Commandments in the Old Testament. Now there is a lot of discussion about what Paul meant when he said, “This is the first commandment with a promise.” Some argue that it seems the second commandment had a promise. And some say, “No, it wasn’t really a promise; it was a statement; this was the first one with a promise. Other people say it wasn’t first in the chronology, but it means first, as most important, with a promise.

You can get into some strange discussions about all of this. But one thing that is interesting is that many people divide the Ten Commandments by saying the first four make up one category that deal with our relationship to God. They would say commandments five through ten (the last six) deal with our relationships with one another—that’s the second category. But the Hebrew people didn’t agree with that. They believed there were two tablets, five commandments on each tablet. The first five dealt with the relationship with God; the second five dealt with relationships with one another. Now I think that is correct, and I think that is what Paul is referring to here, when he says the “first commandment with a promise.” I think he is saying that the fifth commandment is the first commandment to a child. In other words, the first commandment is to honor God as God and all the implications of that.

How does a child understand that? How does a three year-old really understand God and who He is, and the implications of God’s authority on his or her life? There is only one way children understand it, and that is through the authority of the parent. So Paul is saying that when a child is obedient to the parent, that is being obedient to God. When the child submits to the authority of that parent, the child is submitting to God. In other words, if a child doesn’t obey the fifth commandment, then that child is disobeying the first commandment, because that parent represents God to that child. And as that child grows up

and understands that authority structure, and all the implications of that, he or she is going to have to mature and realize, *OK, that parent was just a model of ultimately how I am supposed to respond to God.*

When you look at the Ten Commandments, you will see that the fifth commandment, “Honor your father and mother” had a promise to it. The promise was a group promise: that you will dwell long in the land and that you will basically inherit the land of promise. Paul has to alter that a little bit, because today we don’t inherit a literal land. So he just says “you will live long on the earth” (v3). But that is still a group promise, so we would say it’s more like a principle or proverb. It is saying that, as a group, if you are obedient to your parents, if you honor your mother and father, you will live long and have a long, prosperous life on the earth, because that is the equivalent of honoring God.

When the nation of Israel entered into the land of promise God said, “If you treat Me as God and you honor Me and you obey Me, then I will cause you to prosper in the land.” So the promise to the children is the same promise that was made to the adults. The promise was: “Honor, respect, obey the authority structure in your life. That is obeying Me, and chances are you will live a long, prosperous life.” Now it doesn’t mean that, if a child is obedient to the parents, that child might not die as a young child. It is not a guarantee of a long life. Again, it’s a group promise; and with a group promise there are always those exceptions. It’s a promise to the group, so it’s more like a principle. It is a reminder that Billy Joel was wrong when he was saying, “Only the good die young.” He had it backwards. By and large, it is the good who are going to live a long, happy, prosperous life; and statistics would clearly reveal this is true.

Children, teenagers, anybody under the authority of your parents, I want to talk to you for just a minute. I want you to understand what is being said here. Because your parents represent God’s authority in your life, here is what I want you to do tomorrow. I want you to gather all of your friends together at school and say to them, “You know, sometimes it’s hard to figure out how we are supposed to obey Jesus—how we are supposed to follow after God. I know that can get really confusing, so I just want you to watch me. I want you to watch the way I obey my parents and the way I talk to my parents. I want you to watch the way I talk about my parents when my parents aren’t here. And I want you to know that is the way you should respond to Jesus.” That is exactly what Paul is saying here. Every child ought to be able to say to his or her friends, “Just watch me; just listen to me. Every word that comes out of my mouth, every behavior and every action is a reflection of how everyone should treat Jesus.”

Well, if that is true, then parents probably ought to have their act together as well, and that is where he goes in verse 4. “And fathers, do not provoke your children to anger.” Some people think the Greek word here isn’t *fathers*, but *parents*. However, that seems unlikely. It is true that this Greek word could be translated *parents*, although that was quite unusual. But if you notice in verse 1, Paul used the common Greek word for parents. Then in verse 2, he used the Greek word for father, to distinguish father from mother. Then in verse 4 he is using the same Greek word for father that he used in verse 2. It is pretty unlikely he is mixing up the terms here. He means *fathers*, and the reason is because fathers pretty much ruled the home at that time. We talked last week about how husbands viewed wives in that culture, and children were also viewed that way. They were considered property, and the father was the autocrat—king of the castle—and that’s how their homes were run. He basically had all the “say” and everybody just did what he said.

Also, understand that in that culture the father had exclusive rights to those children, in the sense that he could do whatever he wanted to them. He could sell them into slavery; he could abuse them in any way he wanted. He could even execute them, and there was no legal recourse. So the potential for abuse was huge. Even though most fathers were relatively decent to their children, they still ran the home with an iron fist and really didn't consider they had any real responsibilities to the children.

Paul is saying that all has to change, because we are all now submissive to one another in the body of Christ. These kids are in Christ, and we are modeling this responsibility of God to these kids. Therefore, he says, we are going to operate differently. And fathers now are going to get involved in these kids' lives, and they are going to love them as God loves them. So he says, "Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord." That phrase, "bring them up" is the Greek word translated *nourishes* in verse 29 of chapter 5. So, as the husband nourishes himself, and as the husband nourishes his wife, providing this environment where they can flourish, it is the same Greek word, meaning he is to also nourish his children. He is to provide an environment where they can flourish spiritually, just the way God made them. So, rather than being king of the castle, the father is now going to die to himself to serve them, that they can be all that God intended them to be as children in Christ. He says to bring them up, or nourish them, in the *discipline* (a word that means physical punishment, physical discipline) and *instruction* (a word that means verbal instruction—it can be a warning, or encouragement, or some sort of instruction). So Paul is saying the father nourishes his children. He brings them up, and he nourishes them by his role as disciplinarian.

The reason I think Paul is identifying just fathers here is because the primary role of the father is to be the disciplinarian. We are not going to go back through all of that, but if you are interested, there is a tape on that topic in the tape library. Because that is the father's role, then he is to nourish them as he disciplines them both physically and verbally by encouraging, instructing, warning. But the key to all this, I think, is at the end of the verse: "...to bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord." Do you know what that means? It means that I discipline my kids and instruct them as God would discipline them and instruct them. I stand in His stead, and I carry out His discipline. I carry out God's instruction to my kids, because that's my role as their father.

Hebrews chapter 12 is very interesting on this. It talks about the father as the disciplinarian and how that is a model of how God disciplines us. And if it is done correctly, all we have to do is go back and think about how we were disciplined, and we have a good picture of how God disciplines us when we are disobedient. All of that comes together so that we, as parents, need to ask ourselves this question: What did I teach my child about God this week by the way I disciplined him/her? A parent is a theology professor, and every time I discipline my child, I am teaching theology. So I ask myself, "This week, what did I teach my child about God? Did I teach my child that God yells? Did I teach my child that sometimes God stores it up and then he unloads when He is having a bad day? Did I teach my child that God is unpredictable—that I never know when He is going to blow His top?"

For some parents, what you taught your children this week is that God really isn't going to do anything—that God is "all talk and no do"—that ultimately you can have your own way and do your own thing, so just go right on doing whatever you want to do. You know, those kids are going to have a shock one day, because they are going to find out that God isn't like that. God *does* expect to be obeyed, and God *will do* what is necessary to

discipline His children in order for them to walk in His ways. Every time I discipline my children, I need to stop and think, *What am I about to teach my children about God?* That could get convicting, couldn't it? So we better move on.

In verse 5, we move to *slaves and masters*. You look around the auditorium and you don't see too many slaves and masters, so you think, *Well, we really don't need this—let's pray and go home*. It's important to understand that in the Roman culture the concept of "slaves and masters" was different than what we think of as the slavery in our country a few hundred years ago. As a matter of fact, slavery in the 1<sup>st</sup> century had more in common with employment today—employers and employees—than it had with the slave trade here in this country. The Roman Empire was run with slave labor, and as many as one-third of the people in the major cities were slaves. Slaves were laborers, but they were also professionals. They were doctors, professors, and lawyers. Slaves were prisoners of war. Slaves were children who had been sold into slavery. Slaves were sometimes debtors, because people who couldn't pay off their debt sold themselves into slavery. Slaves were all of those things. Some people just sold themselves into slavery because they could have a better life as a slave than they had trying to make their own way. So slaves included all of those categories. The master had exclusive rights to that slave, meaning that master could, if he wanted, beat or even execute that slave. There were no legal ramifications to that. But that was very unusual, because a master wanted to protect his investment. He had a tremendous amount of money invested in these slaves, so even though he thought of them as tools for labor and not really as people, he still would protect his investment. By and large, slaves were well cared for, in order that they would produce and protect the master's environment, so they had a fairly decent life.

The correlation would be very similar to employers and employees today, and that is how we are going to apply this. Slaves would be employees, so we are just going to throw that in here: "(Employees), be obedient to those who are your masters, {*your supervisors, your employers*} according to the flesh." Paul puts that in because it is a reminder that, in Christ, we are equal. Slave and master are 100 percent equal before God. Both are in Christ in the same way. Both came to Christ the exact same way, and there isn't one that is higher than the other in the eyes of God. But there are different callings, and there are authority structures in the marketplace, and those are still in place. There were some strange dynamics in the New Testament church. You had slaves who came to faith in Christ; and as they matured, they moved into leadership roles in the church. Their master may have been a new believer, so the slave had spiritual authority over the master in the church, and it was turned upside down. Because of that, it created some weird dynamics out in the marketplace, and Paul was saying, "Hey, let's understand what is going on here. He is still your master in the flesh and you still must respond appropriately."

There is an old saying that "familiarity breeds contempt." I think it also breeds carelessness. Sometimes when your boss is a fellow believer, there is a tendency to take advantage of that. There is a tendency to expect favors, and there is a tendency to think that authority structure somehow needs to be kind of dissipated. Paul is basically saying, "Let's not even go down that path. As a testimony to who we are in Christ, let us be obedient to the authority that is over here, and let's be the best employee we can possibly be." He tells us not to take advantage of this relationship when he says: "With fear and trembling {*which doesn't mean to be afraid, but respecting the authority that is there*} in the sincerity of your heart, as to Christ; not by way of eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart. With good will, render service, as to the Lord, and not to men." (v5)

Those phrases are straightforward and fairly easy to understand. But I do think we need to notice in that passage the repetition of the concept that you, as an employee, are to respond to that person over you as if that person is Christ Himself. It is telling you to imagine that Christ is your supervisor. By imagining that Jesus is your employer, you will know how you are supposed to respond.

So here is the application to that. Here is what I want you to do tomorrow morning. While your kids are gathering their friends at school, I want you to go to work and gather your fellow employees around you. I want you to say the same thing to them, “You know, sometimes it’s really hard to understand how we are supposed to respond to God and how to walk in obedience to Him. I know that is hard to understand, so I want you just to watch me. I want you to watch the way I respond to our boss. I want you to watch the way I talk to our boss, and I want you to listen to the way I talk about the boss when he is not here. I just want you to watch every way that I respond to our supervisor (boss, employer) and know that is how we are supposed to respond to Jesus.” Could you do that tomorrow? Could you gather those people around you and say, “Just watch me, and you’ll know how we are to respond to Jesus”?

I want to reread those verses, because it is very clear. Listen for that message in verses 5-7: “(Employees), be obedient to those who are your (employers) according to the flesh, with fear and trembling in the sincerity of your heart, as to Christ; not by way of eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but as (employees) of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart. With good will render service, as to the Lord, and not to men.”

And then verse 8: “Knowing that whatever good thing each one does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether slave or free.” Paul could imagine some of the slaves saying, “You know, I just don’t think it’s fair. I don’t think I’m treated fairly. I don’t think I’m paid enough, and I don’t think I have enough benefits.” And he is saying, let’s remember that ultimately, if the employer is Christ, then Christ is the one who gives the ultimate rewards. In the marketplace there are some people who are paid a lot and there are some people who are paid a little. I can’t do much to change that. But Paul is saying that ultimately your employer is Christ. Every person—slave or free—has the equal share of reward ultimately from Christ, if they choose to walk in obedience. For the rewards that ultimately matter, everybody has the same chance. It’s just a matter of attitude.

And, finally, verse 9: “And masters, {*supervisors, bosses, employers—all are in that category*} do the same things to them...” Paul could have just said, “Masters, ditto...I don’t have to go back through the whole list again; you treat them the same way. You submit to them the same way.” As members of the body of Christ, we are submitting to one another, so he says just do the same thing. “And give up threatening...” Threatening is this abuse of authority by saying, “I’m up here, you’re down there—let’s not forget that.” And what he goes on and says is that isn’t the way it works in Christ. There is no partiality in Christ, so let’s stop acting that way. He says, “And masters, do the same things to them, and give up threatening, knowing that both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no partiality with Him.” Before God, we are all equal in Christ, so let us behave that way. But, also, notice that he is saying, “This is how God masters us, so this is how I expect you to master them.” In other words, this is how God is your supervisor, so this is how I want you to supervise them.

Supervisors, bosses, this is your assignment tomorrow morning. Go to work and gather all your employees— everybody who is under your authority. Circle them up and say to them, “You know, sometimes it’s really hard to understand how God treats us, how God loves us and cares for us, and how He rules over us as our Master. So in order to make that more simple, you just need to notice how I treat you, how I talk to you, and how I care for you, and you will know that is exactly the way God cares for us.” Could you say that to your employees? Could you say that to those people you supervise? You should be able to.

When I went through all these six categories, I realized it is very convicting. If you can walk away this morning without being convicted, you are a better man than I. As a matter of fact, I looked at all these and thought, *Wow, the theological implications are huge!* There is the wife representing submission of the church to God; the husband representing the love of Christ to the church; children representing the obedience the church is supposed to have to Christ; a parent representing the way God disciplines and instructs us; an employee representing the way we are supposed to be in obedience to Christ; and an employer representing the way Christ rules and masters over us.

I reached the conclusion that it is impossible—I can’t do it. And that is the point; that is where we started. Paul said this is only possible with Spirit-filled behavior. You’re right, you can’t...you’re completely incapable. But if the Spirit of God is in control because of who you now are in Christ, it is possible. You can be what God has called you to be—in the home and in the marketplace.

When we went through Ephesians 1, 2, and 3, we marveled at the wonder of God’s grace as to who we are in Christ. But now the responsibility—the bar—has been raised to walk in accordance with that, and it is only possible as the Spirit of God controls our life, and we are in Christ at home, in the marketplace, and beyond.