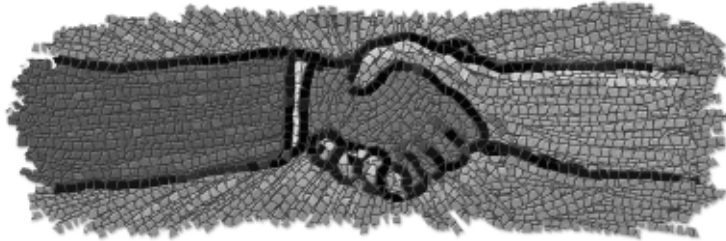


Christian Relationships¹



SABBATH—DECEMBER 3

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Exodus 20:12; Judges 1:21; Luke 9:23; John 3:13; Romans 5:8; Ephesians 5:21-33; Ephesians 6:1-9; 1 John 4:10, 11.

MEMORY VERSE: “Follow the lead of one another because of your respect for Christ” (Ephesians 5:21, NIV).

EPHESIANS 1–3 GAVE US THE BASIC PRINCIPLES² FOR THE CHURCH.

From Ephesians 4 on, Paul discusses how Christians can use these principles. These principles include unity within differences, the Christian walk, and how to have good relationships.

Christianity is a religion of relationships. Christians should have good relationships with God and with each other. A good relationship with God will help us to have good relationships with our families and friends. Church, home, and work are the basic areas of Christian living. One cannot be a saint in the church and a devil at church, home, or work. Christianity is not holiness in a vacuum. Christianity is holiness in wholeness. Christianity influences the spiritual, mental, physical, and social parts of our lives. This week's lesson looks at principles of Christian relationships.

A LOOK AT THIS WEEK'S LESSON: What is Christian submission (surrender)? How should people who have authority³ act toward people under them? How are husbands and wives to relate to each other? What does Paul write about parent/child relationships?

*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, December 10.

¹relationships—the connections we have with other people.

²principles—general laws or truths.

³authority—the right to command or decide.

SUNDAY—DECEMBER 4**SUBMIT⁴ TO ONE ANOTHER
(Ephesians 5:21).****What is Paul saying in Ephesians 5:21?**

Ephesians 5:21 is connected to the words in Ephesians 5:18: “Be filled with the [Holy] Spirit” (NKJV). Christian submission⁵ does not mean being a slave. Christian submission is showing proper humbleness and thoughtfulness toward each other. Such an attitude⁶ is not part of the natural self. This attitude is a result of being “filled” with the Holy Spirit.

The Bible does not say that submission means a person with power can be “bossy,” while the other person must blindly obey.

Indeed, Paul adds to his advice on submission: “in the fear of God”⁷ or “out of reverence⁸ for Christ” (NIV). The Christian’s conduct (behavior) and relationship with others (between husband and wife, parent and child, or master and slave) involve submission in the form of reverence for Christ. God does not destroy. He is a builder. He is not “bossy” and selfish. He is loving. If a Christian must choose

between reverence for Christ and submitting to someone, the Christian must choose Christ. For example, if submission violates (breaks) one’s conscience⁹ or goes against God’s will, then we “ought to [should] obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29). What should a wife or daughter do when the husband or father requires that she become a prostitute¹⁰ to earn some money? What should a child do if the father commands him to sell drugs? Submit? Never! Submission in human relationships is never without challenge. Submission should always be done with the will of God. When a so-called Christian expects submission without God’s will, that person has no right to be called a Christian. He or she does not deserve to continue having any Christian privileges (rights). Submission “in the fear of God” (Ephesians 5:21) demands respect on the part of wife and honor on the part of husband. This is even more important in our time when there is plenty of abuse done to spouses¹¹ and children. No child of God should abuse another person. No child of God should ever be abused.

It is one thing to submit when we should not submit. But what about

⁴submit—obey; to agree with.

⁵submission—obeying; agreeing with.

⁶attitude—how we think or feel about something.

⁷fear of God—deep respect for God.

⁸reverence—deep respect for God.

⁹conscience—a knowledge of right and wrong with an urge to do right; moral judgment.

¹⁰prostitute—a person who earns a living by taking money for sex.

¹¹spouses—husbands and wives.

submitting when we really need to? Sometimes that is even harder. Why is the foot of the cross the only place where we can learn the true meaning of Christian submission? Why is death to self important in the act of submission? Luke 9:23.



MONDAY—DECEMBER 5

AUTHORITY

(Ephesians 5:22; Ephesians 6:1, 5).

Submission and obedience bring up the question of authority. What gives a husband, a father, and a master the right to expect submission and obedience from a wife, a child, or a slave? Ephesians 5:21 says submission is to be “in the fear of God” or “out of reverence for Christ” (NIV). Almost the same words appear in

other places: “as to the Lord” (Ephesians 5:22, NKJV), “in the Lord” (Ephesians 6:1), “as to Christ” (Ephesians 6:5, NKJV). These words about Christ seem to show God’s orderly plan for authority. Paul does not explain this point clearly. But he gives a useful comparison¹² about the relationship between Christ and the church. “Christ is the head of the church.” So “the church is subject to [under] Christ” (Ephesians 5:23, 24, NKJV). The headship of Christ is the model (example) and the church submits itself to Him. The headship of the husband, father, and master is to follow Christ’s example. Headship is not overcontrolling or overpowering. Headship has limits. Paul argues that both headship and submission are in Christ, who “loved the church, and gave himself for it” (Ephesians 5:25). Love, not power, is the reason behind the authority given to protect an organization such as the home. Love, not fear, is the reason for submission.

What do these verses say about Christian relationships?

Genesis 1:26, 27 _____

Acts 17:26 _____

Matthew 12:50 _____

¹²comparison—something that shows how things are the same.

Ephesians 3:6 _____

Galatians 3:28 _____

In front of God, we are all the same. We are sinners in need of God's grace. The ideas of authority and submission have been twisted. But that does not mean these ideas are not from the Bible. People in authority must always remember they are to have a close relationship with God and with others who might be under them. Failure to have these good relationships is a terrible sin to a caring God (Matthew 10:29-31).



God cares about common sparrows. So we should be sure to care about other people.

What can those in authority learn at the cross that could help them use their authority wisely?

TUESDAY—DECEMBER 6

HUSBANDS AND WIVES (Ephesians 5:22-25).

As we read Ephesians 5:22-25, we see that marriage is from God. A husband and wife are equal partners (Genesis 2:24; Ephesians 5:31). The unity and equality of these partners is very clear when God says that the two “shall become one flesh” (Ephesians 5:31, NKJV). Compare¹³ this with Ephesians 2:14. Ephesians 2:14 speaks of how Christ made one group out of Jews and Gentiles.¹⁴ This helps us realize the wonder of God's plan for both marriage and the church.

Also, Christ and the church are closely joined together. Christ is the Head of the church. The church is the body of Christ (Ephesians 5:23). We need to understand two important points: (1) As body, the church is under Christ. (2) As Head, Christ loves His body, the church. He died for the church. He saved the church and made it holy.

Submission and love should not make husbands and wives quarrel. Submission and love bring them together. Submission means to give oneself up completely to the other.

¹³compare—show how things are the same.

¹⁴Gentiles—people who are not Jews.

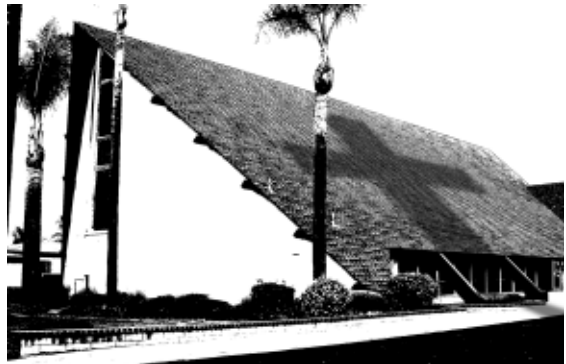
Love also means to give oneself up completely to the other. Love includes dying for the other, even as Christ died for the church.

How does the word-picture of Christ's relationship to the church help us understand how the husband is to treat the wife? Why is a husband able to love his wife the way Christ loves His church? Romans 5:8; 1 John 4:10, 11; Jude 1:21.

A husband and wife are to show the close relationship between Christ and His church. Paul and Peter are clear that wives are to "submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord" (Ephesians 5:22, NKJV; Colossians 3:18; 1 Peter 3:1). But Paul balances that submission by telling the husbands they must love their wives (Ephesians 5:25, 28; Colossians 3:19). This love is to be copied from Christ's example of love (Ephesians 5:25). By dying on the cross, Christ's love was unlimited and sacrificial. The husband's headship does not mean being "bossy." Instead, his headship is about responsibility in a partnership. Submission does not mean slavery, but honor, faithfulness, and respect. There are husbands who treat their wives as servants and abuse them endlessly. That is not true headship. It is a horrible sin that should never be excused as a part of one's culture.

What are some of the forces in your society and culture that are against marriage? How does

Paul's advice protect marriage against those forces?



A husband should love his wife as much as Christ loves His church.

WEDNESDAY—DECEMBER 7

**CHILDREN AND PARENTS
(Exodus 20:12; Ephesians 6:1-4).**

No other religion or philosophy has done as much for children as Christianity. William Wilberforce, a faithful Christian, ended child labor in England. William Carey, the pioneer of Christian missions, acted to end child marriage and widow-burning in India. Today, in some farming areas in Southern India, female babies are choked or poisoned to death. Christian hospitals and pastors have set up cradles outside their doors so parents could give up unwanted female babies without anyone noticing.

Roman culture during Paul's time was even worse. Barclay quotes Seneca, a famous Roman writer: "We kill a fierce ox. We choke a mad dog. We stab the knife into sickly cattle so they

will not infect the herd. Children who are born weak and handicapped we drown.”—Adapted from William Barclay, *The Letters to the Galatians and Ephesians*, p. 176.

During such times Paul writes to Christian parents and their children in Ephesus, a famous Roman city. The children must have been very thrilled to know Paul was writing about them!

What two things are expected of children? How does Paul speak with authority about children and their parents? How does what he says about children and their parents equal what he says to wives about how they should relate to their husbands? What differences are there? Ephesians 6:1-4; Ephesians 5:22; Colossians 3:18.

Paul offers two reasons for obedience: (1) Obedience is right. It is the natural, accepted rule in every society. (2) God’s Ten Commandments require obedience.

Christian artists have pictured the Ten Commandments on two tablets of stone. The first tablet holds the first four commandments. The second tablet holds the last six commandments. The first four commandments show our duty to God. The last six commandments show our duty to humans. But Jews had five commandments on each tablet. This shows that honor to parents belongs with honor to God.

Children are expected to obey parents while they are dependent on them. But honor toward them is a life-long duty.

Paul advises parents not to “make your children angry” (Ephesians 6:4, NIV). Some things that make children angry are: parents setting a poor example, hypocrisy,¹⁵ adults not following the same rules they want children to follow, cruelty. Can you think of other things that make children angry?

What things in your society work against strong and loving parent/child relationships? What does Christianity offer to protect parent/child relationships?

THURSDAY—DECEMBER 8

SLAVES AND MASTERS (Ephesians 6:5-9).

The Roman Empire had millions of slaves during Paul’s day. The Roman economy and society depended on slave labor. Slaves were treated as no better than working animals. Even a great man like Aristotle, a Greek thinker, taught that slaves were only work tools. Ownership of human slaves without any respect to their God-given rights must have disgusted Paul.

Paul advises the slaves in Ephesus to obey their masters. They are to do their work as if they are doing it for

¹⁵hypocrisy—when people say they believe in God but then act as if they do not.

Christ (Ephesians 6:5). Work well done “as to the Lord, and not to men” will be rewarded (Ephesians 6:7, 8, NKJV). Paul recognizes that slaves cannot change their situations. But they can conquer their situation. This is a good way to think: We cannot destroy evil at the moment. But we must not let evil destroy us.

There is no direct criticism against slavery in the Bible. But how do the following verses speak against the principles behind slavery? Matthew 22:39; Mark 10:44; Luke 6:31; Romans 12:10; Philippians 2:3; 1 John 4:11.

Paul’s advice to the masters is also quite pointed. He reminds them that they have a Master (Jesus) in heaven. From this Master, they have received grace and forgiveness of sins. So Paul encourages earthly masters to be gentle toward their slaves (Ephesians 6:9).

Why did Paul not say anything more against slavery? “It was not Paul’s work to rebel against slavery. To rebel against slavery would be to prevent the success of the gospel. But Paul taught principles against the very foundation of slavery. If followed, these principles would surely upset the whole system of slavery.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The*

Acts of the Apostles,¹⁶ pp. 459, 460.

Paul’s work won many people to Christ. Many slave owners became strong Christians. Many slaves also became strong Christians. Philemon and Onesimus are good examples. Philemon was a master who owned Onesimus. Onesimus escaped. But Paul told him to go back. Paul told Philemon to accept Onesimus back “not as a slave but . . . a dear brother” (Philemon 16, NIV).

How can the principles Paul taught in Ephesians 6:5-9 help you understand how you should act toward people who have authority over you and toward people you have authority over?

FRIDAY—DECEMBER 9

ADDITIONAL STUDY: *Parents and children:* “Parents, God wants you to make your family an example of the family in heaven. Guard your children. Be kind and gentle with them. Father, mother, and children are to be joined together with the golden chain of love. One well-trained family is a better example of how Christian-ity works than all the sermons in the world.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White Comments, *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 1118.

¹⁶apostles—the disciples of Jesus whom He chose to preach the gospel after He returned to heaven.



Is your family a good sermon?

Husbands and wives: “Many husbands have not correctly represented Christ in their relation to their wives. This is because the husbands do not keep the way of Christ. They declare that their wives must be subject to them in everything. But it was not in God’s plan that the husband should have control, as head of the house. This is especially true when the husband himself does not submit to Christ. The husband must be under

the rule of Christ that he may represent the relation of Christ to the church. If the husband is rough, boastful, selfish, and abusive, do not let him say he is the head of his wife. Do not let him say she must submit to him in everything. This is because he is not the husband in the true sense of a husband.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Adventist Home*, p. 117.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Suppose you know one of your church members abuses his or her spouse. How should the church handle the problem?
2. Should the church keep silent about important social problems? Or should we get involved? Are there some problems better left alone? If so, how do we decide what problems to leave alone? Also, discuss these questions: How can getting involved in social problems lead us from our real mission? Or, are some social problems part of our real mission?
3. As a class, discuss the questions asked at the end of Tuesday’s and Wednesday’s lessons. What are the forces working against our families? What can you as a class do to help local church members deal with these forces?