

ONE - Study of Ephesians

Part 8 - Love and Respect

Previously, on Ephesians

Last week, we moved from the calling to walk in a manner worthy of your calling (4:1), and into Paul's admonishment to live as people of the light, not people of the darkness.

Ephesians 5:15–21

As we come to this passage, we need to keep this in the front of our minds:

- + The way Paul calls us to live is NOT in the context of people of darkness
- + Its in the context of people full of the Holy Spirit, and the conduct is empowered and centred around the presence and work of the Spirit

Three pairs of people, set in a cultural context of power imbalances, a 'weaker' party and a more 'powerful' party.

The pattern goes, three times:

- + "weaker party" – do this to the other
- + "Stronger party" – do this to the other

Cycle #1: Husbands & Wives

When we come to this section, your Bible probably has one of those topic heading breaks between verse 21 and 22, but there shouldn't be one!

The contextual run up, simplified to give the essence of what Paul wants this next section to capture:

¹⁸ And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, ... ²¹ submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ. ²² Wives... (Ephesians 5:18,21-22a ESV)

Ephesians 5:18,21-33

Philippians 2:1-4

First Amongst Equals?

What is important to note, in all of these pairings, what Paul is and isn't saying.

Often our concerns with these sections is that we mix 'equality of persons' with 'lines of authority' – these aren't value of persons statements, but lines of authority that, within mutual submission, create a space where life can flourish.

1 Corinthians 12:21-26

Sometimes things are set up in a way that helps things happen

So, in the context of what Jesus says, what God says about all humanity being made in his image, we can have functional structures that help things happen well.

Husbands

Submission to a Spirit-filled husband is powerful, and sacrificial love to a Spirit-filled wife to the point of extreme sacrifice is equally as powerful and confronting to us.

Paul has been given the revelation of an ancient mystery, an easter egg, a hidden message, that has been in the scripture and in the world's culture since the beginning of creation. Marriage didn't come first, and then God through Paul thought it was a nifty metaphor to explain Jesus' love for the church. No – the picture of a godly, Spirit-filled husband and wife is the illustration of how Jesus and us, His church, are designed to love each other.

Cycle #2: Parents & Children

Ephesians 6:1-4

“Children, live in such a way as people must think you have amazing parents.”

Fathers, don't exasperate your children, don't draw them away from the picture of God as Father, but foster a good, healthy relationship with your children, so that the concept of Father doesn't negatively impact them when they come to God the Father.

Cycle #3: Slaves & Masters

Ephesians 6:5-9

Slavery is bad – and Paul is not advocating for slavery. That a slave is even addressed in a household code is revolutionary.

In many aspects of the culture of ancient Rome, a bondservant is a little closer to employees, and masters are like employers.

Paul bookends this section of his letter with the practical outworking of Ephesians 2: in Christ we are all one, so live and act accordingly – no matter your position, power or authority.

Response

These 'household codes' in other New Testament writings seem to be pointed at specific issues: the witness of believers to non-believers (1 Peter 2 & 3); or to help a believing spouse win their non-believing spouse to Jesus (1 Peter 3:1).

This one seems, in context of what Paul is championing, is directed at unity in the community of Christians.

The purpose “is not to repress the socially downtrodden, but to transform spiritually all who are in Christ – husbands, fathers and masters included.”
(Russ Dudrey)

Discussion/Response

Will we let the Holy Spirit fill us and empower us to submit ourselves to each other?

Can you put others before yourself, to express the character of Christ in the fruit of the Holy spirit in our lives?

What would it like for you to submit to other Christian brothers and sisters?

The idea of wives submitting to husbands has been abused over the years. When both are full of the Holy Spirit and seeking to demonstrate the character of Christ to the world, what could that look like?

How have you seen Christ’s love toward us demonstrated through a Christian marriage?

How has your experience with your parents impacted your understanding and relationship with God?

What would need to happen to restore your understanding of God as Father?

Jesus says in Matthew 5:24 that we should reconcile with each other before offering worship to God. What does submitting to God and so to those who you need to reconciled to look like? What could you do to repair that relationships?

This week, contact and tell someone that you love them, or that you are sorry that you forgot to thank them for a kindness, or that forgot to clean up your mess you made with them and apologise, or spoke or acted in a way that hurt them. See what difference it makes in how they see you, God and others. See what difference it makes to how you can worship God.