

SERMON

New Harmony (Ephesians 5:18-6:9)

Be practical. How does it help me to live? So what? There are those who seem to know so much about the Bible, but it never makes any difference to the way they live. We have here in the verses that were read a wonderfully idyllic scene. There is perfect harmony between

- Husbands and wives
- Wives and husbands
- Parents and children
- Children and parents
- Employees and employers
- Employers and employees

from this passage, but we know that this is not true. Sadly, this idyllic state does not always occur in Christian homes. In some Christian homes wives are abused and also husbands are abused.

It obviously happened in Paul's time or else why would Paul have to write about relationships within married couples, relationships between parents, especially fathers and their children, why write about servants and masters.

Just to fill out some historical context on the issue.

- At the time of Jesus a Jewish male would thank God within his morning prayers that God had not made him

A Gentile, a slave or a woman

In Jewish law a woman had no rights, she was a thing, a possession.

- Within Greek culture the husband expected his wife to run to the home, to care for his legitimate children, but he found his pleasure and his companionship elsewhere. In Greece, home and family life were near to being extinct, and fidelity was completely non-existent.
- In Rome the whole atmosphere was adulterous with the marriage bond having completely broken down.

Children were not better off than their mothers. A Roman father had absolute power over his family.

- ▽ He could sell them as slaves
- ▽ He could make them work in his fields even in chains
- ▽ He could take the law into his own hands, for the law was in his hands and punish as he liked
- ▽ He could even inflict the death penalty on his child

And for slaves. There are estimated to have been some 60 million slaves in the Roman Empire with slaves holding down tasks such as doctors, architects, teachers as well as manual labourers. The slaves were the work force of the Roman Empire, so many were more like employees than slaves in our modern day thinking. However a slave could be

- ⇒ Inherited
- ⇒ Purchased
- ⇒ Acquired to settle a debt

Also a slave

- ⇒ Had no rights and was a chattel, simply a possession
- ⇒ Was under complete control of his master and so could be
 - Whipped
 - Mutilate
 - Imprisoned in chains

- Their teeth knocked out
- Their eyes gouged out
- Thrown to wild beasts
- Crucified or executed

for the most trivial of offences. Of course one thing that held some masters back was economics, because slaves did cost money!

So Paul is writing, under God into this culture, into this context and so he has to spell out what being a Christian means at home with the family and also at work. If our Christianity is to mean anything, then it must mean a difference to our living. Last week Darren told us of Paul's telling the Ephesian Christians

- Not to lie but tell the truth
- To be angry appropriately
- Not to steal but work
- Not to use words pull others down, but build others up
- Etc, etc.

If you missed it last week, or cannot remember, then look at the website for the sermon. If you can't, then get someone who has to download it and print it off for you, or get the tape to listen to.

But now Paul moves behind closed doors – what happens in the home. We can all put on a Sunday face, a Sunday persona, but what really goes on behind the respectable doors when they are shut. We all know that there are some things, some habits that we have which we will do in the home with our nearest and dearest, but make every effort not to do them within company. You'll all be thinking of those things, or wondering what they are!

So what is the key to what Paul is saying? The key is verse 21

“Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.” (Ephesians 5:21 NIV)

But we have a problem with the concept of submission. For us submission speaks of authority and subservience. However, interestingly, in the passage we read, the word

- *exousia* meaning authority is not used. It is used in Ephesians in chapter 1:21

“far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come.” (Ephesians 1:21 NIV)

and 2:2

“in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient.” (Ephesians 2:2 NIV)

where the word is translated as ruler. Also in 3:10

“His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms,” (Ephesians 3:10 NIV)

And finally in 6:12

“For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.” (Ephesians 6:12 NIV)

So we have one myth thrown out already – submission does not have to do with power and authority. However we do have the word in the passage of
 ▽ *kephale* meaning headship as shown in 1:22

“And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be *head* over everything for the church,” (Ephesians 1:22 NIV)

and in 4:15

“Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the *Head*, that is, Christ.” (Ephesians 4:15 NIV)

Both referring to Jesus. And then in the passage we read earlier, in 5:23

“For the husband is the *head* of the wife as Christ is the *head* of the church, his body, of which he is the Saviour.” (Ephesians 5:23 NIV)

And lastly we have the word

▽ *hupotage* meaning submission which occurs three times in the passage we read earlier and nowhere else in this letter

“Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.” (Ephesians 5:21 NIV)

“Wives, *submit* to your husbands as to the Lord.” (Ephesians 5:22 NIV)

“Now as the church *submits* to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.” (Ephesians 5:24 NIV)

So what do we mean by submission, if we do not mean tyranny and subservience? Let us look at this word *hupotage*. In Greek it had two meanings depending on its context

- Military term meaning
 - ▽ to arrange [troop divisions] in a military fashion under the command of a leader
- Non-military use
 - ▽ a voluntary attitude of giving in,
 - ▽ cooperating
 - ▽ assuming responsibility
 - ▽ carrying a burden

There is no thought there of coercion, of lording it over someone and the other person bowing under the weight. Submission is to build people up, not stamp on people.

Wives are to voluntarily cooperate with their husbands, husbands are to love their wives as Jesus loves the church. This talks of sacrifice, not of harsh authority. This talks of building up each other, not to being seen to be better than the other person.

Jesus is head of the church and it says that the husband is head of the wife. Verse 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 Saviour.” (Ephesians 5:23 NIV)

There is no getting away from that wording, that concept. Jesus is head of the church, but remember what he did for the church. It is expressed in Paul’s hymn to Christ found in Philippians

“Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!” (Philippians 2:5-8 NIV)

That is what is meant by headship.

Headship does not spell tyranny but responsibility

And remember where the Greeks, the Romans were coming from with their view of marriage and family. Paul was speaking to the men in the congregation who would treat their wives badly and also their children. But being a Christian changes all that we say. Yes, it does, but when we are growing up we take as our models our parents and there are some things that we do because our parents did it and there are some things that we do not do because our parents did it! However the new Christians in Ephesus needed to be told how to behave because they had had many years of working and thinking one way – but Christianity is so often counter-cultural.

So Paul moves from marriage to children. At one time in this country we had the adage that

Children should be seen and not heard

That has all changed now. In schools we had children sat in rows, keeping silent and doing their work, all the same work at the same time. Then came along free expression – the thought that children would learn best when they wanted to.

One Primary School teacher tried this and in her class there was a group of about half a dozen lads who were football crazy. For the first week they did nothing but kick a ball around in the playground. But that’s OK the teacher thought because one day they will come in and want to read the rules of football, they will want to weight the football, find out how big a pitch is, measure it out. She had so many ideas on how to get the lads to read and write and do maths around football. Week 2 arrived and the boys spent the whole week, outside, playing football. Week 3 came and on the Monday, the day was spent in football. The same happened on Tuesday. On Wednesday the head teacher stepped in and said that the boys had to do some work and not just kick a football around all day.

Paul does not do away with boundaries – he does not make children rulers in their own homes. 6:1

“Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. "Honour your father and mother" —which is the first commandment with a promise— "that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth." Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.” (Ephesians 6:1-4 NIV)

There is the thought of boundaries here in words like

- *Obey*
- *Training*
- *Instruction*

It is said that children work best and grow up best when they know the boundaries and that they are realistic. The worse thing a parent can do is to keep changing the boundaries

In the first school I taught in, one deputy head stood up at a staff meeting and said that they were going to relax the rule on ties being worn and worn properly, but they were not going to tell the pupils. There was uproar in the staff meeting when this was announced because all the staff said that the pupils would then assume that other rules could be broken. The cry was to either keep the rule and enforce it or scrap the rule completely and tell the pupils that this is happening. The upper management of the school kept the rule!

So from family life Paul moves on to work relationships. Remember that slaves were slaves but that they were also the work force of the day. So how are employees and employers to act? 6:5

“Slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ. Obey them not only to win their favour when their eye is on you, but like slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from your heart. Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not men, because you know that the Lord will reward everyone for whatever good he does, whether he is slave or free.

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 favouritism with him.” (Ephesians 6:5-9 NIV)

Notice that masters are to treat their slaves in the same way. The same way as what? As the slave treats the master. Both are working for God, not for themselves. When we are at work we should do our best and not just do the least we can get away with. And we need to realise that people work better and develop better under love, than under duress.

In this country, not too long ago, the ethos was being put around that we need to take as little money as possible from the rich of the country, or else they will leave and so we lose their expertise. However at the other end of the economic social scale, we need to make them work harder, so we do not give them wage increases. But that policy led to anarchy and strikes and discontent.

But how does this idyllic situation come about? It is wonderful that Paul in this passage we have looked at this morning is telling practically and affirming three truths

1. The *dignity* of womanhood, childhood and servanthood
2. The *equality* before God of all human being, irrespective of their race, rank, class, culture, gender or age, for we are all made in the image of God
3. The deeper *unity* of Christian believers, as fellow-members of God’s family.

But these things do not come naturally to us. Yesterday, at the London Baptist Association London Event we heard about slavery in the past, of Africans, but also of British adults and children made to work down mines and in mills for very little money. We also learn about slavery today that is happening in London, right now as we meet. Sue and I heard of two Asians who were working in a restaurant for £2.50 an hour, when the national minimum wage is £5.35 an hour. Even for 16-17 year olds it is £3.30 an hour.

The key to the answer is in the first words we read in the passage, verse 18 of chapter 5

“Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit.” (Ephesians 5:18 NIV)

Be filled with the Spirit. And there are three things to quickly to finish with about this verse, or about the verb **be filled**. We have already had that we are sealed with the Holy Spirit in 1:13, now we are told to be filled

1. Firstly it is in the *plural* form. This means that it is for all Christians to be filled with the Spirit and not just a chosen few.
2. Secondly it is in what is called the *present continuous* tense. This means that it is ongoing and not a one off experience. I know a man who every day wakes up and asks to be filled with the Spirit – it is a continuous happening – or at least should be.
3. Thirdly it is in the *passive* voice. This means that I cannot make it happen, it happens to be. The filling is done by God, but I have to allow it to happen. I can block it just as I can grieve the Holy Spirit which Paul mentioned in Ephesians 4:30.

And how does this filling show itself? Verse 19

“Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.” (Ephesians 5:19-21 NIV)

Wanting to build people up, not me.