

Spirit-Filled Relationships - Part 3

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- [0 : 0 0] For the third time this month, we are going to read a revolutionary text. Revolutionary in the first century city of Ephesus and the other cities of the Roman Empire.
- And revolutionary in the 21st century cities of our world. Although, when it is read in many of the cities of the world under the influence of the so-called Enlightenment, many initially dismissed this text not as revolutionary but as reactionary.
- And as going back to old, oppressive ways. But when you read it over and over again, when you read it carefully, when you read it in the context in which the Apostle Paul wrote it, you soon discover that it is wonderfully liberating in the first century cities and in every subsequent century that we have lived.
- The text is Ephesians chapter 5 beginning at verse 15, reading through chapter 6, verse 9. Hear the word of God. Therefore, be careful how you walk, not as unwise people but as wise, making the most of your time because the days are evil.
- So then, do not be foolish but understand what the will of the Lord is. Do not get drunk with wine for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit. Speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, to God even the Father, and being subject to one another in the fear of Christ.
- [1 : 4 4] Wives to your own husbands. The italicized means it was not there in the original. Wives to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, he himself being the Savior of the body.
- But as the church is subject to Christ, so also wives to their husbands. They ought to be, doesn't belong there, the wives to their husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave himself up for her, so that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that he might present to himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and blameless.
- So husbands ought also to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself, for no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ also does the church, because we are members of his body.
- For this reason, a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife. The two shall become one flesh. This mystery is great, but I'm speaking with reference to Christ and the church.
- Nevertheless, each individual among you also is to love his own wife, even as himself, and the wife must see to it that she respects her husband. Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.
- [3 : 1 1] Honor your father and mother, which is the first commandment with a promise, so that it may be well with you and that you may live long on the earth. And fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

Slaves, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in the sincerity of your heart, as to Christ. Not by way of eye service, 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, knowing that whatever good thing each one does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether slave or free, 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. Spirit of the living God, we believe that you enable the Apostle Paul to think and write these words, and I pray now that you will speak them into each of the individual situations we all face.

We pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Now, we're going to focus on verses 1 to 9 of chapter 6, on the revolution taking place in the relationship between children and parents, and servants and slaves.

[4 : 39] But before we do, I invite you to stand back, and look at this text as a whole, and take note of what would have immediately struck the first readers and hearers.

I pointed it out last Sunday. Paul is speaking directly to those who have no inherent worth in the first century world.

Here's the picture. The church in Ephesus has gathered together for worship. Someone stands up in front of the congregation and reads out loud Paul's letter to this assembly.

And the amazing fact is that wives, children, and servants are present. Maybe it's no big deal to us, but in the first century, it's a really big deal.

A really big deal. Why should wives, children, and servants be present in public gathering, in a public worship event? They have no inherent status in society.

[5 : 44] Many men treated them as virtual non-humans. The only true humans at that time were men, and actually, only men wealthy enough to have servants.

Yet there they are, in the assembly, in the gathering, in the meeting, wives, children, and servants. Think the old American South.

Slaves in a Sunday worship service? They can have their own service if they get their work done first. Those of you from other countries where they still have household servants?

Servants in the worship service with the family, in the worship service with the larger community? They can meet another time if they get their work done first. Yet there they are in Ephesus, the no-status people, gathered together along with the powerful in public, listening to this letter from the Apostle Paul.

Listening to the letter from this highly educated, wealthy man whose whole understanding of human relationships was turned on its head by Jesus Christ, the head of everything.

[7 : 01] And as these people listen, they are startled by the fact that they are spoken to directly. Directly. The Apostle Paul speaks to the no-status people directly, and he speaks to them first before he speaks to those with status and power.

He speaks to the wives, the children, and the servants first and directly. It's unheard of and very revolutionary. Now, I want to emphasize again that at the heart of this revolutionary text is one basic command.

One basic exhortation. Please do not lose sight of this. I think because people have lost sight of this, this text has gone cattywampus in other kinds of culture.

The one command is in chapter 5, verse 18. But be filled. But be filled. None of what Paul develops of this gospel revolution can work unless we are filled.

But be filled with the Spirit. But be filled with the Spirit of God. Be filled with the Spirit who filled Jesus of Nazareth, enabling him to live the truly human life.

[8 : 17] Be filled with the very life of God. Everything Paul develops from Ephesians 5, 15 to 6, 9 flows out of that filling. Now, one more time, let me also highlight how this whole passage goes together.

Paul begins with a series of not but clauses. Not walk, I think there's a PowerPoint we should have to point out. Not walk as unwise, but as wise. Not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.

Not get drunk with wine, but be filled with the Spirit. By the way, notice over here that you can read that backwards too. Be filled with the Spirit and you will understand the will of the Lord and you will be wise.

Now, then Paul outlines a series of consequences or results of this being filled with the Spirit. And I've been emphasizing that they're participles, not imperatives.

They are all results, they are not commands. And it's the result that this one big imperative be filled. Speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart for the Lord, giving thanks always for everything in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, to God, even the Father, and being subject to one another in the fear of Christ.

[9 : 36] Not be subject, it's not an imperative, it's a participle in this series of participles. Being subject is a result of being filled with the Spirit.

Then Paul goes on and works all this out in three sets of human relationships. Wives, husbands, children, parents, and servant, masters. Wives being subject to their husbands and husbands being subject to their wives.

Children being subject to their fathers and mothers and fathers and mothers being subject to their children. Servants being subject to their masters and masters being subject to their servants.

Now, we have learned that this verb being subject literally means standing under. hupo taso hupo under taso stand standing under be filled with the Holy Spirit standing under one another we are further learning that the idea is giving yourselves away for one another giving yourselves up for one another the whole church everyone giving ourselves away giving ourselves up for one another which means that at any particular time each of us ought to be able to give a concrete answer to the question for whom are you giving up your life in the church everyone should be able to answer that by this says Jesus will all people know that you are my disciples when they see you love one another by the way you stand under one another wives standing under their husbands and husbands standing under their wives children standing under their parents and parents standing under their children servants standing under their masters and masters standing under their servants now I think you can see that the whole text is grounded in who Jesus Christ is everything Paul says in these relational spheres he says because of who Jesus the Lord is and because of the kind of Lord

Jesus is 522 wives as to the Lord 524 husbands as Christ love the church 529 husbands nourish your wives as Christ does the church 6-1 children obey your parents in the Lord 6-5 servants serve as to Christ 6-6 as slaves of Christ 6-7 as to the Lord 6-9 you masters have a master to whom you are accountable ok let's now then focus on the dynamics of this revolution being worked out in the child parent servant master relationships there is so much here and I have to admit right from the beginning I feel like I'm only scratching the surface children be filled with the spirit being subject to your parents your fathers and mothers and fathers and mothers being filled with the spirit be subject to your children now you can see that what Paul says to children turns on the word honor being filled with the spirit being subject to parents turns on the word honor in speaking to children

[13 : 06] Paul is quoting the fifth commandment of the ten commandments honor your father and mother and Paul notes that this is the first commandment with a promise that you may live long in the land now clearly the fifth commandment speaks an explicit word to sons and daughters but the fifth commandment also speaks an implicit word to fathers and mothers which Paul draws out in this text honor what does it mean to honor one's parents the Hebrew word in the fifth commandment carries a wide range of meanings but its basic meaning is to make heavy or weighty to make heavy the verb form is the noun sorry the verb form is of the noun glory the glory of God is the weightiness of God's self manifestation so to honor our parents means to give weight to them it means to feel the weightiness of their position so in the book of Leviticus the word honor is replaced by the word reverence every one of you shall reverence his father and mother we are to recognize the weight the load parents carry

God has entrusted parents with the weighty responsibility of taking care of God's vulnerable creatures I'm watching our two daughters now start to do this parents carry the weight of protecting and nurturing and clothing the vulnerable parents carry the weight of shaping values forming self-identity building the basis of our self-worth parents carry the weight of shaping the building blocks of our worldview of developing the basics of our significance and security and parents bear the weight of giving children their initial idea of who God is this is a huge burden and mercy me every parent who takes this responsibility begins as a rookie so we honor our parents by respecting the weightiness of their role in life such respect however is not absolute that is children especially as they grow older are to weigh their parents input they are to put their parents input on the scale along with input from

God sons and daughters are also called to respect the living God they are called to honor God to obey the first commandment you shall have no other gods between me says God including parents Jesus who clearly upholds this fifth commandment also says to us the one who loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me the one who loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me we honor our parents in the context of honoring Jesus as Lord as Lord of my life Jesus has the last word over the decisions of what I do with my life over my values over my goals over the way I live over my self perception absolute respect is given only to the Lord himself now honoring parents also means obeying them while we're still in their house so

Paul says children obey your parents in the Lord for this is right and it's right because it honors God's ordering of human life God has placed parents in the place of authority on God's behalf we subject ourselves to God by subjecting ourselves to our parents we stand under God by standing under our parents and we stand under them by obeying them yet again such obedience is not absolute as children grow toward adulthood they develop other relationships that they must also honor and there will come a time when the obligations of those other relationships may conflict with the request of the parents and one such relationship is marriage when a son or daughter marries they owe greater allegiance to the spouse than to their parents and we parents have to realize this we have to embrace this it usually comes around when deciding what you're going to do about Christmas

Eve and Christmas Day God who says honor your parents also says a man shall leave his father and mother and cleave unto his wife and they shall become one flesh marriage now calls us to a new loyalty a loyalty that is stronger than the ties of blood and then of course there is the most important relationship that calls for loyalty and obedience the child's relationship with the living God absolute obedience can only be given to God and Jesus Christ the first commandment is always first you shall have no other gods between us now we see this lived out when the lawgiver himself comes to live our life as a young boy Jesus submits himself to his parents direction and leadership yet when he's 12 years old as a family gathering he slips out and goes to the temple to talk with the teachers his parents look all around for him when they finally find him his mother says to him child why have you treated us this way your father and I have been looking for you anxiously and you remember what

[19 : 40] Jesus responds why were you looking for me did you not know that I had to be about my father's business Jesus relationship with his heavenly father takes precedence over the relationship with Joseph and Mary yet we should also note that after Luke records this event he tells us that Jesus does return to Nazareth and quote continued in subjection to Mary and Joseph quote until the day God the father called him to his unique mission now honoring our parents will also mean caring for them accepting the weight of their needs and this will take on different forms at different times of life while parents are still able to care for themselves we care for our parents by protecting their reputations by covering their faults there's a beautiful story in the book of Genesis that illustrates this you remember that after the great flood

Noah and his family settled on the land and one day Noah was in a particularly partying mood he began to drink the newly given wine of his vineyards he drank so much he was terribly drunk one of Noah's sons found Noah lying in the tent stark naked and then we are told that Noah's other two sons took a garment laid it on their shoulders and walked backward into the tent and covered their father's nakedness we care for our parents by not shaming them by covering their faults or sharing those faults with people who can help us process them and we care for our parents by providing for their needs when they no longer can provide for themselves interesting old testament scholar Brevard Child says that the original situation into which God spoke the fifth commandment was the situation where parents were being driven out of the house because they could no longer work gasp and it takes place in all parts of the world today we honor our elderly parents by caring for them when they could no longer care for themselves think of how they cared for us when we were so utterly dependent

I mean we stifled their lifestyles big time with our messy diapers and our horrible eating habits and crying all night think of all the inconvenience we gave our parents is it not only fair that we return the favor and be inconvenienced they pushed us around in those strollers for years and we pushed them around in their wheelchairs for years unheard of in false day you just discard the other again Jesus models this for us on the cross even as he's dying he's making arrangements for his mother to the beloved disciple he says in reference to Mary behold your mother and then John tells us from that time on the disciple John took her into his household by the way Mary then with John ends up in Ephesus can you imagine

Christmas Eve worship service with Mary in the front row now someone has said what we need is an eleventh commandment parents honor your sons and daughters which is what the apostle Paul writes in this text after quoting the fifth commandment he writes and fathers do not provoke your children to anger but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord that is unheard of in the first century fathers were not involved in their children's lives why should they the children had no status they had no financial benefit to be involved with them and most children were treated as slaves just the fact that Paul speaks to fathers about children was revolutionary and as Paul calls children to recognize the weightiness of their parents so he calls parents to recognize the weightiness of their children as people as persons unheard of in the first century children were things to be manipulated and possessed the really radical thing is that Paul calls fathers and mothers not to provoke their children to anger which apparently first century fathers were good at now what is

Paul getting at I think it is that fathers then treated sons and daughters as mere things and fathers did with their children whatever they wanted to do which rightly evoked anger in the souls of children if fathers were involved in their children's lives they insisted on having their own way their children must be and become what the parents want them to be and become which understandably evokes anger in the soul of a child instead Paul says fathers are to bring up their children in the discipline and instruction of the Lord of the Lord fathers are to bring up their children to know the Lord and to know the Lord's will for their children's life which calls for great investment on the part of fathers and mothers it involves getting inside the soul of our children so that we might know what makes them tick and what makes our children tick may not be what makes us tick

[25 : 52] Proverbs 22 6 train up a child in the way that he should go and when he is old he will not depart from it many people have taken it to be this shove your children into a certain mold and even if they rebel later in life they will return to it that attitude causes a child's spirit to be crushed and will instill in a son or daughter anger the scripture tells us that God has made every child unique God has graciously given every child unique temperaments unique gifts unique interests this is how Proverbs 22 6 is to be read listen to it literally train up a child according to his bent and when he is old he will not depart from him train up a child according to her bent and when she is old she will not depart from him our job as parents is to discover our children's unique bent their unique characteristics we're to train them up in their way in a way that is consistent with who they are and the promise is that if our children discover the creator's way for them they will not depart from the nurture and admonition of the

Lord it means being more concerned about their relationship to the Lord Jesus Christ than anything else more concerned with the quality of that relationship than they are for the schools they get into or the status they have in the community more concerned says one commentator for the children to know and love Jesus more concerned than even sparing them pain or sorrow we honor our children by seeking their independent dependence on Jesus Christ am I making sense when I went away to the university my father sent me a pocket bible and in the inside cover of this pocket bible he wrote the words here is a story about a man who can do more for you than your dad my dad was honoring me by pointing me to

Jesus as Lord but like many dads he did not realize the full implication of what he had done for he was running the risk that the man might end up leading me in a path that my dad had not fought on I'm the oldest of five sons in a Swedish family the oldest son does with his life what the father does it's just the way it is my dad was a physicist a really good so I grew up in the world of physics and mathematics it was a given that as the oldest son I would study physics and I did and I loved it especially the theoretical and philosophical parts I honored my dad by listening to his desires for me and I honored my dad by reading the

Bible he gave me about the man who could do more for me than my dad early one morning I was reading Colossians 1 where Paul makes the great claim that all things were made by Jesus Christ and for Jesus Christ things in the heavens and earth visible and invisible and I read in line that leapt out and grabbed me Colossians 1:16 in Christ all things hold together in Christ all things hold together or as J.B.

Phillips rendered it Christ is the upholding principle of the whole scheme of creation later that morning I'm sitting in a lecture hall at the university and a visiting German physicist is writing this massive equation on the large blackboards that were on all three walls of the lecture hall what an equation it was exquisite it was so beautiful I can still see it and it dawned on me in that moment this physicist is simply describing in terms of quantum mechanics how Jesus Christ holds it all together and something began to stir in me or as I should say a vent in me is coming to light a few weeks later Martin Luther King Jr.

[30 : 33] was killed and as I listened to his sermons on the radio all night what had secretly been in my life came to life and I knew I was called to preach Jesus I told my dad he was devastated hurt angry he dreamed all of his life of me being a physicist he had just formed a new corporation and he dreamed of giving it to me we did not speak for three months the pain was so great he finally accepted that I was on a new path he watched as I came alive in a new way studying theology and Bible at seminary he watched as I grew as a preacher and when it came time for me to be ordained he asked if he could speak in service and those who were doing the ordaining said sure that would be appropriate and this is what my dad said I believe Daryl would have had a successful career in physics he had greater confidence in me than

I did I believe Daryl would have had a successful career in physics had not the heavenly father stepped in and changed my plans for him on this occasion I want to say I submit to the father's plan for my son until the day he died he was one of my greatest fans passing my sermons out to all his physics friends my dad was doing what Paul calls fathers to do and I tried to do that with our children it's not easy it's hard work it takes a lot of discernment to get inside their skin and discern their unique ways Sharon and I have tried our best that is what we promised to do when we dedicated our children it's what you promised to do when you dedicated your children at that dedication we said this child is not my own I'll do everything I can to help them freely follow Jesus Christ we were saying in that moment that

Jesus Christ claim on our children precedes and supersedes any claim we have on them he gets the last word which brings us to the dynamics of the revolution very briefly worked out in the servant master relationship be filled with the spirit being subject to one another in the fear of Christ servants to masters and masters to servants you might know that many people think that here Paul is wimping out and he's actually endorsing the institution of slavery but he's not and those throughout history who have taken this text to justify slavery have not read him carefully the fact is what Paul says to servants is more revolutionary than if he had tried to overtly overthrow the institution of slavery had he tried to overtly overthrow the institution he would not have succeeded because he would have been dismissed as a misguided radical I mentioned last

Sunday that while serving in Manila I had a weekly Bible study and one day we were working through this text and we came to the section on servants and masters and I could feel the temperature in the room begin to rise because everyone in that room had household servants including Sharon and me much to Sharon's discomfort the class was okay with how Paul begins servants be obedient to your masters in the Lord things got a little warmer when Paul said do not serve as people pleasers but as slaves of Christ doing the will of God from the heart what do you mean doing the will of God our servants doing the will of the master as to the Lord not to people says Paul you mean the servant serving Jesus and not the master and the temperature really rose when we read and masters do the same thing to servants and give up do the same thing servants do and give up threatening one woman blurted out if you let this text loose in our part of the world it will upset our whole way of life as to the

Lord as to Christ says Paul meaning because you belong to the Lord meaning because you belong to the Lord who calls you to follow in his way Jesus is the Lord who serves as to the Lord means serve with him follow him in his serving it's brilliant it means the servant is no longer a slave of the human Lord I'm no longer slave of a human who is lording it over me I'm a slave of Jesus Christ who tells me that my freedom is found in serving the human master who thinks that he or she is master is not the one dictating my behavior Jesus is dictating my behavior I serve a human master because I copied the great master do it from the heart says Paul serve from the heart serve with grace and courage and excellence do the best you can work in a way that honors Jesus Christ and one day the master will say hey

[35 : 55] I did not order you to serve me that way and you respond I am not under your orders and then comes the most revolutionary line of all the one that captures the drumbeat of the whole best and masters do the same things to them the same things the same things servants are doing for masters masters are to do for servants the same thing employees are doing for CEOs the CEOs are to do for the employees I've been mentioning the name of my scholar friend in the Philippines Bong Manayan who likes to be called Peter he grew up in a home with many household servants and he and his wife live in a home with household servants one day he was sitting at his desk working on this very text 6-9 you masters do the same things to them and he's wondering what does Paul mean and at that very moment one of the servants came do the same things to them and

Peter said I'm to treat her the way she treats me it is simple and as revolution all because Jesus Christ has come all because the spirit of Jesus Christ has come be filled with that spirit and we find ourselves living in a different kingdom with a very different kind of spirit of you body who are hurt