

AM Ephesians 5:22-6:9 & Colossians 3:18-4:1 Relationships

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[0:00] Ephesians chapter 5, a very similar passage.! Ephesians chapter 5, reading from verse 22 down to chapter 6 and verse 9.

! And that is on page 1177 of the Church Bibles. 1177.

So Ephesians 5 from verse 22. Wives, submit to your own husbands as to the Lord.

For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its saviour.

Now as the church submits to Christ, so wives should submit in everything to their husbands.

Husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendour, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.

[1:43] In the same way, husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body.

Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. However, let each of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband. Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.

Honour your father and mother. This is the first commandment with a promise, that it may go well with you, and that you may live long in the land.

Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. Slaves, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, with sincerity of heart, as you would Christ, not by way of eye service, as people pleasers, but as servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, rendering service with a good will, as to the Lord and not to man.

[3:26] Knowing that whatever good anyone does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether he is a slave or free. Masters, do the same to them, and stop your threatening, knowing that he who is both their master and yours, is in heaven, and that there is no partiality with him.

And now we read from Colossians, much shorter passage, on the same theme, which we'll look at later.

Colossians chapter 3, from verse 18, and that is on page 1185. Colossians 3, verse 18, down to chapter 4, verse 1.

Wives, submit to your husband, as is fitting in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives, and do not be harsh with them.

Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord. Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged.

[4:52] slaves, obey in everything, those who are your earthly masters, not by way of eye service, as people pleasers, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord.

Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord, and not for men. Knowing that from the Lord, you will receive the inheritance, as your reward.

You are serving the Lord Christ. For the wrongdoer will be paid back, for the wrong he has done, and there is no partiality. Masters, treat your slaves justly, and fairly, knowing that you also have, a master, in heaven.

We'll come back to that. Well, let's turn now, to Colossians, chapter 3.

Going to look at that passage, we read, from verse 18, down to, chapter 4, verse 1, beginning with the words, wives, submit to your husbands.

[6:08] ending with you, also have a master, in heaven. Some years ago, I had a friend, who put a paper cover, on his Bible, to protect it.

And he wrote, on the outside, the single word, relationships. Now, that may not be, a complete description, of the Bible.

There are, other things, in this great book. But a large part, of the Bible, is, about, relationships. Our relationship, with God, and our relationships, with one another.

Now, this passage, that we're looking at, this morning, is, certainly, summed up, by that word, relationships.

Three relationships, are described here. Wives, and husbands, in verses 18, and 19. Children, and parents, in verses 20, and 21.

[7:27] And, slaves, and masters, in, verse 23, on to, chapter 4, verse 1. Some, versions, translate it, as, bond servants.

The, pulpit Bible here, translates it, as slaves. Which, I believe, is correct. These, same, relationships, are, dealt with, in Ephesians, 5, and 6.

That's, why we, read that passage. We'll be, looking to that, just a little bit, today, for, elucidation.

The, first, and the, third, relationships, are, also, dealt with, in, 1 Peter.

All, three, would have, been seen, in those, days, as, family, relationships. Wives, and husbands, children, and parents, obviously.

But, slaves, were, also, regarded, as, part of, the, family. Sometimes, they were, well treated, sometimes, badly treated, but, they were, part of, the, household.

[8:48] In, every case, notice, it's a, mutual, relationship, wives, and husbands, children, and parents, slaves, and masters, and, we must look, at both sides, in every case.

And, all of them, concern, authority, submitting, to authority, and, exercising, authority.

Now, obviously, not, all of these, relationships, affect, all of us. But, all of us, I believe, can, learn, from them all.

not, all of us, here, are married. But, others, might be, in the future. And, if we care, about our brothers, and sisters, in Christ, then, it's good, also, to, understand, the challenges, that they may face.

Not, all of us, have children. But, others, might have, in the future. some of you, are children. All of us, have been children.

[10:13] Some, still, have parents, alive. And, again, even if we're not, directly, affected, it's good, to, understand, the challenges, that others, face.

None of us, thankfully, is, a slave. And, I, hope, that none of you, own slaves. The, nearest, equivalent, that we have today, is, working for others.

As, it happens, within our, own, local congregation, glancing around, I, think, none of us, are actually, even in that position.

Even, the, the farmers, are all, self-employed. But, again, some of you, may go out, to work, in the future, and some of our, friends visiting, might, be, employed, somewhere.

It's good, to understand, therefore, the challenges, that workers, and bosses, face. But, even if, some of these, relationships, don't apply, to you, literally, spiritually.

[11:29] They all, apply, spiritually. Because, as we shall see, all of them, are a reflection, of our relationship, with the Lord.

The church, is the bride, of Christ. Believers, are the children, of God. And, every Christian, is a servant, of God.

can be said, to us all, you have a master, in heaven. So, let's start, with wives, and husbands, in verses 18, and 19.

Wives, submit to your, husbands, as is fitting, in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives, and do not be, harsh, with them.

Throughout, history, the family, has been, the bedrock, of society. And, at the heart, of the family, traditionally, has been, a husband, and a wife.

[12:46] Now, I know, that that, order, is breaking, down, these days. men, and women, are, living, together, without, bothering, about, marriage, and, gay marriage, has been, introduced, men, living with men, and women, with women.

And, I don't doubt, that some of them, have, very happy, and loving, relationships. But, I have to say to you, that the Bible, knows, nothing, of these, alternative, lifestyles.

As Jesus said, in another context, in the beginning, it was not so. God, made, one man, Adam, and, one woman, Eve, to be his wife.

And, one man, one woman, bound together, in marriage, remains, the biblical pattern, today. But, many marriages, are, unhappy.

Even, Christian marriages, because, they fail, to keep, to the biblical, teaching, on marriage. Paul, gives us here, two very simple, commands.

[14:09] One, positive, wives, submit. And, the other, negative, husbands, do not be harsh. And, they are, commands.

Paul, is not just, giving marriage, guidance, counseling. He is, giving us here, the commands, of God. Now, the idea, of wives, submitting, to their husbands, is not popular, today.

We live, in a very, individualistic, age, where, no one, likes to submit, to anyone else. And, women, in particular, resent, the idea, of submitting, to their husbands.

But, that is what God commands. It's also, what the traditional, marriage vows require. Wilt thou have this man, to thy wedded husband, to live together, after God's ordinance, in the holiest state, of matrimony?

Wilt thou, obey him, and serve him, and love, and honor, and keep him, in sickness, and in health, and forsaking all other, keep thee only, unto him, as long as, ye both, shall live.

[15:27] Those of us, who are married, have all made a vow, similar to that. I once, conducted, a wedding, of a West Indian couple, both of them, Christians, which almost, didn't happen, because, the bride, insisted, the night before, that she would, only say, submit, not, obey.

And technically, she was right. That is the word, that Paul uses. But those two ideas, submission, and obedience, are very close, to each other.

Paul says the same, in Ephesians 5, wives submit, to your own husbands, as to the Lord. Peter says the same, in 1 Peter 3, wives be subject, to your own husbands.

So, it isn't just Paul. This is the teaching, of the whole Bible. Indeed, Peter goes further, than Paul. And he says, that the wives, must submit, even if their husbands, are not Christians.

So that, their husbands, may be, won, without a word, by the conduct, of their wives. Obviously, there are limits, to that.

[16:51] General rule, applies, we must obey God, rather than men. There's no, obligation, to obey, an ungodly, command.

But in general, according to the Bible, whatever the modern world, may think, it is the husband's role, to lead, and the wife, must follow.

But, the husband, must not abuse, this power. Do not be harsh, with them, Paul says. Or to put it more, positively, be kind, to your wives.

Being the head, of the household, doesn't give you, carte blanche, to do whatever you please. The husband, is also under command, to love, his wife.

As Paul says, in Ephesians, husbands, love, your wives. The marriage vow, says the same. Says to the man, wilt thou love her, comfort her, honor and keep her, in sickness and in health, and forsaking all others, keep thee only unto her, as so long as you both, shall live.

[18:06] These are mutual commands. Verses 18 and 19, go together. A kind husband, makes submission, easier.

A harsh husband, may get his own way, in the short term, but he is only creating, resentment. So these then, are the commands, that Paul gives.

But why? All he says here, is that, it is fitting, in the Lord. But in Ephesians, he explains, at more length, that marriage, is not just, a human relationship.

It is based, on the relationship, of Christ, and his church. Ephesians 5, 22, wives are to be subject, to their husbands, for the husband, is the head, of the wife, even as Christ, is the head, of the church, his body, and is himself, its saviour.

So also, wives, should submit, in everything, to their husbands. And to the husbands, he says, love your wives, as Christ, loved the church, and gave himself, for her.

[19:35] Now this lifts it, onto an altogether, higher plane, doesn't it? It is not just, about living, happily together. Marriage is, Paul says, a great mystery.

It speaks of Christ, and his church. Each marriage, here today, is, or should be, a picture, of the love, between Christ, and his church.

The gospel, itself, lived out, visibly, in our own families. Our children, should see, indeed, the whole world, should see, in our marriages, the beauty, of Christ's, sacrificial love, for his church, and the church's, willingness, to obey Christ.

Do they see that? May that, high ideal, be fulfilled, in our marriages, now, and in the marriages, that you, children, may enter into, in the years, ahead.

Long way off yet, but the time, will come. But let's move on now, to the second relationship, children, and parents, 20 and 21.

[21:02] Children, obey your parents, in everything, for this, pleases the Lord. Fathers, do not provoke, your children, lest they become, discouraged. Once again, two mutual commands, one positive, children obey, the other negative, fathers, do not provoke.

The command, to the children, is quite simply, the fifth commandment, in Exodus 20. Honor your father, and your mother, that your days, may be long, in the land, that the Lord, your God, is giving you.

Paul observes, in Ephesians, this is the first, commandment, with a promise. Honoring, of course, is more than just, obeying.

But Paul focuses, on obedience. Nothing, could be simpler. God doesn't, make it complicated, for you. Just, do, as your mom, and dad, say.

That is what, pleases the Lord. doesn't just, please your mom, and dad. It pleases, the Lord, as well. Once again, there are, limits.

[22:21] We must obey God, rather than men. If, your parents, were ever to tell you, to do something, ungodly, I hope they never will. If they did, then you would have, to question it.

But Paul is dealing, with the simple case. Godly children, must obey, godly parents. Even in adult life, if our parents, are alive, we must still, honour them.

We have, the ability now, of course, to make our own decisions, and our, parents will expect, us to do that. But we must, still respect, their advice.

But notice, the mutual command, fathers, do not provoke, your children. A harsh, father, is as bad, as a harsh, husband.

All true authority, is based on kindness. We want to encourage, our children, not discourage them. He expands, on this again, in Ephesians 6, bring them up, in the discipline, and instruction, of the Lord.

[23:39] He addresses this, to fathers, as the head, of the household, you have the responsibility. But of course, it applies, to mothers as well. But again, why?

Paul doesn't, spell it out here, but the principle, is the same, as with marriage. That this relationship, between parents, and children, is a picture, or I think, the technical term, would be a paradigm, of the relationship, between God, and his people.

As Christians, we have been, born again, by the spirit of God, and we have become, the children, of God. Paul says, in Romans 8, the spirit himself, bears witness, with our spirit, that we are, the children, of God.

John says, see what kind of love, the father has given us, that we should be called, the children, of God. Psalm 103, speaks of the father, showing compassion, on us, as his children.

In the Lord's prayer, we are taught, to pray, our father, which art in heaven. As children, of God, we must obey, our heavenly father.

[25:06] And we can be sure, that he will never, provoke us, because he is, the very best, of fathers. Some have been, misfortunate, in having fathers, who have, ill treated them.

Sympathise deeply, if anyone here, has had that. But that will never, happen with God. He is the perfect, father. And the whole, Bible, is a father's, word to his children, to train us up, in the way, we should go.

Peter doesn't, directly address, children and parents, but he does, bring out this, spiritual application, 1 Peter 1 14, as obedient, children, do not be, conformed, to the passions, of your former ignorance, but as he, who has called you, is holy, you also be holy, in all, your conduct. Obedient children, is that what you are? Obedient children, of your parents, obedient children, of God.

But now, finally, slaves and masters. Verse 22, onwards, slaves obey, in everything, those who are, your earthly masters, and so on.

[26:35] Greek word, is douloi, usually translated, slaves, as I mentioned, and some, versions, have bond, servants.

Now, slavery, was, universal, in the Roman Empire. It's been estimated, that there were, 10 million, slaves, out of a total, population, of 50 million.

So, 20% of people, were slaves. This congregation, here, were about, 20 or so of us. Well, four of you, would be slaves.

As Rome, conquered the world, so, the conquered nations, were, taken, into slavery. And the slaves, themselves, married, and had children.

And those children, became slaves, for generations, to come. It wasn't limited, to the wealthy. Quite ordinary, households, would often, have slaves.

[27:47] Nor, were the slaves, necessarily, doing, back-breaking jobs. Teachers, and doctors, were often, slaves. Maybe, that's why, some versions, prefer the word, bond servants, so that we don't, think of them all, like, Egyptian slaves, under, the whip of Pharaoh, building pyramids.

Now, the law, gave, the master, the power, of life, and death, over his slaves. And there was, ill treatment.

So much so, that in BC 73, there was a great, slave rebellion, led by Spartacus. But generally speaking, it seems that, most of the slaves, in the Roman Empire, were reasonably, well treated. And that makes sense, because after all, a slave, was a valuable asset. You wanted, to look after them. Sometimes, a slave, might even be given, his freedom.

Now, the fact that Paul, addresses slaves, both here, and in Ephesians, suggests, that some of them, became Christians.

[29:08] Well, here are, God's commands, to the Christian slaves, and the Christian masters. To the slaves, in verse 22, obey in everything, those who are, your earthly masters, not by way of eye service, as people pleases, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord.

Whatever, you do, work heartily, as for the Lord, and not for men, knowing that from the Lord, you will receive, the inheritance, as your reward. You are serving, the Lord Christ.

Now, these are remarkable commands. We might have expected, to say, slaves, I sympathize with you. You have a hard life.

Pray for grace, that you might be able, to endure the suffering, that you're under. But no, he tells them, to work, enthusiastically.

Not as, men pleases, not with one eye, on the clock, as it were, doing the absolute minimum, but to serve, with all their heart. And to serve, as though they were, serving Christ.

[30:24] If I'd been a slave, in the congregation, I think I might have, felt a bit rebellious, at this. You know, no, I'm not serving Christ, I'm serving this horrible man, Julius, who keeps on whipping me.

No, no, look beyond that, look above that. Ultimately, you are serving, the Lord Christ, who has placed you, where you are. And the Lord himself, will reward you.

Indeed, as Christians, they have an inheritance, awaiting them, far better, than the master, could possibly give, to anyone. Heaven itself.

And if they are ill-treated, well, verse 25, the wrongdoer, will be paid back, for the wrong he has done. And there is no partiality. Scripture says, vengeance is mine, says the Lord.

I will repay. Peter goes even further. 1 Peter 2, verse 18, slaves be subject to your masters, with all respect, not only to the good, and gentle, but also to the unjust.

[31:38] And he sets before them, the example of Christ, suffering patiently. There is, of course, a corresponding command, to the masters.

There must have been masters, in the congregation. Masters, treat your slaves, justly and fairly, knowing that you also, have a master, in heaven. As with, wives and husbands, parents and children, it's a two-way, relationship.

And both sides, have responsibilities. Now again, we have to ask, why? And in this case, the answer is right here, in Colossians.

You are serving, the Lord Christ. You, too, have, a master. Who is that master?

God. Now this, too, surprisingly, perhaps, to our modern minds, is a picture, of the relationship, between God, and his people.

[32:49] Masters, and slaves, surely not. Yes, in the Bible, even that, is treated, as a picture, of God, and his people. Paul calls himself, a slave, of the Lord, Jesus Christ.

God is our master, and we must serve him, with all, our hearts. God, has, as it were, conquered us, by the gospel, and made us, his slaves.

And he has done so, in love. Because we were not, free people, beforehand. We were actually, slaves of sin.

And he has, rescued us, by sending his son, to die for us. He's rescued us, from sin, that most terrible, of masters.

And brought us, into his household, where he is, the best of masters. We are, noticed, both children, and servants, of God, at the same time.

[33:57] He will never, be harsh to us. He will give us, the most amazing, inheritance. Now today, thankfully, slavery, has been, abolished.

I'm aware, that there is still, what they call, modern slavery. Where people are forced, to work, under very, unfair conditions.

Christians, the brick workers, in Bangladesh, spring to mind. And that is, a terrible, evil, that needs, to be addressed. But slavery, as such, has been, abolished.

Largely, through, the work, of Christians. Men, like Wilberforce, who I spoke, about earlier, to the children. Horrified, by the slave trade, Wilberforce, spent his life, campaigning, for an end, to slavery.

Took a long time. He got it, through the British Parliament. In America, it took a civil war, to finally, end slavery. But praise God, it's gone.

[35:12] We may well ask, why, Paul didn't, openly, condemn slavery. Well, the answer is, probably, that the time, had not yet, come, for such, a huge task.

But instead, the whole concept, of man being made, in the image of God, the whole concept, of Christians, being brothers, and sisters, undermined, slavery, and prepared, the way, for men, like Wilberforce.

You may, have read, that there are, demands, for Britain, to pay, reparation, for the slave trade. That, seems, a step, too far.

Remember, it was the African chiefs, themselves, who sold, their own people, as slaves. And how far, do you go? Do you demand, reparations, from Rome?

No, it belongs, to the past. May it remain there. But we can, I believe, still apply, this teaching today, to employers, and employees.

[36:21] They used to talk, about being, wage slaves. The same rules, apply, that we should work, heartily, and enthusiastically, recognizing, the reality, that ultimately, we serve Christ.

And if we employ others, we must treat them, justly. Well, you might say, we don't employ anyone, but you do. Think about, all the tradesmen, who work for you.

The painters, the decorators, the gardeners, the window cleaners, even the plasterers. Sometimes, they don't do, all that you might, wish them to do. But you're employing them.

They must treat you, properly. But you too, must treat them, justly. At our daughter, Hannah's church, in Hong Kong, I once heard, the pastor, speak to the CEOs, the chief executive officers. Big, wealthy church, they had some, in the congregation. We don't have, anything like that. But he could also, have addressed, what they call, helpers in Hong Kong. Child minders, cleaners.

[37:36] There's still, plenty of scope, to apply the principles, of Colossians today. But above all, we must apply, the spiritual message. You also, have a master, in heaven.

If you're not, a Christian of course, you still have a master. The only difference, is that you're, rebelling against him. You need to repent, and submit, to your master.

And if you are, a Christian, you need to serve, your master, enthusiastically. Knowing that he, loved you so much, that he died for you.

And trusting in him, for your, eternal, inheritance. What a privilege, we have as Christians. Christ is, our heavenly, bridegroom.

God is, our heavenly father. Christ is, our heavenly master. May the Lord, help us, in all our earthly, and spiritual, relationships.

[38:44] Amen.