

## 17.9.08 Ephesians 5:21-6:9 midweekchurch Ephesians 5b (mid)

I heard the story recently about a couple on their 50th wedding anniversary at home on the couch watching TV. And the wife turned to her husband and said, "Honey, how about stroking my hair the way you did when we first married." So he did.

Then she said, "Dear, how about cuddling me the way we did when we were first married." So he did. Next, she said, "Sweetheart, how about nibbling on my ear the way you did when we were first married." Abruptly, he got off the couch and left the room. She called out, "Honey, what's the matter? Where are you going?" And he hollered back, "I'm going to get my teeth."

Its true isn't it, that relationships change? Marriage relationships change, as couples get older and know each other better. Family relationships change as kids grow and become adults. Friendships change as we go our own different ways. Relationships change. But as Paul talks to the Church at Ephesus about how to live as a Christian, we see some things never change. The way we conduct our relationships shouldn't change.

That's why God has placed Paul's directions for husbands and wives, for children and parents, for slaves and masters in his Bible. For the principles here don't change. Society may change, life may look very different to the sort of life that Paul was writing about, but Paul's principles remain rock solid.

So as we look at this teaching tonight I want you to pay special attention to how God wants you to live - are you a husband, a wife? A child, a parent? A boss, a worker? Or maybe you are two or three of four of these things all at once. Listen because God has something important to say to you. But don't just listen to those parts of this passage that apply to you, listen to it all. Are you a wife, then be the sort of wife that helps your husband to live like he should? Are you a child, then one day you will probably be a parent. Are you a worker, soon you might find yourself the boss. So listen to Paul, for he is speaking tonight with God's authority.

And the first point Paul wants to make is **1. God cares about your relationships**. He's not just interested in the vertical - your relationship with Him, but also the horizontal - your relationships with others around you. Now that is a powerful truth.

God cares about what happens between you and your husband, between you and your wife, between you and your parents, between you and your children, between you and your boss, even between you and your roommate, your boyfriend, your siblings, your sister, your friends. The life of faith is not just about going to Church or prayer or Bible study, its about everyday stuff, its about every relationship that

you have. Because relationships are important. Important to you. Important to God. For relationships are at the heart of who we are as Christians. And Paul's second point is

**2. Relationships don't just happen; they require work** You have to work at being a good husband, a good wife, a good son, a good daughter. That's why Paul uses words like submit, love, respect, obey, honour, train, instruct and serve. These words don't just happen. It's not natural today to submit or to honour, you will be looked down by others if you obey. Some will think you are crazy if you are seeking to serve rather than be served. These things don't just happen, but if you want to conduct your relationships the way God's wants you to do them, then you will have to work at doing these sorts of things.

So Paul says *wives submit to your husbands as to the Lord*. Wives submit, well that's a dirty word today isn't it? I can hear some feminists saying "wash your mouth out with soap. Submit huh!"

I remember that when Kaylene and I were getting married, we had to work out our wedding vows. And Kaylene decided that she would promise to obey me. Now that caused a stir amongst my sisters, & sisters in laws. Obey, that's something that went out with the ark. But Kaylene was adamant and the word obey stayed.

But Paul doesn't use the word obey, he uses the word submit. Why should wives submit? Paul says that wives should submit because the husband is the head of the wife. And as the Church submits to its head, Christ, so wives need to submit to their husbands. Now let's note what Paul is not saying here. He isn't saying that husbands are better than their wives, no they are equal in God's eyes. He is not saying that the wife is to be a doormat to be walked upon, no she is choosing to submit, not beaten into submission. And he is not saying that wives are the only one who have to submit, because in the verse before he has already said "*Submit to one another, out of reverence for Christ.*"

What he is saying is that wives and husbands are equal but different. They have the same status in God's eyes, but different roles. The husband has the responsibility of headship, of being the one who makes the final decision within this partnership and by the way he will often make that decision on the basis of his wives' view because he wants to please her. And the wife is to submit.

And by doing this she does what Jesus did. Remember Jesus is God in the flesh, yet he submits to His Father's will. Jesus has all power and authority in His hands and yet he submits himself to Pilate's unjust court, to the lashing and punishment of the Roman soldiers, to the indignity of dying on a cross, to even picking up a basin and a towel and washing his disciples stinky, dirty, smelly feet. Jesus said the greatest among you is the servant. The one who serves is greater than the one who is being served. So the wife and the

husband have different roles. Thus the wife is to submit and the husband is to love as Christ loved the Church.

Now how does he do that? By being like Jesus and being willing to sacrifice his will, his desires, his life to his wife. He is charged with the responsibility of caring for and providing for his wife and encouraging her in holiness. He must love his wife as he loves himself, because when they became married, the two became one.

Love, the word rolls off the tongue easily, but its hard to put into practice. For love is not just a feeling, an emotion, it is a commitment to the other's good no matter what. It is a desire to reflect what God has done for me, to the ones who are around me.

Years ago, a lady approached a newspaper editor with some of her poetry on love and was encouraged to read one for him. It talked about moons and summer nights and flowers and sunsets all in beautiful sounding verse. But the editor didn't want to have a bar of it. "I'm sorry," he said, "but you just don't know what love is all about! It's not moonlight and roses. It's sitting up all night beside a sick bed, or working extra hours so the kids can have new shoes. The world doesn't need your brand of poetical love. It needs some good old fashioned practical love." .....

Love. I saw a wonderful example of love a while back. I was called to visit a lady who was dying in the nursing home. She had been in that nursing home for 6 years. And every day her husband visited her, sometimes two or three times each day. The woman was in a coma when I arrived and the husband said "I want you to meet the most beautiful woman in the world." She was 86 years old, his wife for 59 years and she was thin and hollow around the eyes and cheeks & she hadn't been able to speak properly for most of the last couple of years. Yet he loved her. He sacrificed everything for her & any woman who received that sort of love, would willingly submit to that sort of a man.

Submit, love, obey. Children are to obey their parents in the Lord for this is right. Now most cultures in the world encourage their children to obey their parents, but in the ancient Roman world the children had no rights whatsoever, they were like slaves to their father and the girls were treated even worse than slaves.

But here Paul is saying the role of a child is important. You are not forced to obey, you choose to obey, because there will be blessings attached to obedience. If you can learn to obey your earthly parents, even when they are wrong at times, it will help you to obey your heavenly Father, you is never wrong, who never shows favouritism, who is always just and fair.

I remember soon after I became a Christian, my parents banned me from Church and youth group. I was devastated. My friends was there. I wanted to worship my God. I knew these things helped me grow in

the faith. But I was 16 & still living at home. So I obeyed, grudgingly I admit, but I did what they wanted me to do. And a couple of weeks later they changed their mind, my obedience had won them over.

So children need to obey their parents. But for how long? When are you not a child? It doesn't say. But I would guess until you leave home & take full responsibility for yourself. And even then, the Bible encourages us to honour our parents. We may not do everything they say, but we need to respect their wishes and find a way in which you show your own responsibilities & yet still respect your mum and dad.

Children obey, parents need to train and instruct their children in the Lord. For parents have an awesome responsibility for their kids. They shouldn't exasperate them, they shouldn't do things that they know will annoy them, they should seek to point their kids to the true faith through teaching and example. They don't leave the Christian training up to the Church or to the school, they know that this is their number 1 priority in raising their kids, so they do it diligently and prayerfully.

Slaves obey their masters with respect and fear and not to win them over, but to work as is they are doing it for God. Now the master slave relationship is no more, thank the Lord. But we still have the boss/worker relationship which is not dissimilar. So it is your job to obey your boss, as if he or she was Christ. If you are a teacher, teach as if you were teaching Jesus. If you are our housewife, cook as if Jesus was going to eat the meal, if you are a student, do your best for Him.

Why? Because our jobs are an extension of our faith. We spend 30, 40, 50, 60 hours there & we want to show others & God that Jesus is an important part of all of our lives. Similarly if you are a boss, treat your workers the way you want them to treat you, with respect. Be willing to serve them. For the way you treat others is the way that God will in turn treat you. Which just means if we are going to love, submit, serve, teach, obey - we are going to have to work at it. For it goes against our grain. This is true because of Paul's third point... that

**3. The model for every relationship is Jesus.** How does submission work? Look to Jesus' submission to his Father's will. What does it mean to love? Look at how Jesus loved you so much that he died on the cross to make you holy. How does real child-like faith and obedience work out in practice? Look at how Jesus treats his Father and obeys his Father's will. How can you serve people that are not worth serving, look at Jesus' service to you.

The model is always Jesus. He is the one who has given us a certain order in life. He is the one who has given others authority over us. He is the one who is ultimately in authority over us. But his authority is one of care not control, responsibility not rule. He is the one who knows how you can best grow in your faith. And he is the one who experienced all the injustice, the cruelty, the abuse and yet was still

able to remain faithful to the end.

He is the one we are serving when we serve others around us. Which, of course, provides limits for Paul's instruction. For if submitting to your husband, means you are doing something against Jesus, if your boss wants you to lie and/or cover up for his fraudulent actions, if your parents are telling to forget about faith in Jesus, then there is an escape clause. Because ultimately you have to obey God over men. But this escape clause will be the exception rather than the rule.

Which leads us to our final point, **4. God is more interested in your responsibilities than your rights.** What I mean by this is, our world is one eyed about our rights. And if our rights are infringed, we can jump up and down, make a huge show and dance about it, sue anyone who comes in our way. Our world concentrates on what others need to do for us. But that is not what this passage is all about. It concentrates on my responsibility to others.

So if you are a husband, don't demand that your wife submit to you, just get on with the job of loving your wife and pray that in time, your wife will grow in her submission. Likewise if you are a wife don't expect your husband to treat you as Christ would treat you. Just do your part and watch before your eyes as his love for you will grow. Children obey your parents, even when they are unreasonable, for in time that will show them your trustworthiness. And workers forget about what the boss should do for you, just get on with treating him and others as Jesus would want you to treat them.

I like the story of the drunk who went into a mission centre and got a free meal and place to sleep. He stayed around and over time he noticed a guy called Joe there. Joe did all the jobs that no one else wanted to do. He cleaned up the vomit on the floors and the mess in the toilets, he served the down and outs their food, and he did everything without complaining. And as time went on this drunk found out that Joe used to be a drunk himself but the mission had turned him around.

One night there was a Church service at the mission and the drunk went forward after the service and in prayer he cried, "Lord, make me like Joe, make me like Joe". The mission director leaned over and said "you mean, make me like Jesus don't you mate?" "Why" replied the drunk "is he like Joe?" Oh if people around here would be crying out make me like Don, like Cathy, like Dawn. Because they could see Jesus in us and in all our relationships. How amazing would that be?