

# Explore the Bible: Walking as Family

October 29, 2019

- *The Explore the Bible lesson for Nov. 17 focuses on Ephesians 5:22-6:4.*

Although lists of God-ordained institutions vary as to number and focus, two that are on nearly every list are the church and the family. Given their divine origin, then, it is not surprising to find these two entities so closely connected in our focal passage.

In the first part of Ephesians 5, Paul outlined how believers are to walk in wisdom. This instruction culminated with the call to walk in mutual submission as the body of Christ. In order to communicate how deeply the call to mutual submission must pervade who we are as believers, Paul takes the instruction into the relationships that most define us—our family.

The tie between the two institutions is nowhere made more clearly than in this passage. Subsequently, the guidance given to family members in this passage go beyond just guidance to them, but breaks into the heart and mind of every member of the church as well.

## Wives (Ephesians 5:22-24)

Few passages are as controversial in our modern setting as the instruction in Ephesians 5:22 for wives to submit to their husbands. Interpreters at times find it tempting to try to apologize for its presence in Scripture or to dismiss its injunction.

To be certain we must be certain to interpret the passage in light of its

surrounding injunctions. We must point out that it is only the first example of several calls to submission. We must also acknowledge that the verb “submit” is not actually even present in verse 22 and comes from the call to mutual submission in verse 21.

At the same time, however, the instruction is unmistakable—wives should submit to their husband as an aspect of their submission to the Lord. This approach seems the best understanding of the phrase “as to the Lord.” The injunction is carried over into verse 24 with the addition of “in everything” reveals that the call pervades every part of life.

In Ephesians 5:23, the comparison to Christ and the Church is made explicit within the command. The husband is called the head of the wife just as Christ is the head of the church. The question that the passage creates, however, is what is exactly is the comparison being made here?

It seems unlikely, if not impossible, that Paul has a thoroughgoing comparison between how Christ is the head of the Church and the husband is the head of the wife. Generally, scholars move to a single point of comparison. Some have argued for a meaning linked to leadership or authority. While such an image is common in both Hebrew and English, it is virtually unknown in the Greek usage of the word *kephale* that Paul uses here. In fact, when Greek uses head in a leadership sense, it uses a totally different word.

Others have argued that the intention is that of source, or perhaps prominence. This would highlight the role of bringing one to completion. But this approach seems at odds of other places where Paul uses this word elsewhere for Christ’s authority (cf. Colossians 2:10 and Ephesians 1:22).

It is probably best to maintain a tension in the instruction that Paul often pursues. The tension is found in the servant-leadership model Christ established in the Gospels. But Paul is careful to say that while the husband

is a servant-leader just as Christ is, Christ is the only Savior. Though the NIV omits it, verse 24 begins with a contrasting “but” which clearly identifies the statement at the end of verse 23 as a parenthetical statement.

In the end, the instructions focused on the wife call for an acknowledgment of roles and relationships in light of one’s greater obedience to Christ. Paul starts here, it seems, because this greater pattern of relationship most closely mirrors every other relationship that is take place within the church. Every role, every decision, every characteristic of our relationships must be lived out first and foremost as an outgrowth or component of our relationship to Christ.

*What are some ways a wife’s respect for her husband (5:33) are similar and different than the Church’s fear of Christ? What do these differences and similarities contribute to the observations made about the relationships observed in the earlier verses?*

## **Husbands (Ephesians 5:25-33)**

Although one might expect Paul to tell husbands how to lead their submitting wives (and this is indeed the direction many interpreters try to go), Paul instead continues his challenge to mutual submission by highlighting how husbands must also submit to their wives. This submission is characterized by one of the most basic of Christian virtues—love.

Just as the wife has been challenged to selfless commitment to submit to her husband in light of her relationship to Christ, the husband is now called to selfless placement of the wife’s needs over his own just as Christ selflessly gave himself for the church. Again, such a disposition is an expression of something that must be a part of every Christian’s experience within the world we live.

*What are some ways that a husband can demonstrate this kind of selfless*

*love for his wife? How might selflessness find expression beyond a marital relationship in the greater work of the church?*

## **Children (Ephesians 6:1-3)**

Just as with the instruction to the wife and husband, the call from Paul to obey “in the Lord” expresses the concept of carrying out the challenge as a component of our greater relationship with Christ. Paul gently alters the promise of the Old Testament that one would dwell in the Promised Land to one dwelling upon the earth. His thought is that the stability such obedience brings results in a healthier situation for all. The injunction to obey is significant as a component of our place in the church since again it mirrors a command from Christ that is a fundamental characteristic of his followers (cf. John 14:15).

*How does one’s ability to obey his or her parents establish a larger capacity to function within society? How does the challenge to obey fit together with the call to selflessness and submission?*

## **Parents (Ephesians 6:4)**

Paul challenges parents, fathers in particular, to not simply raise their children, but more specifically to nurture them. The picture here is of interest in all those in our care. It is important that Paul doesn’t simply refer to sons, but to children as a whole. The concept is holistic interest of those we are responsible for and it is not accidental that the guidance here draws to mind the idea of discipleship. Once again, Paul has used the familial relationship to identify a key component of our responsibility within the church.

*What are some ways that discipleship and child-rearing mirror each other? How does the emphasis on nurturing that Paul makes in this verse alter*

*one's understanding of the discipleship process?*

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