

LIVING IN HARMONY

Ephesians 5:22-6:9

Introduction:

Turn with me back to Ephesians 5. The reading we just heard from Paul's letter to the Colossians is a condensed version of what Paul wrote to the believers in Ephesus. I would like to read you the same passage now from the book of Ephesians. It is much longer, but I think it is worth reading through the entire passage in order to get a cohesive understanding of what Paul is saying.

Read Eph. 5:15-6:9. Everyone wants a happy home, a purposeful and harmonious home. Everyone wants a happy life, a meaningful life, a peaceful and joyous life. I think that, for the most part, everyone wants to live in harmony with those around them. Oh, there may be exceptions, but especially as Christians, we want to live in peace.

I've often seen examples of people who are asked what they would like more than anything else in the world and they say their greatest wish is for world peace, for peace and harmony in the world. I say a quote the other day that said, *"Why do we only rest in peace? Why can't we also live in peace?"*

Last week we looked at Ephesians 5:22-33, a passage regarding husbands and wives. We looked at the perspective of marriage being a picture of Christ's relationship to his bride, the church. Today, I want to back up and take a broader approach to this whole passage as we consider how we are to live in harmony in our relationships in this life.

There are three key areas of life and relationships addressed in this passage—marriage, family and workplace. But it all comes under the banner of a Spirit-filled life. Verses 15-21 introduce the passage with a significant series of commands.

- Be careful how you live (be wise)
- Make the most of every opportunity (use of time)
- Understand the will of the Lord

But the key, central command is, "Don't be controlled by wine, but be under the control of the Spirit..." This command is then followed by a series of participles which define what the spirit-filled life looks like:

- Addressing one another
- Singing to the Lord
- Giving thanks for all things
- Submitting to one another

Many translations make v. 21 a separate command but it is actually another participle in the original.

Then comes v. 22 – there is no break—no paragraphs or punctuation—in the original. It just carries over from v. 21 as an example of the submission we are to have for one another.

v. 22 – *lit.* "The woman (wife) to your own husband, subject yourself as the Lord."

So with all of that in mind, let's consider what Paul has to say about living in harmony and contentment. We are going to look briefly at the three areas he addresses, then I want to try to draw some principles that we can apply to our lives.

Harmony in Marriage

We spent some time last week on verses 22-33. However, I would like to say a few things more specifically about the marriage relationship and the roles of husband and wife in a marriage. I do this with great trepidation.

Wives submit to your own husbands as to the Lord.

The key element to that command is the phrase, *as to the Lord*. John Piper says, *"That little phrase 'as to the Lord' has two implications. One is that a woman's first and ultimate allegiance is to the Lord Jesus and that other allegiances are subordinate to and derivative from this one. The other implication is that, therefore, the subordinate allegiances are limited by the revealed will of Christ. This means that the form which a wife's submission takes will vary according to the quality of her husband's leadership."*

Clearly, if her husband is an ungodly man, urging her to be involved in things either immoral, illegal or unethical, she is not expected to blindly go along with it.

But if the husband is a godly man with a Biblical vision for her and for the family, she will willingly and gladly support him and enjoy the godly leadership he provides. She will assist him as well, with her own godly advice and encouragement.

Husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the church.

Men, God has certainly set the bar high for us in our marriages. We spoke last week about Christ's sacrifice for the church and his desire and purpose for the church. I am not going to repeat all of that...

But, Christ's purpose in giving himself up for the church is to prepare for himself a bride who is pure and blameless, without spot or wrinkle. And so He gave himself in sacrifice for the salvation and sanctification of the members of his body.

But along with the surrender and sacrifice also comes an incredible responsibility. Men, we are called to a position of headship. That does not mean lording it over our wives, demanding unquestioning submission to every whim. It means careful, thoughtful, loving leadership.

When the loving headship of the husband and the respect and submission of the wife are in right balance the result will be harmony in the marriage relationship. That is what is pictured in Christ's relationship to his bride, the church, as we looked at last week.

Harmony in the Family

The second area Paul mentions is the relationship between parents and children – harmony in the family. I realize that most of us here are not in this situation any more, but I want to mention a couple of things anyway.

Just as in the marriage relationship there is an order of authority, so there is here. In marriage you have on one side the loving headship of the husband and on the other the respect and submission of the wife. Here in the family relationship you have the gracious authority of the parent coupled with the willing obedience of the children.

Look at 6:1-4 – for children, obedience is the key word. Obedience involves not only doing what you are told, but doing it with an attitude of willingness, a desire to please. Once again, however, there is a qualifier – *"...in the Lord..."* There is also a promise associated with this command – *discuss...*

The other side of this relationship is that of fathers – parents. There needs to be graciousness on the side of parents in their dealings with children – *discus briefly.*

Albert Barnes, in discussing this command to not provoke or exasperate your children says, "That is, by unreasonable commands; by needless severity; by the manifestation of anger. So govern them, and so punish them—if punishment is necessary—that they shall not lose their confidence in you, but shall love you."

When discipline is meted out justly and graciously and children are encouraged and built up, and children respond with respect and obedience, there will be harmony in the family.

Harmony in the Workplace

This third area that Paul mentions is something that was a major area of concern in his day. The relationship between masters and slaves was a delicate issue in the early church – when both were believers, in the church they were on equal standing.

"There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." (Gal. 3:28)

Yet in the workplace they were of very different standing. So how were Christian masters to treat their slaves, and how were slaves to respond to their masters. That was an important question.

Obviously, that is not an issue today, but I believe we can justifiably apply these instructions to the workplace today and the relationship between employers and employees. So what does Paul say?

Slaves (Employees): Obedience, with an attitude of working for Christ himself. Recognize that ultimately it is the Lord you must please and he is the one who will reward you.

Masters (Employers): Treat your servants with respect, do not threaten or abuse them. Recognize that you too must ultimately answer to God for your behaviour.

Conclusion

So, in marriage, in family life, in the workplace. We all want a happy life; we all want to live in peace and harmony with others. Paul has given us some instruction to facilitate that.

But I want to wrap this up with some general statements of application. There are some principles in here that I believe can help us to get a handle on this. I will mention three:

1. We must recognize that in all of life there is a chain of command or authority. Every one of these relationships are built on the concept of leading and following, of headship and submission. I am reminded of the centurion who came to Jesus to have him heal his servant. As Jesus prepared to go to his house, "The centurion answered and said, 'Lord, I am not worthy that You should come under my roof. But only speak a word, and my servant will be healed. For I also am a man under authority, having soldiers under me. And I say to this one, 'Go,' and he goes; and to another, 'Come,' and he comes; and to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it."
No matter who we are, no matter what power or authority we wield, we still answer to someone higher and ultimately that chain of command ends with God, for all of us.
2. You cannot force attitudes – Love, submission, obedience, etc. You can make people do what you want them to do if you have the power, but that does not make the attitude Christ is looking for.
3. This is the ultimate goal: We are, each one, responsible for our own attitude and mindset. In marriage, in the family, in the workplace, we often find ourselves trying to change those around us, to make them what we think they should be. But our responsibility is to focus on becoming what God wants **US** to be.

So, I think the key is found in our text in Ephesians 5 – "...be filled with the Spirit..." and then in v. 21 – "...submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ."