
The Transforming Power of Submission: Part 2

Ephesians 5:22-6:9

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Without the submission, nothing will survive. We take great pride in being independent, our own persons, the sun of our system. We forget too often, at the root of sin is rebellion. The Bible has many ways to talk about sin. Fundamentally, sin is an unwillingness to submit to God and His Word. From the fall forward, this is the most basic question: “Will you submit to God?”

I don’t know what you’ve been taught about submission, but none of those is Biblical submission.

Being under the influence and control of the Spirit produces Biblical submission in our roles and relationships::

¹⁸ And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit,¹⁹ addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart,²⁰ giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,²¹ submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.

We move from pleasing God in our general relationships to pleasing God in the relationships within our roles. We have talked about this first section of submission in the home. Let’s take a moment to get the back story to what we will focus on together.

In the Home (5:22-6:4)

Verse 33 is a summary of the commands to husbands and wives. Here the **central commands are to love and to respect**.

³³ However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.

The conclusion of this section should cause us to stop, stare at it and then go back and reread the section again. What insight does Paul give us about marital relationships? What challenges did he highlight?

Husbands tend to put themselves first and love themselves ahead of and before their wives. Self-love is the greatest enemy of marital love. Brothers, all of you, you are commanded by the God of the universe, *love your wife*.

Wives who do not respect their husbands will not submit to them. This idea of reverence and respect is interwoven through the text. The point is strong and emphatic: you make sure that you respect your husband. Sisters, all of you, you are commanded by the God of the universe, *respect your husband*.

Briefly, let’s have a look again at the Lord’s commands for us.

Wives to Husbands – Respectfully Submit (v. 22-24)

²² Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. ²³ For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. ²⁴ Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands.

The Lord requires that Christian wives submit to their own husbands. This is required because God has established the headship of the man in the home. Headship has to do with authority in the roles. In the same way that Christ is the head of the church, the husband is head of the wife. Now this may not be culturally acceptable, but it is Biblically true. Within the roles in the home, this is the way God has structured the authority of the home. Wives, when you submit, then you reflect to the world how the church submits to Christ.

Husbands to Wives – Sacrificially Love (v. 25-33)

²⁵ Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, ²⁶ that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, ²⁷ so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. ²⁸ In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. ²⁹ For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church,

³⁰ because we are members of his body. ³¹ “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” ³² This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.

The Lord commands us to love our wives, brothers. It is as simple as that. If you do not love your wife, you are disobeying God and are sinning. Brothers, love your wives.

We are to do this as husbands and wives. But the reason we do this is because we are members together in Christ’s body. In other words, you are to each other as husbands and wives *because* you are to each other as bother and sister.

Sisters, see to it that you respect your husbands so that you are inclined to submit.

Brothers, see to it that you love your wives so that they are cherished and nourished.

Children to Parents - obey and honor (v. 1-3)

¹ Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. ² “Honor your father and mother” (this is the first commandment with a promise), ³ “that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land.”

Why are children to obey and honor their parents?

IT IS RIGHT. God has said it is the right thing, so it is the right thing.

IT IS BEST. If you obey and honor your parents, then things will go better for you in your home and in your life.

Children are to obey their parents while they are under their authority. Even once they are on their own, they are to honor their parents. This means to esteem them and look up to them. As parents get older, sons and daughters are responsible to honor them by caring for them and providing for them as you are able. Now, Christian parents are almost always raising unbelieving children. But they are to bring them in the pattern of training and discipline *of the Lord*. For the peace of the home, and their own good later, young children must be taught self-control, impulse-control by parents teaching them to obey.

Children, obey your parents. Do so because it is right, and it is best.

Fathers to Children - bring them up (v. 4)

In the context of children being required to obey parents, a very important set of commands are addressed to fathers.

⁴ Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

William Barclay writes: ‘A Roman father had absolute power over his family. He could sell them as slaves, he could make them work in his fields even in chains, he could take the law into his own hands, for the law was in his own hands, and punish as he liked, he could even inflict the death penalty on his child.’ [Cited in Stott, p. 245]

In contrast, the Christian father was to be a self-controlled, consistent, nurturing, disciplining and teaching parent. The Biblical parents is to stand in sharp contrast to the world’s ways. And yet, so often, there is little real difference. Too many Christian fathers get their cues from the world. This is addressed to fathers who have the primary responsibility for child rearing. The actual implementation is to be shared by both parents, but the responsibility for Biblical child-rearing is placed on the father’s shoulders. You may delegate to your wife, to tutors, to schools – but you must not surrender it and you had better be engaged with what is going on and ensuring that your children are Biblically reared.

I want to press home Paul’s emphasis. This is addressed to fathers. Yes, it applies to both parents. But the responsibility and accountability is to the fathers. I know there are fatherless homes in the church. I know there are wives and children with unbelieving fathers. Those situations are not being addressed here. IT is believing fathers in the church who being addressed. Brothers, you are responsible for your children’s upbringing. Yes, you can delegate responsibility to your wife and to others. But that does not absolve you of the responsibility to carefully avoid sinning against your children and to intentionally, carefully and wisely bring them as the Bible says.

How does a father provoke his children to wrath? By doing the opposite of nurturing discipline and instruction or failing to do it at all. You must do what the Bible says the way the Bible says to do it. This means consistent discipline in counsel, correction and chastening with the rod and other Biblical means. This means instruction

so that children know what is expected, know how to do what is expected with teaching, retraining and reinforcement.

Listen to one of the best comments I have ever read on this by Samuel Martin, a pastor in Great Britain during the 1800's.

The power of a parent is very great; and there is very little to check it; even the State does little here, unless the abuse of power be extraordinary. The power of a parent is, as we scarcely need remind you, almost unbounded. Do you see that the text recognizes the danger of this power being abused? "Ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath." Power, more than anything else, tempts to cruelty; it is an exceedingly dangerous thing to possess—and no man in his senses will ever covet it; he will rather ask God to give him very little of it, than desire to possess it. Those who have right views of power will never be ambitious for it: but they will rather, like some of the old prophets (like Jeremiah, for instance), tremble to take it even when God puts it into their hands. We often see power make the most tender natures cruel, and the most gentle natures fierce. How often have women been rendered cruel by an increase of authority, and an increase of influence! There is danger to parents of caprice, and harshness; of giving commands, and precepts, and prohibitions, for the sake of maintaining their position, and of upholding their authority. And that is the point of the words, "Ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath, but bring them up." The child is to be nourished; it is not to be driven—it is to be cherished; it is not to be forced. The incitement and the impulsion which are likely to distress and dishearten the child, are distinctly forbidden in the text. The force of the contrast must be manifest to you in a moment. The bringing them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, is placed in contrast with provoking them to wrath. The child's faults are to be corrected; but still, correction is to be so administered as not to sink the child into despondency, or drive him to despair—as not to wean the heart of the child either from father or from mother. (*S. Martin, D.D.*)

Now let's consider those two important spheres in which you must rear your children.

In the discipline of the Lord

Discipline is everything you do to help your children become pleasing to God. It is both preventative and corrective. It is not only about what they do wrong, but it is to help them develop life skills as well as pleasing God.

Biblical discipline has several key elements in it:

Clarity in what is required. The child must clearly know what is expected of them.

Connect choices to consequences. You are seeking to drive out folly and to instill wisdom. Whether it is the rod, loss of privilege, the assignment of greater tasks, the consequence must be clearly related to the sin or folly of the child.

Chastening that is framed by the Scripture. This is initially in younger children the use of the rod. While this is not popular in our culture today, the Bible commands and commends it. The parent who does not use the rod when it is required does not love the child. Furthermore, that child is not assured of the parents' love.

Moving from imposed chastening to natural consequences. As your children get older, you will be moving from primarily commanding them to primarily counseling them. In that transition, you have to be willing to allow them reap the consequences of their choices. You must not shield them from the consequences of sinful or foolish choices.

As an aside, discipline is not punishment. Punishment is what happens in the legal realm. You are their father not their judge. Chastening and discipline are what are done by fathers.

God is the perfect father who, for the love of His children, chastens them regularly (Hebrews 12).

In the instruction of the Lord

Fathers, you are not only responsible for the discipline of your children, but also for their instruction. You are to ensure that your children are given all the instruction they need to live in God's world with God's people God's way. Now, others may do that actual instruction, but you are responsible for it.

Do you teach, train, explain, apply and live God's Word? Do you do so just as life happens trusting that God's providences are bringing just the right lessons at just the right times?

Do you talk about how to respond to and prepare for life? Are you equipping them to be God and people wise?

Do you go to parent-teacher meetings? Do you know what they are being taught?

Are you being sure that they are taught all they need to be a responsible person in God's world? Can they cook? Can they clean? Can they wash their clothes? Can they change a tire on a car? Can they keep a check book?

You see your responsibility. Having family devotions may be in view here. But it can be a pitiful and small substitute for a holistic teaching of your children where the Word of God is the basic tapestry woven into the fabric of life.

How does a father provoke his children to wrath? By doing the opposite of nurturing discipline and instruction or failing to do it at all. You must do what the Bible says the way the Bible says to do it. This means consistent discipline in counsel, correction and chastening with the rod and other Biblical means. This means instruction so that children know what is expected, know how to do what is expected with teaching, retraining and reinforcement.

Now we know there are situations where there may not be a father in the home. In cases like this, the mother is to assume responsibility. But it would be wise for men of the church to engage the children in assisting the single mother to nurture, discipline and teach the children.

Fathers, be sure that you are pleasing God in your childrearing.

Reflect and Respond

The Bible calls on Christians to live in submission. We are first in submission to the Lord. Then we live in submission to those He has placed over us.

Submission is tested and demonstrated in how we respond when we are asked or told to do what we do not want to do.

Sisters, see to it that you respect your husbands so that you are inclined to submit.

Brothers, see to it that you love your wives so that they are cherished and nourished.

Children, obey your parents. Do so because it is right, and it is best.

Fathers, be sure that you are pleasing God in your childrearing.

May God be pleased to help us wisely live as husbands and wives, parents and children, employees and employers according to God's will.