

**YOU CAN DO RELATIONSHIPS DIFFERENTLY****EPHESIANS 5:21- 6:9**

Relationships! The classic novel by Daniel Defoe about Robinson Crusoe portrays a man who could live just exactly the way that suited him – at least for a while. That happens when you're all alone and cast away on a deserted island. He could build his hut where he pleased, eat whatever fruit he fancied and shoot his gun in any direction he wanted. Then one day he discovered someone else was living on the island – a man he named Friday. From that moment on, Robinson Crusoe's freedom was limited. Now, there was at least one direction he had no right to shoot. There was now some food he had no right to eat. There was at least one spot where he had no right to build his hut. Now, Crusoe was very glad for Friday's companionship and friendship, but he also sacrificed some freedoms. As the story goes, soon people became Robinson Crusoe's greatest problem. He and Friday had to deal with cannibals who came from other islands intent on eating both of them! Other people can be your greatest blessing and your greatest problem in this life. It's no wonder that the Bible has much to say about relationships. With that in mind, let's look at the portion of Ephesians we want to consider today.

We will understand better this portion of Paul's letter to those churches in and around Ephesus if we remember what he wrote earlier in his letter to them. "Therefore I, a prisoner for serving the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of your calling, for you have been called by God.... Don't be drunk with wine, because that will ruin your life. Instead, be filled with the Holy Spirit." (Eph 4:1, 5:18 NLT) When you live your life in such a way that it is worthy of your calling, you are filled with the Holy Spirit. When you are filled with the Holy Spirit, the way you live your life is worthy of your calling. They're one in the same. It's no accident, then, that Paul drills down on how followers of Jesus are to act in the most important areas of human relationships. When you are a child of the one, true King, you can and should do relationships differently.

Now, let me go on to say a few things that I believe will enable us to interpret this passage better. First, one clear evidence that you're filled with the Holy Spirit is harmony in your relationships with other people. A Spirit-filled Christian is not necessarily someone with a dynamic personality or remarkable abilities. Instead, it's the ability to grow in your learning and ability to have grace-filled, peace-filled relationships with other people. But as soon as I say that, it's also very important that you hear that you will never experience 100% success in that area of life this side of Heaven. I love the realism of Romans 12:18 (NLT) which says, "Do all that you can to live in peace with everyone." Spirit-filled followers of Jesus are not going to experience peace and harmony in every human relationship. You can't control the reactions and choices of other people. You can, however, when you are fully yielded to the Holy Spirit control your reactions and choices. The bottom line? You must never be the problem in a bad relationship. You must be the one always seeking peace and reconciliation.

Second, I want you to recognize in advance that all the groups of people Paul addresses here – wives, husbands, children, parents, employees and employers – are to relate to one another "in the Lord." Paul is talking to followers of Jesus in all those

groups. He appeals to them and instructs them on the basis of their relationship to and in Jesus. Why is that important? If you try and force every human relationship into these guidelines, you're missing Paul's intent. Let me give you a few examples. Some folk have argued that wives should tolerate physical abuse by their husbands on the basis on what Paul says here about wives submitting to their husbands. That's absurd. That's not Paul's intent at all. He is talking about the relationship of a Spirit-filled wife and a Spirit-filled husband where there is mutual submission, love and respect for one another. Some folk have argued that children should continue to live under the authority of parents who are physically, emotionally or sexually abusive on the basis of what Paul says here about obeying one's parents. Or, that parents should put up with abusive or destructive treatment by their children in an effort not to exasperate them. Both interpretations are absurd. Paul has in mind here Spirit-filled children and Spirit-filled parents. It is equally absurd to conclude that a Christian employee should have to endure sexual harassment, for example, in the workplace or that a Christian employer must put up with a dishonest employee who claims to be a follower of Jesus on the basis of this passage. Absurd! The context is Spirit-filled employees and Spirit-filled employers. Let's not force the Bible to speak to issues it's not addressing. Instead, let's try to get a grip on the principles and then seek the Holy Spirit's guidance in applying those truths to our own unique relationships and situations. With those two interpretive principles in mind, let's discover, first of all...

## **HOW TO BE SPIRIT-FILLED IN YOUR MARRIAGE**

I suggest to you that the key words for the Spirit-filled wife in this passage is "loving service" and the key words for the Spirit-filled husband is "serving love." There are all kinds of serving – forced serving, manipulated serving, fearful serving. What's described here is loving service. The Spirit-filled wife offers loving service to her Spirit-filled husband. By the same token, there are all kinds of so-called love. What's described here is serving love. The Spirit-filled husband offers serving love to his Spirit-filled wife. What's the difference between loving service and serving love? Not much, frankly! The differences are subtle and nuanced rather than dramatic and clearly different. Loving service and serving love are like two sides of the same coin.

A word or two about the loving service of a Spirit-filled wife. It's interesting to me that the Greek word "submit" doesn't actually appear in v. 22. Literally, the original reads, "Wives – to your husbands as to the Lord." The verb "submit" is shared with v. 21 – which says, "And further, submit to one another out of reverence for Christ." So what? A wife's relationship to her husband is not the only place where submission ought to be happening. Paul's point is that Spirit-filled Christians should be submitting to one another in every relationship across the board, and the first example is in the context of marriage. Spirit-filled submission of a wife to a husband here can't mean agreeing to do something wrong or submitting to a husband out of fear for your life. Instead, a wife is being asked to submit voluntarily to the loving care of her husband and to a kind of husbandly leadership that serves her needs. Wives, you're not asked to submit here because of some order of creation, some supposed chain of command or even because

you're a woman. You're asked to submit because you're a follower of Jesus and Spirit-filled followers of Jesus submit to one another.

Now the husband is referred to as the "head" of the wife here as Jesus is the Head of the Church. I admit that sounds like subordination. But the word "head" doesn't always mean "ruler" or "authority." It can also mean "source" or "origin" – like identifying the specific source of a river. The origin or the source of the Church goes back to Jesus. You recall Adam was the source or origin of Eve because God created Eve out of Adam. I believe the emphasis here is on the husband, as the male, being the source of the wife, as the female, just like Jesus is the source or the origin of the Church. In other words, the emphasis is on the relationship between husband and wife not who has authority. The question is not so much who's in charge between the husband and wife, but what's the relational connection between husband and wife. Men and women, and more specifically, husbands and wives are made for each other and complement each other in much the same way Jesus and the Church are made for each other.

Thomas Wheeler served as the Chief Executive Officer of Massachusetts Mutual Life Insurance Company for a time. One day, while he and his wife were out driving around, he noticed he was very low on gas. So he got off at the first exit and found a dumpy, little, one gas pump station to fill up his car. Only one man was working the place. While Wheeler was adding a quart of oil to his car's engine, he noticed that this man had engaged his wife in quite a long conversation. When they left, he asked his wife if she knew the station attendant. She admitted that she did. In fact, she had known him very well indeed. They had attended the same high school and had even seriously dated each other for about a year. Wheeler couldn't help but make a dangerous observation, "Boy, were you lucky I came along! If you'd married him, you'd be the wife of a gas station attendant instead of the wife of a Chief Executive Officer." His wife replied, "My dear, if I had married him, he'd be the Chief Executive Officer and you'd be the gas station attendant." Touché!

So, if everyone is supposed to be submitting to everyone else, why is the wife singled out here to submit? Because while headship does imply relationship and connection, it also implies leadership. Just as the Church needs a leader (Jesus), so a marriage and a home needs a leader. Not a dictator, not a tyrant, not a general – but a leader like Jesus who leads by serving and loving. As I study the Scriptures, I do think God gives the husband the mantle of leadership in a marriage, but in order for it to be Spirit-filled leadership it has to look a whole lot like Jesus, men. Within that understanding of Spirit-filled leadership, the wife is asked to submit. Wives, you are called to offer loving service to your Spirit-filled husband as an extension of you being a servant of the Lord Jesus Christ. You submit – or offer loving service - "as to the Lord."

Now, a word or two about the serving love of a Spirit-filled husband. If Jesus' love for you and me isn't defined by serving, then I have seriously misunderstood His love. God's kind of love never implies dictatorial control, but selfless giving. Jesus said, "For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many." (Mk 10:45 NLT) Loving and serving are intertwined in the Bible. But

doesn't Jesus have all authority in Heaven and on Earth? Isn't He in charge of all things? Yes, but let's make sure we understand how Jesus chose to demonstrate His authority. For many people, authority implies power, being in control and being in charge. But for Jesus, authority, being in control and being in charge meant the opportunity to serve others and taking the initiative to serve others. So, what's being asked of a Spirit-filled husband? Take every opportunity and take the initiative to offer unselfish, sacrificial, serving love to your wife. That's how Jesus loved you and me – His Church - men. That's how Spirit-filled men are supposed to love their wives.

Husbands, Jesus is our model. He loved His Church so much, He died for her. Jesus is devoted to His Bride – the Church – and ensures her completion and fulfillment. You're committed to your wife's completion and fulfillment. If she wants to be in the home, let her be a homemaker. If her gifts and talents need expression in the workplace, then support her in that journey. You are called, Spirit-filled husband, to help your wife discover fully the person God wants her to be not to impose on her the person you want her to be. We need to catch the spirit of this passage and not get mired down in the letter of it! When it comes to a Spirit-filled marriage, God is far more interested in who's serving not who's in command, who's practicing real love not who's in charge. Love your wives – or offer serving love – just like Jesus loved the Church. Next, in 6:1-4 Paul addresses...

## **HOW TO BE SPIRIT-FILLED IN YOUR HOME**

The key word for Spirit-filled children is "obedience." Until a person reaches maturity, obedience or submission to one's parents "in the Lord" is godly and good. God considers a stubborn, rebellious spirit towards one's parents as a mark of serious spiritual trouble. You might be surprised to find it listed right along with what we would consider to be far more serious sins. In describing godless people, the Bible says, "Their lives became full of every kind of wickedness, sin, greed, hate, envy, murder, quarreling, deception, malicious behavior, and gossip. They are backstabbers, haters of God, insolent, proud, and boastful. They invent new ways of sinning, and they disobey their parents." (Rom 1:29-30 NLT) Why is disobeying your parents such a big deal? Ultimately, it points to a deep rebellion against God Himself. When you fail to recognize the most basic authority in the world – your parents – you're in serious trouble. It's as if the Bible says, "Show me a child who is consistently disobedient to his or her parents and I'll show you a child who is fundamentally in rebellion against God."

Notice that Paul puts the responsibility upon Spirit-filled children to obey their parents. He doesn't say, "Mom and Dad, make your kids obey you." Instead, he says, "Children, young people, teenagers, God is holding you responsible to submit to your parents. Like God, they are seeking the best for you. Obey them in the Lord." That's what the fifth of the Ten Commandments points to fundamentally and why Paul quotes it here. The best way to honor and respect your parents is to submit to them as to the Lord. Obeying your parents is a stepping stone to obeying God Himself. If you learn how to submit to your parents, you'll have an easier time learning how to submit to God.

But Paul also has something to say to Spirit-filled parents here - more specifically, fathers. "Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger by the way you treat them. Rather, bring them up with the discipline and instruction that comes from the Lord." (Eph 6:4 NLT) First, the negative. How can Moms and Dads provoke, frustrate or exasperate their kids? By putting unfair demands on them. "Why? Because I said so! That's reason enough!" By putting unloving demands on them where they're put down or ridiculed. "Do it now, or else, you blankety, blank, blank!" By putting inconsistent demands on them. "I don't care what I said last time. Do it this way this time!" Those aren't Spirit-filled answers, Mom or Dad. Do you treat your kids like creatures made in God's image who deserve a clear, loving and consistent explanation of why your demands will benefit them? You will if you're a Spirit-filled parent.

Second, the positive. Mom and Dad, hear me well. Yes, this church, and its Sunday School and its youth group should be able to help bring up your child in the discipline and instruction that comes from the Lord, but – at the end of the day – it's always your primary responsibility to instill in your child a knowledge of Jesus as Savior and Lord, a knowledge of the Bible, and an understanding of what it means to live for God. As far as I know, they didn't have Sunday Schools and youth groups back in the 1<sup>st</sup> century. They're never mentioned in the Bible. Of course, Sunday Schools and youth groups have great value. That's why we offer both here and are trying to improve them all the time. But don't you dare blame this or any church for your failure as a parent to point your own children towards Jesus Christ.

Spirit-filled parents are always on the lookout for teachable moments with their children – opportunities to pass along a spiritual value, a godly perspective, a biblical picture of what it means to know and live for God. The Bible assumes that parents are the primary Bible teachers for their kids and the primary evangelists to their own kids. I remind you that Paul is addressing fathers here primarily. In the Old Testament tradition, Jewish men were the ones who made sure the spiritual heritage was passed on to their kids. Mom helped, to be sure, but Dad took ultimate responsibility. Paul is saying that Spirit-filled Christian parents follow the same pattern. Unfortunately, we live in a culture that suggests a passionate, intense love for Jesus is somehow inconsistent with being manly or masculine. I want to say something to every boy, man, husband and father here today. You can never be a real man and not love Jesus with all your heart. Do your kids know that? Finally, in 6:5-9, Paul addresses...

## **HOW TO BE SPIRIT-FILLED AT YOUR WORK**

Now, I'm well aware that Paul is talking here about slaves and masters. No, the Bible in no way condones slavery and there are very good answers to the question of why Paul doesn't condemn slavery here. I just don't have time today to try and answer those very legitimate questions. Instead, does this passage have any application to you or me? I believe it does. I think we can find in these verses what it means to be a Spirit-filled employee and a Spirit-filled employer. You may not realize it, but what you do on Monday – Friday from 9:00 am to 5:00 pm is just as spiritual as what you do here on a Sunday morning. You can and must do your job as to the Lord. The bottom line is not

making a living, making a profit for your company, or pleasing your boss, but working in such a way that pleases the Lord and points other people to Him by your example. There's the underlying principle as big and bold as you please! "Work with enthusiasm, as though you were working for the Lord rather than for people." (Eph 6:7 NLT)

I like how one person puts it. "We're not just laying bricks; we're building a wall for God's glory. We're not just teaching a class; we're educating students for God's glory. We're not just balancing the books; we're keeping the ledgers in excellent order for God's glory. We're not just driving a tractor; we're plowing a straight furrow for God's glory." As Spirit-filled employees in any workplace, we should be known for diligence, excellence and conscientiousness because that points people to Jesus. The former chaplain of the Boston Red Sox baseball team once counseled a young player who was constantly quoting the Bible. He said, "Son, don't quote the Bible until you hit home runs." When you do your job in a Spirit-filled way, will it always be recognized and rewarded appropriately? Don't hold your breath! The Bible is always completely realistic. Paul knew that honest, hard, good work often goes unrewarded in this life. That's why he says here, "Remember that the Lord will reward each one of us for the good we do, whether we are slaves or free." (Eph 6:8 NLT)

Paul also has a word here for Spirit-filled employers. The focus of the marketplace is on the bottom line – profits, quotas, sales reports, balance sheets, budgets and competition. An environment like that tends to measure the value of human beings in terms of how they can affect all those factors positively. Paul suggests here that a Spirit-filled employer is going to buck that trend. He or she is going to treat those who report to him with respect, justice and equality regardless because they're all made in God's image. They're all people for whom Jesus died and rose again. A Spirit-filled employer's oversight is going to be marked by compassion, encouragement and a genuine interest in caring for those he or she supervises. He or she knows that we will answer to the real Boss one day for every part of our lives – even how we do our jobs.

Whenever I think of what it means to have Spirit-filled relationships in general and what it means to have a Spirit-filled marriage, specifically, I'm reminded of a man by the name of Robertson McQuilken. The Christian high school I attended in Asheville, NC was sponsored by Columbia Bible College and Seminary in Columbia, SC. Robertson McQuilken was the president of that institution. He would come up to my high school on occasion. I knew some of his children. While both still in the prime of their lives, his wife, Muriel, was diagnosed with early onset of Alzheimer's disease. She was a tremendously gifted person: a great cook and hostess, a portrait painter, a speaker at conferences. She even had her own radio program for a while. But slowly, ever so slowly, she began to lose all of her abilities as she succumbed to Alzheimer's. She was no longer able to speak in sentences. Just a phrase or a word here and there. But she could say one sentence and she said it often: "I love you."

For a while McQuilken was able to continue on in his work and ministry as a person was hired in to care for Muriel in the family home. But it became evident that arrangement was just not going to work long term. As soon as McQuilken left the house, Muriel

would find a way to take off looking for him. Often she would walk the mile round trip from their home to McQuilken's office at the college and seminary ten times a day - just desperate to be near him. And so Robertson McQuilken had a big decision to make. Should he resign from his 22 year ministry as President of Columbia Bible College and Seminary at the still vital age of 57 or put Muriel in a facility knowing that she would be terribly frightened and often angry because she could not be with him? Yes, it was painful to resign, but the right path wasn't difficult to discern. After all, he was a Spirit-filled husband with a Spirit-filled marriage. At the time, Robertson McQuilken explained his decision with these words. "It is all more than keeping promises and being fair, however. As I watch her brave descent into oblivion, Muriel is the joy of my life. (It's not that I have to take care of her; I get to.) Daily, I discern new manifestations of the kind of person she is, the wife I have always loved. I also see fresh manifestations of God's love - the God I long to love more fully."

If you're married, you're called to have a Spirit-filled marriage. You're called to have a Spirit-filled home. And you're called to be Spirit-filled at your place of work, too. When you are a child of the one, true King, you do relationships differently.

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The key word for Spirit-filled children is "obedience." Until a person reaches maturity, obedience or submission to one's parents "in the Lord" is godly and good. God considers a stubborn, rebellious spirit towards one's parents as a mark of serious spiritual trouble. You might be surprised to find it listed right along with what we would consider to be far more serious sins. In describing godless people, the Bible says, "Their lives became full of every kind of wickedness, sin, greed, hate, envy, murder, quarreling, deception, malicious behavior, and gossip. They are backstabbers, haters of God, insolent, proud, and boastful. They invent new ways of sinning, and they disobey their parents." (Rom 1:29-30 NLT) Why is disobeying your parents such a big deal? Ultimately, it points to a deep rebellion against God Himself. When you fail to recognize the most basic authority in the world – your parents – you're in serious trouble. It's as if the Bible says, "Show me a child who is consistently disobedient to his or her parents and I'll show you a child who is fundamentally in rebellion against God."

Notice that Paul puts the responsibility upon Spirit-filled children to obey their parents. He doesn't say, "Mom and Dad, make your kids obey you." Instead, he says, "Children, young people, teenagers, God is holding you responsible to submit to your parents. Like God, they are seeking the best for you. Obey them in the Lord." That's what the fifth of the Ten Commandments points to fundamentally and why Paul quotes it here. The best way to honor and respect your parents is to submit to them as to the Lord. Obeying your parents is a stepping stone to obeying God Himself. If you learn how to submit to your parents, you'll have an easier time learning how to submit to God.

But Paul also has something to say to Spirit-filled parents here - more specifically, fathers. "Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger by the way you treat them. Rather, bring them up with the discipline and instruction that comes from the Lord." (Eph 6:4 NLT) First, the negative. How can Moms and Dads provoke, frustrate or exasperate their kids? By putting unfair demands on them. "Why? Because I said so! That's reason enough!" By putting unloving demands on them where they're put down or ridiculed. "Do it now, or else, you blankety, blank, blank!" By putting inconsistent demands on them. "I don't care what I said last time. Do it this way this time!" Those aren't Spirit-filled answers, Mom or Dad. Do you treat your kids like creatures made in God's image who deserve a clear, loving and consistent explanation of why your demands will benefit them? You will if you're a Spirit-filled parent.

Second, the positive. Mom and Dad, hear me well. Yes, this church, and its Sunday School and its youth group should be able to help bring up your child in the discipline and instruction that comes from the Lord, but – at the end of the day – it's always your primary responsibility to instill in your child a knowledge of Jesus as Savior and Lord, a knowledge of the Bible, and an understanding of what it means to live for God. As far as I know, they didn't have Sunday Schools and youth groups back in the 1<sup>st</sup> century. They're never mentioned in the Bible. Of course, Sunday Schools and youth groups have great value. That's why we offer both here and are trying to improve them all the time. But don't you dare blame this or any church for your failure as a parent to point your own children towards Jesus Christ.

Spirit-filled parents are always on the lookout for teachable moments with their children – opportunities to pass along a spiritual value, a godly perspective, a biblical picture of what it means to know and live for God. The Bible assumes that parents are the primary Bible teachers for their kids and the primary evangelists to their own kids. I remind you that Paul is addressing fathers here primarily. In the Old Testament tradition, Jewish men were the ones who made sure the spiritual heritage was passed on to their kids. Mom helped, to be sure, but Dad took ultimate responsibility. Paul is saying that Spirit-filled Christian parents follow the same pattern. Unfortunately, we live in a culture that suggests a passionate, intense love for Jesus is somehow inconsistent with being manly or masculine. I want to say something to every boy, man, husband and father here today. You can never be a real man and not love Jesus with all your heart. Do your kids know that? Finally, in 6:5-9, Paul addresses...

## **HOW TO BE SPIRIT-FILLED AT YOUR WORK**

Now, I'm well aware that Paul is talking here about slaves and masters. No, the Bible in no way condones slavery and there are very good answers to the question of why Paul doesn't condemn slavery here. I just don't have time today to try and answer those very legitimate questions. Instead, does this passage have any application to you or me? I believe it does. I think we can find in these verses what it means to be a Spirit-filled employee and a Spirit-filled employer. You may not realize it, but what you do on Monday – Friday from 9:00 am to 5:00 pm is just as spiritual as what you do here on a Sunday morning. You can and must do your job as to the Lord. The bottom line is not

making a living, making a profit for your company, or pleasing your boss, but working in such a way that pleases the Lord and points other people to Him by your example. There's the underlying principle as big and bold as you please! "Work with enthusiasm, as though you were working for the Lord rather than for people." (Eph 6:7 NLT)

I like how one person puts it. "We're not just laying bricks; we're building a wall for God's glory. We're not just teaching a class; we're educating students for God's glory. We're not just balancing the books; we're keeping the ledgers in excellent order for God's glory. We're not just driving a tractor; we're plowing a straight furrow for God's glory." As Spirit-filled employees in any workplace, we should be known for diligence, excellence and conscientiousness because that points people to Jesus. The former chaplain of the Boston Red Sox baseball team once counseled a young player who was constantly quoting the Bible. He said, "Son, don't quote the Bible until you hit home runs." When you do your job in a Spirit-filled way, will it always be recognized and rewarded appropriately? Don't hold your breath! The Bible is always completely realistic. Paul knew that honest, hard, good work often goes unrewarded in this life. That's why he says here, "Remember that the Lord will reward each one of us for the good we do, whether we are slaves or free." (Eph 6:8 NLT)

Paul also has a word here for Spirit-filled employers. The focus of the marketplace is on the bottom line – profits, quotas, sales reports, balance sheets, budgets and competition. An environment like that tends to measure the value of human beings in terms of how they can affect all those factors positively. Paul suggests here that a Spirit-filled employer is going to buck that trend. He or she is going to treat those who report to him with respect, justice and equality regardless because they're all made in God's image. They're all people for whom Jesus died and rose again. A Spirit-filled employer's oversight is going to be marked by compassion, encouragement and a genuine interest in caring for those he or she supervises. He or she knows that we will answer to the real Boss one day for every part of our lives – even how we do our jobs.

Whenever I think of what it means to have Spirit-filled relationships in general and what it means to have a Spirit-filled marriage, specifically, I'm reminded of a man by the name of Robertson McQuilken. The Christian high school I attended in Asheville, NC was sponsored by Columbia Bible College and Seminary in Columbia, SC. Robertson McQuilken was the president of that institution. He would come up to my high school on occasion. I knew some of his children. While both still in the prime of their lives, his wife, Muriel, was diagnosed with early onset of Alzheimer's disease. She was a tremendously gifted person: a great cook and hostess, a portrait painter, a speaker at conferences. She even had her own radio program for a while. But slowly, ever so slowly, she began to lose all of her abilities as she succumbed to Alzheimer's. She was no longer able to speak in sentences. Just a phrase or a word here and there. But she could say one sentence and she said it often: "I love you."

For a while McQuilken was able to continue on in his work and ministry as a person was hired in to care for Muriel in the family home. But it became evident that arrangement was just not going to work long term. As soon as McQuilken left the house, Muriel

would find a way to take off looking for him. Often she would walk the mile round trip from their home to McQuilken's office at the college and seminary ten times a day - just desperate to be near him. And so Robertson McQuilken had a big decision to make. Should he resign from his 22 year ministry as President of Columbia Bible College and Seminary at the still vital age of 57 or put Muriel in a facility knowing that she would be terribly frightened and often angry because she could not be with him? Yes, it was painful to resign, but the right path wasn't difficult to discern. After all, he was a Spirit-filled husband with a Spirit-filled marriage. At the time, Robertson McQuilken explained his decision with these words. "It is all more than keeping promises and being fair, however. As I watch her brave descent into oblivion, Muriel is the joy of my life. (It's not that I have to take care of her; I get to.) Daily, I discern new manifestations of the kind of person she is, the wife I have always loved. I also see fresh manifestations of God's love - the God I long to love more fully."

If you're married, you're called to have a Spirit-filled marriage. You're called to have a Spirit-filled home. And you're called to be Spirit-filled at your place of work, too. When you are a child of the one, true King, you do relationships differently.

**YOU CAN DO RELATIONSHIPS DIFFERENTLY****EPHESIANS 5:21- 6:9**

Relationships! The classic novel by Daniel Defoe about Robinson Crusoe portrays a man who could live just exactly the way that suited him – at least for a while. That happens when you're all alone and cast away on a deserted island. He could build his hut where he pleased, eat whatever fruit he fancied and shoot his gun in any direction he wanted. Then one day he discovered someone else was living on the island – a man he named Friday. From that moment on, Robinson Crusoe's freedom was limited. Now, there was at least one direction he had no right to shoot. There was now some food he had no right to eat. There was at least one spot where he had no right to build his hut. Now, Crusoe was very glad for Friday's companionship and friendship, but he also sacrificed some freedoms. As the story goes, soon people became Robinson Crusoe's greatest problem. He and Friday had to deal with cannibals who came from other islands intent on eating both of them! Other people can be your greatest blessing and your greatest problem in this life. It's no wonder that the Bible has much to say about relationships. With that in mind, let's look at the portion of Ephesians we want to consider today.

We will understand better this portion of Paul's letter to those churches in and around Ephesus if we remember what he wrote earlier in his letter to them. "Therefore I, a prisoner for serving the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of your calling, for you have been called by God.... Don't be drunk with wine, because that will ruin your life. Instead, be filled with the Holy Spirit." (Eph 4:1, 5:18 NLT) When you live your life in such a way that it is worthy of your calling, you are filled with the Holy Spirit. When you are filled with the Holy Spirit, the way you live your life is worthy of your calling. They're one in the same. It's no accident, then, that Paul drills down on how followers of Jesus are to act in the most important areas of human relationships. When you are a child of the one, true King, you can and should do relationships differently.

Now, let me go on to say a few things that I believe will enable us to interpret this passage better. First, one clear evidence that you're filled with the Holy Spirit is harmony in your relationships with other people. A Spirit-filled Christian is not necessarily someone with a dynamic personality or remarkable abilities. Instead, it's the ability to grow in your learning and ability to have grace-filled, peace-filled relationships with other people. But as soon as I say that, it's also very important that you hear that you will never experience 100% success in that area of life this side of Heaven. I love the realism of Romans 12:18 (NLT) which says, "Do all that you can to live in peace with everyone." Spirit-filled followers of Jesus are not going to experience peace and harmony in every human relationship. You can't control the reactions and choices of other people. You can, however, when you are fully yielded to the Holy Spirit control your reactions and choices. The bottom line? You must never be the problem in a bad relationship. You must be the one always seeking peace and reconciliation.

Second, I want you to recognize in advance that all the groups of people Paul addresses here – wives, husbands, children, parents, employees and employers – are to relate to one another "in the Lord." Paul is talking to followers of Jesus in all those

groups. He appeals to them and instructs them on the basis of their relationship to and in Jesus. Why is that important? If you try and force every human relationship into these guidelines, you're missing Paul's intent. Let me give you a few examples. Some folk have argued that wives should tolerate physical abuse by their husbands on the basis on what Paul says here about wives submitting to their husbands. That's absurd. That's not Paul's intent at all. He is talking about the relationship of a Spirit-filled wife and a Spirit-filled husband where there is mutual submission, love and respect for one another. Some folk have argued that children should continue to live under the authority of parents who are physically, emotionally or sexually abusive on the basis of what Paul says here about obeying one's parents. Or, that parents should put up with abusive or destructive treatment by their children in an effort not to exasperate them. Both interpretations are absurd. Paul has in mind here Spirit-filled children and Spirit-filled parents. It is equally absurd to conclude that a Christian employee should have to endure sexual harassment, for example, in the workplace or that a Christian employer must put up with a dishonest employee who claims to be a follower of Jesus on the basis of this passage. Absurd! The context is Spirit-filled employees and Spirit-filled employers. Let's not force the Bible to speak to issues it's not addressing. Instead, let's try to get a grip on the principles and then seek the Holy Spirit's guidance in applying those truths to our own unique relationships and situations. With those two interpretive principles in mind, let's discover, first of all...

## **HOW TO BE SPIRIT-FILLED IN YOUR MARRIAGE**

I suggest to you that the key words for the Spirit-filled wife in this passage is "loving service" and the key words for the Spirit-filled husband is "serving love." There are all kinds of serving – forced serving, manipulated serving, fearful serving. What's described here is loving service. The Spirit-filled wife offers loving service to her Spirit-filled husband. By the same token, there are all kinds of so-called love. What's described here is serving love. The Spirit-filled husband offers serving love to his Spirit-filled wife. What's the difference between loving service and serving love? Not much, frankly! The differences are subtle and nuanced rather than dramatic and clearly different. Loving service and serving love are like two sides of the same coin.

A word or two about the loving service of a Spirit-filled wife. It's interesting to me that the Greek word "submit" doesn't actually appear in v. 22. Literally, the original reads, "Wives – to your husbands as to the Lord." The verb "submit" is shared with v. 21 – which says, "And further, submit to one another out of reverence for Christ." So what? A wife's relationship to her husband is not the only place where submission ought to be happening. Paul's point is that Spirit-filled Christians should be submitting to one another in every relationship across the board, and the first example is in the context of marriage. Spirit-filled submission of a wife to a husband here can't mean agreeing to do something wrong or submitting to a husband out of fear for your life. Instead, a wife is being asked to submit voluntarily to the loving care of her husband and to a kind of husbandly leadership that serves her needs. Wives, you're not asked to submit here because of some order of creation, some supposed chain of command or even because

you're a woman. You're asked to submit because you're a follower of Jesus and Spirit-filled followers of Jesus submit to one another.

Now the husband is referred to as the "head" of the wife here as Jesus is the Head of the Church. I admit that sounds like subordination. But the word "head" doesn't always mean "ruler" or "authority." It can also mean "source" or "origin" – like identifying the specific source of a river. The origin or the source of the Church goes back to Jesus. You recall Adam was the source or origin of Eve because God created Eve out of Adam. I believe the emphasis here is on the husband, as the male, being the source of the wife, as the female, just like Jesus is the source or the origin of the Church. In other words, the emphasis is on the relationship between husband and wife not who has authority. The question is not so much who's in charge between the husband and wife, but what's the relational connection between husband and wife. Men and women, and more specifically, husbands and wives are made for each other and complement each other in much the same way Jesus and the Church are made for each other.

Thomas Wheeler served as the Chief Executive Officer of Massachusetts Mutual Life Insurance Company for a time. One day, while he and his wife were out driving around, he noticed he was very low on gas. So he got off at the first exit and found a dumpy, little, one gas pump station to fill up his car. Only one man was working the place. While Wheeler was adding a quart of oil to his car's engine, he noticed that this man had engaged his wife in quite a long conversation. When they left, he asked his wife if she knew the station attendant. She admitted that she did. In fact, she had known him very well indeed. They had attended the same high school and had even seriously dated each other for about a year. Wheeler couldn't help but make a dangerous observation, "Boy, were you lucky I came along! If you'd married him, you'd be the wife of a gas station attendant instead of the wife of a Chief Executive Officer." His wife replied, "My dear, if I had married him, he'd be the Chief Executive Officer and you'd be the gas station attendant." Touché!

So, if everyone is supposed to be submitting to everyone else, why is the wife singled out here to submit? Because while headship does imply relationship and connection, it also implies leadership. Just as the Church needs a leader (Jesus), so a marriage and a home needs a leader. Not a dictator, not a tyrant, not a general – but a leader like Jesus who leads by serving and loving. As I study the Scriptures, I do think God gives the husband the mantle of leadership in a marriage, but in order for it to be Spirit-filled leadership it has to look a whole lot like Jesus, men. Within that understanding of Spirit-filled leadership, the wife is asked to submit. Wives, you are called to offer loving service to your Spirit-filled husband as an extension of you being a servant of the Lord Jesus Christ. You submit – or offer loving service - "as to the Lord."

Now, a word or two about the serving love of a Spirit-filled husband. If Jesus' love for you and me isn't defined by serving, then I have seriously misunderstood His love. God's kind of love never implies dictatorial control, but selfless giving. Jesus said, "For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many." (Mk 10:45 NLT) Loving and serving are intertwined in the Bible. But

doesn't Jesus have all authority in Heaven and on Earth? Isn't He in charge of all things? Yes, but let's make sure we understand how Jesus chose to demonstrate His authority. For many people, authority implies power, being in control and being in charge. But for Jesus, authority, being in control and being in charge meant the opportunity to serve others and taking the initiative to serve others. So, what's being asked of a Spirit-filled husband? Take every opportunity and take the initiative to offer unselfish, sacrificial, serving love to your wife. That's how Jesus loved you and me – His Church - men. That's how Spirit-filled men are supposed to love their wives.

Husbands, Jesus is our model. He loved His Church so much, He died for her. Jesus is devoted to His Bride – the Church – and ensures her completion and fulfillment. You're committed to your wife's completion and fulfillment. If she wants to be in the home, let her be a homemaker. If her gifts and talents need expression in the workplace, then support her in that journey. You are called, Spirit-filled husband, to help your wife discover fully the person God wants her to be not to impose on her the person you want her to be. We need to catch the spirit of this passage and not get mired down in the letter of it! When it comes to a Spirit-filled marriage, God is far more interested in who's serving not who's in command, who's practicing real love not who's in charge. Love your wives – or offer serving love – just like Jesus loved the Church. Next, in 6:1-4 Paul addresses...

## **HOW TO BE SPIRIT-FILLED IN YOUR HOME**

The key word for Spirit-filled children is "obedience." Until a person reaches maturity, obedience or submission to one's parents "in the Lord" is godly and good. God considers a stubborn, rebellious spirit towards one's parents as a mark of serious spiritual trouble. You might be surprised to find it listed right along with what we would consider to be far more serious sins. In describing godless people, the Bible says, "Their lives became full of every kind of wickedness, sin, greed, hate, envy, murder, quarreling, deception, malicious behavior, and gossip. They are backstabbers, haters of God, insolent, proud, and boastful. They invent new ways of sinning, and they disobey their parents." (Rom 1:29-30 NLT) Why is disobeying your parents such a big deal? Ultimately, it points to a deep rebellion against God Himself. When you fail to recognize the most basic authority in the world – your parents – you're in serious trouble. It's as if the Bible says, "Show me a child who is consistently disobedient to his or her parents and I'll show you a child who is fundamentally in rebellion against God."

Notice that Paul puts the responsibility upon Spirit-filled children to obey their parents. He doesn't say, "Mom and Dad, make your kids obey you." Instead, he says, "Children, young people, teenagers, God is holding you responsible to submit to your parents. Like God, they are seeking the best for you. Obey them in the Lord." That's what the fifth of the Ten Commandments points to fundamentally and why Paul quotes it here. The best way to honor and respect your parents is to submit to them as to the Lord. Obeying your parents is a stepping stone to obeying God Himself. If you learn how to submit to your parents, you'll have an easier time learning how to submit to God.

But Paul also has something to say to Spirit-filled parents here - more specifically, fathers. "Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger by the way you treat them. Rather, bring them up with the discipline and instruction that comes from the Lord." (Eph 6:4 NLT) First, the negative. How can Moms and Dads provoke, frustrate or exasperate their kids? By putting unfair demands on them. "Why? Because I said so! That's reason enough!" By putting unloving demands on them where they're put down or ridiculed. "Do it now, or else, you blankety, blank, blank!" By putting inconsistent demands on them. "I don't care what I said last time. Do it this way this time!" Those aren't Spirit-filled answers, Mom or Dad. Do you treat your kids like creatures made in God's image who deserve a clear, loving and consistent explanation of why your demands will benefit them? You will if you're a Spirit-filled parent.

Second, the positive. Mom and Dad, hear me well. Yes, this church, and its Sunday School and its youth group should be able to help bring up your child in the discipline and instruction that comes from the Lord, but – at the end of the day – it's always your primary responsibility to instill in your child a knowledge of Jesus as Savior and Lord, a knowledge of the Bible, and an understanding of what it means to live for God. As far as I know, they didn't have Sunday Schools and youth groups back in the 1<sup>st</sup> century. They're never mentioned in the Bible. Of course, Sunday Schools and youth groups have great value. That's why we offer both here and are trying to improve them all the time. But don't you dare blame this or any church for your failure as a parent to point your own children towards Jesus Christ.

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## **HOW TO BE SPIRIT-FILLED AT YOUR WORK**

Now, I'm well aware that Paul is talking here about slaves and masters. No, the Bible in no way condones slavery and there are very good answers to the question of why Paul doesn't condemn slavery here. I just don't have time today to try and answer those very legitimate questions. Instead, does this passage have any application to you or me? I believe it does. I think we can find in these verses what it means to be a Spirit-filled employee and a Spirit-filled employer. You may not realize it, but what you do on Monday – Friday from 9:00 am to 5:00 pm is just as spiritual as what you do here on a Sunday morning. You can and must do your job as to the Lord. The bottom line is not

making a living, making a profit for your company, or pleasing your boss, but working in such a way that pleases the Lord and points other people to Him by your example. There's the underlying principle as big and bold as you please! "Work with enthusiasm, as though you were working for the Lord rather than for people." (Eph 6:7 NLT)

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