

**COMMENTARY ON THE BOOK OF EPHESIANA**  
**II. PAUL'S CHALLENGE TO THE EPHESIANS**

**13.**

**E. WALK NOT AS UNWISE ONES, BUT AS WISE ONES**  
**EPHESIANS 5:15-6:9**

The fifth challenge Paul gave to the Ephesians concerning how to walk worthy of their high calling in Christ Jesus was to walk not as unwise persons, but as wise persons. Being unwise is to follow the ways of the world and to practice the inclinations of one's own fallen nature. Being wise is to follow God's words and Jesus' teachings. Paul gave some specific instructions concerning how to live according to God's wisdom. He spent almost no time talking about unwisdom or foolishness. If believers will follow the wisdom that comes from God's Word, their good actions will eliminate foolishness naturally and instruction in how to avoid foolishness will become unnecessary.

E. ***Therefore, watch how carefully you walk, not as unwise ones but as wise ones*** (5:15-6:9),

1. [How to walk as wise ones] (5:16-21)
  - a. ***Redeeming the time, because the days are evil*** (5:16),
  - b. ***For that [reason], do not be foolish ones but ones understanding what the Lord's will [is]*** (5:17-6:9):
    - (1) ***And do not get drunk with wine, in which is depravity; but be filled with the Spirit*** (5:18),
    - (2) ***Speaking to one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs*** (5:19a),
    - (3) ***Singing and making music to the Lord in your heart*** (5:19b),
    - (4) ***Giving thanks always for everything*** (5:20)
      - (a) ***In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ*** (5:20b),
      - (b) ***To God the Father*** (5:20c)
    - (5) ***Submitting to one another in the fear of God*** (5:21).

**Verse 5:16. The purpose of walking as wise ones:** **To redeem the time.** Paul indicated that believers accomplish a greater purpose than simply redeeming themselves when they walk as wise ones. Their wise living also helps redeem the time in which they are living. Paul revealed the meaning of "**redeeming the time**" when he said, "**... because the days are evil.**" The evil days to which he was referring were clearly the times in which he and the Ephesians were living. Those times were being lost and destroyed because so many people were using them for evil. They were throwing away the time allotted to them by using it for evil and destructive purposes. However, Paul indicated to the Ephesians that they could save the time in which they were living by using it wisely.

Time is a precious commodity. It provides people with more opportunity than money can. It is a shame for time to be wasted. A person can waste his time by laziness, foolishness, unrighteousness, and harmfulness. Since he is helping to set the

record for his generation, he also can help waste the years and the times in which he is living. Whole periods and ages in the history of nations and of the world have been wasted and destroyed in just that way. However, people can just as surely redeem the times in which they are living and turn them into benefit and progress for the world and for mankind just by living wisely.

People with good intentions speak of wanting to leave the world a better place than it was when they came into it. They are following Paul's advice and saving the time they are on earth, giving those who come behind them a better opportunity than they otherwise would have had. Saving the world and the times God entrusts into our hands by living as wise ones should be a task that every believer takes seriously.

**Verses 5:17-21. The key to walking as wise ones:** **understanding the will of the Lord.** Paul presented a simple explanation of how to avoid

walking as foolish ones. He said the key is to understand the will of the Lord. The key to living wisely cannot be found in philosophy, science, mathematics, athletics, industry, or government. People keep seeking for wisdom in all of those areas of learning, and they always end with disappointment. Human ingenuity and discovery accomplish much good, but they never produce wise living. They always contain unseen and unexpected flaws that tear down the good that is accomplished. The only true wisdom is in God. When we discover what His will is, we become wise and then we are able to walk and live wisely.

God has not left us in the dark about what wisdom truly is or how to practice it. He has been busy revealing truth and wisdom to people through the ages, and His revelations are now written in His divinely inspired Book. The will of God is clearly recorded in His holy Word. It is available to everyone who will use it. Walking in wisdom does not require great expenditures of money. It does not require years of study or earning learned degrees. It only requires knowing and doing the will of God. By no means, do those statements mean that study and experience are without value. They have great value, but they do not lead to true wisdom. Walking in wisdom comes from understanding the will of the Lord.

Paul followed up his general statement about how to walk in wisdom with five pointed examples of what the will of the Lord is. In quick succession, he listed five instructions about wise ways of living that are the will of God. His five suggestions do not cover every aspect of God's will, but they are amazingly inclusive.

*"Do not get drunk with wine, in which is depravity; but be filled with the Spirit."* Paul's first instruction concerning how to do God's will contains both negative and positive advice. The negative advice is that a person must not get drunk with wine. Drunkenness is one of the world's great deceivers. Drunkenness should be off-limits to believers in Jesus, because it clouds the person's judgment and makes him act in disgraceful ways. Thus, it degrades the dignity and worth of a person made in God's image. Drunkenness makes a person think he is funny, smart, and strong; but others who

observe him see clearly that he is silly, stupid, and wobbly. It degrades a person and makes him disgusting. If drunkenness becomes a practice, it leads to the loss of everything that is stable and constructive in the person's life. Paul's instruction was that believers should never let getting drunk happen to them.

Many people are quick to point out that Paul did not instruct the Ephesians not to drink any wine at all. They conclude that wisdom means to drink alcoholic beverages moderately and stop before the person gets drunk. The greatest problem with that approach is that it is almost impossible for a person to recognize when he crosses the line into drunkenness. One of the strongest effects of alcohol on the human brain is that it dulls a person's judgment. A person who has drunk a few alcoholic drinks thinks he is sober when he is not, thinks he is making sense when he is not, thinks he is driving safely when he is not, and thinks he can safely drink more when he cannot. The only way for a person to be sure he keeps control of his judgment and good sense is just not to use alcohol as a beverage at all. The only guarantee that a person will obey Paul's instruction not to get drunk is just not to drink alcohol at all.

Paul described the greatest danger that is involved in drinking wine or any other alcoholic beverage. It is what drinking alcohol leads to. Paul said "depravity" is in it. The word translated "depravity" has been translated variously in English versions. KJV translates it as "excess"; Douay as "profligacy"; NKJV, NEB, and NASB as "dissipation"; HCSB as "reckless actions"; and RSV and NIV as "debauchery." The literal meaning of the Hebrew word is "unsavableness," which is not an accepted English word but which communicates nonetheless. "Irredeemableness" is a recognized English word that has the same meaning but that is not so easily understood. The Hebrew word means a condition from which a person cannot escape or a sickness that cannot be cured. Paul meant that getting drunk leads to an addiction for which no cure exists. It is literally true that once a person becomes an alcoholic, his addiction can never be cured. With great difficulty, he may be able to stop drinking; but he still will be a "dry alcoholic." His addiction always will be alive in

him, though it may be dormant. Only one drink will awaken his alcoholism again, and he will be as enslaved to his addiction as ever. Risking becoming an alcoholic just is not worth the small, temporary benefit that wine and other alcoholic beverages provide. The pain and degradation that come from alcoholism is too great to be worth the risk. The only sure way to be sure that one's drinking does not result in incurable alcoholism is to not drink alcoholic beverages at all.

Mind-altering drugs were not widely available or used in Paul's day. Paul surely would have given the same instructions with regard to using recreational drugs if their use had been prevalent in his day. A wise person will never allow a recreational drug to touch his lips or skin, and he should be cautious even about those that have some medical benefit. The dangers in them are too great for them to be taken lightly.

Paul instructed the Ephesians to quit depending on wine and instead to "**be filled with the Spirit.**" His comparing the filling of the Spirit with getting drunk is highly revealing. When a person is drunk, we say he is "full of liquor." We certainly do not mean he has drunk enough liquor to fill his whole body. We mean he has drunk enough liquor for it to take control of him. When he talks, the alcohol is talking; and when he acts the alcohol is acting. Being filled with the Spirit has the same meaning. It means the person is controlled and directed by God's Holy Spirit. Being controlled by alcohol is dangerous. Being controlled by the Holy Spirit is uplifting and empowering. It enhances the person's abilities and gives him gifts he does not have naturally. It gives him power from God to do what God wants him to do and makes him useful to God's kingdom.

Paul's words about being filled with the Spirit are a firm instruction. They are a command. Being filled with the Spirit is something that a believer is obligated to do. If it is a command to obey, the person has some control over it. He can determine if he will allow the Spirit to fill him, or he can resist being filled and cause the Spirit to grieve (Acts 7:51; Eph. 4:30). Believers need to take this command seriously and learn how to obey it. The way a person obeys the command to be filled with

the Spirit is to make himself available to God and to allow God to do His work through him. Truly, when a person is filled with the Spirit, the Spirit takes control of him; but that control does not come to him against his will. He must open himself to the Holy Spirit and make himself available for what the Spirit wants to do with him. Also when the Spirit takes control of him, he does not become a robot. He becomes an empowered person. He is aware of what he is doing, but he is also aware that he is doing it under the Spirit's guidance and in the Spirit's power. He speaks intelligently and acts sensibly. He also speaks with an enhanced effectiveness, and good results come for the kingdom of God. He will not be able to determine in advance what will happen. As the Spirit moves him, he will not duplicate the way the Spirit used someone else. He will be used in a way that the Spirit will design just for him and for the need of that hour.

We need to make ourselves constantly available for the Holy Spirit to fill us and to be eager to use the power He gives us. The result will always be a surprising, exciting, and satisfying.

*Speak to one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs.* Paul's second instruction about how to do God's will is to speak with each other by singing all kinds of Christian songs. Paul considered gospel music to be a means of communication. It is about more than notes and melody. It is about enhancing the message of the gospel by singing it to each other. The words give meaning to the music, and the music adds emotion to the words. Music can bring repentance to the sinner. It can encourage the disheartened, soothe the hurting, cheer the sick, comfort the sad, and even calm a disoriented mind. It can convict or inspire or teach. It can express praise to God or bring conviction to the rebellious. It can communicate love or encouragement or even reprimand to others. It can sometimes spur a person to decision or to action when spoken words would fail. Therefore, singing together in worship or singing what one's heart feels in the presence of others is a powerful way to communicate God's will and to do it.

It should be noted that Paul's instruction concerned "*speaking to one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs*" assumes that the person has something to say and that he means what he says. More is involved than simply hitting the notes and saying the words. The message the singer sings must be real to him, or he deceives instead of blesses. Just as some preachers have turned preaching into money-making machines, some gospel singers have turned singing into profitable making enterprises and channels for earning awards and honors. Some sing gospel songs for a show and do not mean or practice the words that they sing. A few sing songs about Jesus' ability to comfort and save when they are on stage but have to be held up with drugs and alcohol off stage. They are not singing the truth, but putting on a show. The false imitators provide no excuse for rejecting the value of Christian music, but they should provide incentive for the rest of us to live what they sing.

*Sing to the Lord in your heart.* Paul's third instruction also relates to music. It concerns singing to the Lord in one's heart. Singing gospel music is not only helpful in communicating with others, but also in expressing feelings that are too strong to be spoken in prose or too inspiring to be explained in words alone. Therefore, singing to oneself to express personal devotion or private worship, is a strong aid to communicating with God. Singing in our hearts can be accompanied by singing aloud or it can be sung silently in one's mind. Either way, it is a meaningful expression of private worship of God.

Paul described two types of songs that can be used in one's private worship of God. The first word he used was "singing," and applies to any type of singing. The second word, which is translated above as "making music" was literally "psalming." "Psalming" is not a familiar word in English, but it can be understood easily. It means to sing psalms, which can be psalms recorded in the Bible or written more recently. The point is that a person can use various styles of music when he sings in his heart, as long as his singing expresses his thoughts and feelings sincerely. Regardless of what type of music a person uses and regardless of whether he is able to sing beautifully or not, as long as a person's heart is in it, his singing is a powerful tool for

helping him do God's will, because God is pleased with any method a person uses with sincerity to worship Him.

In order to receive true blessings from spiritual songs, we must remember that they must be sung in our hearts. Sounding the notes and repeating the words are of no value unless they express a truly genuine heart-felt emotion. When only the vocal chords sing, the person's life remains cold and unchanged. When the heart sings, the person's whole life is uplifted.

*Giving thanks always for everything.* Paul already had recommended giving of thanks as a means of overcoming sensuality, greed, and crudeness (Eph. 4:5:4). In this passage, he recommends it as a powerful way to do the will of God. In this verse, he went far beyond saying that believers have much to be thankful for. He instructed the Ephesians to be thankful for everything. Everything includes good, bad, and in between. Everything that happens to us may not be good, but God is able to bring good out of bad or out of what seems to be bad. He can use sickness to increase our faith. He can use loss to spur us to depend on Him for strength; and death of a loved one to inspire us to find true life. We may not be able to see how some of the things that happen to us can have a good result, but God sees multitudes of opportunities that are hidden to us. When we trust Him enough to know He is working all things to our good, we can thank Him for being with us in the darkness and praise Him for deliverance that we have not yet seen. A thankful heart prevents us from ever giving up.

In a different way, thanksgiving can keep us from pride and self-glory when everything is going well in our lives. When we experience a great joy or victory or blessing, thankfulness will help us recognize that those blessings did not come from our efforts, but from God's grace. It can lead us to humility and generosity instead of self-satisfaction and pride. Thanksgiving is as beneficial to the believer in good times as it is in bad times.

No time ever comes and no event ever occurs unless something is in for which we should be thankful. Thankfulness leads us to accept and do

God's will. It should be the frame of mind in which ever believer walks every day.

Paul was careful to state to whom we should be thankful. He was specific that we need to give thanks "***in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God the Father.***" It has become popular for some secular sociologists to claim that emotional healing can come to a person from observing the good things in his or her life and being grateful for them. To them the healing is not in the person who gave the good things, but in the positive attitude in the person's mind. That view of thanksgiving sometimes provides temporary relief, but it always fails in the end. It fails because it does not take away the burden of the things that are not good in the person's life; and no matter how he concentrates on the good things, the bad times inevitably come again. Then he can only see his problems and cannot imagine why he should be thankful. Only gratitude to God can enable us to have true thankfulness. When we know He always will bring good out of every experience, even when we cannot see how, we can be thankful without having to know how he will do it. It enables us to do as Paul instructed and give thanks at all time for everything. Continual thanksgiving gives true healing to emotional wounds and genuine strength in every troubled hour.

When Paul spoke of giving thanks to God, He mentioned Jesus first, because he was aware that people come to the Father only through Jesus. Sometimes a person exults over speaking to his loving Father and never reaches Him at all, because he proposes to approach God on the strength of his own name. It is Jesus who is our "one Mediator between God and man" (1 Tim. 2:5). Thanksgiving in any other name than Jesus' name never reaches the throne. Leave Jesus out of a prayer of thanksgiving, and it is no thanksgiving at all. Jesus' name opens the door to the throne room of heaven (John 14:13-14; 16:23). Going to the Father in Jesus' name assumes that we have a right to claim His name. That right comes to us when we yield our lives to Him and receive Him as our Savior. However, the saved person who fails to acknowledge Jesus when He tries to approach the Father reveals a haughty attitude toward himself and a failure to acknowledge that the privilege of

prayer is made possible by the sacrifice of Jesus for our sins. Omit Jesus' name from our expressions of thanksgiving, and we leave them limp and powerless. Acknowledge Jesus, and our words of thanksgiving become a fragrant perfume in the Father's nostrils in heaven and return power to the earth.

*Submit to one another in the fear of God.* Paul put the capstone on his instructions about how to do God's will by describing the attitude that should control a believer's every action toward others. He called on believers to submit to each other. Submitting means to put the needs of others ahead of our needs and to seek the welfare of others more than our welfare. Submission to others is the opposite of selfishness. Selfishness builds a wall around ourselves and forces us to live in isolation, even when we are surrounded by a crowd. It hardens the heart and shrivels the soul. Submission to others, on the other hand, opens the door to friendship, comradeship, and love. In the end, the one who puts others first gains much more than he ever gives up.

It must be noted, however, that Paul instructed us to submit "to one another." Submitting is not a one-sided action. It must be a mutual commitment. God does not teach that His followers should mildly accept abuse from others. Neither does He excuse a person who takes advantage of another person or who turns himself into a tyrant. If someone refuses to form an unselfish loving relationship with us, we may have to defend ourselves; but doing so does not provide us with an excuse to return evil for evil. Returning good for evil is Jesus' way of dealing with abuse. However, the person who will not respond to an offer of reconciliation misses out on the joys of the ideal relationships that Jesus gives among His obedient children. Submission to one another works when two people both put the other person first or when two groups both seek first the welfare of the other group. It occurs when two people commit themselves to each other, when each lifts the other up, and when they work together to help both to rise to new levels together.

Submitting to one another can only be accomplished "*in the fear of God.*" Paul did not mean that we submit to each other because we are

afraid of what God will do to us if we do not submit. He meant we have such an awesome respect for God that we are glad to live like He teaches us to live. When we live in awe of God, He gives us a genuine respect for others. We care for

2. [Examples of submitting to one another in the fear of God] (5:22-6:9)
  - a. [Wives and husbands] (5:22-33)
    - (1) ***Wives, submit to your own husbands as to the Lord*** (5:22-24),
      - (a) ***For the husband is head of the wife*** (5:23a)
      - (b) ***As also Christ is Head of the church and He is the Savior of the body*** (5:23b).
        - [1] ***Now as the church submits to Christ*** (5:24a)
        - [2] ***So wives to their own husbands in everything*** (5:24b).
    - (2) ***Husbands, love your wives*** (5:25-33)
      - (a) ***Just as also Christ loved the church and gave Himself for her*** (5:25-26)
        - [1] ***That He might make her holy*** (5:26),
          - [a] ***Cleansing [her] like washing with water*** (5:26b)
          - [b] ***By the Word*** (5:26c),
        - [2] ***That He might present her to Himself a glorious church*** (5:27),
          - [a] ***Not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing*** (5:27b),
          - [b] ***But that she might be holy and faultless*** (5:27c).
      - (b) ***In the same way, husbands should love their wives as their own bodies*** (5:28-33).
        - [1] ***He who loves his wife loves himself*** (5:28b-29b),
          - [a] ***For no one hates his own flesh*** (5:29a),
          - [b] ***But he provides for it and cares for it*** (5:29b),
        - [2] ***Just as Christ the church*** (5:29c-32),
          - [a] ***Because we are members of His body*** (5:30-31),
          - [b] ***Of His flesh and of His bones*** (5:30b),
        - [3] **"For this reason a man will leave his father and mother** [Gen 2:24a] (5:31a)
          - [b] **"And he will be joined to his wife** [Gen. 2:24b] (5:31b)
          - [c] **"And the two will become one flesh"** (Gen. 2:24c) (5:31c).
        - [4] ***This mystery is profound*** (5:32),
          - [a] ***But I am talking by comparison with Christ*** (5:32b)
          - [b] ***And the church*** (5:32c).
      - (3) ***And so*** (5:33):
        - (a) ***One by one you each must love his wife as himself*** (5:33b),
        - (b) ***And the wife must respect her husband*** (5:33c).

Paul elaborated extensively on the fifth of the instructions he gave concerning how to do God's will. That instruction was to submit to each other in the fear of the Lord. Perhaps Paul elaborated on that instruction because it was the most important of the five instructions he gave. It definitely was the most difficult instruction to follow. Therefore, he gave some pointed suggestions about how it could be obeyed. He did so by citing three examples of

them, because He loves them. We want God to bless them as He blesses us. As we fear God together, we minister to each other and we bless each other; and God is blessed at the same time.

relationships in which mutual submission should be practiced.

In each example, he showed that each party was responsible to submit to the other. He gave no example of how submission could be practiced by only one of two parties. Submission by only one party will not work, and Paul gave no hint that it should be attempted. Entirely different principles

should be followed when one party insists on dominating or abusing the other. Paul did not discuss those principles here. He discussed the proper and ideal Christian relationship in which both parties seek to do God's will. He said that in such a relationship the principle to be followed is that each person should put the other person ahead of himself and seek the other person's welfare ahead of his own.

The first relationship to which Paul applied the principle of mutual submission was wives and husbands.

**Verses 22-24. Wives, submit to your own husbands as to the Lord.** Paul unashamedly advised wives to put their husbands' welfare ahead of their own welfare. He counseled them to give first attention to meeting their husbands' needs, to promoting, encouraging, and providing for their husbands before they sought to satisfy their own wants. He said a wife was to be more concerned about her husband's happiness than her own.

In a day when women have felt compelled to fight not only for their dignity but even for their basic rights and needs, Paul's words have been considered to be harsh and offensive to women. The reason they have been interpreted in that manner is that attention has been given to Paul's advice to wives without considering the advice he gave to husbands at the same time. Actually, Paul's instructions to husbands were much more extensive than those he gave to wives, and they also were much more demanding. In the light of the instructions that Paul gave to husbands, the advice he gave to wives was brief and mild.

What made Paul's instructions to wives meaningful is that he compared them to the relationship between Christ and the church. He said that husbands are heads or leaders of their wives, but they are to exercise that leadership in the same way that Christ exercises His headship of the church. Christ is Head of the church because He is the Savior of the church. Jesus spared no effort or sacrifice to save the church because it was designed to be His body functioning for Him on the earth. He not only gave His life on the Cross to save the church, He also continues to deliver the church

from its enemies and to provide its needs in spite of every trial and opposition it has to face. He has promised to provide those needs so consistently that He has guaranteed that the church will not enter through the gates of hell and die out. Jesus provides so bountifully for the church that the church willingly submits to Him. His leadership and requirements are not a burden or a sacrifice, because He is the Savior of the church from all its trials and enemies.

Paul then said that on the same basis wives should submit to their husbands' leadership. They should submit to their husbands because their husbands protect them, provide for them, and seek to save them from every trial. A wife who has that kind of husband has no difficulty following his leadership and contributing to his welfare. Putting that kind of husband first is not a burden. It is a privilege and a joy. It knows no limits. It extends to every part of her commitment to him in every way.

**Verses 25-33. Husbands love your wives just like Christ loved His church enough to die for her.** Paul's instructions to husbands demanded the ultimate of submission. Husbands are to love their wives. He used the exalted word for love that means unselfish devotion, like a person loves God. He called on husbands to love their wives with the kind of love that comes only from God. Paul gave two comparisons to show how thoroughly men are to love their wives.

Paul's first comparison was that men should love their wives as Christ loved the church. Christ's love for the church was so great that He gave His life for her. According to Paul, Christ gave Himself for the church not just to pay the penalty for her sin, but to make her holy. He described Christ's making the church holy as cleansing her like one washes away dirt with water, except that He washes away all her stain with the Word. He cleanses her so He can present her to Himself glorious and beautiful, without one ugly spot or one tiny wrinkle to mar her perfect purity. Having made her spotless, He presents her like an admiring husband presents his bride to his guests. Since Jesus has no one greater than Himself to present her to, He presents her to Himself in perfect and flawless holiness.

Paul said that what Jesus does for the church is a model for husbands to follow in relating to their wives. Husbands are to love their wives so thoroughly that they are willing to spend their lives helping them be pure and glorious in holiness. As Christ spared no sacrifice for the church, a husband should spare no expense or effort to meet his wife's needs, so that she can stand before his eyes superbly pure and admirable in every way. Truly, those who call Paul a woman hater because of his advice to wives should read on to observe the advice he gave to husbands. They would consider Paul the greatest exalter of wives in all of history.

Paul went even further in describing the love husbands should have for their wives. The second comparison he made was that men should love their wives as their own bodies. He said that, when a man takes a wife, she is to be so much a part of him that his love for her is equal to his love for his own body. Now men do not hate their bodies. They provide for them and care for them. The word translated "provides for" was used to describe what parents do when they protect their children, meet their needs, and nurture them until they come of age and can provide for themselves. The word translated "cares for" was used to describe what a mother does when she covers her infant from the cold with a blanket and with the warmth of her own body. Men care for their bodies with that kind of careful attention, and Paul commanded them to provide for their wives with the same attentive care.

Paul again compared a husband's care for his wife with Christ's care for the church because believers in the church are members of His body doing His work in the world. He is in them and works through them, so He provides for them so they can do His work with skill and effectiveness. In the same way, a husband is to be so much a part of his wife that she becomes his own body, and he strives to meet her every need.

To support his point, Paul quoted from Genesis 2:24, which describes the relationship God designed for husbands to have with their wives when He first used Adam's rib to create the first wife in history. The plan God instituted at that time

has been His plan and expectation for husband's ever since. Paul quoted the verse in this way:

**"For this reason a man will leave his father and mother, and he will be joined to his wife, and the two will become one flesh"**

Interpreters and theologians have been trying to explore the depths of meaning in that verse ever since the Voice of God first spoke it in the Garden. Several interpretations have been given, some discerning and some not.

Many explain the relationship between husband and wife that is described in Genesis 2:24 by saying a husband and wife become one body by producing a child that contains characteristics inherited from both of them. However, Paul did not say a husband and wife produce one flesh but become one flesh. It is true that a child inherits the same flesh as his or her parents. He shares characteristics with his parents because he physically inherits them. Those inherited characteristics bond them together in a way that is distinct from any other bond they experience. However, Paul was not talking about children having that kind of bond with their parents. He said the husband and wife take on that kind of bond with each other when they leave their parents and give themselves to each other. They bond into a relationship that is as tight and unique as if they were born as one flesh. They are able to bond that thoroughly because God makes them one flesh. They blend as thoroughly as if they were formed by the same genes, and thus they become more like one person than two.

Paul plainly said that kind of relationship is a great mystery, but it can be understood by comparing it with the bond between Christ and His church. Paul indicated that the only way to begin to understand its wonder is to compare a husband's union with his wife with Christ's union with His body, the church. The church is bound to Jesus because Jesus lives within it. It lives and acts in His presence and under His leadership. A husband and wife who truly submit to each other in love develop a bond that real, because their souls blend into one. Though they live in two bodies, they are more one flesh than two. Husbands and wives who learn to

understand and live that relationship live for each other more than they live for themselves, and together they reach their highest potential as one person rather than two.

**Verse 33. In summary, you each must prefer the other above yourself.** Paul closed his instructions to wives and husbands with a summary statement. That statement confirms that the advice he was giving had to be a mutual commitment. The husband was to love his wife as himself, and the wife was to respect her husband. It takes a commitment on the part of both to fulfill the ideal Paul was recommending.

The word Paul used to describe the relationship a husband should have with his wife was *ἀγαπάω* (*agapaō*), that unique word for love that is so exalted it seldom was ever used by writers outside of the Bible. It describes unselfish, undivided, sacrificial, total commitment that should make a husband die before he displeases his wife.

The word Paul used to describe the relationship a wife should have for her husband was “fear.” It did not mean fear in the sense of terror. He used the word to mean respect and reverence for

- b. [Children and parents] (6:1-4)
  - (1) ***Children*** (6:1-3),
    - (a) ***Obey your parents*** (6:1)
      - [1] ***In the Lord*** (6:1b)
      - [2] ***Because this is right*** (6:1c):
    - (b) **Honor your father and mother** (*Ex. 20:12a; Deut. 5:16a*) (6:2a)--
      - [1] ***Which is the first commandment with a promise*** (6:2b)--
        - [2] **That it may be well with you and that you may have a long life on the earth** (*Ex. 20:12c; Deut. 5:16b*) (6:3).
  - (2) ***And the fathers*** (6:4),
    - (a) ***Do not harass your children*** (6:4b),
    - (b) ***But nurture them in the instruction and correction of the Lord*** (6:4c).

The second relationship to which Paul applied the principle of mutual submission was children and parents. Paul started with instruction to children.

**Verses 1-3. “Children, obey your parents.”** Paul instructed children to obey their parents. Obedience requires submissiveness, recognizing and honoring the authority and responsibility of parents. It is the same attitude on the part of

her husband that it is akin to the worship one extends to God. She does not put her husband ahead of God or even equal to God, but for the sake of God she spends her life pleasing and supporting her husband. Doing so will not be detrimental to her, because he will be defending and uplifting her with his very life.

No advice for marital relationships has ever been so uplifting and inspiring as those Paul outlined under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Special and mysterious indeed is the relationship of the husband and wife who understand and practice his instructions.

It must be understood that a husband and wife can attain the full extent of the ideal Paul outlined for them only with the help of God. When the Holy Spirit lives in both husband and wife, He joins their spirits together. The result is that they become one flesh that enables them to live as one person rather than two. It is indeed a mystery. It is designed to be experienced under the leadership and power of the Holy Spirit more than it is designed to be understood or explained.

children that produces harmony and happiness between a husband and a wife. Bending to the wisdom of parents does not come easy to children, because even children want their own way. Helping them learn to be submissive requires patience and persistence. When they do learn it, it is a mark of wisdom. For their sake it is worth all the effort it takes on the part of parents to teach them the value of obedience. The principle of children’s willingly

submitting to their parents is as valid as husbands and wives submitting to each other.

Obedience is necessary if a person is to profit from the accumulated learning of past generations. It is necessary if a person is to learn how to develop profitable relationships in the workplace, in friendships, in homes, and in society. It lays a foundation for every other kind of learning and accomplishment they may achieve in their whole lives. Therefore, the most important contribution parents can make to the development of their children is to help them learn to obey.

Education theorists have departed from that principle in recent generations to the detriment of children and society. The theory that has been promoted in recent generations is that the most important skill that can be taught to children is to learn how to develop their own ingenuity and be innovative and creative. For sure, those are important skills, but when a child is encouraged to develop his own ingenuity without giving him the materials to use in exercising that ingenuity, he is being set up for failure. That method of educating children has produced more than one disappointing generation. Why should the generation of Americans who are passing off the scene be called "The Greatest Generation" if we have not failed to give the new generations the tools they need to become even greater? Today, we have a nation full of people expressing their undisciplined ingenuity in dizzying proportions to the detriment of themselves and of society. They have learned to be innovative, but now how to be innovative constructively. We have set them up for frustration by liberating them to experiment without first teaching them to discipline themselves to learn what others before them have discovered is true and valid.

Paul explained both how and why children need to obey. How to obey comes from being "in the Lord." It takes Jesus presence in a person's heart for him to understand that being liberated to do just what he wants to do is not wise. The Holy Spirit convicts a person of his sinfulness and makes him realize he will not help himself but harm himself if he is liberated to do whatever he wishes. Children need to be taught to trust willingly. When

they yield their hearts to Him of their own free will, they are "in the Lord" and their willful natures begin to be controlled. Then they can humble themselves to obey.

The reason why children should obey is "because this is right." Children need to be taught to obey, not because they are afraid of punishment but because it is the right thing to do, for their own lives and for the sake of others. Punishment is a necessary part of rearing children, but it should not be used as the primary means of motivating them. Fear of punishment leads a person to seek for ways to hide wrongdoing, and children can become extremely skillful in deceiving their parents in order to avoid being caught. Learning to want to do the right thing makes it easier for children to obey and also easier for them to try to do better in the future. One of the most important lessons to teach children is that doing what is right is in the end the most pleasant, rewarding, and productive way to live.

Paul quoted the fifth of the Ten Commandments to support his instructions to children. It is the first commandment of the second section of the Ten Commandments, which is a list of principles for right relationships with other people. Establishing the right relationships with one's parents is the basic foundation on which to build a relationship with everyone else.

Paul quoted the first words of the commandment literally, "**Honor your father and mother.**" Honoring parents includes more than just obeying them, but honor begins with obedience. If we respect our parents because they are responsible, respectable people, obedience becomes easy. Parents must be honorable. Then children will want to honor them, and obedience will become natural.

Then Paul noted that the fifth of the Ten Commandment is the first commandment that has a promise connected to it. Actually, it is the only one of the Ten Commandments that contains a promise. Paul evidently meant that it is the first to contain a promise of all the commandments that God gave to the Israelites at Sinai. That distinction gives it special significance.

Paul then stated the promises that are connected with the commandment. The Ten Commandments are listed twice in the Books of Moses: Exodus 20:1-17; and Deuteronomy 5:6-21. The promises are stated slightly differently in Deuteronomy from the way they are stated in Exodus. Paul did not strictly follow either version. Instead, he combined the two and rephrased them. He did not change the meaning, but he adapted them to include Gentiles in the requirements and promises of the covenant. The promises of the Fifth Commandment as stated in Exodus and Deuteronomy applied directly to Israel's possession of the Promised Land. It promised the Israelites that their days would be long on the Land God gave them if they honored their fathers and mothers. It was a promise that God would preserve their possession of the Land, so they could live in it without being driven out. God could make that promise because, if they honored their parents, they would be taught the way of life that would enable God to bless them and keep His promises to them, including the promise of the Land.

Paul broadened the application of the promise to include all believers in Jesus. He said, if children would honor their parents, they would have long life on the earth. Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, he gave the commandment a more significant meaning. He applied it not to possessing a certain piece of the earth but to having health and strength enough to live a long life on the earth. God could make that promise because, if children honored their parents, they would learn the principles and practices that tend to extend a person's life. Everyone who has lived even a few years has seen many examples of the truth of that promise. People who honor their parents and learn good and productive habits from them avoid many of the dangerous ways of living that bring on early sickness and death. They are able to maintain their strength into old age and to continue to be useful even when many of their peers have left the earth. They are able to live long lives because they learned early from their parents how to live lives that protect and preserve health and strength. Learning to respect and obey parents does not take away the penalty of death for every person because of our sins, but it does delay that eventual outcome.

In old age, people gather the harvest they planted in childhood and youth. Wise and fortunate are those who plant good seeds in their youth because they honor and obey their parents.

**Verse 4. “Fathers, do not harass your children, but nurture them in the instruction and correction of the Lord.”** Then Paul turned to give instruction to parents. He addressed those instruction directly to fathers. No doubt he did so in order to stress that fathers must not neglect their responsibility to assume primary responsibility for the rearing of their children. Sad indeed is the loss that comes to children whose fathers turn the children over to their wives and devote themselves to their work or play or some other interest. Children need the firm hand and the steady example of their fathers, and their lives are handicapped throughout life without that benefit. Nevertheless, Paul's instruction to fathers is equally applicable to mothers. His brief words to fathers are the wisest instructions ever given to either husbands or wives, or both.

Paul's instructions to fathers were both negative and positive. His negative instruction was, **“Do not harass your children.”** The word translated “harass” is derived from a root that means “to anger.” Therefore, it has commonly been translated “provoke your children to wrath.” Unfortunately, too many parents—and children—have understood those words to mean that parents must keep their children happy at all times because displeasing or angering them would wound their sensitive psyches. Paul meant no such foolishness. His instruction to fathers was to avoid driving children to bitter resentment and hatred by constantly haranguing them, belittling them, or terrorizing them. Heavy-handed authoritarianism is no more successful with children than it is with adults. Paul said, just do not do it.

Paul's positive instruction was, **“Nurture them in the instruction and correction of the Lord.”** The word translated “nurture” is the same as the word Paul used in Ephesians 5:29 to describe how the Lord provides for the church and how a husband should provide for his wife. It means to provide all that is required to meet a person's needs so he can reach his best potential. Parents are

responsible for providing far more than just the physical necessities of their children. They are responsible also to provide the emotional, educational, and spiritual support children need to blossom into their full potential.

Paul said that providing the needed nurture includes both instruction and correction. Instruction means taking time to share with children the knowledge their parents have gained from experience with life. It means teaching them lessons they need to know in order to succeed in relationships with fellow workers, friends, and society. It means taking time to share with children the valuable lessons they learned in their years of living. Instruction means teaching children the knowledge and skills they need to live useful and happy lives. Correction, on the other hand, means helping children overcome their mistakes. It does not mean condemning them for their mistakes, but it does mean helping them to recognize their mistakes and to know how to avoid making those mistakes again. Correction is not easy for parents or for children, but it is a necessary part of preparing children for a successful life.

For fathers and mothers to carry out the instructions Paul gave them concerning relating to

- c. [Slaves and masters] (6:5-9)
  - (1) ***Slaves, obey your masters according to flesh*** (6:5-8)
    - (a) ***With fear and trembling*** (6:5a),
      - [1] ***In singleness of your heart*** (6:5b),
      - [2] ***As to Christ*** (6:5c),
    - (b) ***Not according to eye-service*** (6:6-8)
      - [1] ***As men pleasers*** (6:6b),
      - [2] ***But as slaves of Christ*** (6:6b-8),
        - [a] ***Doing God's will from the soul*** (6:6c):
          - {1} ***Willingly doing service*** (6:7a)
          - {2} ***As to the Lord and not to men*** (6:7b)
        - [b] ***Knowing that whatever good deed each one does*** (6:8),
          - {1} ***He will receive it back from the Lord*** (6:8b),
          - {2} ***Whether [he is] a slave or a free man*** (6:8c).
    - (2) ***And masters, do the same to them*** (6:9),
      - (a) ***Rejecting threatening*** (6:9b),
      - (b) ***And knowing that*** (6:9c-9e)
        - [1] ***Your Master and theirs is in heaven*** (6:9d),
        - [2] ***And favoritism does not exist with Him*** (6:9e).

their children requires as much submissiveness on their part as it does on their children's part. They must be as submissive toward their children as they are to each other. It means they will sacrifice themselves and do without in order to help their children develop and be prepared for meaningful lives. Patience with unruly children is difficult. Persistence in instructing and correcting children is even more difficult. However, for their children's sake, they must make the sacrifices that are necessary. To be obedient to God and to help their children prepare for life, parents must deny themselves both time and money that they might prefer to spend some other way. However, instructing and correcting children is a responsibility they owe to the children they brought into the world. If they neglect it, they will harvest bitter fruit in years to come. If they submit to the limitations it puts on them, they most likely will be the parents who will see their children succeed in life. Their children most likely will be the ones who return to their parents appreciation, love, and protection when they need it in old age. The self-denial that is required of parents produces rich benefits for children and parents that last to the end of life.

The third relationship to which Paul applied the principle of mutual submission was slaves and masters. He began with instructions to slaves.

**Verses 5-8. “Slaves, obey your masters according to the flesh.”** The masters of slaves “according to the flesh” were their human owners. The word translated “masters” is the same word Paul applied to Jesus. He called them “lords.” Paul instructed slaves who were followers of Jesus to respect their owners’ authority and obey them.

To present-day Americans, Paul’s instructions to slaves are shocking. We are sure Paul should have told slaves to rebel against their owners and to demand their freedom. We are confident Paul should have been marching in the streets to demand justice and equality for all slaves. For sure, if Paul had done so, he would have been demanding what is right and opposing a cruel and unjust practice. However, we need to recognize that Paul would have received no hearing and would have become only a footnote in history as a foolish crank. He most likely would have been executed for sedition against the Empire instead of for preaching about freedom through faith in Jesus. Slavery was an unjust but firmly entrenched, legally enforced, social practice. The world was not ready to respond to a demand for freeing slaves. The love of Jesus had to be preached across the world for many years before people were ready to grasp the truth that all men everywhere deserve to be free. Even new believers fresh out of paganism were not able to accept and practice individually the concept. Under the conditions of that day, Paul preferred to be a preacher of spiritual salvation than to be a social reformer. Paul probably based that preference on two factors: (1) Spiritual salvation was even more important than physical freedom. (2) Preaching spiritual freedom allowed him a much greater possibility of success.

Social reformation is a Christian and godly enterprise when social attitudes are open to some favorable response. When attitudes are completely closed to an idea, it is necessary to change people’s hearts first and then gradually teach them godly social ideals. Paul took the route of preaching the truths that change men’s souls. Many years later those truths led whole societies to change their

social customs and abolish slavery. In the end, Paul’s approach was a resounding success, but he first had to start with people where they were and lead them to the first step of a process that eventually changed whole nations. If he had chosen to agitate for immediate freedom for all slaves, he would have accomplished nothing. He did not have the recognition or the support to have any chance of succeeding. He would not even have been able to gain a hearing among Gentiles for the message of salvation through faith in Jesus, because the idea of freeing all slaves was so radical people would have closed their ears to everything he had to say. Their rejection of the message of freeing all slaves would have made them deaf also to Paul’s even more important message about salvation. Therefore, he preached a message that provided a foundation for others to build on in a later time and accomplish liberating slaves from unjust social arrangements.

Paul was operating on the principle of progressive revelation, which the Lord practiced throughout the years. God increased revelation to men as they were ready and able to receive it. In Paul’s day, the world was not ready to receive the message of social and political freedom for all men. It was ready to receive the message of salvation from sin through Jesus’ death on the Cross. Paul engaged himself in the possible. He was God’s instrument to advance God’s truth to a new level and to prepare the way for others later to advance it even further.

Under the condition of the times in which Paul lived, he instructed slaves to respect and obey their human owners. Paul gave slaves two guidelines to follow in obeying their masters. The first guideline was to obey out of sincere respect for their masters. Paul said they were to obey “with fear and trembling.” He used those words in the same sense that he used them when telling believers to “fear God.” He did not mean they should obey because they were terrified over what would happen to them if they did not obey. When Paul instructed masters in the next verses, he commanded them not to use threatening, so Paul could not have meant that slaves should obey because of fear of mistreatment. He meant they should obey out of respect and honor for the position and responsibilities of their owners. He reinforced that instruction by saying slaves were

to obey "in singleness of your heart." He meant they were not to be double-minded or double-tongued in their service. They were to serve with one purpose in their hearts, which was to do their job well, just like they would do in serving Christ. In fact, they were serving Christ, because they were representing Christ as they worked. They were to show by their conscientious labor that Jesus' followers always seek to do good for others, even to those who hold them in forced submission.

The second guideline Paul gave slaves concerning how to obey their masters was to do it to be seen by God and not by men. Paul meant they were not to do a good job only when their masters were watching. They were to be aware that God always was watching, so they were to do their work well at all times to please God, not to please men. They were to do God's will from their souls, that is, from an inner desire to please God. Thus, they were to serve willingly because they realized they were serving God and not just men.

Paul also reminded slaves that those who serve God will never go unrewarded. All the good they do may not be seen by men, but it is seen by God; and God is faithful to reward good service in the same measure that the person served. God rewards all men justly regardless of who they are, slaves just the same as free men. Sometimes He rewards people for their good service while they are alive on the earth, but their real reward comes after death in heaven and even more specifically at the Judgment. However long it takes for the reward to come, God will give it without fail. If they were unfairly treated on earth, they did not need to fear. They were going to be rewarded in the Judgment for faithfully living their faith, and that reward was going to last forever.

As slaves submitted themselves to their position in life, they benefited their masters and they benefited God even more. When they did so, they also benefited themselves and would be rewarded for it by God as fully as if they were free.

The advice Paul gave to slaves should be taken to heart by employees. A believer in Jesus should respect his employer and seek to contribute to the progress and growth of his business. When

he does so, he honors God who teaches him to do good to everyone. He also does good for his employer and helps his business to prosper. When he is genuinely interested in helping his employer's business, he will avoid being jealous and covetous of his employer. Instead he will rejoice to be able to contribute to his employer's success. Most of all, he will do good for himself, because as his employer prospers so will his fortunes as an employee of a successful business. His submission to the success of his employer will enable both of them to increase together. Jesus does not teach class warfare or social conflict. Through Paul, He taught economic cooperation, which results in benefit for all.

**Verse 9. "And masters, do the same to them."** Paul instructed slave owners to treat their slaves the same way he instructed slaves to treat their owners. He could scarcely have meant that masters were to obey their slaves. He meant masters were to show the same unselfish, submissive, caring concern for their slaves that their slaves were to show to them. Just as slaves benefited themselves when they worked diligently for their masters, masters benefited themselves when they treated their slaves with kindness and consideration. They were his livelihood, and therefore he could not prosper unless they were healthy, strong, contented, and hard working. As he cared for their needs, they had the strength and desire to contribute to his success.

Paul gave masters two guidelines to follow in submitting themselves to the responsibility of providing for their slaves' welfare. The first guideline was to reject threatening. Force, fear, punishment, and pain do not produce good workmen. Threatening builds resentment and resistance. When a master hurts his slaves, he damages his slaves' ability and willingness to work. His slaves become less productive, and he hurts himself as much as he hurts his slaves. Paul instructed masters just not to do it.

The second guideline Paul gave to masters went far beyond their own self-interest. He reminded them they had a Master in heaven, and his slaves had the same Master he did. Since both of them were servants of the same Lord, they both

should be thoughtful and helpful to each other. Masters were to care for their slaves because Jesus died for everyone, slaves as well as free men. He gives both equal access to His blessings, and He loves both with an equal love. He directs and guides slaves and masters alike. Therefore, masters were obligated to show their slaves the same caring concern that they showed to every other Christian brother.

Paul added that their heavenly Master showed no favoritism, and neither should they. The word translated “favoritism” is literally “face-respect.” “Face-respect” is respect that is given because of the person’s outward appearance or because of who the person is. God does not deal with people according to the appearance of their faces or according to their positions in society. Earthly station in life does not change a person’s relationship to God. God deals with each person according to the condition of his soul, and so should His children. Therefore, Paul reminded masters that had the same Master in heaven that their slaves had, and they should treat their slaves accordingly. Masters wanted their Master in heaven to be kind and generous to them, so they should be equally kind

and generous to slaves under their care, who had the same Master in heaven that they did.

The same principles should be applied to employers’ relationships with their employees today. A Christian employer should recognize that he is responsible to provide for his employees in kindness and love, just as his employees are responsible to be faithful to their work for him in the same spirit. An employer should be fair in his assignments to his employees, should pay them adequate salaries, and should be concerned for their welfare, because he is God’s servant just as much as his employees are. He and his employees may have different responsibilities on the job, but before God they are equal brothers. Employers help themselves and their businesses when they are generous to their employees, and they also receive an even greater reward from God.

Mutual submission is as meaningful in the workplace as it is at church, in the home, and in society.

**Conclusion.** In his instruction to believers to walk not as unwise people but as wise people, Paul did not depart from the theme of his letter, which was “Harmony in Christ.” Perhaps he was more on target with his theme in this section of his letter than in any of the other practical instructions he discussed. Virtually every word in this section described a way of contributing to togetherness, comradeship, and mutual benefit.

Wisdom means knowing and doing God’s will. God’s will means serving and benefiting others. The harmony that results makes daily life pleasant. It also is a prophetic example of a much greater harmony Jesus will give to the whole cosmos at the End.