

20th Sunday after Pentecost
October 6, 2024
Lincoln Heights Lutheran Church
Ephesians 5:21-6:4 (EHV)

and by submitting to one another in reverence for Christ.

²²Wives, submit to your own husbands as to the Lord. ²³For the husband is the head of the wife, just as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he himself is the Savior. ²⁴Moreover, as the church submits to Christ, so also wives are to submit to their husbands in everything.

²⁵Husbands, love your wives, in the same way as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her ²⁶to make her holy, by cleansing her with the washing of water in connection with the Word. ²⁷He did this so that he could present her to himself as a glorious church, having no stain or wrinkle or any such thing, but so that she would be holy and blameless. ²⁸In the same way, husbands have an obligation to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. ²⁹To be sure, no one has ever hated his own body, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, ³⁰because we are members of his body, of his flesh and of his bones. ³¹“For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two will be one flesh.” ³²This is a great mystery, but I am talking about Christ and the church. ³³In any case, each one of you also is to love his wife as himself, and each wife is to respect her husband.

⁶Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. ²“Honor your father and mother;” which is the first commandment with a promise: ³“that it may go well with you and that you may live a long life on the earth.” ⁴Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.

Dear Friends in Christ,

Almost everyone loves their family. Christians love their families. Muslims love their families. Hindus love their families. Atheists love their families. In general, parents love their children and husbands and wives love each other. So, what makes the love of a Christian family different? Followers of Christ know how to love our families because Christ loved us and made us part of his family, the church.

In Ephesians 5 & 6 before us this morning, Paul gives us God’s plan for Christian families. He centers everything around Christ and the church, that is, Christ and all believers. In the earlier chapters of his letter to the believers in Ephesus, Paul proclaimed how God brought us into the family through Christ. “He chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world” (1:4). “We have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins” (1:7). “It is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this is not from yourselves, it is a gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast” (2:8-9). In the latter chapters, Paul encourages the blood bought followers of Christ to imitate Christ in our way of living. Today’s verses focus on husbands, wives, and children. He extends it to slaves and masters, to bosses and employees in the verses following our text. All the principles for living in our Christian vocations center on Christ.

The first verse today gives us a word we need to understand in order to follow Christ in our family lives.

Submitting to one another in reverence for Christ.

Submission means to be under the authority of another. This verse does not mean that everyone is to submit to everyone else. Instead, it means that we are to submit to those who are in authority and almost everyone submits to someone. The private in the military submits to the sergeant who submits to the lieutenant who submits to the captain who submits to the major and on it goes up to the five-star general who submits to the commander in chief. One command in

chief, President Harry Truman often had a sign on his desk that read “The buck stops here.” He said in his farewell speech in 1953, “The President--whoever he is--has to decide. He can't pass the buck to anybody. No one else can do the deciding for him. That's his job.”¹ Someone has to have the authority to make decisions in order for the military to function.

The same is true of businesses. The fry cook and the CEO have the same value in God's eyes but one has authority to make all kinds of decisions for the fast-food business and the other submits to his authority. To submit to someone does not tell us anything about the value, the ability, the strength, or the intelligence of either of the people. It is a way for many relationships in society to function. We all submit to someone in Christian love. Paul applies this idea of submission to the order of a Christian family.

²²Wives, submit to your own husbands as to the Lord. ²³For the husband is the head of the wife, just as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he himself is the Savior. ²⁴Moreover, as the church submits to Christ, so also wives are to submit to their husbands in everything.

All believers submit to Christ. Jesus is our Savior. He rescued us all from sin, death and the devil. He truly loves us with an everlasting love. Being the body with Christ as our head is a wonderful honor and joy. However, ladies, your husband or future husband is not going to always be like Jesus. Besides our sinful nature's aversion to submitting to anyone else, the imperfection of husbands can be an excuse to pass over these verses as though they only apply to wives with perfect husbands. If you have sinned by despising God's order in marriage, turn to the Savior who cleansed you by his holy, precious blood and as you submit to your Savior, so also to your husband.

Now for the boys and men who are or will be husbands. That last section was not for you. If you focus only on God's instructions for Christian wives, you will be misled by the devil into the lies that you are the boss, that everything you say goes and worst of all that because God instructs your wife to submit to you that means she is to be your servant. Those lies will lead a husband to demand submission from his wife which is absolutely the wrong thing to do. The Christian life turns such ideas upside down. The Christian man who is the head of his wife, who has authority, is not to use that authority for himself. Just two weeks ago we listened to Jesus teach us to be “the last of all and the servant of all” (Mark 9:35). The one given authority is to use that authority to serve all who willingly place themselves under his authority. Yes, husbands are the head of the family. That means husbands are being called to serve their wife and their children.

And this is not just the being nice and considerate type of service, although that is good too.

²⁵Husbands, love your wives, in the same way as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her ²⁶to make her holy, by cleansing her with the washing of water in connection with the Word. ²⁷He did this so that he could present her to himself as a glorious church, having no stain or wrinkle or any such thing, but so that she would be holy and blameless. ²⁸In the same way, husbands have an obligation to love their own wives as their own bodies.

Too often, we men act like selfish little boys. We like being the head. We like the idea of authority, but we want to use it to get what we want instead of doing what is best for our wife and family. We are more than willing to die for our wife but not as ready to live and serve our wife every day. You see, sacrificing our life for our wife is a one-time event that will likely never happen. It's relatively easy to promise to protect my wife with my own life. But living for her, serving her every day is not something selfish little boys want to do. We want to play video games instead of help with the dishes. We want to finish watching the game instead of listening to our wife discuss something that is on her mind. We want our family to serve us instead of looking for all the ways we can serve them. Men, we have plenty to repent of. Turn to the Lord when the selfish little boy shows up and look at what Jesus, the true definition of manhood, did

¹ <https://www.trumanlibrary.gov/education/trivia/buck-stops-here-sign>

for you. The One with all authority in heaven and on earth was born for you, lived for you, died for you, and still serves you with forgiveness day by day. Filled with the love of Christ, go and love your wife every day as Christ loved the church.

Next, Paul gives us God's instructions for parents and children.

Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. ²“Honor your father and mother,” which is the first commandment with a promise: ³“that it may go well with you and that you may live a long life on the earth.”

I'm going to do something I don't normally do during a sermon and give you permission to talk. Children, tell your parents the number of the commandment I just read. Parents, help your children if they don't get it right away.

The Fourth Commandment requires children to obey their parents. But notice that Paul adds “in the Lord” just as he added “as to the Lord” for wives' submission and “as Christ loved the church” to husbands' loving service. This is a Christian family, and baptized children of God's family will gladly obey the parents God gave them. But the sinful nature still clings to baptized children until heaven. So, the two-year-old boldly says, “no!” to a direct command of his parents. The 12-year-old rolls her eyes as her parent's rules. And the 16-year old's sarcasm too often crosses the line from fun to vicious. For all who are children now, there are times you need to repent for disrespecting the parents the Lord gave you, just as all of us who were once children did.

Who is going to teach children about true, Christian repentance? Parents have this responsibility and again Paul focuses on the men.

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

Paul must have been hearing about fathers who provoked their children to anger and therefore given this warning to all Christian fathers. It goes back to that sinful nature that loves the idea of authority, being the head of the family and therefore demanding submission from our wife and obedience from our children. That is leaving Christ out completely. The two-year-old can be given the reason “because I said so” when he questions his father or mother. But the 12- and 16-year-old might deserve a little more explanation. If a child obeys his or her father only out of fear, this can provoke children to anger and resentment. If the parent is unfair or inconsistent in the rules, this can also lead to an exasperated child.

Christian fathers, your most important job is to bring your children up in the training and instruction of the Lord. It is vital that your children not only know the facts about Jesus and his Word but also that your children know by experience what true repentance and forgiveness in Christ is. So, fathers, repent and make sure your children know you need Christ's forgiveness. You don't have to list your sins but humility before God is important to show. Fathers, have as the goal of your training and instruction that your children have complete confidence that their Father in heaven forgives them and so do you. A father who knows and shows Christ's forgiveness is a great gift to any child.

The Lord has called us into our various roles in life and he has not given us an easy way to live in these vocations. Even if you are not currently a husband, wife, father, mother, or child, you are likely in some role in which you are called upon to submit, serve, and/or obey. Try reading the verses from Ephesians 5 & 6 today without any phrases that mention Christ. We will quickly conclude that we can do nothing we are called upon to do as Christians in families and societies without Christ. He is our Savior. He is our head. He gave himself for us and cleanses us from all sin. Therefore, we submit as to Christ, love as Christ loved the church, and obey in the Lord.

Amen.