

EPHESIANS 5:15-6:9

The Gospel Changes Everything

Memory Verse

"Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil."

Ephesians 5:15-16

Real-life Problems

Ever since our relationship with God was broken by the fall in the garden, our relationships with others have also suffered as a result of that brokenness. Even in your closest and best relationships with friends or family, you can likely still find moments of hurt, pain, or sadness. Yet, in every relationship, we are called to live as imitators of God. We are to love as Christ loved us, which was a perfect love. But none of us is perfect, nor will we ever be. When God gave us the command to be imitators of His love, He knew we would not be able to do it on our own. Yet, He also knew that through His Spirit in us, we could.

The Good News

God has called us to live a life worthy of the gospel, but in our own strength, we cannot do it. However, because Jesus did what we could not do—living the perfect life—He has become not only our salvation, but our strength. By His Spirit in us, we can now live as the people of God in every part of our life.

I. Introduction

OPENING QUESTIONS

Idea #1: If you knew you were going to be stuck on a desert island for a year, what three items would you have to bring with you?

Idea #2: If you could only watch one movie for the rest of your life, which one would you choose? Why?

PRAY

Open your time together in prayer.

REHEARSING THE GOSPEL

What does gospel mean?

Good news

What's the good news?

Jesus died for my sins

Why did He die for your sins?

So that I can have abundant life in relationship with Him now and forever

What is grace?

God's love for undeserving sinners

REVIEW

1) What were the two reasons Paul wrote this letter?

1) To remind the church of the power of the gospel 2) To encourage believers to live in light of their new identity as the church

2) Who was the original audience of this letter?

The church, or followers of Jesus Christ, in Ephesus

3) Where was Paul when he wrote this letter?

Paul was in prison for his work in spreading the gospel.

What's going on?

REMIND

As beloved children of God, we are called to imitate Him as we walk in love and light and expose the darkness.

TODAY WE'LL LEARN

- 1) Because of the gospel, we now walk in wisdom as we are filled with the Spirit
- 2) Because of the gospel, we now are partakers in Spirit-filled fellowship.
- 3) Because of the gospel, we are called to Spirit-filled relationships.

Read

Read **Ephesians 5:15-6:9** aloud in your group.

Tough topic

Household Rules

This passage is what many refer to as the "household rules." These are the instructions Paul gives in regards to living in different relationships. One of the main concerns that can arise from this passage is Paul's treatment of people who have traditionally been subject to oppression in relationships—wives, children and slaves. This passage is an opportunity for you to first acknowledge that people have used the Bible to justify great horrors, and we need to repent of that and make space for those who have been wounded by it. Second, it is an opportunity to help your students see the importance of contextual reading of Scripture.

The idea of wives submitting to husbands can feel antiquated, even threatening. What is important is to help your students change the definition of submission from a cultural one to a biblical one. The premise of our submission, according to Paul, is not weakness, but reflection. Submission is not a framework for strength over weakness but, instead, a framework for the beautiful display of the gospel. Further, the fact that Paul called husbands to self-sacrificing love would have been quite counter-cultural. It would have indirectly acknowledged and lifted up the dignity of women in a way that is hard for us to see from our vantage point today.

It can also be hard to understand why Paul would address slaves instead of condemning slavery. It can almost seem as if this is Paul condoning slavery, and the fact is that many American slaveholders used this passage as a biblical justification for their oppression. When you look at the entirety of Paul's letters and the storyline of Scripture, it is clear that the worth and dignity of every human life is lifted up in a way that makes slavery impossible to maintain. Instead, Paul is, in fact, making a counter-cultural move when he directly addresses slaves, especially before their master. He dignifies the slave in a way that would have sent shock waves through the Roman world. He is recognizing their value in the kingdom of God and showing how, even in the place they are, God is concerned for their good. Some might argue that—whether he says it out right or not—if you really obeyed Paul's command to masters, slavery would become impossible.

II. Questions for Discussion

A. WHAT?

1) In 5:17-18, what contrasts do you see Paul making?

He contrasts being foolish with understanding the will of the Lord in 5:17. Also, he contrasts being drunk with wine with being filled with the Spirit in 5:18.

2) What are the three actions of the Spirit-filled person that Paul lists in 5:19-22, and what does he say is the motivation for each action?

1) Addressing one another with psalms, hymns and songs in order to sing and make melody to the Lord with your heart 2) Giving thanks always and for everything to God in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. 3) Submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.

3) Who does Paul address first when talking about marriage?

Wives

4) In 5:22-24, what does Paul tell wives to do and what illustration/motivation does he give them?

Wives should submit to their husbands. He uses the example of Christ and the church.

5) In 5:25-30, what does Paul tell husbands to do and what illustration/motivation does he give them?

Husbands should love their wives. He uses again Christ and the church. They are to love their wives as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her. Husbands should love their wives as their own bodies, just as Christ loves the church, which is his body.

6) According to 6:2-3, what makes the command "honor your father and mother" unique?

It was the first command with a promise.

7) In 6:5-8, Paul instructs obedience to earthly masters. What is the motivation he gives for that obedience?

The motivation of obedience to earthly masters is our obedience to Christ. We are to serve as unto the Lord, and not man, because whatever good we do, we will receive back from the Lord.

B. SO WHAT?

1) Why do you think Paul would emphasize the need to be filled with the Spirit before addressing the roles in Christian relationships?

In this passage, Paul could have chosen to only address how believers are to act or rules they should follow. But Paul was not simply giving the Ephesian believers a new set of rules to follow. Instead, he wanted them to understand the impact the gospel has on all of their lives—not only their relationship to him, but to others. But what he is making clear is that we cannot follow these rules on our own. We need the power of the Spirit in us. It is because we are Spirit-filled people that our relationships can now look different than the world.

2) What do you think Paul means when he says to "submit to one another" (5:21)?

Paul is wanting us to see that all submission, whether to family, authority, etc, is to be done out of reverence for Christ. If the gospel is true, then knowing that Christ humbled Himself by being made like a servant should cause us to humble ourselves to other another. Christ's example of love was to wash the feet of His disciple, a position of low humility. So submitting to one another is simply placing ourselves always in a place of humility toward our bothers and sisters.

3) Why do you think Paul would address wives before he addresses husbands? Or servants before masters?

The significance of Paul's order in addressing these relationships can easily be overlooked. Yet, in the time of Paul's writing and in the Ephesian culture, it would have been incredibly significant for someone to address the wife before the husband, a child before a parent, or a slave before a master because these were seen as the people holding lesser roles in society. To address them first elevates them to a status that the culture did not. Paul is actually pushing against culture, flipping the script of what is expected, and showing great respect for

what would have been considered the weaker roles. Paul is really emphasizing here just how much the gospel changes everything and looks different than the world.

4) In what way does understanding marriage as a picture of Christ and the church give significance and hope to marriage?

It places a huge value on marriage. It reminds us that marriage is ultimately not about us and our happiness, but about being a image and representation of Christ and His bride. We should care deeply about the institution of marriage as it is a visual proclamation of the gospel to the world. But it also gives us hope in marriage to know that marriage is not our ultimate hope, Christ is. Marriage on this earth will not meet our every need and will disappoint us at times. However, when Christ comes to take us as His bride, in that marriage will find true fulfillment and perfect peace.

Also, it is important to remember that some of us may not experience marriage in this life. When we keep marriage in the right perspective, we know that even if we never marry in this world, we are not missing out. All of us who are in Christ will one day experience the marriage of the Lamb—whether married in this world or not. In the same way marriage is given to us as a reminder of our coming hope in the gospel, faithful singleness is also given as a gift to draw our hearts to long for our coming hope.

The Photograph

Back during World World II, as soldiers went to war they would often bring a picture of their loved one with them. They would carry the photograph in their bag and keep it by their bunks as a way of remembering their hope, and to show others the one they loved.

However, when the soldiers would return home, they did not continue to stare at the picture of their loved one. Instead, they embraced and held the one they loved who was now in the flesh. They could put away the picture because they had the real thing.

The same is true for marriage. While we are on earth, marriage is a beautiful and treasured picture. It is a picture of what our hope is in and where our true love lies. However, it is just that, a picture. One day we will no longer need the picture as we stand before our true husband in the real wedding feast.

This is why marriage is to be valued on earth, because it is our reminder of where our hope lies—not in earthly relationships, but when we will finally be reunited with our real and ultimate love.

5) Why would Paul address our relationship with others when talking about the gospel's impact on our lives?

The gospel changes everything; it changes our very identity. The gospel not only offers us salvation from our sin, but it offers us strength to live as we were created. Our identity as the children of God not only changes our relationship with God, but it changes our relationship with others. Because of Christ, in all we do—in marriage, friendship, work, etc.—we live as a redeemed people whose lives display the love of God.

C. NOW WHAT?

1) How does understanding the Spirit's role in the Christian's life help encourage you as you read the commands in this passage?

Answers will vary. However, it is important here to help your students to see that God is not just giving us a set of rules to follow in these commands, but, instead, showing us what it means to live a Spirit-filled life. It is not in our own strength that we obey the commands of God, but through the Spirit's strength in us. God has not just told us the way we should live, but He has made the way for us to live through Christ.

2) How has your relationship with Christ changed your relationship with others?

3) How does seeing Jesus as the perfect husband, father and master change the way you view the way you view earthly marriages, earthly parents, and earthly authorities?

Knowing that our ultimate love, care and leadership can only be found in Jesus—and that all these things are meant to be reflections of the gospel to the world—should help us to both care more deeply for those relationships, while also having more grace when they fail us.

4) What would it look like for you to put Christ at the center of all your relationships—friends, dating, parents, teachers, etc?

Answers will vary, but help your students think more practically here. Help them get into the weeds of applying what they have learned to their own relationships.

Main takeaway

The gospel changes everything about the life of the believer. No longer do we walk as unwise, but through being filled with the Spirit, we have new fellowship and transformed relationships.

III. Closing

REMEMBERING THE GOOD NEWS

God has called us to live a life worthy of the gospel, but in our own strength, we cannot do it. However, because Jesus did what we could not do—living the perfect life—He has become not only our salvation, but our strength. By His Spirit in us we can now live as the people of God in every part of our life.

CLOSE IN PRAYER

Father, help us to walk in wisdom as we seek Your will in our lives. Fill us with Your Spirit that we may find the power we need to live as transformed disciples. We confess that we do not always live as if Your Word is enough. Lord, may Christ be our center and may Your gospel be our hope. Amen.

Supporting resources

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- 1) Are there any relationships in your life that are not informed by your relationship with Christ? What do you need to do to transform those relationships to keep Christ at the center? Who is someone you can invite to support and encourage you as you do this?
- 2) Knowing the high purpose God has placed on marriage, how does this change the way you pray for married couples or how you view your own future marriage?
- 3) Were any commands listed in this passage hard or challenging for you? Why do you think that is? Talk to Jesus about why they were hard and listen for what He has to say to you.

QUESTIONS FOR PARENTS

- 1) How did understanding the Spirit's role in empowering believers to live transformed lives/relationships help to encourage you as you read all the commands in this passage?
- 2) How does the gospel change the way we live in relationship with others?
- 3) How does seeing Jesus as our true husband, father and master change the way we view our earthly husbands, fathers and leaders?