

Book of Ephesians Bible Study Lesson 22

Ephesians 6:5-9 Notes

The Spirit Filled Life Everyday

Introduction

(Piper) Jesus is precious because He removes our guilt. He is precious because He gives us eternal life. And He is precious because through Him we become authentic. Jesus Christ is the most important man that ever lived. To know Him is more valuable than knowing all the most famous and powerful people of history. To be known and loved by Him is greater honor than if all the heads of state were to bow in your presence. When this world is over and we all stand before the judgment seat of God, many of us will look back with shame and dismay at how small was the place granted to the Son of God in our daily lives: how seldom we spoke to Him, how little of His Word we learned, how half-hearted our resolve to obey, how narrow the sphere of life in which we eagerly sought His lordship. And on that day we will wonder no more why we were so unhappy in this life: unhappy at work, unhappy in school, unhappy at church, unhappy at home. It will all come clear: half-hearted allegiance to the lordship of Christ in the practical affairs of everyday life not only robs Jesus of the honor we owe Him, but also robs us of joy and purpose.

Jesus desires so much to be Lord in our lives that He died for that purpose, then is it not plain that in every part of our lives Jesus wants to be Lord? There is no time or place or activity in our daily routine where Jesus does not want to be our owner, our provider, and our commander. And we will never know joy and authenticity in the minute by minute doing of our daily duties until we are wholly surrendered to Him. That is, until we say, "Anything You say, Jesus, at work, at school, at church. Jesus, I will do anything, anything You say at home."

The main point of Ephesians 5:21-6:9 is this: Christian family life is a work of God's Spirit in the lives of those who do everything for Christ's sake. It deals with wives and husbands, children and parents, slaves and masters. Paul was answering the questions: what difference does it make in a family when its members become Christians? The very existence of such a text in the New Testament shows that God is not indifferent about the ordinary give and take of home and work life. If Christ is our Lord, He is Lord of all our daily life (Col. 3:18-4:1; 1 Pet. 2:18-3:7; Titus 2:4-10).

But what is not as familiar about this text is the context in which Paul puts it. Looking back to Ephesians 5:15: "Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise, making the most of the time because the days are evil. Therefore, do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debaucher, but be filled with the Spirit." And

then comes a series of phrases which tell us the effect of being filled with the Spirit of God: “addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with all your heart, always and for everything giving thanks in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God the Father.” And then most of the English versions do something that makes it very hard to see Paul’s intention. They put a period or semicolon at the end of verse 20 and translate verse 21, “Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ.” But in the original, “Be subject” is not a new sentence or a main verb. It is another participle like “addressing”, “singing”, “making melody”, and “giving thanks”.

The purpose of Ephesians 5:19-21 is to spell out what happens when we are filled with the Holy Spirit. In verse 19 our hearts overflow in song to each other and to the Lord. Verse 20 says that thankfulness is at the center of those heart songs. And verse 21 says that when we are filled with the Spirit, we will submit to one another.

When the Holy Spirit is holding full sway in our lives, then our heart brims with a song of gratitude and our hearts humbly submit to serve those around us. It’s what Paul means when he says in Ephesians 4:1-2, “Lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called in all lowliness and meekness, with patience, forbearing one another in love.” And in Philippians 2:3, “Do nothing from selfishness or conceit, but in lowliness count each other better than yourselves.” That kind of humility and readiness to serve rather than be served, to honor rather than be honored, is a fruit of the Spirit. And when we are filled with the Spirit, we will be submissive to each other in this way.

Christian family life is a work of God’s Spirit. The submission of a wife to her husband and a husband’s love to his wife (vs. 22-33), the obedience of children and nurturing by their loving parents (6:1-4), the obedience of servants and the patience of masters (6:5-9) all are expansions of the principle in Ephesians 5:21: “submitting to each other in reverence to Christ.” And this submission in verse 21 is a description of how people act when they are filled with the Holy Spirit.

Christian family life is a work of God’s Spirit in the lives of those who do everything for Christ’s sake. Even though the Spirit of God is free to blow where He wills, there is a God-ordained correlation between submission to Jesus as Lord and the work of the Spirit. Wherever a person bows in humility under the lordship of Christ, there the Spirit of God is at work. It is the mission of the Spirit to exalt Jesus Christ. Jesus said in John 16:14, “when the Spirit comes, He will glorify me.” Therefore, when we are filled with the Spirit, we are in love with the glory of Christ and we delight to bow to Him as Lord. Or to put it the other way around, if we desire to see the Spirit of God transform our daily lives, we must surrender totally to Jesus as Lord and turn all our daily doings in to an offering of

worship to Him. When the Spirit reigns in our life, we do everything with a view to honoring Jesus. And in that way Jesus becomes the foundation and focus and goal of the family, work, and life at home is transformed.

Evidence of the Holy Spirit in Action:

After commanding us to be filled with the Spirit in verse 18, almost every verse that follows all the way to 6:9 shows that the Spirit's work is to exalt Christ and place all of life on Him. Let's follow his thought. First, in verse 19 the Spirit produces songs to the Lord Jesus. In verse 20 He produces gratitude to God in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then, in verse 21 He produces submission in reverence for Christ. In verse 22 wives submit themselves to their husbands as to the Lord. In verse 25 husbands love their wives as Christ loved the church. In 6:1 children obey their parents in the Lord. In verse 4 fathers bring up their children in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. In verse 5 slaves obey their earthly masters in singleness of heart as to Christ. And in verse 9 masters leave off threatening because they too have a Master in heaven. When a family is filled with the Spirit, everything is placed on Christ. Christian family life is a work of God's Spirit in the lives of those who do everything for Christ's sake.

Submission and Authority in the Workplace

(MacArthur) In Ephesians 6:5-9 Paul gives his final illustration of the principle of Spirit-produced mutual submission, applying it to relations between slaves and masters---and, by extension, to all employer-employee relationships.

In our day the struggle between employers and employees has reached monumental levels. Conflicts rage constantly between workers and management, with each side accusing the other of selfishness and unreasonableness. It is not hard to see that the heart of the problem on both sides is greed, the primary fuel that feeds the inflationary spiral that has become a common part of modern life in most parts of the world.

God did not design man's freedom to work against man. He designed it to allow us to earn a living, provide for our families, and be a service to others. Yet, as in every other area of life, man's depraved nature turns God's provisions to selfish ends. As with problems in relations between husbands and wives and parents and children, the solution to labor relations problems must begin with God's solution---salvation through Jesus Christ and the empowerment of His Holy Spirit. In every aspect of human life God's plan is one of authority and submission, and those two pillars are the bedrock of biblical labor relations. To avoid chaos and anarchy, someone must lead, and others must follow.

Submission of Employees:

Slaves (douloi) translated in the Greek indicates subjection and usually bondage. In biblical times slavery was common and much abused. In both Greek

and Roman cultures, most slaves had no legal rights and were treated as commercial commodities. Roman citizens came to look on work as beneath their dignity, and the entire empire gradually came to function largely by slave power. Slaves were bought, sold, traded, used, and discarded as heartlessly as if they were animals or tools. Considerate masters such as Pliny the Elder, who was deeply grieved over the death of some of his slaves, were an exception.

Although Scripture does not speak against slavery as such, it clearly speaks against the kidnapping of anyone for the purpose of making him or her a slave (Ex. 21:16). The European and American slave trade that lasted past the middle of the nineteenth century was therefore in clear violation of Scripture, despite the rationalizations of many Christians who were involved in it. Certain types non-abusive and beneficial slavery were permitted, or even advocated in the Old Testament. For example, a thief who could not make restitution could be indentured until repayment was worked out---a plan far superior to the modern prison sentence which provides for no restitution of property or money to the victim or restoration of dignity for the thief. The kind of slavery controlled by scriptural teaching was a blessing to both employer and employee and was a rewarding and fulfilling relation between them (Ex. 21:2 5-6, 26-27; Lev.25:10, 39-46; Deut. 15:13-14; 23:15-16).

Although slavery is not uniformly condemned in either the Old and New Testaments, the sincere application of New Testament truths has repeatedly led to the elimination of its abusive tendencies. Where Christ's love is lived in the power of His Spirit, unjust barriers and relationships are inevitably broken down. As the Roman empire disintegrated and eventually collapsed, the brutal, abused system of slavery collapsed with it---due in great measure to the influence of Christianity. In more recent times the back of the black slave trade was broken in Europe and America due largely to the powerful, Spirit-led preaching of such men as John Wesley and George Whitefield and the godly statesmanship of such men as William Wilberforce and William Pitt.

New Testament teaching does not focus on reforming and restructuring human systems, which are never the root cause of human problems. The issue is always the heart of man---which when wicked will corrupt the best of systems and when righteous will improve the worst. If men's sinful hearts are not changed, they will find ways to oppress others regardless of whether or not there is actual slavery. On the other hand, Spirit-filled believers will have just and harmonious relationships with each other, no matter what system they live under. Man's basic problems and needs are not political, social, or economic but spiritual, and that is the area on which Paul here concentrates.

Christian slaves are commanded to be obedient to those who are their masters. 'Be obedient' is in the present tense in the Greek, indicating

uninterrupted obedience. Believers are not to obey simply when they desire to or when their employers are fair and reasonable. They are to obey in everything and at all times, the only exception being when they are instructed to do something immoral, idolatrous, blasphemous, or the like (1 Pet. 2:18-20).

In the New Testament times many slaves became Christians and thereby became children of God and joint heirs with Jesus Christ, as Paul has already reminded his readers (Eph. 1:5-14). Therefore, the natural response of many Christian slaves was to look upon their bondage as completely incompatible with their new standing before God. They reasoned that God's own children, who will reign with Him forever, should not be subservient to any human being, certainly not to a ruthless pagan. As spiritual nobility, they deserved more than common slavery. Yet Paul tells them plainly and simply to 'be obedient'. The first obligation of a Christian is to please his Lord and to be a faithful testimony to Him. When a believer sits beside his boss in a worship service or works beside him in Christian service, he does so as a completely equal brother in Christ. But on the job he is to submit to the authority of his boss, because that witnesses his submission to the higher authority of God's Word.

So whether his boss is kind or cruel, believing or pagan, a Christian is obedient to him because that is God's will (Tit. 2:9-10). 'According to the flesh' means while the authority-submission relationship is important and is to be respected, it is only temporal. It lasts only in this life and does not apply to moral and spiritual concerns at any time or under any circumstances.

Although men terribly abuse it, the principle of authority and submission is God-given and is always to be honored. God has allowed bosses to be where they are and subordinates to be where they are, and the faithful believer willingly and graciously submits to those under whose authority God has placed him.

The place where a believer works is part of his field of service for the Lord, and it is often a mission field. When he does his work carefully and respectfully, it is a testimony to unbelievers, an encouragement to believers, and an act of service to God. The idea is to do well the work we are assigned to do, without complaining, bragging, criticizing the work of others, or in any other way being disruptive (1 Thess. 4:10-12).

Being filled with the Spirit brings practical results, including those of being a reliable, productive, and cooperative worker. And whenever a Christian is submissive to the Holy Spirit his accomplishments are as to Christ, because Christ is both the origin and the goal of his obedience. He does everything out of love for Christ, by the power of Christ, and to the glory of Christ (1 Co. 10:31).

God's credits and rewards are always dependable and always appropriate. An employer may not appreciate or even be aware of the good work done, but

God knows and God rewards. No good thing done in His name and for His glory can pass His notice or fail to receive His blessing.

The Submission of Employers:

A Christian employer's relationship to his employees should have the same motivation and goal as a Christian worker's relationship to his employer; the desire to obey and please the Lord. An employer is to use his authority as to the Lord, just as workers are to submit to authority as to the Lord. That is an expression of their mutual submission in being subject to one another in the fear of Christ (Eph. 5:21).

A Christian employer's first work is to do God's will and to manifest Christlikeness in all that he does. He makes business decisions first of all on the basis of God's standards of righteousness, truth, and honesty---seeking to manifest the nature and will of his heavenly Father in everything he does. He deals with his employees on the basis of their own welfare and best interests as well as of those of business. He deals with them fairly because that is his Lords' will. He treats them with respect because to do so is to respect and honor the Lord. The faithful Christian employer knows that he is a fellow servant of Jesus Christ with his employees, and is accountable to the same Master.

The Christian employer also knows that before God he is no more important or worthy in himself than the least of his employees, he plays no favorites because God plays no favorites. God's impartiality is the closing truth in Paul's discourse on being "subject to one another in the fear of Christ" (Eph. 5:21). Spirit-filled believers---whether husbands or wives, parents or children, employers or employees---are to be mutually submissive because they are equally loved, equally cared for, and equally subservient to a common Master, their Savior and Lord, Jesus Christ.

References:

Sermon by John Piper "Jesus Is Precious as the Foundation of the Family"
MacArthur New Testament Commentary Ephesians, pg. 321-329