Mature Christians at Home and at Workplace

Ephesians 5:21-6:9

Key Verse: 5:21 “Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.”

Human beings are social animals. As one Greek philosopher said, we live on this earth with many relationships with others at home, at workplace, at school, at church, in our community, and so on. We probably spend more than 90% of our daily life at home and at our workplace or school. Good and right relationships with others at home and at workplace determine the happiness and quality of our life. In today’s passage, the Apostle Paul gives instructions to the saints in the church how to live as mature and influential Christians at home and at our workplace. May God give us deep understanding and obedience to his word. Amen.

First, instruction to wives. (21-24) Before he gave instructions to wives, Paul gave us the most important principle for having good and right relationships at home and at our workplace. Let us read verse 21. “***Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ***.” According to the New Life Version, the word ‘submit’ does not mean ‘be enslaved to’, but ‘be willing to help and care’. In our relationships at home and at our workplace we must be willing to help and care for each other because of Jesus Christ. When we do so, we honor Jesus and glorify his name. There is no superiority among husband and wife when they submit to each other for the sake of Jesus. They are equal in rights, role, and responsibilities to serve the Lord, who is the head of their family, and they establish a godly family in the Lord. As long as husband and wife acknowledge that Christ is the Lord and the head of their family, they can submit to each other for Jesus’ name sake. It is not a big deal for them to consider others better than themselves for the sake of Jesus and for the sake of family order and peace.

Now what is Paul’s instruction for wives? Look at verses 22-24. “***Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything***.” Here Paul compares the relationship of husband and wife to the relationship of Christ and the church. He urges wives to submit to their own husbands as they submit themselves to the Lord. This is because as the Lord is the head of the church, so the husband is the head of the wife. As head and body cannot be separated, a husband and his wife cannot be separated. They must submit to each other as parts of one body.

These days, women’s rights are a big issue in politics, religion, education, human resources, health care, and every aspect of our lives. In fact, women’s rights have been an issue since human history started. In ancient Egypt and Greece, women shared equal rights with men in many ways. But in ancient China, under the Confucian law, women’s rights were largely restricted. When I was young, some Chinese women lived next door. I was surprised to see all of them walking strangely, as if they were limping. This was because their feet were bound by their husbands, the so called ‘foot-binding.’ I heard that their feet were bound so that they could not run away from their husbands. Chinese wives could not run away from their violent, abusive, and irresponsible husbands. I have grown up under the Confucian law in Korea. I saw my mother always cooking, cleaning, washing in the kitchen, while my father was working outside. My father was mindful of my sick mother, and when my mother was sick, he often cooked for us with special recipes. I couldn’t wait for his special meals. But there were many irresponsible, immoral, lazy, and abusive husbands and fathers at that time in Korea.

When I came to Chicago UBF in 1994, Dr. Samuel Lee often told us, “In America husbands and wives must wash dishes 50 % and 50%.” He meant not only that wives have equal rights with their husbands in America, but also that husbands must be mindful and considerate of their weak wives by helping them even with housework, such as cooking, washing dishes, laundering, picking up and driving children, and so on. There is no better law between husband and wife than ‘compassion.’ When husbands see their wives with the eyes of compassion, they can do all things. When wives see their husbands with the eyes of compassion, they can do all things. Usually wives work at home while their husbands work outside. Wives cook and wait for their husbands. When their husbands come home from work, they eat delicious meals which were provided by their wives. The joy of wives is to see their husbands eating delicious food which they cooked. This might be reversed in America. While wives work outside, husbands may cook, babysit, and do house work. The joy of husband is seeing his wife eating the delicious food which he cooked. My point is that husbands and wives must submit to each other out of reverence for Christ. They must be considerate, compassionate, and subordinate to each other in Christ.

In America even 100 years ago, women were not allowed to vote. In 1920 women had the right to vote in America. Since then, women’s rights have been developed and expanded in many aspects of social life. Claiming women’s rights is important and necessary. However, obeying God’s law out of reverence for Christ Jesus is a more urgent task to be required.

Second, instruction to husbands (25-33) Now Paul turned to husbands. Look at verses 25-30. “***Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish but holy and blameless. In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. After all, no one ever hated their own body, but they feed and care for their body, just as Christ does the church- for we are members of his body.”*** Paul urged husbands to love their wives as Christ loved the church and as they loved their own bodies. How did Christ love the church? Christ gave his life for the church to make her holy, cleansing her by washing with water through the word. Here, washing with water and cleansing indicates ‘baptism.’ Christ Jesus died on the cross for our sins. Those who belong to Christ are baptized with Christ in his death and are raised to be new creations in his resurrection. (Ro 6:1-7) We are justified through faith in the blood of Jesus and are sanctified with his words. We commit ourselves to Christ, as a virgin bride commits to her bridegroom. In the ancient Jewish wedding custom, when a wedding ring was given, a bridegroom said to his bride, “Behold, thou are sanctified to me.” Christ’s purpose for making his people holy and cleansed is to reveal her as a radiant church. This means that Jesus our bridegroom will accept us as pure virgin brides when we enter into his glorious kingdom.

Paul said that husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. No one ever hated his own body, but feeds and cares for his body, just as Christ does the church. In verses 30-32 Paul explains why husbands must love their wives as themselves based on the Scriptures. Look at verse 30. “***For we are members of his body.”*** In this verse, Paul said that both husbands and wives are part of Jesus’ body, like branches are parts of a vine. We are branches of the true vine Jesus. As members and parts of Jesus’ body, we must be united and we must love one another.

In order to solidify Christ’s lordship over marriage, Paul quoted Genesis 2:24, which is the most powerful marriage statement of God. “***For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.***” When a husband and a wife start their new life, they are no longer two, but one. They must live together whether they like or not. They ride in the same boat of destiny, since they made their marriage vow before God and people. Here the word, “be united” means “closely joined’ or ‘be glued.’ In other words, they become one in body and spirit. When we remember our marriage vows, we fear God and accept his lordship over our marriage and family.

Paul said in verse 32 about marriage relationships in the Lord, “***This is a profound mystery- but I am talking about Christ and the church.***” Paul never got married. So someone said that marriage must have been a profound mystery to Paul! But Paul did not mean that. He meant that the relationship between a husband and a wife is as mysterious as the relationship between Christ and the church. Those who understand the love and trust relationship with Christ Jesus can understand the relationship between husbands and wives. They know the meaning of submission, love, and respect.

Paul gave husbands and wives a conclusive and practical instruction. Look at verse 33. “***However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband***.” The words, “*the wife must respect her husband*” are meaningful to us. In this materialistic society, the criteria of a man’s value and recognition is largely based on his ability in gaining wealth. When husbands make lots of money, they are recognized as good and able men. But if not, they are regarded as bad and unstable men. We must overcome all materialistic ideas and live according to the Bible principle. Wives must respect husbands as the head of the family, whether they make lots of money or not. Jesus said, “*A man’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.*” (Lk 12:15) A wife must be thankful for her husband who is faithful to her and takes care of her. A husband must work hard to be responsible for his family. When they are thankful for everything and thankful for each other, their joy will double and their pain will decrease in half.

Third, instruction about parenthood (6:1-4) Recently I heard news from Christian radio that over 50% of children in America live without a father, that over 70% of juvenile criminals are fatherless children, and that over 80% of fatherless children suffer from depression. I believe that this is not just a problem in America, but in Korea and in many other countries in the world. Most problems related to children are absolutely caused by the absence of their parents. How did Paul give instructions to children? Look at verses 1-3. “***Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. “Honor your father and mother”---which is the first commandment with a promise---“so that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth***.” Children are not excluded from the lordship of the whole family. Children are God’s gift for their parents. Children succeed their parents’ heritage. Paul said that children should obey their parents in the Lord. The word “*in the Lord*” indicates the lordship over their lives and relationship with their parents. Obedience to their parents is right in the Lord. In the fifth commandment, God said, “*Honor your father and mother*.” Paul added God’s blessing for children who honor their parents. In Deuteronomy 5:16 the Lord says, “…*so that you may live long and that it may go well with you in the land the Lord your God is giving you*.” Obedience is willful submission with respect and trust. Isaac’s obedience to his father Abraham is a good example about how children should obey their parents in the Lord.

Look at verse 4. “***Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.***” Here the word ‘exasperate’ means ‘infuriate’, or ‘madden’ or ‘annoy’. Fathers must not make their children angry by exercising their authority with unreasonable demands. Instead, they must understand their children and discipline them according to God’s word with great patience and sincere love. Children are not parents’ possession. They belong to God. Fathers should take care of their children with the fear of God. Children are also a parent’s future. Educating them and training them with the words of God is a parent’s duty and responsibility.

Fourth, instruction for employment. (5-10) Today there is no slavery system in America, but in Paul’s day there were over sixty million slaves in the Roman empire---about one-third of the total population---and more and more became Christians. Most of them were under pagan masters, but a few were under Christian masters, like Onesimus, who was a slave of Philemon. Paul said in verse 5. “***Slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ***.” When slaves accept Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior, they are free in Jesus. Jesus Christ becomes their true and eternal master. Nevertheless, as long as they live on this earth, they must be loyal and faithful to their early masters. They must obey them not only to win their favor when their eye is on them, but as the slaves of Christ they must do the will of God from their heart. Look at verse 7. “***Serve whole-heartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not people, because you know that the Lord will reward each one for whatever good they do, whether they are slaves or free***.” Joseph in the Old Testament is a good example about Paul’s teaching. Joseph was sold by his brothers as a slave to Egypt. He served Potiphar, the Egyptian chief guard, with sincerity of heart. He worked whole-heartedly whether his master was watching him or not. He had fear of God and overcame sexual temptation. The Bible says that God was with Joseph and gave him success in whatever he did. (Ge 39:3, 21, 23) In prison and in the palace he was faithful to the Lord and to his masters. He worked hard for his King Pharaoh and made the king very rich. God exalted Joseph highly above all the servants and made him a blessing to all peoples of all nations, including his own family.

At work, Christian employees must live and work like Joseph did. We must work hard before God’s eyes whether our boss or supervisor is watching us or not. Mature Christian employees work hard for the glory of God. They fear God and work hard before the eyes of the Lord, not before the eyes of people. They are faithful and loyal to their employers because they want to glorify God’s name through their good deeds.

Look at verse 9. “***And masters, treat your slaves in the same way. Do not threaten them, since you know that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven and there is no favoritism with him***.” Christian masters must treat their slaves gently and nicely as the Lord served the church. Indeed, in Christ there is neither slave or free, no Jews or Greeks. We are all equal in the Lord Jesus. (Gal 3:28) Our real and true master is the Lord Jesus Christ. Christian employers or bosses must treat their workers nicely and gently so that they may see their good deeds and come to Jesus Christ.

The book of Ephesians teaches us Christian ethics, instructing us how to live as mature Christian husbands and wives, parents and children, and employers and employees. In all these instructions, there is a common principle to be applied: *Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ*. As the Lord Jesus loved the church, husbands and wives must love and respect each other. As the Lord Jesus served his church, parents and children must serve each other. As the Lord Jesus served the church, workers must work whole-heartedly. May God bless us when we put these instructions into practice so that our church may become a good, healthy, and mature body of Christ Jesus. Amen.