Opening Words

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182 Eph The Faith in the Family 1 – Authority Structures

What is the real test of putting our faith into practice in a consistent God-glorifying way? Let me get right to the answer – it is how we apply it at home in our family relationships.

We are moving into a new section of Ephesians. Beginning in chapter 4, Paul has been talking about unity in the church and purity in our lives. Now he will speak about harmony in our homes. This is another of those "walking tours" I mentioned some while ago, that the last three chapters of the book are about our application, or, our "walk" with the Lord.

Unity in the church with our brothers and sisters is a challenge. Purity in our personal lives is a test, but harmony in the home and carrying out our God-given duties and roles can be the greatest test of how sincere we are in obeying the Lord. It can be easier, at times, to put our faith into practice when we are with people for a few hours a week, but living with one another in close quarters where you see what others are really like and where they see what you are really like is the greatest challenge.

I will go so far as to say that if you can live for Christ at home, you can live for him anywhere. If you can pass the tests that come at home, you have qualified yourself for greater responsibility in Christian circles. In fact, one of the requirements for leadership in the Church, is how things are going at home. Paul said, "if a man does not know how to manage his home, how can he manage the church of God?"

Paul has given the marks of a Spirit filled life in Ephesians 5:18-21. A Spirit controlled man or woman will speak to others in an edifying way, will have a heart of praise and worship to the Lord, will have a spirit of thankfulness in life and will have humility of character that expresses itself in submission to others. This fourth marker for being filled with the Spirit, submission to one another, serves as a marker and as a transition for the major section of Scripture that follows. Paul, in 5:22-6:9, explains what subjecting ourselves to one another in a family situation looks like. He is going to get specific on what Spirit filled living looks like. And brothers and sisters, it doesn't get any more basic than this.

- In 5:22-24 he speaks to wives.
- In 5:25-33 he speaks primarily to husbands with one more brief comment to wives.
- In 6:1-3 he speaks to children.
- In 6:4 he speaks to parents, and especially fathers.
- And then in 6:5-9 he speaks of the master/servant relationship in households.

I'm not going to read this section of Scripture for you as I normally do because it is too lengthy, but I do want to make some preliminary observations.

First, many have found it extraordinary that Paul speaks to those under authority first, and then to those with authority. He speaks first to wives, then to husbands; first to children, then to parents; first to servants, then to masters. To us, especially if we are accustomed to this part of Scripture, this may seem trivial. But in the first century this was revolutionary. To speak at all to those in a subordinate role was amazing. In the ancient world, wives, children, and servants had little to no rights. In many situations, they had little to no value and were considered property. They were possessions more than people and there were few, if any laws that protected them.

Second, other ancient writings had household codes, as these are sometimes called. We find them in Jewish writings which should not surprise us because of their unique relationship with God as a covenant people and the revelation they received from him. But we also find such codes in some Stoic writings which was one of the prominent philosophies in the ancient world. The reason we find such instruction, even in pagan writings, is that the image of God is still present, to a degree in people. The image of God and this innate sense that we are made for more and that we must order our lives right before God resides within us. It's like the verse in Ecclesiastes 3 that says God has set eternity in the hearts of men. But when we look at these words of Paul, we find the highest revelation and the best principles for glorifying God in our family relationships.

Third, we find in this section of Scripture something that makes people, especially in our modern, individualistic age, bristle. We find authority words. In verses 21, 22, 24, and 33 of chapter 5 we find references to subjection. In 6:1 and 5 we find the command for obedience. These are fighting words for some people, especially for women who think that the commands to be subject to their husbands are out of date, and especially for those who have suffered suffocating control or even abuse from authorities. It is understandable that some would react to such passages by holding them at arms-length saying, "I don't like this what these words in the Bible are saying."

In addition to those who have suffered at the hands of those in authority, there are always some who are just plain rebellious and don't want to submit even to good authority. These fail to see that authority, as created and intended by God is meant to be a good thing in the world. Scripture teaches us that authority comes from God. God himself is a God of authority, and he expects us to submit to him, and we should because he is God and we are his creatures. But God has also delegated authority to humanity. God told our first parents to rule the world. He gave them dominion and expected them to create culture and communities and governments to rule those communities. In other words, in the creation of culture and community, there would necessarily be authority structures.

But a little complicating factor came into the situation – sin! I'm speaking somewhat facetiously of course because sin is hardly a "little thing." Sin is a big thing and sin damaged our relationship with God, damaged our relationship with others, with creation, and within ourselves. The first sin was an act of rebellion to God's authority. When Adam and Eve partook of the fruit of the tree, this was not an arbitrary act of disobedience against an arbitrary command. This was an act of mankind setting up his own authority against God. This spirit of rebellion and defiance has seeped into every part of the human experience, including our governments and our family relationships.

Sin has caused two extremes. On the one hand, those in authority have often expressed a smothering control that stifles people and has often crushed people. On the other hand, those under authority have often had a spirit of rebellion that leads to anarchy and a disruption of order in society. These have often played off against each other throughout history causing much suffering and grief. Totalitarianism on the one hand, and anarchy on the other.

But there is another factor in this – praise be to God! Christ has come to bring back the balance of authority and obedience. When Scripture speaks of Christ's mission, it often speaks of his obedience and submission to his Father. In Hebrews 10:5-7 we find the words of the Messiah saying,

"SACRIFICE AND OFFERING YOU HAVE NOT DESIRED,
BUT A BODY YOU HAVE PREPARED FOR ME;
6 IN WHOLE BURNT OFFERINGS AND *sacrifices* FOR SIN YOU HAVE TAKEN NO PLEASURE.
7 "THEN I SAID, 'BEHOLD, I HAVE COME
(IN THE SCROLL OF THE BOOK IT IS WRITTEN OF ME)
TO DO YOUR WILL, O GOD.'"

We find here, not a spirit of religiosity or ceremony, but a humble heart of obedience which is what the first man was to demonstrate. Paul in his magnificent passage in Philippians 2 speaks of him humbling himself and obeying all the way to the cross. Christ obeyed everywhere Adam, and you and I, should have obeyed.

We also find in Scripture the Father's loving care which was most excellently manifested when he raised Christ from the dead and enthroned him at his right hand as ruler of all. God's mission is to bring this universal rebellion to an end and to unite the world in glad submission under his loving care. This has been a theme in Ephesians which we saw in 1:10 and in 4:7-10, the uniting of all things under the authority of Christ and the filling of all things by Christ which will result in the restoration of God's perfect reign on earth.

This is the framework for the passage in front of us. Paul is not advocating an oppressive status quo where women or minorities are pushed down under the hands of tyrants. Paul is appealing to the people of God to follow the steps of Jesus, the steps of glad submission to authority as to God. Just as Jesus' obedience led to the salvation of the world through the cross and resurrection, so our obedience demonstrates to the world what our Savior has done and leads to the advance of the reign of Jesus in the world.

This is the reason Paul, in another letter, teaches about this kind of humble, obedient life because if we don't live this way, we undermine with our behavior the message we seek to bring to the world with our words. How can we talk about Christ's obedience to the Father, even to the point of suffering, while we have a spirit of rebellion and wanting to assert ourselves? That is a contradiction.

This is the reason Paul tells us in this section for wives to obey as to the Lord, for husbands to love as Christ loved the church, for children to obey parents in the Lord, for parents to raise them properly, for servants to obey as to Christ and for masters to be just.

We are to fulfill our roles with this Christ-like spirit. This is revolutionary! This is life-changing. This is culture changing. This is world changing. I hope you will join us in the broadcasts to come as we bring out the full implications of Paul's message.