

# Christ's Love

**Bible Background • EPHESIANS 5:21–6:4**

**Printed Text • EPHESIANS 5:21–6:4 | Devotional Reading • JOHN 3:16–21**

## Aim for Change

By the end of the lesson, we will: COMPARE Christ's love for the church with the relationships among family members; APPRECIATE Christ's sacrifice to show love and care for the church; and ACCEPT responsibility for showing love in the family as Christ demonstrated love for the church.

## In Focus

Angie's heart broke as she read through her students' papers. Angie had assigned her fifth-grade students an assignment that began, "I wish..." as a way to get them thinking about the New Year. The students were instructed to write at least two sentences on the topic.

Angie expected to read things like "I wish we could go on vacation to Disneyland," or "I wish I could have a new computer." Instead, 15 out of 20 students wrote about their families:

"I wish my dad would come back."

"I wish my parents didn't fight all the time."

"I wish I could get good grades so my parents would love me."

"I wish my brother wasn't so mean."

"I wish my mom's boyfriend didn't live with us."

"I wish we could have Christmas all together for once."

Angie bowed her head over the papers and wept. Her students needed the love of Christ to permeate their lives and transform their families. She prayed for the upcoming year to bring these students and their families Christ's peace and love.

*Strong families are built upon the foundation of Christ's love for the church. In this lesson, we will see how serving one another in love creates an atmosphere where families can grow and thrive.*

## Keep in Mind

"Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God."  
(Ephesians 5:21, KJV)

## Focal Verses

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**KJV** **Ephesians 5:21** Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God.

**22** Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord.

**23** For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body.

**24** Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing.

**25** Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it;

**26** That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word,

**27** That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish.

**28** So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself.

**29** For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church:

**30** For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones.

**31** For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh.

**32** This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church.

**33** Nevertheless let every one of you in particular so love his wife even as himself; and the wife see that she reverence her husband.

**Ephesians 6:1** Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right.

**2** Honour thy father and mother; which is the first commandment with promise;

**3** That it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth.

**4** And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

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### The People, Places, and Times

**A Household Code.** The verses found in Ephesians 5:21–6:4 comprise what is called a household code. At the time Paul wrote Ephesians, many Romans were concerned that religions such as Judaism and Christianity would negatively influence traditional Roman family values. To allay these fears and show their support for these values, Christians, Jews, and other religious groups would often employ a standard form of statements. Paul writes under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit to give God's directives for family. Also known as household codes, the statements were often broken down into discussions of husband and wife, and father and children.

### Background

In Ephesians 5, Paul calls on believers to live out a life of holiness in relation to the world around them. He challenges them to live wisely, being led by the Spirit. Such a life will produce a believer who becomes more like Christ every day. As we become more like Christ, we will learn to respect and submit to others in love and humility. The foundation of family relationships is to be modeled after Christ's love for the church.

## At-A-Glance

1. Wives' Submission Should Reflect Christ's Authority Over the Church (Ephesians 5:21–24)
2. Husbands' Love for Their Wives Should Reflect Christ's Love for the Church (vv. 25–33)
3. Children Should Be Obedient and Loved (Ephesians 6:1–4)

### In Depth

#### 1. Wives' Submission Should Reflect Christ's Authority Over the Church (Ephesians 5:21–24)

Ephesians 5:21 is a general instruction to all believers to submit to one another in love. This principle is directly associated with verse 18, where Paul instructs believers to be filled with the Spirit. When we are living a Spirit-led life, God gives us the grace to live in an attitude of humility and submission to others. Paul addresses the wives first. He instructs wives to submit to their husbands “as unto the Lord” (verse 22). The word “submit” in this verse means to yield one’s rights or to cooperate. This word does not imply slavish obedience or being silent in the home. Though the household codes of ancient days often required a wife to obey her husband, Paul does not make this a requirement, as he does for children. Rather, he appeals to a wife’s dedication to God as a basis for submission to her husband. In other words, when a wife honors and respects her husband, she submits to God and His plan for the family.

In verse 23, Paul explains why a wife is to submit to her husband: because he is the “head” of the wife and family just as “Christ is the head of the church.” Christ was appointed by God to be the head of the church. On the basis of this

authority, the church is to submit to Him. Some people might conclude from these verses that there is an inequality between male and female. But Paul makes clear that in Christ, all are equal (see also 1 Corinthians 11:8–12; Galatians 3:28). Within this equality, however, order and respect for authority should exist.

#### 2. Husbands' Love for Their Wives Should Reflect Christ's Love for the Church (vv. 25–33)

Paul now turns his attention to the husbands. Interestingly, he does not stress the husband’s authority or headship over the wife. Instead, Paul charges the husband to love his wife. And not only is the husband supposed to love the wife, he is to love her “even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it” (v. 25). A husband’s love for his wife is to follow the pattern of Christ’s love for the church. Christ’s love for the church was self-sacrificing. A self-sacrificing love is unselfish love. A husband with self-sacrificing love will demonstrate his love by seeking the best for his wife. This kind of love is committed and faithful, even through rough times. This kind of love does not depend on emotions or circumstances but strives to hold the marriage together forever. A loving, Christ-like husband will also provide for his wife. Just as the church is the body of Christ, a wife is a part of her husband. God says that a husband should love his wife just as he loves himself. As a husband nourishes, protects, and provides for his wife, he “loves himself” (vv. 28, 29). Christ’s love for the church is a secure love. The love of a husband for his wife should be the same (verse 31). When a couple marries, they become “one flesh.” Paul explains this as part of the “mystery” of marriage (v. 32). Within the security of this relationship, a wife can submit to her husband.

### 3. Children Should Be Obedient and Loved (Ephesians 6:1–4)

After discussing the husband-wife relationship, Paul now gives specific instructions to children. Children are exhorted to obey their parents “in the Lord,” that is, in the spirit of obedience as if they were obeying God (6:1). Paul also instructs children to obey their parents because it is the right thing to do. Obedience to parents is also a commandment of God (Exodus 20:12; Deuteronomy 5:16). And according to Ephesians 6:1–3, when a child honors, respects, and obeys his parents, that child is blessed. Just as children have a responsibility to obey their parents, parents also have responsibilities to their children. In verse 4, Paul speaks specifically to fathers as the head of the family. He first gives the fathers a negative instruction—“do not provoke your children to anger by the way you treat them” (v. 4, NLT). A father’s role in his child’s life makes a direct impact on the child’s concept of God the Father. Fathers, therefore, need to be watchful and consider how their behavior influences their children’s actions. Unreasonable expectations, harsh or unfair punishment, or playing favorites will dishearten a child and can lead to disillusionment or rebellion.

Instead of these behaviors, fathers are encouraged positively to “Rather, bring them up with the discipline and instruction that comes from the Lord” (v. 4). It is the father’s responsibility to see that his children are being raised according to God’s principles. Fathers are to nurture their children, which means to care for them tenderly and to lead them gently into God’s ways. Therefore, parents are to give correction and instruction with the goal of developing their child’s character and pointing the child toward righteousness. We give our children a great gift when we teach them how to obey God and His Word.

### Search the Scriptures

1. Why are believers commanded to submit to one another (Ephesians 5:21)?
2. How are wives to submit to their husbands (v. 22)?
3. How are husbands to love their wives (v. 25)?
4. What specific instructions does Paul give to fathers (Ephesians 6:4)?

### Discuss the Meaning

1. What does Paul mean when he says that wives should submit to their husbands just as the church submits to Christ (Ephesians 5:24)?
2. How can a husband love his wife as his own body (v. 28)? Why is this important?

### Liberating Lesson

In our post-Christian culture, we are witnessing the breakdown of the family unit. Marriages are disintegrating. Children are disobedient and disrespectful to parents and others in authority. Families are important to God. He created them! He also laid out specific principles for creating a loving, harmonious family life. When we live according to these principles, a godly family is the result. And a godly, harmonious family is a living testimony to Christ’s love for the church.

### Application for Activation

How can we serve one another in the home in the name and Spirit of Christ? Think about your relationship with each family member. Are you following God’s principles for family life? Pray that God would show you areas that need improvement, and then be willing to change and grow. Pray for your family members that they, too, would be willing to follow God’s plan for your family. If possible, pray together as a family, committing to grow together in God’s ways.

## Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

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## Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

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### Sources:

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- New Testament Greek Lexicon. Bible Study Tools.com. <http://www.biblestudytools.com/lexicons/greek/> (accessed October 24, 2011).
- The NIV Study Bible*. 10th Anniversary Edition. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1995. 1800-1801.
- Vine, W. E. *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words. With Topical Index*. Edited by Merrill F. Unger and William White, Jr. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1996.

## Say It Correctly

Nurture. NUR-cher.  
Admonition. ad-muh-NISH-un.

## Daily Bible Readings

### MONDAY

God Is Love  
(1 John 4:7-12)

### TUESDAY

God's Gift of Love  
(John 3:16-21)

### WEDNESDAY

The Proof of God's Love  
(Romans 5:6-11)

### THURSDAY

The Example of Jesus' Love  
(John 13:1-9)

### FRIDAY

Abiding in Christ's Love  
(John 15:9-17)

### SATURDAY

Following the Commands of Christ  
(1 John 3:18-24)

### SUNDAY

Following the Example of Christ  
(Ephesians 5:21-6:4)