

Let Each His Lesson Learn with Care and All the Household Well Shall Fare.

Ephesians 5:21-6:4 • 2021-10-10



Martin Luther wrote something at the end of his Small Catechism that rings true for every generation. "Let each his lesson learn with care and all the household well shall fare." The instructions he included for the Christian household weren't just his own ideas. They were built upon the wisdom of Scripture to guide families. Have you considered lately God's instruction for you as part of the family of God? What role do you play in your own family? Today we turn to Ephesians 5 and find instructions for the Christian home. There are instructions for wives, husbands, children, and parents.

These instructions in Ephesians 5 have always been important. Many might argue they are now more needed than ever. Households are crumbling. The generation of those born after 1997 is labeled by many as Generation Z. A few years ago, Forbes magazine came out with an opinion article citing reasons why the Z in Generation Z should stand for zombie. It argued that Generation Z is disconnected from things which nearly every generation once highly valued. Previous generations used to enjoy family dinners and community events, Generation Z statistically most often eats alone, staring at a phone screen instead of interacting with others. Surveys indicate that most in Generation Z prefer the modes of communication which are not "in-person." Interpersonal connections are frail and online. Many bemoan the fact that Generation Z is less-educated, more depressed, and more self-indulgent than previous generations. For example, you can ask them to identify the characters to the latest hit movie or pop artist and they'll know the answer. Ask them to name the faces on Mount Rushmore and you'll be hard pressed to find accurate responses. They are growing up in a time with the highest rate of atheism, the highest rate of unmarried couples, highest rate of divorce and broken families, the highest rate of depression, and the most abundant rate of substance abuse.

These are all frightening realities for the generation now growing up! But can we just put the blame on them? We have to consider who has led them and is living as their example. How well have the rest of us done in sharing and following God's instructions for the household? Let's take a look at what God's Word tells us.

Paul begins this portion of his letter by calling on Christians to "*submit to one another in reverence for Christ.*" Our recognition of Christ's love and authority is the starting point for all other aspects of life. Already three times in this letter Paul has referred to Christ as the living head of all. After he submitted to death he rose to life. What follows is his will for Christian households. Everything we do should be driven by his headship, his example, and his love.

A healthy household is built first around God's gift of marriage. Many couples do not get married today. But any sexual partnership outside of marriage dishonors God's gift of marriage. If you know any Christian who stumbles at this point, let them listen to what Christ says. As we read earlier in Mark 10, he speaks of marriage as a gift of God, one man and one woman in a life-long union. That's the starting base for a healthy family under Christ.

And yet simply being married doesn't make for a Christian home. A whole new heart is needed. The instruction starts here for the wives. "*Wives, submit to your own husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, just as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he himself is the Savior.*" Notice it doesn't say, "Husbands make your wife submit." These words are addressing the wives. They are to willingly submit as the church willingly submits to Christ. And before anyone argues this is degrading or unfair for women, they need to look at the full picture. The submission of a wife to her husband is supposed to be driven by Christ's love. It is supposed to reflect the same type of submission the church has for Christ as the head. Does the church submit because it is inferior, less valued, or in any way degraded? The church has been placed in a position of greatest worth, has been valued with the blood of Christ and his own life, and has been given the highest honor. When the church listens to the Word of Christ, it is a beautiful submission. When a wife lets her husband act as the head, it is a beautiful thing.

Wives, do you manipulate your husband? Do you threaten to not love him or follow him if he doesn't do what you say? Many households have fallen in ruin at the hands of a wife who doesn't understand what beautiful picture is given by the church submitting to Christ. Are you on the same team as your husband or are you constantly wrestling the wheel from his hands or changing the play call? Marriages crumble under loveless manipulating wives.

Husbands, you have an even longer list with an even higher goal to achieve. "*Husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.*" Husbands are supposed to imitate the great act of love displayed by Christ as he sacrificed himself for the sake of his bride, the Church. Can you picture any love more grand or beautiful than Christ's love for us? He took our place. He suffered and died the death that we deserved for our sins. He tells us we are now one with him, forgiven. Husbands aren't told to lord it over their wife or their children, but to be worthy of respect and to reflect the highest form of love, sacrificial love. This is love: Christ loved us and gave himself for us!

Is that the kind of love you display, husbands, for your wife? How many husbands are only willing to lift a finger for their wife if it means they will get something in return? That's not sacrificial love. That is a selfish business transaction. Husbands, do you love your wife even when you know it will cost you your energy and your time? Or is it clear to her

that you live for self-gratification, for leisure and sport? No wonder generation Z is crumbling apart! It has the highest number of men lost in playing video games instead of being a husband to their wife. It has the most readily accessible form of pornography in the history of this world. It has men who refuse to lead their families until they've fed their appetites! How about you, men of older generations, have you led by example and taught your sons? Husbands, look to the unconditional, sacrificial, freely given and faithful love of Christ. Doesn't it make you weep that you've failed to love your wife as much as Christ would have you love her? It should!

The relationship between husband and wife is often treated by the world like a contract. It is void of love and full of selfish ambition. But it is not that way in God's design. Paul says that the love between Christ and his bride, the Church, is the real picture that marriage reflects. I could share instructions all day about what makes a healthy marriage. But until that picture of Christ and his church is understood it will all amount to nothing. Wives will only submit out of reverence for their husband instead of reverence for Christ. Husbands will only love out of selfish gain instead of living as one-flesh with their wife and sacrificing all for her.

If you can walk away with anything to share from Paul's instructions for husbands and wives, let it be to reflect the love between Christ and his Church. Christ so loved his bride that he made her one with himself. He lowered himself as a servant to die on the cross for her. His love for you is found in that sacrifice and all his gifts. We are also children of God the Father who in love adopted us into his household. He lovingly disciplines us and nourishes us with the gospel. We are members of God's household because he has made us one! That's why Paul speaks of husbands loving their wife as their own bodies. They are to view the relationship with their wife as so close that they are one. There is no longer, "What do I desire." His desire is to give her everything. And the wife no longer asks, "How can I get what I want?" She wants what her husband wants because they are one. It is a mutual love. It should not reflect the fallen relationship between Adam and Eve. It should reflect the restored relationship between Christ and the Church.

Next Paul addresses children. *"Obey your parents in the Lord for this is right."* This commandment was given a lot of weight for ancient Israel. Just as openly breaking the first three commandments made a person an unbeliever, so did openly breaking this commandment. If parents had a child who refused to obey them God directed the community to put such a child to death. That was a command for ancient Israel which is not binding on us today, but it does impress how important the fourth commandment is! God knows that if there is a child who will not obey their parents that child is as good as dead. Its importance is still stressed for us with a promised blessing for those who keep it. *"That it may go well with you and that you may live a long life on the earth."* *"...and all the household well shall fare."*

But God goes further than asking children to obey. He calls on them to honor their parents. Children, do your parents have to raise their voice or threaten punishment before you listen to them? Do you listen to them but then still complain? Don't expect God to bless that attitude. Expect it will cause you emotional and mental trauma and lead to a strife-filled life. But don't obey out of mere fear or to gain something good. Obey "in the Lord." Do it as a child of God who stands in reverence for Christ who is head over all. Do it because your parents are there as God-given authority. Do it to honor your Savior God.

A family is built around more than obedient children who honor authority. It is built by responsible and loving parents. Fathers are addressed first as the spiritual heads. Sometimes this will be the mothers. *"Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord."* Fathers, do you discipline your children by yelling at them? Do you let them get away with lies and evil just until it annoys or angers you? That is not parenting! That is teaching your children not to anger you. It is wicked for a parent to just lash out at their children. Paul says it will drive them to anger and resentment. Instead, you are called to parent by nurturing your children. The word for "bring them up" is related to the idea of feeding and nourishing them. And don't think you are doing your job if you toss food at them and give them clothes. Paul says nourish them in the training and instruction of the Lord. Your child has a soul. Your child has been purchased by Christ! Feed them the Word of God and give them loving discipline for their own good, not yelling so that they fear to go against your good will.

There are many broken families. Some will bemoan the times they've failed. Others will deem these instructions too hard. But you are now part of the family of God. You don't live by the example of previous generations. You live by knowing Christ. His household knows what loving headship is. It is a Savior who gave up his life for his bride so that she might live as his treasured bride. His household knows what submission looks like. It is the church willingly letting the Word of Christ take the lead. It is the church that yields always to the head, Christ, her Savior. His household doesn't just obey, it understands what honor is. It follows the Son of God who submitted, honored, and obeyed in order to save us all. He is the risen Lord and lives as our loving head. His household knows how to operate without fear and anger. It operates on a much higher level of knowledge and love. He disciplines you in love for your good and gives you instruction in his Word. He forgives. Parents, do the same with great patience and feed your children the gospel.

The realities facing the current generation are frightening. But the timeless love of every generation in Christ is far greater! Consider who has led us to this point and still lives for us: Christ! We are members of his household. Only then will what Luther wrote be true for Generation Z and for every generation: "Let each his lesson learn with care and all the household well shall fare."