

West Valley  
8/14/11

**church.rethink**  
Part 9  
(Ephesians 5:21-6:9)

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“Rethink” means simply to stop and think again about something; to make sure that what we think something is, is really what it is supposed to be. When it comes to the church; we’ve created a great deal that goes along with it over the years; we have programs and pastors and worship styles and buildings and budgets that all reflect what we think church is. Not to say any of those methods of doing church are bad; but over the creeping of time and comfort and familiarity the methods slowly replace the purpose; they become tradition. So we need to ask ourselves why we do the things we do in the way we do them: you could call it, “church rethink.”

The Apostle Paul wrote the letter of Ephesians to spell out priorities for the church. But it wasn’t just for Ephesus—more than likely Paul wrote it intending that his letter be circulated to all the churches in that area. So this letter is really Paul’s charge to the church (capital “C”) to keep the main thing, the main thing. To remember what the church is for, what the church should do, and how the church should behave. And he doesn’t mention anything about buildings, decorations, or programs.

So we’re using Ephesians to help us rethink what church is, to make sure our priorities and attitudes are correct, so we can be best prepared for what God has in store for us. I am certain that God is growing this church and intends to touch the lives of thousands in our community, providing encouragement, meeting needs, and introducing people to Jesus Christ and equipping them with a faith that works, because we are living as people with purpose! (That’s our mission statement, by the way!)

Last week, we looked at characteristics of the community of believers as a whole—that we must consistently live day by day and moment by moment in love, light, and learning. Now Paul gets more specific in the passage we are going to look at today. In today’s passage Paul identifies three important relationships, besides those we have among one another. These three that Paul talks about can be prime opportunities to practice the Christian life, and to demonstrate to others that we really do have a faith that works. Because if our faith really is what we say it is, then it will have the greatest impact on the health and quality of our relationships.

Ephesians is all about relationships—primarily, it is about our relationship to God, which is available through Jesus Christ. We’ve been reconciled to God through Christ when we put our faith in him. It is a relationship that is filled with great blessings and function and purpose beyond what we can even imagine. And when we enter that relationship with him, we are supernaturally capable of having a greater quality of relationship with one another. We have a new love for each other, a new unity with each other, and a new purpose *together*—to reconcile people to God and each other. That’s the only way to fulfill our purpose as a church in this community. The greater community of West Valley needs the church to demonstrate what it really means to be the church: a place where people can come to and be accepted, to belong, and to have their needs met. A place that models healthy relationships. So we are at a critical point in our life and growth as the church. That’s why we shared with you what we did last Sunday night about the way forward as our church is growing. We don’t want to simply become a larger church, although we are. We want to become more mature, more like Christ, and become a healthy and growing community of believers. People who live with purpose, caring for each other and reaching out to help people in our community.

So now Paul is getting personal— he’s dealing with three vital relationships in every person’s life. You might not have all three of these, but I’m certain you’ve been, or are involved in at least one of them, and more than likely two of them. Take out your notes please—you will want to keep track of what we are talking about. If you have a smart phone or an iPad you can go to our website, [westvalleychurch.com](http://westvalleychurch.com), and download the notes right now off our sermon page.

What Paul is saying is that this new life in Christ makes a difference in every relationship, including and especially these three we are going to look at today. But he starts by saying that underlying the success of our relationships are two principles that govern all of a Christian’s relationships. It’s in the very first verse of this passage. This is what it says: “And further, submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.” (Ephesians 5:21, nlt).

Paul starts out saying “and further.” What he means is that he just got done telling us how to approach relationships in general—remember, in love, light, and learning. Now he’s basically saying, “Let’s get more specific.” And he gives us the two governing principles of our Christian relationships. First is that we must ***Submit to each other***. If we approach any of our relationships in the church with mutual submission, all church conflict, all striving and division, all agendas and control issues would disappear. But in the three kinds of relationships that we will look at, it’s interesting that Paul starts with the issue of mutual submission, because in each of the following three relationships, there is one who is considered “above in rank” and one who is under. One is a “superior” if you will. Still Paul is saying

that the rule of submission to each other still applies.

This is hard for us to understand, because “individual freedom and rights” is important to us. We don’t want to approach relationships thinking about submitting to someone or to each other. But it is the God-mandated and biblical way that we will find success in relationships. Regardless of your position in a relationship, you are to submit to the needs of the other person. By doing so, you are not “giving up control” - you are not submitting to someone so they can control you. That’s why the second principle is important: you are doing it **in the Lord**. We are to submit to one another *in the Lord*. Your relationships are based on the connection of your own relationship to Jesus Christ. If we are Christians, we must be obedient to Christ first, and we share his heart for others. So we submit to, or *serve*, each other, regardless of our status over each other, because we are submitted to Christ first. This is the way we will find success in relationships, beginning with the relationship of

### 1. ***Marriage***

Paul starts off talking about the highest of human relationships—husband and wife. Here’s what it says:

“For wives, this means submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For a husband is the head of His wife as Christ is the head of the church. He is the Savior of His body, the church. As the church submits to Christ, so you wives should submit to your husbands in everything. For husbands, this means love your wives, just as Christ loved the church. He gave up His life for her to make her holy and clean, washed by the cleansing of God's word. He did this to present her to Himself as a glorious church without a spot or wrinkle or any other blemish. Instead, she will be holy and without fault. In the same way, husbands ought to love their wives as they love their own bodies. For a man who loves his wife actually shows love for himself. No one hates his own body but feeds and cares for it, just as Christ cares for the church. And we are members of his body. As the Scriptures say, "A man leaves his father and mother and is joined to his wife, and the two are united into one." This is a great mystery, but it is an illustration of the way Christ and the church are one. So again I say, each man must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.” (Ephesians 5:22-33, nlt)

Before we go any further, I *must* say that the first few verses of this passage have probably been misused more than just about any other in the Bible. The part about wives submitting to husbands has been used as a club to beat women into submission, and has kept far too many women trapped in abusive relationships. I’ve had to counsel ladies whose lives have been destroyed because some ignorant Pastor and some controlling husband have berated her to “submit.” That is what

happens when you take a verse out of context of the rest of Scripture and twist it to make it say what you want, instead of being obedient to what it really says. If nothing else, that would never happen if they would just remember the first two principles: *Submit to one another, in Christ*. If we could get this relationship right, we could get so many things right; we too often don't understand our roles. And this mutual submission in marriage applies to both husband and wife! Someone once said that when the wedding march begins, a bride sees three things: the aisle, the altar, and him—the groom. And from that time on her motto is: "I'll altar him." It doesn't work that way, of course, and people are disillusioned. It's not our job to change our spouses, only to love them. It's God's job to change them.

Now ladies, before you get too concerned about this submission thing, or men, if you think you've got it easy, realize that while wives have three verses of instructions, the men have nine verses. That means a couple of things: one is, guys, it takes three times as much instruction to get it through our heads. And two, the job of the husband carries three times the responsibility and work.

Every relationship has some degree of subordination. The same is true here. Paul understood this, and this isn't the first time he's talked about the important roles of husbands and wives (see your notes). As man and woman, they are equal in Christ. But when they become husband and wife, the wife agrees to submit to her husband. A wife is in no way inferior to a man, but there is a divinely ordered structure. Both husband and wife go together; that's why it is a *oneness*. But the husband leads in service.

Paul is saying that just like the church is to give first place to her devotion and service to Christ, so the wife must give first place to her devotion and service to her husband. Besides, we know who's *really* the boss, right? One night a man was talking with his preschool daughter. She sweetly said, "Daddy, you're the boss of our house, right?" The man very proudly said, "Yes, I'm the boss of the house." But the little girl burst his bubble when she said, "You're the boss cuz mommy put you in charge, huh?"

Then, husbands are told to love their wives—in fact the word used means to *continue on* loving your wife. We are to love our wives just as . . . What? Christ loves the church. How much does Christ love the church? Infinitely, eternally, willing to give up his very life for her, so that she can become all God created her to become. That's how much the husband is supposed to love his wife. Now ladies, let me ask you: if your husband loves you like that, wouldn't you want to submit to him? And men, isn't it easy to love a wife who submits to you? Where we get into trouble is when each person starts worrying about themselves more than submitting to the other in this way. We say things like, "She's not meeting my

needs,” or “He’s not being thoughtful enough for me.” True submission only works when we are focusing on the other person. So the husband asks himself, “am I sacrificing myself enough to see her be fulfilled?” and the wife asks, “Am I doing all I can to support him, build him up, and meet his needs?” That’s the only way it works.

If you’d like to study more about the kind of love Christ has for us, I’ve put it in your notes in parentheses—you can take some time and learn how to love each other like Jesus loves us.

Now please don’t think that this implies you shouldn’t be single, or that, if you are divorced, you are some kind of bad example. Just understand that, if you are married, your marriage is a major way that you show the reality of Jesus to the world around you. That’s why this passage says, “This is a great mystery, but it is an illustration of the way Christ and the church are one.” The health of your marriage not only benefits your own life, it is a direct example of the reality of Christ and his relationship with us. That’s why it’s so important in the church. But it’s not just your marriage; it’s also in the relationship of

## 2. *Family*

Specifically, Paul is talking about parents and children. This is what the Apostle Paul says next: “Children, obey your parents because you belong to the Lord, for this is the right thing to do. ‘Honor your father and mother.’ This is the first commandment with a promise: If you honor your father and mother, ‘things will go well for you, and you will have a long life on the earth.’ Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger by the way you treat them. Rather, bring them up with the discipline and instruction that comes from the Lord.” (Ephesians 6:1-4, nlt)

There’s something going on here that you need to know—by talking about the relationship of parents and children, Paul was doing something that was revolutionary to his culture at that time. He is dignifying the role and value of children. In those days children were property, not people. A father could punish children to whatever extreme he wanted, sell them into slavery for the money, or even kill them. But that is not the way our Father, God, views children. Time and again in the Bible we see Jesus valued children by calling them to himself. (That’s why we do baby dedications like we just did this morning) There is value in every child, and this relationship is vital. Not all of us have been or are married, but all of us have been either a parent or a child.

So first if you are or have been a child, your key action is obedience. There was a little girl playing in her room when her mother called her in for dinner. When she didn’t respond, her mother gave her the three name call and said, “Did you hear me?” The little girl said, “Yes Mama, my ears heard, but my legs didn’t.”

When this passage uses the word “obey,” it’s a stronger word than “submit” - it implies duty. The word is a part of the compound of the word “to hear.” This kind of obedience involves listening, attending to, *and* obeying. Most disobedience comes from a child’s unwillingness to listen to what they are told, and the reasons for why they are told. Do you want to honor your parents? This is how you do it, listen to them and do what they tell you. And according to this passage you are doing yourself a favor too—the promise is that your own life will be better. It will certainly have less stress! You will also learn how to obey God by doing so.

Next then is the role of a parent. Parents are told not to provoke a child to anger, or to “exasperate” our children. That is the same word that is used to talk about working with horses, and it means literally, “to break the will of a horse.” Here’s what that means: Discipline is necessary, but too many rules and regulations, and the inevitable nagging that goes along with it, will lead to rebellion. Back off, parents! Instead, bring them up “in the Lord.” Remember how the Lord loves us? Love your children that way. As a parent, I can raise my child by provoking him, leading to rebellion, or by loving him, leading to his growing up in the Lord. It all depends upon the approach.

In describing raising our children, Paul uses the words “to bring up.” That phrase means the same thing as “to cherish.” Parents, cherish your children. You will also learn how your Father, God, loves you as you cherish your children.

Again, if we as a church are going to be a healthy community that unchurched people want to be a part of, maybe we should worry less about carpet color and coffee stains and musical styles, and be more concerned with the quality of our relationships. Especially at home.

Finally is the relationships at...

### **3. Work**

Paul is talking about slaves and masters, but at that time it was very much like bosses and employees today. Here’s what he says: “Slaves, obey your earthly masters with deep respect and fear. Serve them sincerely as you would serve Christ. Try to please them all the time, not just when they are watching you. As slaves of Christ, do the will of God with all your heart. Work with enthusiasm, as though you were working for the Lord rather than for people. Remember that the Lord will reward each one of us for the good we do, whether we are slaves or free. Masters, treat your slaves in the same way. Don't threaten them; remember, you both have the same Master in heaven, and He has no favorites.” (Ephesians 6:5-9, nlt)

At the time that this was written, there were over 60 million slaves in the Roman Empire. The culture of Rome was such that the goal of Roman citizens was to be completely free of work. So the slave industry grew. Slaves could come from being captured in a war, being found guilty of a crime; they may have been sold by a parent, or forced into it to pay off a debt. Slaves came in all professions—doctors, teachers, artists, actors, secretaries, politicians. But remember that in Christ, there are no distinctions between slave and free. So rather than go into a detailed explanation of slavery and the reasons why Paul didn't denounce it at the time, let's just make the application to our current life.

Let me ask - How many here would consider themselves an employee? Okay, and how many are bosses? How many are self-employed? (Then you are *both!*)

Starting with employees, we are told to be obedient. It's the same word used with children and parents, meaning it's a *duty* to do so. If you want to be a good employee, you need a readiness to listen, a teachability, and a willingness to comply with an order. That's what it means to have the best relationship with your boss. Now, in the Lord, if you are a Christian and your boss is also, then it's true that you are both fellow servants of Christ. But in your working relationship, you are to be obedient to your boss. Don't confuse it! And be that way *all* the time—not just when your boss is watching you. Do you know what the percentage of the workday is that Americans spend goofing off? 32%! A third of the time is spent goofing off. 20% of employees between 19-35 have called in sick more than once for a “mental health day.” Your calling as a Christian, is to work obediently all the time, just as if you were doing it for Jesus, and you are to do it gladly.

Now, for bosses. Paul says, “You are to treat your employees in the same way.” “In the same way” as what? In the same way as you want to be treated. It's the golden rule. You don't lead by fear, or with intimidation or threats. Remove threats from the relationship and replace them with goodwill. Serve your employees. If you tyrannize, you depersonalize. Affirm employees as real people deserving respect and dignity, and they will work harder for you. And if they don't, then fire them! But don't forget; you have a master, you have a boss too—Jesus Christ himself, and you will have to answer to him for how you treat your employees.

One of the magazines I read is called Fast Company, which is great for leadership and management. I like what an article said about JetBlue CEO and founder David Neeleman. He could bask in the glory of the #1 ranking his new airline received in the Airline Quality Rating—but he's too busy doing what he calls servant leadership.

When he flies around the country on his airplanes, which he does regularly, he's just one of the crewmembers. He passes out snacks and blankets with the flight attendants, he sits in the cockpit and chats with the pilots, and he joins the team that cleans the planes. He says, "You can't ask employees to do something you wouldn't be willing to do yourself."

Employees, do what your boss tells you. Bosses, care for your employees! How we behave at work will be either a great witness to others for Christ, or a great deterrent for them against Christ. It matters!

But wait—the question is, how does our marriages, our families; our work relationships help us rethink the church? Isn't that what this series is about? Yes it is. And here's the answer: the church is made up of relationships. So the health of our personal relationships contributes to the overall health of our church. The church is a collective of our own relationships. You may not like something in your church, but you've got no room to complain if your personal relationships are not healthy, because we are together only as healthy as you are in your relationships. Instead of making the church be about traditions or programs or styles or buildings, let's look at the church as God does: relationships. And God desires us to be a healthy, whole, and holy community made up of godly relationships.

I prayed about how to close this service. I could have used some appropriate illustration that would tie all this together. I could ask you to come pray about it at the altar. But why? There's nothing for you to pray about; you either do this, or you don't. Wives, submit to your husbands. Husbands love your wives like Jesus does. Children: listen to and obey your parents. Parents, don't be harsh. Cherish your kids. Employees: quit goofing off, work hard and be teachable. Bosses—don't be heavy-handed. Serve your employees. Get out and do it. So that your church will be healthy, too.

Pastor James—will you come pray for us and dismiss us?