

## In Christ: Doing What Doesn't Come Naturally

Ephesians 5:17-6:9

### Small Group Discussion Guide

**Opening Question** (get everyone involved in discussion):

- What is one chore or obligation that you have to do, but which does not come naturally for you? What motivates you to get it done?

**Read** Ephesians 5:17-20 and then discuss the following.

- As we learned on Sunday, the primary charge from Paul in these verses is to “be filled with the Spirit,” in an ongoing way.
  - Based on Sunday’s sermon, or on your recollections from our study of Ephesians 3:14-21, what is the role of the Holy Spirit in relation to our experience of the love of Christ? (Leaders: the Holy Spirit enables the truth of the gospel, which we know in our minds, to become real to our hearts).
  - If our main aim is to let the Holy Spirit fill us, on a daily basis, with the heartfelt understanding of the treasure we have in the gospel, this understanding will overflow into our lives. Paul’s phrases, following v. 17, describe what that overflow will look like.
- What difference does it make in our interpretation of this passage to know that the verbs in vv. 19-21, in the original language, are participles? (Leaders: the participial verbs are describing what our lives will look like when we allow the Holy Spirit to continually fill us. This insight makes a world of difference, especially to our interpretation of vv. 21ff.)
  - Spend a few minutes processing the descriptive phrases in vv. 19-20, which we didn’t spend much time discussing on Sunday. Do you think these descriptions are true of your life? Of your small group? Of our church?
- **Do your best to ignore the heading** between vv. 20 and 21, which says, “Instructions for Christian Households.” This heading is artificial—it is not part of Paul’s letter, but was added by modern publishers, and it gets in the way of interpreting the principles at hand. Pay close attention to the fact that v. 21 is a continuation of Paul’s thought from the preceding verses. The verb “submit” is another participle, describing what our lives will look like when we are filled with the Spirit. The original Greek literally reads, “Always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ, ...”
  - If you were present in church on Sunday, how did you feel about Pastor Josh’s suggestion to ignore this heading? Will this suggestion make any difference in the way you read the Bible?

**Read** Eph. 5:21-30, then discuss the following.

- Do you have any pushback to, or initial questions about, these verses? How do you feel about them?
- In your own words, what does it mean when we all submit to one another out of reverence for Christ (v. 21)? What examples have you seen of this principle in church life—either when it was practiced well or neglected altogether?
  - How do you feel about the notion, which we heard repeatedly on Sunday, that “**In Christ, we are people who submit to one another?**”
  - In what way is this practice a *reenactment of the gospel* in our relationships?
- In vv. 22ff, Paul goes on to describe what this principle of mutual submission will look like in Christian marriage. He starts by addressing wives.

- Pastor Josh re-worded Paul’s instructions to wives as follow: “When two spouses are filled with the Holy Spirit, with the gospel at the center of their lives, a wife is to yield leadership of her marriage and family to her Spirit-filled husband.” How do you feel about this description of the principle in v. 22-24? How have you seen this play out, either for good or for bad?
- Paul goes on to say that a Spirit-filled husband’s pattern for family leadership is the same as what Jesus did for his bride, the church. What is that pattern of leadership? (Vv. 25-30)
- How does the gospel enable us to lay down our personal agendas in marriage?
- What are some ways that a husband can take up Jesus’ model for the sake of his wife becoming all that God intends? What does this look like in practice? If any of you feel that you and your spouse have found a good, workable way to do this in your marriage, please share with the group.
- According to vv. 31-32, what has human marriage always been pointing to? (Leaders: it points to the marriage of Christ and the church, specifically Jesus’ sacrificial love for us).
  - On Sunday we spent a good bit of time talking about how this fact frees us to have healthy expectations in marriage, and gives us the resources to live out the gospel whether we are married or single. Flesh that out for a few minutes—how does this work out in life?

**Read** Eph. 6:1-4. Note that Paul is still describing what family life looks like when we are filled with the Spirit, submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.

- If your parents are alive, what does it look like at your current life stage to re-enact the gospel in your relationship with them?
- If you are a parent with children who are still around, do you feel that you exasperate them? (Remember the image of someone standing outside a lion’s cage and provoking the lion.) Do you have a health balance of boundaries, discipline, and grace?
- If any of you feel that you have found good, workable ways to “bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord,” please share with the group.

**Read** Eph. 6:5-9.

- People often have difficulty with the fact that Paul addresses slaves’ and master’s behavior, rather than seeking to abolish slavery altogether. If your group is wrestling here, a few observations may help with this difficulty: 1) In Paul’s mind, slavery was an institution that was just a fact of life. He was addressing Christ-followers who had to live within that institution. He himself was in prison on false charges, so he was writing as one of the oppressed, rather than as someone in power. 2) Slavery in the Roman Empire—although not justifiable by our modern standards—was much different and less cruel than what we know of from U.S. history. It was not based on race, and it did not limit slaves to harsh, menial tasks. Slaves could be found in every profession, including medicine, government and law enforcement. 3) That Paul assumed slaves and masters would both be in the Ephesian churches, hearing the reading of his letter as equals, was a radically egalitarian expectation for his day. It was already becoming a reality that the grace of God, in Christ, puts us all on equal footing.
- Which of Paul’s instructions in this section applies most to you, with respect to your working life?
- Are you able to “serve wholeheartedly” (v. 7), as if Jesus were the direct beneficiary of your work?
- What might it look like to re-enact the gospel in your work setting?

**Closing thoughts/prayer:**

- How does the gospel motivate us to practice the difficult principles we’ve considered today?
- What other needs exist in your group? Spend some time sharing and praying for them.