

# 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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## 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)

# Proclaiming Christ

**Bible Background • PHILIPPIANS 1:12–30**

**Printed Text • PHILIPPIANS 1:15–26 | Devotional Reading • PSALM 119:169–176**

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## Aim for Change

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By the end of the lesson, we will: COMPREHEND Paul’s message of joy in the proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ; REFLECT on the variety of motives for proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ; and FASHION a personal proclamation of the Gospel.

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## In Focus

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Warren and Deloris drove home from the doctor’s office in silence. They both had a hundred thoughts passing through their heads. The doctor had actually said the word: cancer. If he were to live at all, Warren would have to undergo surgery and extensive chemotherapy. They would have to break the news to their children and grandchildren. Warren would also have to tell the church.

“Well,” Warren finally broke their silence, “this will certainly put my faith to the test. Now I must live what I have preached for so long.”

“Baby, don’t try to deny what you are really feeling about this. Not for my sake, not for the children’s, and not for the church’s sake, either,” Deloris responded.

“It’s not that,” Warren said. “I know that people will be watching me. It’s important to me that I will be able to praise the Lord throughout this ordeal, whether it means life or death. If I can’t, I’ll end up feeling like my entire life, not to mention my faith, has been just a front.”

*Many things come into our lives that challenge our public witness. People are watching to see if we are for real. Paul teaches us how to walk with God through the fires of life.*

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## Keep in Mind

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“What then? notwithstanding, every way, whether in pretence, or in truth, Christ is preached; and I therein do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice.”  
(Philippians 1:18, KJV)

## Focal Verses

**KJV Philippians 1:15** Some indeed preach Christ even of envy and strife; and some also of good will:

**16** The one preach Christ of contention, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my bonds:

**17** But the other of love, knowing that I am set for the defence of the gospel.

**18** What then? notwithstanding, every way, whether in pretence, or in truth, Christ is preached; and I therein do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice.

**19** For I know that this shall turn to my salvation through your prayer, and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ,

**20** According to my earnest expectation and my hope, that in nothing I shall be ashamed,

but that with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether it be by life, or by death.

**21** For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.

**22** But if I live in the flesh, this is the fruit of my labour: yet what I shall choose I wot not.

**23** For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better:

**24** Nevertheless to abide in the flesh is more needful for you.

**25** And having this confidence, I know that I shall abide and continue with you all for your furtherance and joy of faith;

**26** That your rejoicing may be more abundant in Jesus Christ for me by my coming to you again.

## The People, Places, and Times

**Prison.** During the time that the New Testament was written, people could be imprisoned for nonpayment of debt (Matthew 5:25–26), political insurrection, criminal acts (Luke 23:19, 25), and for certain religious practices (Acts 8:3). The Apostle Paul was often in prison. On one occasion, he and Silas were placed under the charge of a lone jailer, who put them in an inner cell and placed their feet in stocks (Acts 16:23–24). The inner cell was probably for maximum security or solitary confinement. In Jerusalem, Paul was detained in a Roman barracks (Acts 23:11–18). In Caesarea, Paul's confinement did allow him some freedom, and he was allowed to have visitors (Acts 23:33–35). As he awaited trial in Rome, Paul was guarded constantly under a type of house arrest (Acts 28:16–17, 30). While there, he met his own expenses and was free to receive visitors and preach the Gospel.

**Roman Empire.** In the early days of the Christian movement, several emperors ruled the empire. Most of Paul's ministry is believed to have occurred under the reign of Gaius (Caligula, A.D. 37–41) and his aging uncle Claudius (A.D. 41–54). Claudius reportedly expelled some Jews from Rome because they were creating disturbances with their efforts to spread the Gospel. It is believed that both Paul and Peter were martyred during Nero's reign (A.D. 54–68), perhaps in connection with the burning of Rome in A.D. 64, an event for which Nero blamed Christians.

## Background

It's interesting how some people can devote themselves to encouraging others in the midst of their own struggle. Many terminally-ill children, instead of feeling sorry for themselves, have been a source of encouragement for the families they leave behind. Paul was encouraging to his Christian family. Even

as he sat in prison, his letter was full of love, encouragement, and instruction for those who were carrying on the work. It is very likely that his co-laborers in Christ were feeling worse about Paul's imprisonment than he was. Paul recognized that his release from prison was uncertain. However, as he contemplated his fate, Paul did not lose faith in God. He did not become bitter or angry about his circumstances. He did not cease the work to which he had been called. Through good times and trials, Paul remained faithful to God and his task.

## At-A-Glance

1. A New Effort (Philippians 1:15–18)
2. A Certain Victory (vv. 19–26)

## In Depth

### 1. A New Effort (Philippians 1:15–18)

Paul's confinement led to many new efforts to spread the Gospel. No one particular movement could do the work. Some followers were stronger because Paul was in jail. Perhaps they felt they had to fill in the gap left by Paul's absence. Paul called into question the motives of those who were preaching about Christ. Some were preaching out of "envy and strife" (v. 15), while others were preaching out of genuine goodwill. Some may have been jealous of the attention Paul was receiving despite his imprisonment. This very well may have been the case in Rome where Christianity had been established before Paul came. His presence there may have posed a threat to the Christian leaders who were already there. Some were likely vying for Paul's leadership role within the Christian community, assuming he would not be released. His rivals must have felt that their success would cause Paul to become jealous, perhaps adding to his troubles. Instead, he

rejoiced that others were spreading the Gospel, regardless of their motives. Paul recognized that the Gospel is powerful enough to transcend human pettiness. If this were not so, the spread of the Gospel would have stopped at Calvary. There is no human who is truly worthy to preach the Gospel. It is fallen human nature to be affected by envy, strife, egotism, narcissism, and partisanship. From the pulpit, all kinds of motives fuel the Sunday morning sermon. Still, the Gospel is preached, and people come to Christ. Paul's solution was to continue making the Gospel known and rejoice that it came through multiple means. The Good News cannot be held hostage to human imperfection. No one can alter its power. Not even the worst example of Christianity can take away the power of the Gospel. Paul's message has many implications for the Christian community today.

### 2. A Certain Victory (vv. 19–26)

Paul was confident that his experience—of being both jailed and harassed by rival Christians—would lead to victory. He wrote confidently of salvation as a result of his circumstances (v. 19). Some translations refer to Paul's "deliverance," and others suggest that he was referring to salvation in its fullest sense. The latter is that full redemption would be realized through Christ. The apostle was sure of his dependency on Christ for the impending victory. He quoted Job 13:16 (the Septuagint—the Greek translation of the Jewish Scriptures) where Job looked confidently to his ultimate vindication. There is no indication, however, that Paul was certain of his release from prison, nor did he appear to be excessively concerned about it. Paul's primary concern was not with life or death, as determined by the outcome of his trial. He appears to have been chiefly concerned with his own constitution, that he would not be afflicted with any manner of shame. Instead, he hoped for Christ to be "magnified" (Philippians

1:20). Paul was not looking to be a hero. He was willing to meet his fate, whether life or death, so that all could see how much Christ meant to him.

Paul stood at the crossroads between life and death. The apostle found favor in either outcome. Paul had no desire to escape death in favor of life. He viewed death as a portal into the greater realm of a life already filled with greatness. To Paul, life was Christ, who gave Paul's life meaning. Apart from Him, life held no meaning or purpose. Death, therefore, did not equal loss but gain. He knew that death was not final. Rather, it was an extension of his marching orders as a soldier in the army of the Lord. The life he knew in Christ would only become more magnificent through death. Conversely, if Paul's life was spared, he viewed it as an invitation to do more fruitful work for the kingdom. His only interest in being released from jail was that it would allow him to continue his ministry. He could preach the Gospel a while longer. He could continue to encourage the churches that had become so dear to him. Through life, he could continue to live and do more for Christ.

For years, Paul had been working in the trenches as a missionary—spreading the Gospel and encouraging and guiding the faithful. His hard work was just beginning to show results. Like a farmer who has been tending to trees hoping they will bear fruit, Paul is longing to see evidence of the harvest. He desires to stay because there is so much to be done. The two options the apostle faced did cause some divided feelings, which he expressed in verse 23. Understandably, Paul was pulled between his two options. Not that he viewed either as negative. Instead, in his heart, he longed to be with Christ. His was not a morbid desire, however. Paul probably envisioned a life with Christ too wonderful for the human spirit to totally conceive.

On the other hand, he wanted to be of service to his fellow Christians. He viewed the

continuance of life as being necessary only for the sake of the Philippians (v. 24). Paul was willing for his life to be used in whatever way the Lord deemed necessary. The Philippians were openly proud of Paul, whom they, in a sense, regarded as their own special apostle. Paul lovingly reminded them that Christ, not he, must remain the subject of their boasting. If he was to return to them, they should rejoice in the works of Jesus Christ, not himself. Paul's ability to have hope, even in the most hopeless of circumstances, came from his own experience of being granted new life after his former life had passed on. The boldness he possessed came from his certainty that Christ would be honored by him, whether through his life or his death.

### Search the Scriptures

1. For what motives were some preaching the Gospel (Philippians 1:15–17)?
2. Why were motives unimportant in preaching the Gospel (v. 18)?
3. For what reason did Paul want to remain alive (v. 25)?
4. Of what benefit would his continued life be to the Philippians (v. 26)?

### Discuss the Meaning

1. Paul reached a high spiritual point that caused him to rejoice, whether the outcome of his trial meant life or death. How did he reach such a point of spiritual maturity?
2. Why were some of the Christians strengthened by Paul's imprisonment? Why did they not become fearful that the same thing might happen to them?

### Liberating Lesson

Every Christian professes belief in eternal life. Yet, very often, when we think of death, we get scared at the uncertainty of our fate. Perhaps this is because we do not feel certain about our salvation. Some may doubt Christ's

promise. Our enslaved ancestors sang often of heaven—of the streets paved with gold, the pearly gates, where the Sabbath would have no end. They longed for the day when “trouble will be no more,” and every person would live in freedom and equality. Perhaps because there has been a general improvement in our social and economic standing, many of us now appear to place more value on life on earth than eternal life. No matter what attainments life holds, it can never compare to the future glory of life with Christ Jesus. As Christians, we must rejoice in our assurance of eternal life and leave the matter of when we will go to heaven in the hands of God.

### Application for Activation

If you were told today that you may not live much longer, what preparation would you make to ensure that Christ would be glorified through your experience of passing from life to death?

### 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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## Say It Correctly

Philippians. fi-LIP-ee-uhn-z.  
Praetorian. pray-TOR-ee-uhn.

## Daily Bible Readings

### MONDAY

Praising God in Word and Life  
(Psalm 119:169–176)

### TUESDAY

Giving Glory to God  
(Matthew 5:13–16)

### WEDNESDAY

Making the Word Fully Known  
(Colossians 1:21–29)

### THURSDAY

Sharing in the Gospel  
(Philippians 1:1–7)

### FRIDAY

Speaking the Word with Boldness  
(Philippians 1:8–14)

### SATURDAY

Toiling to Proclaim the Gospel  
(1 Thessalonians 2:1–11)

### SUNDAY

Proclaiming Christ in Every Way  
(Philippians 1:15–26)