

# Where the rubber meets the road

Ephesians 5:18 6:9

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## How can this study help me?

Paul continues his exhortation to change our attitude (4:17-5:17) and adopt a different way of behaving. In this section he takes up some of the basic relationships in life and shows that when one is “filled with the Spirit” (5:18) it shows particularly when we treat people differently *for the Lord’s sake*.

## What is going on in this section

There is something profoundly simple in all that he says, maybe even obvious, yet as all of us in relationships know, it is often exceedingly difficult to be consistent. Paul doesn’t set out to be egalitarian, sweeping away roles in marriage (5:22-33) and becoming an abolitionist with regards to slavery (6:5-9). Rather he is incisive and introduces a new perspective: act as if you were serving or representing the Lord Jesus.

## Wives and Husbands (5:22-33)

There has been much written on these verses. They appear to assume a relationship where both wife and husband are committed to the Lord Jesus, to one another, to “putting off” old attitudes and habits and putting on new ones. They don’t envisage relationships characterised by violence, abuse and/or alcoholism or where only partner is a Christian.

- The roles in the relationship between Christ and the church are the model for what Paul says. Can you map out the ideals in this relationship?
- Assuming that their husbands are not tyrants, what fundamental attitude are wives to “put on”? (6:22-24, 33; cf., 4:24.)
- What does this mean practically without qualifications?
- What sort of old pagan attitude might Paul think they ought to “put off” (cf., 4:22) when he speaks this way?
- Assuming their wives are not independent and uncooperative, what fundamental attitude are husbands to “put on”? (6:25, 28, 33; cf., 4:24)
- What does this mean practically not sentimentally?
- What sort of old pagan attitude might Paul think they ought to “put off” (cf., 4:22) when he speak this way?

## Children and Parents (6:1-4)

- The child/parent relationship has a clear structure, yet what spiritual dimensions does Paul introduce? (6:1, 2, 3, 4)

- Paul quotes the fifth commandment which in context leads into a discussion of the role of parents. What is Paul assuming about father's attitude and God? (cf., Deut 5;16; 6:1-2, 4-7, 13)

### Slaves and masters ((6:5-9))

It has been estimated that well over half the workforce in Paul's time could be described as slaves. However, our understanding of slavery is distorted by the overwhelming pictures of negro slaves in America conveyed by different media.

In Roman times slaves included what we would often call professionals today. So doctors, teachers and builders were most often slaves.

- When you think of the movies, like *Gladiator* and the old *Ben Hur*, how would slaves relate to their masters?
- Is Paul unreasonable to introduce a spiritual dimension into what was most often a relationship characterised by exploitation? (6:5-8)
- What hope do you think Paul had in changing the attitude of masters to their slaves? (6:9)

### What about us here and now?

Twice already Paul has given his understanding of the role of apostles in the church (3:5; 4:11). What right has Paul to give directives about marriage, parenting and slavery and why would we take any notice of it today?

### So what do I do?

- Statistics tell us that most couples choose to cohabitate today. When deep down everyone knows what God expects, how is cohabitation fundamentally a spiritual decision against submission?
- Having taken this decision, why then is it difficult to appreciate and implement the wisdom of these verses? How could you help a couple who are struggling with the implications of these words?
- Many, maybe most of you, the users of these studies, would have been slaves in NT times. What do these words say about your accountability in situations when your work is not supervised or you feel exploited?
- What criterion can you develop that would help someone in a difficult work situation know when it's time to move on?
- How are children who are separated from their fathers/mothers to apply these words?
- How could fathers (and mothers) who are separated from their children apply these words?