

WORDS OF ENCOURAGEMENT AND HOPE

A Study of Paul's Letters to the Thessalonians and the Ephesians

MEDITATE: *Ephesians 5:21-33*

Quiet your heart before the Lord. This does not necessarily mean that your environment needs to be silent, although this can be helpful. Set aside a time free from distractions to focus on the passage as you read and meditate on it.

These instructions may help you develop a method for meditating on our passage each week. You may want to incorporate all or some of these ideas, whatever is helpful.

- ❖ Read the passage slowly and prayerfully, asking the Lord to speak to you from his word. Take several minutes to mull over the passage.
- ❖ Read the passage aloud and again take several minutes to give careful thought to it.
- ❖ Listen to the passage being read aloud. You may want to have someone else read it to you, or use a Bible program such as biblegateway.com or YouVersion, a free Bible app.
- ❖ Read the passage in other translations.

Finally, consider the following questions:

What words or phrases stand out to me? Why?

What questions does the passage raise that I want to know more about?

MEDITATE

“The will of God for your life is simply that you submit yourself to Him each day and say, ‘Father, Your will for today is mine. Your pleasure for today is mine. Your work for today is mine. I trust You to be God. You lead me today and I will follow.’”

—Kay Arthur

DIG IN: *Read Ephesians 5:21-33.*

1. Review Ephesians 5:18b-20. In these few verses Paul mentions several manifestations of a Spirit-filled life. Now in verse 21 he mentions one more – “Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ” – “a phrase that sets the stage for the rest of this epistle’s instructions about human relationships.”¹ How do you think “reverence for Christ” impacts the way we interact with others?

SUBMIT (v. 21)

The verb “submit” in the original Greek “means literally to ‘arrange under’,”² to “voluntarily place yourself under the authority of”³ others who are “worthy of respect, either because of their inherent qualities or more often because of the position they [hold].”⁴ Paul “is exhorting against a spirit of self-exaltation by anyone in the church. He calls for a recognition of the divinely-established order in human life and in the church, and for each Christian to submit himself to whatever human authority he has been placed under.”⁵

2. In verse 22, Paul begins his discussion of Christian marriage with the exhortation to wives to submit to their husbands as to the Lord (vv. 22, 24).
 - a. What should this submission look like in the marriage relationship? (v. 33b; Titus 2:3-5; 1 Pet. 3:1-6)
 - b. Why is this challenging?

“A truly Christian marriage will mirror the relationship between Christ and his church. The two are closely intertwined. ...[T]his ‘mirroring’ will involve both the husband *loving* his wife as Christ loves the church, and the wife gladly *submitting* to her husband as the church is to be subordinate to Christ. The two elements, love and submission, are nonnegotiables within the relationship.”⁶

3. In the table below, jot down the parallels between the marriage relationship and the relationship between Christ and his church.

Roles of the husband and wife	Roles of Christ and his church
Wife vv. 22, 24	Church v. 24
Husband v. 23a v. 25 vv. 28-29	Christ v. 23a v. 25 vv. 23, 29

4. “As Christ is the head of the church” (v. 23), so the husband is the head in the marriage relationship (v. 23; see also 1 Cor. 11:3).
 - a. What should characterize the husband’s headship? (vv. 25, 33a; Col. 3:19; 1 Pet. 3:7)

“Wives and husbands... have different God-appointed roles, but all have equal dignity because they have been made in the divine image and in Christ have put on the new person who is created to be like God (4:24).”⁷

b. Why is this challenging?

5. Christ demonstrated his love for the church by “[giving] himself up for her” (v. 25). What is the goal of Christ’s sacrifice for the church?

v. 26; Eph. 1:4; Titus 3:4-6

v. 27; 2 Cor. 4:14; Rev. 21:2

6. If husbands are to love their wives “in the same way” (v. 28) as Christ loves the church, what should that look like? (vv. 28-30; Jn. 13:12-17; Eph. 5:1-2; Phil. 2:3-8)

7. In verse 31, Paul quotes Genesis 2:24. Francis Foulkes says, “This statement from the creation story is the most profound and fundamental statement in the whole of Scripture concerning God’s plan for marriage.”⁸ What happens in marriage? (v. 31; Gen. 2:23-24; Mt. 19:4-6)

8. The unity of husband and wife in marriage was for Paul “the highest analogy that he knew for the still more wonderful relation of Christ and His Church.... They are made one together. The husband’s position as head, and his duty of sacrificial love and devoted care for his wife are but pictures, imperfect, but the best that this life can offer, of Christ as Head, and of His love, self-sacrifice and concern for His Church.”⁹ Similarly, the wife’s submission to her husband is “a picture of how the Church should live and act towards her divine Lord.”¹⁰ How does this analogy to Christ and the church change your view of ordinary human relationships, especially the bond of marriage?

PAUSE TO WORSHIP

Re-read Ephesians 5:21-33. Take time to interact with the Lord about the passage.

“Once we’ve meditated to focus, understand, and remember, we will normally find our hearts inclined to worship. So, we pause to lift our gaze to the excellencies of Christ, to bend our eyes off of the world, to express thanksgiving and adoration when we pray. Meditation leads to delight when the Holy Spirit inclines our hearts to see and savor how glorious God is.”¹¹

- ❖ How do I respond to the beauty I see in God’s will, work, and ways in this passage?

- ❖ In what ways do I see Jesus more clearly through this passage?

- ❖ Is there a song or hymn that comes to mind that helps express my response to the passage?

REFLECT & PRAY

- ❖ How can I take what I’m learning from this passage and make it my own? Is there something specific to believe, do, not do, be grateful for, etc.?

- ❖ How does this passage help me see myself and others differently?

- ❖ Pray the passage: Use the passage as a basis to talk to God about the things you are learning, seeing, and longing for as well as ways the passage speaks to your current life experiences.

¹ Chapell, Bryan, *Ephesians*, Reformed Expository Commentary (Phillipsburg: P & R Publishing, 2001), 267.

² O’Brien, Peter T, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 399.

³ Stedman, Ray C., *Our Riches in Christ: Discovering the Believer’s Inheritance in Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Discovery House, 1998), 311.

⁴ Wood, A. Skevington, “Ephesians” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary with the New International Version: Ephesians through Philemon*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 11 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988), 75.

⁵ Kent, Homer A. Jr., *Ephesians: The Glory of the Church*, Everyman’s Bible Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1971), 98.

⁶ O’Brien, 408.

⁷ O’Brien, 412.

⁸ Foulkes, Francis, *The Epistle of Paul to the Ephesians*, The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries ed. R. V. G. Tasker (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981), 161.

⁹ Foulkes, 162.

¹⁰ Foulkes, 162.

¹¹ <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/5-steps-to-meditating-on-your-bible/>