

“God’s Laboratories,” Ephesians 5:21–6:9, *Love Incorruptible*, 7

Compassion Announcement

We love Compassion, and, as a church, we’ve been partnering with *them* for several years.

- I **really believe in this mission organization** and love it...
- 3 reasons I love them:
 - **Holistic:** They work with kids in some of the poorest parts in the world, and do so in a way that ministers **body and soul**—providing medicine, education and training in the gospel
 - **Local church based:** not Americans dropping in like Saviors, but local **leaders empowered**. Don’t just need Americans. They are not about creating dependency but about raising up leaders.
 - **Good for the family:**
 - We sponsor 4.
 - Just a **couple weeks ago** I went with one of my kids to visit three of our sponsored child in the DR.

Some of you look at what is going on in the world and wonder, “What can be done?” This is what can be done. This is the most effective local leader development I’ve ever seen. **The most impressive** young adults I have ever met—I go on these trips and they are so inspiring. You meet these incredibly sharp men and women, some of them business leaders and they say, “I was orphaned, and Compassion helped rescue me.”

Many of you have been praying about what your first step into missions should be. Here’s your answer: sponsor a child today. 3K.

HOLD UP Compassion Card...

- Shows you what your giving goes toward (food, medicine, education)
- You can choose from specific regions you’re interested in, and ages that are similar to your own kids’.
- Most sobering... when I meet kids overseas waiting on a sponsor

Introduction

Ephesians 5: Moving our way through Ephesians, almost done.

One of the most era-defining movies of my childhood was ***The Karate Kid***.

- It was a story about a **loser kid who gets beat up** and this older Japanese man teaches him to **succeed in life** using karate.
- As a kid, it was **inspiring and awesome**.
 - (FWIW, I **went back to watch it with my kids** and it didn’t seem nearly as good now—how **getting into the crane** position doesn’t signal clearly to your opponent what is about to happen I don’t know.)
- But one of the most **captivating things to me as a kid** about the movie was **how Mr. Miagi** taught Daniel to fight. Daniel comes over to be trained and Mr. Miagi basically gives him a number of chores—wash the cars, sand the deck, paint the fence. And Danie does these things for about a month, and finally gets sick of it, but then Mr. Mlagi shows him that in learning to do those mundane things he’s learned all the basic motions that will make him a great fighter.

Paul shows us in Ephesians 5 that God has set up the world in basically the same way.

He takes 3 very common relationships: marriage; family; and work, and shows us that these very ordinary relationships are like **laboratories** that God uses make us more like himself.

In each of these relationships, we learn a very important quality, a quality that defined Jesus, too: “submission.”

Paul opens this section with that concept. ...21 **submitting to one another in the fear of Christ.* (This is the last phrase of the previous section on how to walk, and serves as Paul’s transition into this discussion on gospel-centered relationships.)

Submitting to one another, out of **respect for** Christ. He’s going to highlight **3 different relationships—marriage, family, work**—in which we submit to each other as a way of learning to be like Jesus.

Very important: The fact that we submit to others in relationships like these does not make us **inferior to the person to whom we are submitting**.

In another of his letters, Paul said (we looked at this already once in this series): **Galatians 3:27-29:** [28] In Christ... there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, (you could add here these other relationships parent or child, boss or employee) **for you are all one in Christ Jesus.**

- IOW, we are all **equal in our nature** in Christ. But that doesn’t mean for a time we don’t play various roles, though.

Even Jesus learned to play the role of submission: **In 1 Cor 15 Paul says that** even though Jesus was God himself in his nature and thus equal with the Father, still submitted his will to the will of the Father. The **writer of Hebrews says that by doing that** he “learned” submission. But he did all this while being fully equal with God.

- **Illus.** We used to have on our staff a **part-time police officer**. He was part of our **pastoral counseling team**.
 - (It was great because he understood that fine line between when someone needed compassion and when they needed to be arrested.)

- But when he was here, he was under my authority, because I am the head of the staff. But sometimes he would come in his police car, and when we stepped out onto the road, I was under his.
 - **So, who was superior to whom?** It just depends on what role we were playing.
 - **That’s the idea** behind what Paul teaches here. It has nothing to do with superiority/inferiority, it has to do with roles we play at various points in our lives.

Let’s look at the first laboratory, **marriage**.

(Lab 1: Marriage (5:22–32))

22 Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord (Ladies, there’s your favorite verse! I’m sure you probably have that cross-stitched somewhere on a pillow at home), **23 because the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church. He is the Savior of the body. Then he repeats it, just so it’s clear.** **24 Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives are to submit to their husbands in everything.**

- **“In everything.”** Just so that you can’t accuse me of ever soft-pedaling what the Bible teaches. “In everything.”
- A lady says, “*Well, am I supposed to submit to my husband in this area?*” Well, is it in the ‘everything’ category?” You tell me.
- Now, ladies, listen, I know for some of you, your head is about to explode and maybe this raises all kinds of questions or maybe you’ve seen this really distorted and abused, but just hang with me for minute.

25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself for her **26 to make her holy, cleansing her with the washing of water by the word.** **27 He did this to present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or anything like that, but holy and blameless.** **28 In the same way, husbands are to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself.** **29 For no one ever hates his own flesh but provides and cares for it, just as Christ does for the church,** **30 since we are members of his body.** **31**

For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two will become one flesh. 32 This mystery is profound, but I am talking about Christ and the church.

So, let's start with the husband: **The husband submits to his wife by leading her like Christ leads the church.**

In teaching this, Paul draws all the way back from the creation narratives of Genesis 2, where we see at least **4 ways the man was to have a Christ-like leadership role:**

He was, first of all, to lead in providing for her.

- Before God created the woman, he had the man working in the garden. *After the man* had a job, God brought him a wife.
- **Quick application** here: Ladies, if he can't hold down a job—he's 28 and still uses his parents' credit cards, you might want to think twice!)

Second, he was to lead the way spiritually

- **When she was brought** to him, he already had a relationship with God. He was tasked with relaying to her the commands of God and leading her in obeying them.
- Men, you were to be the **spiritual leaders** in your home.
- Did you see that phrase, "Wash her with water with the word"?
 - That means you **lead in the application of Scripture** to your family.
 - **Overwhelmed?** You get the image of trying to lead your wife in a Bible lesson and you're like, "She's smarter than me and I know that and she knows that and God knows that and I don't know what to do." **Try this:** Tonight, when you get home, say, "Hey, baby, how can I pray for you," then hold her hand, say, "Dear God," and just pray the application of my sermon point over her. And when you look up, she's going to be crying & you're going to be leading & you're going to feel great and you'll come write me a thank you note!

- **Washing her with the word means you become the primary mouthpiece** declaring to her God's feelings about her. She is valued, cherished, and precious in God's sight, with a bright future because of God's plans for her.
 - **Husband:** What if your wife's identity was built solely on your compliments & encouragements to her? **How balanced** would her emotional life be?
 - Here's another experiment I'll give you (because I am feeling generous): Use the character trait lists in Eph 5, I Cor 13, Prov 31, Gal 5, (Why aren't you writing this down? No, I'm not going to do it again, you should have had your pens out when I started)... as a scavenger hunt for the characteristics of Christ you look for, pray for, and affirm in your wife.

Thirdly, he takes the lead in romance. The 1st human words recorded in the Bible were Adam composing a love poem about his wife. He was to be the one taking initiative in romancing his wife.

- Men: You should be the one **budgeting for** and **suggesting the date nights**;
 - You should be the **one figuring out** when the relationship is in trouble and that you need some counseling. Usually the opposite.

Finally, he was to lead in sacrifice. In **vs. 31** Paul references God's instruction to the man to **leave his previous life** and cleave to his wife.

Paul **compares this to Jesus' relationship with us:** Jesus left his heavenly home and laid down his life for us. Now we are to do that for our wives.

- Laying down your life doesn't simply mean being willing to die for her; it means daily putting her needs above yours—using your power to serve her.
- It means that in decisions, I give **her needs and preferences** more weight than my own.

- **Guys, if I am serving her like Christ** served the church, that means that in 90% of places where we disagree, we are going to end up doing what she wants because most decisions are not spiritual leadership decisions, **they are preferences**, and mine should always be second to hers.
- To borrow from **C.S. Lewis here**: Men, in the marriage relationship you wear a crown, but the crown you wear is first and foremost one of thorns.
- **That's how I submit to her**: I use my leadership to serve her.

Before we move on to the wife, let me point out that, in one sense, humanity's fall happened through a failure of the man to lead:

- Go back to the garden: Who sinned first? Clearly **Adam**. Gen 3: he was **"with" the woman** when she ate, which means he failed in leading spiritually; failed in protection.
- *How it should have gone.*
- The first sin was as much one of **omission** as it was **commission**: the failure of man to lead.
- I think the way God came looking for the human race is revealing: Adam, where are you?
 - Man's **sitting back on the couch** watching SportsCenter on ESPN while the wife runs the family...

Humanity fell because men didn't lead like Christ... and I would suggest that when men in this church re-assume their leadership role, their families and our society will be transformed!

- Studies show that if child is first to get saved, then **3.5% chance** everyone else in the household will follow; mother, 17%; father, 93%.
- **Men, your families will be most impacted when YOU are the one leading in family devotion**; you are the ones setting the priorities, when you are leading in discipline and keeping the family schedule on track.
 - **As it stands now**, a lot of men are on auto-pilot when it comes to their family. They come home and let their wives lead. You led all day at work.

- Guys, if some of you showed the same level of initiative at your job that you do in your family, you'd be fired in a week! And leading your family is your most important assignment.
- Listen: We have a lot of great men at this church. We need more.
 - **IMB: Women applicants** to go to the hard places outnumber men 7 to 1! (And *praise God* for those women. They are faithful and courageous. But men, they shouldn't lead the way into the hard areas.

Ladies, Amen?

Now, to the WIFE, he says: You reflect Jesus in how you submit to that leadership. As I showed you, twice in this passage she is told, "submit to your husbands—in everything."

So, what does that mean? Well, first let me point out what it doesn't mean:

- **It doesn't mean the dominance of the man**, as if she exists as a **serf** in his house to cater to his whims. Because, as we just saw, the husband is told first to lay down his life for her.
- Nor does it mean, ladies, you **allow yourself to be put in a situation** where you might be harmed.
 - **When it says (vs. 22) submit to him "as to the Lord"** that means *"as a way of serving God"* not "in the place of God." **Which means if your husband was telling you to do something that would make you disobey the Lord**, or his leadership ever puts **you or your family in physical harm's way**—you need to get out of there. **Come see us**, get some counseling.
- This **doesn't mean that all women everywhere** should submit to men, as if women can't lead in the workplace. Paul only talks about the marriage relationship.
- **Finally, guys, let me also point that out that this verse is not a tool you are given to wield over your wives.**
 - Notice that the verse is addressed specifically to *women*.
 - It's her verse, not yours!

- **DMLJ says** that means men you shouldn't quote it at your wife. It's hers to obey, not yours to demand. If she's not doing it, all you can do (other than maybe **leaving the Bible open to Eph 5** every night) is to **try to be the kind of leader** it would be a joy to submit to.
- You play your role and trust God with hers.

What it DOES mean, ladies, is that you allow him the space to steer the family.

- I love how **Kathy Keller** explains it. She says, "It means that in matters of disagreement I yield to Tim the deciding vote. I get a vote; he gets a vote; he gets the deciding vote." **She tells the story of their decision on whether to move to NYC** so he could pastor: *He felt yes; she no. They had to make a decision; to not make one would be, functionally, to make one against. He conceded: "OK, if you don't want to go, we won't go." Kathy: "Oh no you don't... you're not putting this on me. You have to make it and bear the responsibility."*
 - **Spiritual leadership means he has the burden of responsibility.** You are relieved of the burden of being accountable for a bad decision.
 - **Tony Evans:** Spiritual headship is God telling the woman to duck so he can punch the man.
- **He bears the burden of the deciding vote.**
- Guys: **Spiritual headship is not license to do what you want to do, it is empowerment to do what you ought to do.**
- But, wives, that means you **don't only follow him** when you agree with him or feel like he is making the right decision. That's not submission; that's agreement.
 - **A lot of times a woman will come back** from something and say, "Well, my husband is not a spiritual leader." And **they wonder**, "What does that mean for how I follow him?" This **verse doesn't say**, "Submit when he is sufficiently a spiritual leader in your eyes."

- **Ladies, listen: If your husband is not a spiritual leader, your submission to him in this way can help call him up** into this kind of leadership!
 - **Let me explain something about guys:** Every guy from the day he is born is asking the question, "Do I have what it takes?"
 - Some of us **got that affirmation** that we have it from our fathers and we became spiritual leaders. A lot of guys didn't, though, and so they doubt they have it.
 - **You can call him up into that by saying**, "You lead!"
 - Your submission creates a vacuum that serves as an invitation.
 - **And when he does, encourage him.** Say things like, "That's what I love in my man. Leadership." And watch him come alive.

LISTEN: Let me encourage you: Don't reject this just because you have seen this warped. (All relationships can be twisted—marriage, parenting, work relationships—but that doesn't mean the frameworks are wrong in themselves).

- **Matt Chandler:** "A husband sacrificially loving his wife, and a wife submitted to her godly husband creates a relationship that the world would never look at and say, 'How disgusting and archaic.'"
- A lot of people who say they are turned off by the Christian teaching on marriage are attracted by the Christian marriages they see.¹
- LISTEN: When the **two of you start to conduct your marriage** this way, you will find, I promise you, that **deeper joy** you've been looking for. This is what **happy marriages are made of**.

Marriage, is not first and foremost making you happy in a perfect mate, but making you holy by **teaching you to love like Jesus**. It is **gospel-reenactment**.

¹ Adapted from Tim Chester, *Titus for Everyone*. See below.

Marriages that fall apart do not do so because couples fall out of love with each other, but because they fall out of fellowship with Jesus.

For those of you who are single: there are other laboratories where God works on this, too; marriage is just one of them. Paul's main objective is our hearts toward God, marriage is just one lab and there are others. Which actually brings us to Paul's next example...

(Be encouraged, btw, marriage was Paul's main example... the next 2 are shorter.) In chapter 6, Paul talks about

Lab 2: Children and Parents (6:1–4)

¹ Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. Honor your father and mother, which is the first commandment with a promise, so that it may go well with you and that you may have a long life in the land.

Family is a **lab where children** learn to obey God by obeying their parents.

- **See how he ties their obedience to the 10 commandments?**
6:2, "Honor your father and mother"

Interestingly, "honor your father and mother" is the 5th commandment. Which means it's right in the middle of the 10. The first 4 commandments are about our relationship to God. The last 5 are about our relationship to others. Right in the middle of that is this one, because it hinges the two.

- **When we are young**, our parents represent the authority of God to us. In a way, they stand in for God for a time. We first learn to obey and submit to God by obeying and submitting to them.
- **That means**, for those of you living at home, how you submit to the authority of your mom and dad is how you submit to God. LET THAT SIT THERE.
- **Parents—LOOK AT ME, EYES FRONT, DON'T LOOK AT YOUR TEENAGER—it is one of the reasons we take discipline seriously.**

How they learn to respect you, and submit to you, is how they will learn to submit to God.

- **I don't demand my kids respect me** just because I'm me, or because they shouldn't embarrass me, but because of whom I represent, and I try to teach them that.

Parenting is a lab that teaches children to submit to God.

Which actually brings up a question that I get a lot: What about when you are older—do you still have to obey your parents?

- **We have adult couples** in our church with kids of their own on the **mission field** whose parents tried to forbid them, even when they knew God was telling them to go.

Well, notice the command is **not to obey**, but to **honor**. (To children it is "obey.") As a child, you honor your parents by obeying them. As you get older, you honor them in different ways.

- This is where it helps to understand that parents are a temporary stand-in for God. They are like the training wheels to obeying God. The point is obeying God.
- **By the time you leave the house, you are supposed to have shifted the authority** from your parents to God.
- **Which means, when you are older, the way you honor them** is *be the man or woman that God designed you to become and obeying HIM*, even if that means you go against their wishes sometimes.
- By obeying God, you are honoring the institution of parenting. *Which means that for some of you, the best way to honor your father and mother is to defy their wishes and do what God says.*

Beyond that, other practical ways **you can honor them** is by:

1. **Calling them.** Keep them involved in your lives. No parent ever feels like they are consulted too much or invited into your life too much.
2. **Asking their opinion.** They do have the benefit of a lot of years and there is usually no one who knows you as intimately or cares for you as deeply as they do.

3. Or how about this one? **Saying “thanks.”**
4. Making **caring for them in their old age** your priority.

On the parents’ side: 4 Fathers, don’t stir up anger in your children, but bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.

- (BTW, do you notice that the **parenting instructions are almost always given** to men!
 - The book of Proverbs, which contains probably the most instruction on parenting anywhere in the Bible, is addressed specifically to a man. (It’s a **father writing to a son**), which again shows us is that God looks to the father to be the spiritual head of the home.
- **“Bring them up in training and instruction of the Lord”** means that what you are primarily focused on is **character development**. You are shaping their heart toward God.
 - **Gospel-shaped discipline** is less concerned with controlling the behavior and more concerned about the shape of their heart.
 - Which, **when you understand it**, will change your approach to discipline altogether!
 - Often, when you are stirring up anger in them it is because you have shifted into behavior controlling which is more about your convenience than their development.
- I would love to dive into this, but I just don’t have the space today—I would recommend a couple of books you should read immediately—*Shepherding a Child’s Heart*, and *Gospel-Powered Parenting*.
- **Me and some of our pastors here** published a study with Lifeway that you could do in your small group: **Ready to Launch**.

So much more to say on this, but let’s get to...

Lab 3: Work (6:5–9)

⁵ *Servants, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, with a sincere heart, as you would Christ,* (For the sake of these verses, read “servants” and “masters” as an employer—employee relationship.)

Some translations say, “slaves,” but most translations don’t use that because Paul is in no way condoning what we in the Western world think of when we say, “slavery.” Paul makes clear in other places in the Bible the wickedness of that practice.)

Paul is referring here to a practice like indentured servanthood, which was typically a voluntary contract that didn’t last for a lifetime and not based on race.

- Granted, it wasn’t a great working situation, because you literally would sell yourself to someone, but it is in no way a commendation of the chattel slavery system that we think of when we say “slave.”

So, read these instructions as **“employees to employers.”**

- **This is a Christian philosophy of work, which so many of you have wondered about.** You think, “What does it mean to be a Christian at work?” And you think it means:
 - Writing **“God bless you”** on receipts.
 - **...opening up a coffee shop** called **Jehovah Java**; **He brews** my fav: **St. Arbucks** or a hair salon called **“His Clips”** or **“A Cut Above.”**
 - **I saw a list the other day** of “ways to share your faith in the workplace.” **Some of them were ok**, but some were things like, and I kid you not:
 - **#61:** “Put up a sign that says, ‘Ask us about our exchange policy.’ When customers ask, let them know about your actual policy, then ask if they would like to hear about the greatest exchange policy on the planet—Jesus righteousness for our sin.”
 - **#60:** “When a customer has paid his bill in full, send an invoice that says, “Paid in full. These were the

same words the bloody Jesus spoke from the cross about your sin.”

- **And you are like, “I’m not sure I can do that.”** Or remember the story I told you about the American Airlines pilot in 2004 who got fired... “We don’t sense any problems on our flight today... but, you know, you never can be too sure.”

Here’s Paul explanation of living out your faith at work. In short, you approach your work *submissively*. If you are an employee, you should “...*obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, with a sincere heart, as you would Christ*⁶ *not by the way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but as servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart,*⁷ *rendering service with a good will as to the Lord and not to man...*”

In those verse, I see Christ-like submission at work meaning at least 3 things:

A. A Cheerful Disposition toward Obedience – “obey them, as you would Christ”

- Submitting to your boss is how you show submission to Christ.
- That’s not supposed to be dependent on how nice your boss is or even if he or she always rewards you fairly, because ultimately, Paul says, you are not working for him or her, but for God.
 - I know some of you are in jobs where your boss is a jerk; or, “He’s unfair...”
- **God will repay** them one day. But he’s your first audience. In **every assignment**, he’s the real boss behind your earthly boss. Do your work for him.

B. A Commitment to Excellence – “not by way of eye-service.”

- You don’t just do the minimum required to get by; they are trying to bless their employers or the people they work for.
- **Illus.** Lewis and the flowers.

- At your job, are you doing the minimum required to get by, or am working hard to try to bless my employers and my customers?

C. An Attitude of Servanthood – “rendering service with a good will”

- One of the **distinctive things about the Christian approach to work: World sees work as a necessary evil to get money. When you get enough money, you stop working.**
- Christians see work as a way of serving their fellow man. We **recognize that God put us** in an earth filled with raw materials that we are to develop for the benefit of other humans.

He turns vs. 9, to bosses...⁹ Masters, do the same to them, and stop your threatening, knowing that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven...

- **For you who have power over others**, he says, use that power the way Jesus used his power in your life. To lift up and empower, not to manipulate and control.
 - You see, there’s **two things you can do with power**:
Collect it: This is what the world does—collects it and uses it for its own benefit.
 - **The other is leverage it**: this is what Jesus did. God gives away his power to serve others.

So here again, we see, **work is a laboratory** where you get to learn to serve like Jesus, lead like Jesus, and put Jesus on display for everyone to see—**living this way is the best way to be a witness!**

So much more to say here, but no time!

- More study, see **Right Now Media**—I’ve got a study on there called “Work as Worship.”
- (**Right Now** is a subscription we buy as a church that any of our members can access. Like Netflix for Christians.)

Conclusion/MUSIC

So, as Paul nears the end of Ephesians, he is trying to get the Ephesians to see that in all their relationships—even in the most normal ones—they are serving God.

- **I've heard it said that you can measure the progress** of your Christian life by **how well you relate** to your spouse, your parents, and your employer. The truest measure of your Christianity is how you are at home!
- So, let's stop there with that question: ***If you based your spiritual progress solely on how well you lived it out at home, how do you think you are doing?***

What Paul shows us is that the quality of our horizontal relationships goes back to the quality of our vertical ones.

- **Disruption here (vertical) leads to chaos here (horizontal).**
- If you are **satisfied in Christ**, secure in Christ, sure you are chosen by Christ, and feeling significant in Christ, happy in your reward with Christ, ***you quit putting so much weight*** on these other relationships.
- **Many of us can't be good** husbands or wives or parents or children or employees or employers because there is **something WRONG HERE** (vertical), and that makes us dissatisfied, selfish here (horizontal), trying to **SQUEEZE out** of these horizontal relationships what we should be getting from this one (vertical).

You have conflict in all these relationships because all THESE people are BIGGER to you than Jesus.

So maybe you need to turn your attention first **HERE**. **Good news:** when you get this (vertical) right, he'll take over in these.

BOW HEADS

- Ever repented and turned over control of your life to him?
- Accepted his offer to forgive you in Christ?
- Are you asking him for his help, submitted to doing things his way?

- Are you committed to growing in these things by **active involvement** in the church