

The Cure for Conflict

by Ray C. Stedman

The most common charge leveled against the Christian church in our times is that it is irrelevant to people's real problems, and does not help people where they live. The church is accused of avoiding the blood and tears and guts of life. One of the most frequently heard charges is that the church is interested only in preserving the status quo. As someone has put it, "Come weal or come woe, our status is quo."

Let us be perfectly honest and admit that this is often too true today. There are churches that do not come to grips with life. Many churches of our day are interested only in singing hymns and performing religious ceremonies, or in spouting moral platitudes and reading Scripture, but not really engaging in the current burning issues of our society.

Where that is true, however, it is invariably due to a departure from the wisdom and authority of Scripture, either by setting aside the authority of Scripture, treating it as a collection of myths unworthy of modern man's intelligence, or, equally deadly, mechanically accepting the authority of Scripture without attempting to carry it out into life. In either case, perception of the Bible's relevance to life is lost, despite the fact no book is as relevant as the Bible. The Holy Scriptures take the radical secret of Christianity – that Jesus Christ is alive and can take up residence in a human being, and that he proposes to dress himself in the personality and individuality of that person and express his life through him – and apply it to the very struggles that we experience daily.

In Chapters 4 and 5 of Ephesians, we have seen that the Apostle Paul comes to grips with our constant urge to lie, to steal, to gossip, to be hateful and bitter with one another. He deals at length, frankly and forthrightly, with the problem of how to handle our powerful sex drives in a responsible and proper way. In every way, he brings Christian

truth right down into life, and shows us how to live in a sick society. This is what these New Testament books are all about.

In Ephesians 5, we come now to a passage where the apostle takes up the matter of Christian relationships with other human beings. Here we will face squarely the great, burning problems of our own day. In this section we will be dealing with such matters as climbing divorce rates, spreading juvenile delinquency, the squabbles between management and labor, civil rights struggles, and all the pressing issues of our day, for this passage brings us right to grips with these very conflicts.

What does Scripture have to say on these matters?

Well, the amazing thing is, and it is truly amazing, that what the inspired apostle has to say as to the solution of all conflicts between individuals can be put into one brief sentence. That is exactly what he does:

Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ. {Eph 5:21 RSV}

Having said that, he has summarized everything he says in the next several verses, on through Chapter 6, Verse 9. He will simply apply this sentence again and again to various specific situations which a Christian faces in his relationship with other people. In saying, "Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ," the apostle is dealing with the basic remedy for all the conflicts in our day, or any day.

Perhaps you are ready to charge us with being superficial. Perhaps you say, "Oh, this is another of those easy answers you Christians are always coming up with, another platitude that is supposed to take care of everything." Well, you can look at

it like that if you wish; you can take it as an easy answer. Or you can give intelligent, thoughtful consideration to what Paul has to say, and see that it is indeed the answer to the problem.

It is noteworthy to contrast this simple statement with the approaches we use to solve the social issues of our day. When we are confronted by some moral problem, some grave social issue, what do we do? First, we must somehow gain the attention of the public to this problem. This may involve a riot or some other kind of violence in order to put it on the front pages and bring it to the attention of others. Then we must get an appropriation from some funding body, private or governmental. Then a committee must be appointed to go into the matter and to study it thoroughly. Then the committee must publish its report. After the report is out, and we have all studied it, then we proceed to organize pressure blocks and boycotts and pickets and other methods of bringing pressure on the right people to correct the abuses which exist.

I am not necessarily condemning these processes. I am simply listing them as the approach society inevitably takes to solve its problems. Inevitably such a solution creates as many, or more, problems than it actually solves. Thus, we get involved deeper and deeper in a descending spiral of difficulty which breaks out continually in riots and violence. This is the story of what is happening in our country today.

Contrast that with what Paul says here. He addresses himself to Christians, and he says to us, as individuals, "Start right where you are. Do not try to solve your problem on the community level first, or on the state level, or on any other level of society, but start as an individual; start right where you are." All the admonitions and exhortations of Scripture are addressed to us as individuals. The amazing thing, as you read through the New Testament, is to note the total absence of any appeal for corporate action in solving these basic problems of society. The solution is always addressed to individuals. Start where you are by doing one simple thing: "Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ."

In applying this, Paul will discuss the relationship of husbands to wives, which brings in the whole realm of marriage and divorce and the problems that arise there. Then he will take up the matter of children and parents, which brings in the whole issue of juvenile delinquency – its causes and

what can be done about it. Then he will take up the issue of management and labor, masters and servants, employers and employees. In each case, the remedy is always the same: "Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ."

I suggest that there is nothing more important than for us to see, carefully and exactly, what he means by this, and why he says it: For, if we have any desire at all to be part of a solution of the issues surrounding us today, we must do so out of an intelligent understanding of what God has revealed about the heart of the problem. If we are to have any answer to give those who urge us to get involved in this or that kind of activity, we must understand the great, basic, underlying, fundamental realities of the problem. It is to these realities that Scripture always brings us.

If we are going to understand the world in which we live and the reasons for violent conditions break out in recurrent cycles in human history, we must go back to the basic cause of all human strife.

I suppose there is not one of us here, old or young, who has not at some time asked himself the question, "How can I get the greatest satisfaction out of life? How can I get the maximum expression of my potentialities? How can I escape boredom and monotony in my life? How, in other words, can I fulfill myself?"

Now it is not wrong to ask these questions, because it is obvious that God has put these urges within us. It is God who makes us desire to express ourselves and to fulfill ourselves. It is he who creates these inward urges in every human heart to experience life, to be happy, and to gain satisfaction out of life. It is not wrong to ask the questions, but it is absolutely essential that we understand it is gravely wrong to ask them in this way.

When we ask the questions this way – "How can I get satisfaction out of life? How can I fulfill myself?" – we are asking as though we were the only person in the world, as though we were all alone in the world and were responsible only for our own self-development. Others, of course, are responsible for their own self-development, and we are all trying to get the same thing. They are going about it their way and I have to choose my own way. This basic drive in every human heart, this universal approach to every problem, can be expressed in the question heard frequently: "What will I get out of this? What's in it for me?" This

you hear on every side. Look beneath the surface of the violence, the difficulties, the wranglings involved in Capital-Labor squabbles, or in the civil rights struggle today, and you see that this idea underlies each situation. Each group is saying, "What can we get out of this? What's in it for us?" This is basic.

Under this approach, the inevitable always occurs. Sooner or later, in my attempts to develop myself and to gain satisfaction, I find myself on a collision course with someone else who is attempting the same thing with the same motives. And I find that my efforts to satisfy myself are continually sabotaged by his efforts to satisfy himself. I feel that he is standing in my way and he feels that I am standing in his. This person may be the boss, it may be the husband or wife, it may be the children, it may be the man who works next to me at my desk, it may be the income-tax collector, it may be anyone! We constantly find ourselves cutting across the courses of others. These are the normal relationships of life. I insist on my rights and he insists on his rights, and so we become rivals, enemies, obstacles to each other. We discover that we cannot even successfully arbitrate or arrange a compromise, except for relatively short periods of time, because the same old suspicions remain within us and soon the same old charges are hurled all over again.

That, I submit to you, is the pathetic pattern of life visible all around us, on every side, both individually and corporately.

But the Apostle Paul takes up this matter and changes the whole pattern for Christians by introducing two radical and powerful factors which drastically alter the whole situation. First, he reminds us of the presence of a third party in every relationship we experience: "Subject yourselves to one another out of reverence for Christ," {cf, Eph 5:21}. Second, he reveals to us the true way of finding fulfillment. He does all this in one brief statement. Let us take these one by one.

First, the Christian must never forget that, in every relationship of life, another person is present: It is not merely a problem of 'what I want' versus 'what you want.' There are not only the two of us present – the husband and wife, the parent and child, the boss and employee. In every relationship, the apostle reminds us, a third person is present – the Lord Jesus Christ. To a worlding, who does

not recognize the universal presence of Christ, the primary concern is 'what I want versus what you

want,' but, to a Christian, this must always and inevitably be secondary. Here, then, we come to the solution. The great issue for the Christian must never be 'what I want versus what he wants,' but "What does Christ want me to do? What does he want out of this situation?" The great question must ever be, "What does Jesus Christ, living in me, expect of this relationship?"

Notice how Christ is seen in each relationship. Paul has brought this to our attention in Verse 21: Subject yourselves "to one another out of reverence for Christ." Then he brings up the matter of wives and husbands. "Wives," he says, "be subject to your husbands, as to the Lord," {Eph 5:22 RSV}. Then, "Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church ..." {Eph 5:25 RSV}. "Children, obey your parents in the Lord," {Eph 6:1 RSV}. "Parents, do not provoke your children ... but follow the instruction of the Lord," {cf, Eph 6:4}. "Slaves, be obedient to your earthly masters ... as to Christ," {Eph 6:5 RSV}. "Masters, do the same to them, remembering you have a Master in heaven," {cf, Eph 6:9}.

So, in each of these relationships, the apostle is careful to remind us that we do not face them alone. We must never think of them that way. It is not, "This person and I, opposed to one another," but "Christ is also here, and what does he want?" That is the first consideration.

If we do not recognize his presence, then, of course, we cannot submit ourselves to one another. We know how this goes. We are all so familiar with it. If we do not recognize this third party who is present in every situation, then, of course, we see only the two of us. And our pride immediately gets in the way, and grips us, and holds us, and we refuse to yield, to back down. "Let him back down first!" "Let her apologize first!" Our pride grips us so that we cannot give in. And our mind rationalizes the whole thing, and says, "After all, it's because I'm right that I'm insisting on it. Therefore, she (or he) should give in first." We soon invent all kinds of reasons and excuses for why it is perfectly right and proper for us to act the way we are acting, and why we cannot, under any circumstance, yield to the other.

But when we see Christ, when we see that we are not alone in this matter, then the great question which throbs through the whole relationship is not,

“What am I going to get out of this?” but “What does Jesus Christ want? What is he after in this? As his representative, as the one in whom he lives, the one redeemed by his grace, what responsibility have I to him in this situation?”

Here is where the difference comes. We know that our first responsibility must be to obey him. After all, we have crowned him as our God and our King. And here is where the test comes: To whom shall we yield ourselves to obey? Whatever it is, that is our god. If we insist on satisfying the urges within ourselves for self-justification or vindication, then that is our god. If we are willing to obey Christ, we prove he is our God. Therefore, our first responsibility must be to obey him, our Lord, our God. We cannot live with his displeasure, if we are really Christians. “The love of Christ constrains me” {cf, 2 Cor 5:14}, Paul says.

That brings us to the second matter. When I am at odds with another person, no matter where it is or who it is, to see that Christ is there too is immediately to make me aware of what he has shown me, what he has taught me. I remember that I cannot attain my greatest possible development when I consciously try to do so. That is a fundamental law of life. That is why it is so wrong to ask, “How can I get what I want in order to find fulfillment for myself?” It is only when I forget myself and devote myself to another’s fulfillment that I will find my own heart running over with grace and glory and satisfaction.

This is one of the fundamental mysteries of life, and it is confirmed to us every day. The man who tries desperately to satisfy himself, the man who gets up in the morning and says, “Today I’m going to make a great deal of money, and I shall have everything that I want,” the man who gives himself to that is the man who ends up empty-hearted, hollow inside. As someone has eloquently expressed it, he suffers from “destination sickness,” the awful sickness of having arrived where you want to go, but having nothing when you get there. Our Lord put it this way: “If any man would save his life he will lose it, but if he lose his life for my sake he will save it,” {cf, Matt 16:25, Luke 9:24}. “Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you,” {Matt 6:33 KJV}.

It becomes, then, a question of priority. What is the right way to find fulfillment? If we are Christians, we must face honestly, thoughtfully,

and absolutely seriously this pronouncement of our Lord that life is so constructed that if we try to find it we will never do so. You cannot have your rights by insisting upon them. You can have them only when you seek to give another person his rights. The person who loves and does not think of himself finds himself. The one who is constantly seeking is always cheated.

Do you dare to try this? Do you dare to try this radical, revolutionary principle right where you live?

The problem has not been that we have not known it, but that we do not act on it. We acknowledge that it is true. We nod our heads when we hear these words of Christ’s. But when it comes to a specific situation where someone is cutting across our pathway and we find ourselves in the direct, head-on collision of insisting on our rights while they insist on their rights, we revert so many times to the old basis by which the world lives: “Well, at any cost I’m going to have my rights. I demand my rights!” As a result we only increase the enmity, and ultimately it breaks out in violence or bitterness. But here is the solution. Do you dare to try it? Do you dare to apply this the next time you clash with another?

A friend was telling me recently of a Christian couple who had moved into a new home. They had not been in their house more than a day when the man chanced to meet their next door neighbor out in the yard. The first thing the neighbor did was to bawl him out for some minor inconvenience which had resulted from their moving in, and then he threatened him with a lawsuit if he did a certain thing. The man went back into his home, heavy-hearted, to tell his wife about it, realizing that when he bought his dream house he had bought with it a very cantankerous neighbor.

Now he planned to live there the rest of his life. What was he going to do?

He confessed he felt a very natural reaction to allow a wall of exclusion, of silence, to be built, to have nothing to do with the neighbor. That is the easiest way to handle a person like this. You don’t want to antagonize him or fight with him, so just cut him off, don’t talk to him, don’t have anything to do with him. The wife was concerned about this, too, and they were praying about what to do.

A day or so later she was baking a pie, and it suddenly occurred to her to make a pie for her neighbors and take it over to them. So she baked a

beautiful pie, and, at lunch time, she took it over to the neighbor's house, and fearfully rang the doorbell. When the woman came to the door, her face set in hard, unyielding lines, the Christian woman greeted her, and said, "You know, I was baking a pie today, and I thought of you folks. I thought you might like to have a pie, so I brought this over." The neighbor took it, thanked her, and went back inside.

About an hour later the phone rang and there was the neighbor lady calling up to thank her for the pie. She said, "That happened to be my husband's favorite pie. He loves lemon meringue pie!" And on the spur of the moment the Christian lady said, "Well, that's wonderful! Why don't you come over to dinner tomorrow night?" There was an almost audible gasp on the other end of the line, and then the neighbor lady said, "Well, I'll ask my husband." In a little while, she called back and said, "Yes, we'd love to come over." The last my friend heard the four of them were going out for a ride together, and the neighbor couple had already made some inquiries as to where the others went to church, suggesting that they might go with them.

This is exactly what Paul means: "Subject yourselves to one another, out of reverence for Christ." The world is waiting to see a demonstration of this. They do not understand this kind of action, and they cannot grasp its importance until they see it in action among Christians.

I do not think there is any doubt whatsoever that if Christians in this country had been living like this in relationship to those with whom they live and work, the civil rights riots we are facing in our land today would never have occurred. And if Christians now, in this country, begin individually

to live on this level, the riots will be greatly diminished – if not ultimately eliminated.

Here is what strikes at the heart of these problems. The solutions we usually attempt are superficial. They do not get at the heart of them. But, when we act on these basic, underlying, fundamental laws of life, fulfilling the mystery of our being in the paradox of action which loses our life in order to gain it back, we discover that we have found the answer to conflict.

The apostle will go on, and we shall go with him, to apply this principle to husbands and wives, to children and parents, and to employers and employees. As we trace these out, we will see him putting his finger squarely upon the great, burning issues which are creating so much havoc and strife today. We can solve them only as we take these words seriously and begin to live on this level.

May God help us, through Christ.

Prayer:

Our Father, we thank you once again for a word which searches us, which probes us, which cuts deep and lays bare and hides nothing. We know that in this sweet surgery of the Holy Spirit there is healing, forgiveness, cleansing, and restoration. We thank you for the love that will not let us go, but insists on examining our lives unto the most uttermost corner, into the darkest closet, bringing out all that is hidden therein. Teach us to walk in the light as Christ is in the light, and thus to experience the glory of fellowship with our living Lord. We ask in Christ's name, Amen.

Husbands and Wives

by Ray C. Stedman

Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ. {Eph 5:21 RSV}

Here is the divine solution to the problem of conflict between individuals, those areas of friction where life is rubbed raw, and the ugly sores of violence and conflict often erupt. The solution consists of the recognition of two very powerful and transforming factors which, if recognized in any situation of conflict and carried out, will resolve that conflict. In our previous message we tried to challenge ourselves to take this very seriously.

Those two factors, remember, were these:

- First, life is so constructed that we cannot find fulfillment without another person being involved. We are not made to satisfy ourselves. Though each of us has within us a drive to fulfill ourselves and to find satisfaction, we make a very grave and serious error if we think that we can ever do that apart from reacting and relating to another person. It is this matter of human relationships that the apostle is now taking up in Ephesians 5, the relationships of husbands and wives, of parents and children, and of employers and employees. We vitally need these relationships. Life is made this way. One of the fundamental mysteries of life is that we cannot achieve our own satisfaction if we try to do so, but we can only achieve it if we seek to attain not our own benefits but the benefits of another. This is why Paul says, "Subject yourselves to one another."
- The second factor, which makes the first one possible, is that you can only subject yourself when you see a third party present in every situation – the Lord Jesus Christ. It is there-

fore not a case of "you against me" or "me against you," but it is a case of Christ being present. In the case of a Christian, the great issue is the matter of my relationship to him, and my obedience to his word and to his will. This touches the matter of motivation. I never can submit to another if it is a case of "you versus me" or "me versus you," for then, as we saw last week, my pride comes to the fore and I get stubborn and rationalize my position and justify myself, and so the conflict is perpetuated. But when we see that it is a matter of loving obedience to the One who first loved us and gave himself for us, and who now lives within us as our Lord, our God, this then becomes the primary relationship, and it is easier, much easier, to give up our fancied rights in order that we may be obedient to that which is first – our relationship to Christ. So the apostle sums it all up in that wonderfully concise statement, "Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ," {Eph 5:21 RSV}.

Now Paul applies this to specific relationships, and the first one he takes up is that of husbands and wives. There is no area of life in which conflict is more widespread than this. The oldest battle of all time is the battle of the sexes. The longest war ever waged is the war that goes on between husbands and wives. We need only remind ourselves that a few months ago we were informed by the newspapers that in San Mateo County there are more divorces each year than there are marriages. In Santa Clara County it is almost as bad. This one significant statistic points up the fact that marriage is the greatest area of conflict among human beings, far surpassing the statistics of war.

Now, I grant you immediately that this area of conflict is far less among Christians. Certainly the

statistics of divorce are less. But even in Christian homes the degree of squabbling, bickering, coldness, bitterness, and even violence that is encountered by any marriage counselor is simply unbelievable. In no other area of our national or family life are we more desperately in need of help than in this area of conflict between husbands and wives. The atmosphere in many a Christian home is no better than that of an armed truce. I suggest to you, therefore, that there is nothing more important than that we thoughtfully hear these illuminating words of the apostle as he applies this tremendous formula for peace, "Subject yourselves to one another out of reverence for Christ," to this specific relationship of husbands and wives.

Paul begins with **wives** in Verse 22:

Wives, be subject to your husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. As the church is subject to Christ, so let wives be subject in everything to their husbands. {Eph 5:22-24 RSV}

We must remember that this is an application of the general principle. Subjection, therefore, is not merely to be on the part of one alone, but, in the case of Christian husbands and wives, is to be done by both. The husband is to subject himself to the wife as much as the wife is to the husband. The method will differ according to the sex, but the principle is the same for each. It is well to bear this in mind. What the apostle will now go on to spell out for us is what, exactly, this means for each one. How does the wife subject herself to the husband, and how does the husband, on the other hand, subject himself to the wife, out of reverence for Christ?

With the wife he simply repeats the word he has used, "Subject yourselves to your husbands, as to the Lord." This would clearly imply that, for the wife, the basic meaning of the word applies to her. The basic meaning of the word for *subjection* (or *submission* in the King James Version) is "keep yourself under," "put yourself under the authority of," or, as some versions translate it, "adapt yourself to," "adjust yourself to the to the authority or will of another." The apostle is saying to the wife, "Adapt yourself to your own husband, adjust to him."

This is the fulfillment of the initial word of the Creator when he said of the woman that she was to "be a help meet for man," {cf, Gen 2:20 RSV}. She is not to be his rival nor, least of all, his slave, but his willing, loyal helper to accomplish his aims and his goals. It is not the other way around. God never intended the man to fulfill his wife's aims and goals. It is quite the other way. She is to be his help meet and his partner in what he, under God, is led to do in life. The woman is made essentially to be a follower. All of nature and all of Scripture confirms this. It is in this role that woman finds fulfillment.

The apostle links this immediately with the reason for such subjection:

Wives, be subject to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. {Eph 5:22-23 RSV}

The key phrase here is "as to the Lord." The wife is subject to her husband not because her husband is such a wonderful creature, but because she has a previous and primary relationship to her Lord. The phrase "as to the Lord" does not mean that the wife is to worship her husband as though he *were* the Lord – despite the fact that many a bride has set a burnt offering before her husband! It means she is to yield to her husband, and such yielding is pleasing to the Lord. It means her primary relationship is not to her husband, but to her Lord. What he asks of her is that she yield herself to the will and aims of her husband.

A Christian woman wrote me some time ago asking, concerning this passage, "Would this mean that my submission to my husband is a kind of gauge or a measure of the degree to which I am submitted to Christ?" It is exactly that. The submission of a wife to her husband in the proper areas of his authority is precisely the gauge of her submission to Christ. This woman goes on to write, very insightfully,

I realize that my submission to my husband is not my gift to him, to be received gratefully on his part, and to be returned in kind. Nor is it to be a subtle form of blackmail. (See how submissive I was in this circumstance, Lord? Now what about seeing some results!) In fact if I were submitting to him as unto the Lord I

wouldn't care what the results were – that's his business. Actually, a woman is never more free to be herself than when she is most joyfully submissive to her husband's authority. What a relief to be free to be what I was made for!

There is a woman who has caught the full intent of this word addressed to the wife, "Wives, submit yourselves to your husband's authority."

It is all a matter of headship, and headship means authority. There are other headships mentioned in Scripture. In Paul's letter to the Corinthians, he writes these illuminating words:

But I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ, the head of a woman is her husband, and the head of Christ is God. {1 Cor 11:3 RSV}

If you want to understand what it means for the man to be head of the woman then analyze what it means for God to be the head of Christ: "The head of Christ is God." If you search the Scriptures which describe the Lord Jesus in his relationship to his Father as he walked on earth, you will discover that there are four elements involved in the headship of the Father.

There is, first, identity. Jesus said on one occasion, "I and my Father are one," {John 10:30 KJV}. The Scripture says also that, when a man and a woman are married, they become "one flesh," {cf, Gen 2:24, Matt 19:5-6, Mark 10:7-8}. There is an identity of person which is involved in this whole matter of headship.

The Lord Jesus, on another occasion, said, "My Father worketh, and I work" {John 5:17 KJV}, i.e., we cooperate together. In the area of work, headship obviously involves a mutual cooperation. So the husband and wife are to cooperate.

Then there are other passages where the Lord Jesus says of his Father, "I always honor my Father" {cf, John 8:49}, and, "It is the Father who honors me," {cf, John 8:54}. There is a mutual sharing of honor which indicates again what headship means.

Finally, there is that passage where the Lord says, "My Father is greater than I," {John 14:28b KJV}. In words full of mystery he suggests that, despite the identity of person, there is a difference of authority, for he says, "I do always those things that please him," {John 8:29b KJV}.

So there we have headship interpreted for us:

- Identity as to nature,
- Cooperation as to work,
- Honor as to person, and
- Subsistence as to final decisions.

That is headship. That is what it should mean to a wife to be subject to her husband.

At this point wives say, "How far should I go in this? You don't know the kind of brute I live with!" Scripture answers that with one phrase, "Wives, be subject to your husbands in everything." Now, I did not write that; the Apostle Paul wrote it! He wrote it inspired of the Holy Spirit, and he means it – "in everything."

It hardly needs to be said that this excludes moral wrong. No husband has the right to ask of his wife something which is morally wrong. This is always taken for granted as excluded from admonitions such as this in Scripture. But in all other areas the wife is to allow the husband to make final decisions. There is plenty of indication elsewhere that the husband is to expect and encourage his wife to express her desires, to speak her viewpoint, or to argue the matter, and to bring out what she feels is the right way, for otherwise how can she be a helper to her husband? But in the ultimate decision she is to honor his choice. This is essentially what this means: "in everything."

Now the apostle holds up the relationship of the church to Christ as the example:

As the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives also subject in everything to their husbands. {Eph 5:24 RSV}

Immediately I can see a gleam in the eyes of some wives who say, "Exactly! And how is the church subject to Christ? In so many cases it is very rebellious, and, if this is the way we're supposed to be subject, then, I'll gladly qualify!" But it is obvious that the apostle does not have in mind here the actual reality of the church's subjection to Christ, but the ideal of it. How does the church want to be subject to Christ?

Perhaps we have it spelled out best for us in our hymn books. The Bible is the Lord's word to the church, the hymn book is the church's word to the Lord. If we read our hymns we will see re-

flected the hungerings and yearnings of the church to be subject to its Lord.

I suggest, therefore, that it might be helpful for wives to take those hymns and apply them to their own relationship to their husbands. Not, of course, in the sense of worship, as I have already suggested, but in the matter of submissiveness. The next time you, as a wife, have difficulty accepting your husband's ultimate decision, perhaps it might be well to go around the house singing,

- ◇ "I'll go where you want me to go, my dear, I'll do what you want me to do."
- ◇ "Have thine own way, love, have thine own way."
- ◇ "All the way my husband leads me. What have I to ask besides."

Now, there are also some songs you should never sing, such as "Sound the battle cry," or "The fight is on" – but, for the most part, the hymn book well reflects this admonition of the apostle.

Now Paul turns to the **husbands**:

Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. Even so husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no man ever hates his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body. "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one." This is a great mystery, and I take it to mean Christ and the church; {Eph 5:25-32 RSV}

All is said in one phrase, "Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church." The rest is an elucidation of that.

Perhaps there is no word in our modern parlance which needs more interpreting than this word love. It is grossly misused today. It is used to de-

scribe everything from sordid sexual passion to patriotic emotion. But here it is defined for us in a very illuminating phrase which is set in apposition to it. The apostle does not merely say "Love your wives as Christ loved the church," but he goes on to describe what that love is: "... and gave himself up for her." That is what love is! That is the way the husband is to be subject to the wife. He gives himself up for her. It does not mean he is to give in to her, for that is her role toward him. If he did that he would be subjecting himself to the wife as the wife is supposed to subject herself to the husband. But his form of subjection is different. It is not to give in, but to give up – to give himself up for his wife. No husband is playing his proper role in marriage until he learns to give himself up to his wife, to open his heart to her, to share his emotions and dreams, his thoughts and disappointments, his joys, to fully expose himself to his wife. And there is nothing that makes a woman happier than to know that she fully enters into her husband's life. That fulfills her, and it fulfills him.

Now, as in the case of the wife, the apostle holds up to us the example of Christ. "Love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her." His self-giving was deliberate and purposeful. Our Lord did not give himself up for the church without certain objectives in mind, and those purposes are three-fold. The apostle lists them for us that we might draw the parallel and understand what it means for a husband to give himself up for his wife. He says the Lord Jesus gave himself up for the church,

- First, that he might sanctify her,
- Second, that he might present the church to himself in splendor, and
- Third, that he might fulfill the mystery of his own being,

as is suggested in Verse 30: "because we are members of his body."

These same goals apply to the husband and wife relationship:

The husband is to give himself up for his wife in order that he might sanctify her. Well, what does that mean? Basically, as we have seen in other messages, the word "sanctify" means "put to

the proper use.” I have already reminded you that anything can be sanctified. This is not a religious word. I am sanctifying this pulpit by using it for the purpose for which it was intended. You are sanctifying those chairs upon which you are sitting. The organ was sanctified a few moments ago as the organist was playing upon it. The piano, too, was thus sanctified. Anything that is put to its proper use is sanctified, and that is what that word means here.

The Lord Jesus gave himself up on the cross in order that the whole church, those who would be redeemed by his grace, might be put to the proper use for which God intended man and woman, might be called back to the original function and purpose of humanity. This is also to be the goal of the husband. He is to give himself up for the wife in order that she might fulfill her womanhood, her purpose.

Now, he must know what that purpose is. That is why the Apostle Peter, in his parallel passage to this says, “husbands, dwell with your wives according to knowledge” {1 Pet 3:7 KJV} – not according to guesswork, not according to your present feeling, but according to knowledge of what a woman is supposed to be.

Let me share a great secret with you men. It is something I learned from the Scriptures, for I would never have learned it from life, though it is confirmed by life: Women cannot understand themselves; only men can understand women. Ah, but ladies, do not feel bad – men cannot understand themselves either; only women can. How often we realize that our mates know us better than we know ourselves! So the man is to give himself up in order that the woman might fulfill her womanhood.

The purpose of womanhood is twofold:

- First, it is to be a helper to her husband. But it is impossible for someone to help you unless you let them. If a husband excludes his wife from his thinking, she cannot be his partner, she cannot be his helper. At the deepest level of her being she will sense that she is being deprived of that for which she was made. That is what creates this restiveness uneasiness and sometimes perverseness of women which frequently puzzles so many husbands. When these attitudes are displayed by wives, it is usually because the husband is denying his wife her right to be a woman and the oppor-

tunity to fulfill her womanhood. She is to be his helper.

- Second, she is to contribute beauty to his life. That is what women are for. That is why they are much more beautiful than men. They are intended to contribute beauty at every level, not only beauty of form, but of spirit as well. That is why, again, Peter says that a woman should seek after that “quiet and gentle spirit which is, in the sight of God, of great price,” {cf, 1 Pet 3:4b RSV}. That is what a woman can uniquely contribute to life. But it is the husband who opens the door of opportunity for a woman to do this by sharing himself with her.

Notice that the apostle points out that the instrument by which the Lord sanctified the church was the word, “the washing of water with the word.” By the Word of God, by talking to the church, by telling it things, by opening up its eyes to the understanding of reality – that is the way the Lord sanctifies his church. “You shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free” {cf, John 8:32} – to be what you ought to be. The same is true in a husband and wife relationship. It is the husband’s talking to his wife which makes it possible for her to fulfill her role as a helper and a beautifier. He must, therefore, give himself up in this sense, share with her, discuss with her, talk about things. Even though there may be obstacles to communication, he must find a way around them, for his responsibility is to open up and share with her.

I read once of a judge in a divorce action who said to the husband, “You mean to say that what your wife tells me is true, that you actually have not spoken to her for two years?” The man said. “Yes, sir.” The judge said. “Why is that?” He replied, “I didn’t want to interrupt her!”

I rather suspect that such marathon talking indicates a wife who is trying to fill a great vacuity in her life.

In Verse 27 we have the second reason why the Lord gave himself up for the church:

... that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. {Eph 5:27 RSV}

This is right in line again with what the Apostle Peter reminds us. “Husbands,” he says, “give honor unto the wife, as to the weaker vessel,” {cf, 1 Pet 3:7 KJV}. The husband must find ways by which he honors his wife, glorifies her, exalts her in the family circle, and in his own thinking. This is his role, his job in marriage, to give himself up to the end that his wife might be honored, not only in the family circle but outside as well. It requires, above all, that he show her simple courtesy.

I heard recently of a truck driver whose wife was required to fill out some kind of a form. For her occupation she wrote down “housewife,” and he objected. He said, “You’re not a *housewife*, you’re *my wife*.” That went a long way to cementing their relationship in that marriage.

Look at the face of a woman who is loved by her husband and you will see a glory there that cannot be duplicated. An honored wife fulfills womanhood. To accomplish it, husbands should be infallibly courteous to their wives. We are always courteous to those whom we seek to honor. It means the avoidance of sarcasm or contemptuous language, and the avoidance of criticism, at least bitter or sharp or unwarranted criticism. It does not mean that there cannot be a discussion of areas of difference, or a bringing out of matters which need to be brought to attention, but it does mean to avoid any semblance of that which would disgrace or dishonor or in any way degrade the wife.

The third reason why Christ gave himself up for the church was in order to fulfill the mystery of his own being. That is described in a lengthier section as the mystery of being members of his body. As the apostle says, “Husbands should love their wives as their own bodies, for he who loves his wife loves himself. And no man ever hates his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it.” Thus again he brings in the example of Christ. Christ did this. He loves us and continually gives himself up for us because he cannot help it; we are part of him, we belong to him. We who are Christians are part of his body in this mystery, this amazing mystery of life. To substantiate it, the apostle quotes a verse from the first chapter of Genesis:

“For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one.” {Eph 5:31 RSV}

That is not simply beautiful language. There is a basic, fundamental reality behind this: Husband and wife are not just two people rooming together. Their lives actually do blend into one another. They actually become one. It is, therefore, true that what hurts the wife damages the husband. It cannot help but do so. If he is bitter toward her, it will eat like a cancer in his own life and heart. That is why, if you have had a squabble with your wife, you may find yourself unable to do your work properly that day. This works with regard to the wife toward the husband as well. They are one flesh.

In Dr. Henry Brandt’s helpful book *The Struggle For Peace* he tells of a woman who came to him because of a great fear she had of going into supermarkets. She would be terribly frightened whenever she went into a supermarket. She came to him for help in this problem and he relied, as he always does, on the wisdom of Scripture. Remembering the verse, “Perfect love casts out fear,” he began to look for a violation of love in her life, for fear comes when there is something inhibiting the flow of love. He said to her, “Whom are you mad at?” Finally she was able to realize that she was angry at her husband for an incident which had occurred a number of years before in a supermarket when they had had an unpleasant flare-up. As a result, she was emotionally disturbed whenever she went into a supermarket. When she dealt with her lack of love, her fear left. What happened, because of her injury toward him, reflected right back on herself.

This is also true of the husband toward the wife. If we would understand this and realize that injuring our mate is the same as taking a hammer and pounding ourselves on the head, or neglecting some part of our own body, we would stop trying to hurt one another. Injury to our mate is bound to come back upon us in some physical, soulful, or spiritual injury.

The **final point** the apostle makes here is given in Verse 33:

... however, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband. {Eph 5:33 RSV}

Notice that he puts this on the basis of each person in the marriage relationship fulfilling his

responsibility to Christ, regardless of what the other does. That is the key. It is not “wait until he starts loving me, and then I’ll submit to him,” or “wait until she starts submitting to me, and then I’ll love her,” but it is essential to your responsibility before Christ, regardless of what the other does. To do so breaks through the vicious circle of marriage conflict and serves to restore peace and permit the other to fulfill his responsibility.

I have seen such unilateral obedience work wonders in marriage relationships. Husbands and wives have been brought together, harmony restored in bitterly divided homes, grace and peace made to reign where there has been battle and conflict, violence and ugliness before.

Therefore,

- Husbands, love your wife as yourself, and
- Let the wife see that she respects her husband.

Prayer:

Our Father, let these words be illuminated in our hearts and lives by the understanding of the Spirit. May we give ourselves to thinking them through and to working them out in practice in our lives. What good is it if we should understand it here in this meeting place, but refuse to put it into practice the next time a conflict arises? God grant to us the willingness and the grace to be obedient to the Lord Jesus who is with us in every circumstance and every relationship of our life, regardless of what the other person does. We ask in his name, Amen.

Parents and Children

by Ray C. Stedman

In our series in Ephesians we are coming to another of the great relationships of life, that of parents and children. It is rather obvious that in our present world something has gone drastically wrong with this relationship. This is a day when juvenile delinquency and juvenile crime is skyrocketing to heights never before known. A conscientious policeman, not long ago, told me how heartsick he was to find that some of the most brutal crimes in his area were being committed by children – not teenagers, children! – children of ten years of age or even eight, and this is becoming more and more frequent.

We all are familiar with the teenage riots and outbreaks which are a daily occurrence in our nation these days. Revolt and rebellion seem almost to have become the symbols of youth in our age. Even in Red China, youth riots are now flaming through the streets.

A lady told me this week that she had cashed a money order for fifty dollars at the Post Office in Redwood City, and was walking home in broad daylight with the money in her purse, when, only a few doors from her house, a young man ran up, grabbed her purse, and ran off down the street.

These things are happening everywhere.

Perhaps the most distressing thing about this whole matter of juvenile crime and delinquency is the indifference or helplessness of parents. Everywhere parents wring their hands, and cry plaintively, "I can't do anything with him (or her)." There seems to be abject despair on the part of parents to do anything about this situation. They look to the police and other law enforcement agencies to take over the responsibility of raising their children. There is an utter breakdown, apparent on every side, in this major relationship between parents and children.

What has gone wrong? Why is it that our nation is experiencing this terrible tempest in this regard? There is no question but that we are reaping the whirlwind which was sowed in the '20s and '30s of this century by the winds of permissiveness which blew across the homes and through the classrooms of our nation. Many of us remember that the philosophies of John Dewey, and others of the school of permissiveness, captured the thoughts of educators and the minds of parents throughout this land. We were taught that children were to be allowed to grow up to 'express themselves,' that all discipline is wrong, that it keeps them from developing properly and fully. As a result, there grew up a whole generation of young people who never learned to obey, never learned to yield their will to the authority of another. This present revolt against authority is the direct result of that kind of sowing to the wind.

We shall never have relief from this until we hear again the great words of the Apostle Paul in the Scriptures in respect to the answer to all conflict. In Ephesians 5, the apostle put his finger precisely on the solution to these overwhelming problems of conflict between various groups, so prevalent in our age. He said it all in one sentence:

Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ. {Eph 5:21 RSV}

Then he went on, as we have been seeing, to apply this to various relationships. We have already examined the matter of husbands and wives and the whole realm of marriage conflict. Now we come to the problem of the relationship of parents and children.

The apostle's first word is addressed to the children:

Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. “Honor your father and mother” (this is the first commandment with a promise), “that it may be well with you and that you may live long on the earth.” {Eph 6:1-3 RSV}

Notice, this is not a simple exhortation to children to obey, much as you might find in a pamphlet or booklet on parent-child relationships written from a secular point of view. It is not simply “Children, obey your parents.” It is “Children, obey your parents *in the Lord.*” The key to the whole command is “*in the Lord.*” As we saw in regard to the wife, who is to submit herself to her husband as unto the Lord, so it is with the child to the parent. Children are to obey their parents, for Christ’s sake.

That is the point he makes. They are to obey, not because this is what their parents want, so much as because this is what the Lord Jesus wants. This is their responsibility to Christ. They cannot possibly fulfill their desire to belong to him, and to reflect his life, unless they are willing to obey their parents. This is the ground upon which the apostle puts it.

This word *obey* is, literally, the Greek word *stand under*. It means “to be under another’s authority,” and it is used in many places in the Scriptures as a military term. It is the same word that would apply to a soldier in obeying his orders. It means to follow orders. To put it very practically and plainly, it says to children, “Do what your parents say.”

Now this is a most important matter, for all through the Word of God you find exhortations to parents to teach their children to be obedient, and to children to be responsive to that teaching and to obey their parents.

We read earlier from the book of Proverbs a lengthy section in that regard. Proverbs is probably the most helpful book on child-raising ever written. Its whole theme is this: A child must learn the most important lesson of all, to be an obedient child. This is much more important than simply accomplishing the immediate wish of the parent, whatever it may be. It is obedience that is the issue.

There is a wise family in this congregation who teach their children obedience in a rather unusual fashion. They want the child to learn that the im-

portant thing is not merely to do what the parent asks, as if that specific thing were the issue, but, rather, that obedience is the important thing. If either parent says to the child, “Do so-and-so,” and the child delays, procrastinates, or refuses, the parent does not repeat the request, “Now I told you to do such-and-such.” He or she says, rather, “Do what daddy (or mother) says,” so as to convey the clear impression to the child that the important thing is not the specific request they made, but the issue of obedience to a parent. This has taught the children of that particular family that the great and overwhelming thing is to be an obedient child.

With this word of Paul’s goes a reason. The Scriptures never give us exhortations like this without a reason. Many children are completely familiar with this verse – oh, how familiar! They have had it dinned into them any time anything goes wrong at home. They are constantly reminded, “Children, obey your parents in the Lord.” But it is very seldom their attention is called to the reason for this. Paul adds a reason immediately: “Obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.”

Now, what does that mean? Do not take that lightly. I think there is oftentimes a tendency, on the part of young people, particularly, to read that and to slough it off as though it meant, “Obey your parents because this is the way we all act, this is just the way we do it,” or, “We’ve done it for years and there’s no reason to change; therefore, obey your parents.” But it does not mean that. This is not merely an appeal to custom. This is not saying that the traditional thing to do in our Christian heritage is to obey our parents. It means, rather, that this is in accord with a fundamental reality, this is one of the basic laws of life. If you do this, everything will turn out right; if you refuse to do it everything will go wrong, because it is a violation of one of the fundamental laws of living.

If you want proof of the claim that violation of this will make everything go wrong, read your daily newspapers. They are Exhibit A! The reason we are suffering from this tremendous epidemic of delinquency, revolt, and rebellion is because a generation has been taught that they need not obey, that there is nothing important connected with obedience. But the apostle puts his finger directly on this, and says, “This is the supreme thing, it is the right thing, it is in accordance with reality.” It’s the only way to make your home run right.

Now, in Verses 2 and 3, the apostle moves on to press deeper into this subject. He says the same thing again, but he goes behind the actions to the attitudes. He says it is not only important to obey, but to obey in such a way as to honor your father and your mother. The attitude of obedience is exceedingly important. We know, of course, that it is possible to obey with a heart seething with disobedience and hatred. It is possible to obey with any icy coldness which is perfectly correct in its action, and perfectly wrong in its attitude. It is possible to give obedience with a deceptive compliance that looks like willingness, but inwardly one is waiting for an opportunity to revolt or to break over the lines.

We all remember the story of the little boy whose mother wanted him to sit down but he wouldn't sit down. Finally she took hold of him and sat him down in the chair. He looked up at her with defiance in his eyes, and said, "You may make me sit down outside, but I'm still standing up inside!"

That kind of obedience is not obedience at all because, as the apostle brings out, it is dishonoring to the father or mother. It is dishonoring because it depersonalizes the parent. It treats the parent as a thing, an obstacle, certainly not as a person from whom life has come, and also love and concern and care. It is to ignore every generous gift of parental love and to treat them as though they were nothing but an obstacle in the way. That is why the first commandment with a promise, as the apostle reminds us, was the commandment, "Honor thy father and thy mother," {Exod 20:12a KJV}. The promise that was linked to it was this: "... that it may be well with you and that you may live long on the earth," {cf, Exod 20:12b}. That means that obedience is not merely to be in action only, but in attitude as well. It requires one to obey cheerfully, not sullenly or with pouting or with sarcasm. All is to be done before the Lord, who knows the heart, who reads the inward mind and the attitude. If a child who loves the Lord Jesus is set to live the Christian life, this is the first area it will show – in a willing, glad obedience to his parents.

Now, what does this promise mean? – "that it may be well with you and that you may live long on the earth." Does that sound as though it is mere superstition or something which has come to us as tradition from the past? No, God's word is never shallow. It always has some very real substance to

it. It simply means that glad obedience, willing obedience, is a boon to the children who obey. But sullen, reluctant, rebellious obedience injures you, and can even drastically shorten your life. There is no joke about this. This is not mere superstition. Sullen obedience is really resentment and bitterness, and there is nothing more destructive in a human heart than resentment or bitterness. It does not injure the one you are bitter against; it injures you, it tears you up inside. It can cause serious physical disturbances.

Modern doctors and psychologists agree that a bitter and resentful heart produces acne, causes ulcers and loss of appetite, upsets digestion, impairs the use of the mind, causes allergic reactions such as asthma or fainting spells, makes the skin break out in hives and blisters, and causes many other kinds of serious physical disturbances. That is why the Word of God promises that honor to father and mother will actually mean a lengthening of life and will certainly make the life we do live much more enjoyable. This, therefore, is highlighting a very real problem. Much of teenage emotional disturbances and physical problems come from an attitude of rebellion toward a parent.

Furthermore, rebellion slams the door to learning. I learned this as a youngster, and, as an adult, I have often seen it in my own experience and that of others. As long as we are rebellious against something, we cannot learn anything from that situation. If we fight everything, we learn nothing. Therefore we act in ignorance. When we have rebellion in our hearts we do the most senseless things, and make the most atrocious blunders. We do things that we would never do if we were in possession of our full faculties.

This could be demonstrated in a thousand ways. All you need to do is to watch a mob in action, or a riot in progress, and to see how absolutely senseless are the things a mob does. The vandalism in Watts is a good example – the burning down of whole areas of a city, the depriving of individuals of their possessions, their food, and even of their liberty, all in the name of an attempt to correct an evil. This is mob violence. It reflects what happens in an individual heart as well when the heart is filled with rebellion. You close the door to any possibility of learning anything, and you act out of an emotional surge that results in senseless activity.

It is, therefore, absolutely essential that children learn to obey their parents willingly. Nothing is more important.

I pointed out earlier this morning to our high school young people that this problem does not end at graduation from high school. We do not move beyond the need to render obedience to authority. It follows us all our life. Adults are as much under authority as children are. If obedience has not been learned as children it is very likely that it will not be learned as adults. This is another reason for the outbreak of violence, disobedience and rebellion against all forms of authority sweeping across our land today.

This is, therefore, one of the most important sections of Scripture.

This issue is dealt with frequently and widely throughout the whole of Scripture because it is so vital. It strikes right to the very heart of one of the most important relationships of life, which touches every aspect of human thinking. It is extremely important, then, that children, especially Christian children, understand how necessary it is that they willingly and gladly obey their parents.

But subjection is always a two-way street. The Word of God never says to one party only in these relationships, "Subject yourself to the other." It says, "Subject yourselves to one another out of reverence for Christ." Therefore, if it is true that children are to subject themselves to their parents by obeying them, it is equally true that parents are to subject themselves to their children. How? Paul goes on to show us in Verse 4:

Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. {Eph 6:4 RSV}

It has been pointed out that this word translated *Fathers* could well be translated *Parents* because it includes both the father and the mother. It is also true that the emphasis is laid largely upon the father, for it is his responsibility as to what the children become. That is sobering, is it not, fathers? But it is true. Mothers may enforce policy but it is the father's task to set it, and to see that his children are raised properly. There is nothing that is more dishonoring to the spirit of Christianity than the attitude adopted by many fathers: "It is my job to make the living; her job is to raise the children." Not in the Word of God! In the Bible, the ultimate

responsibility for what a home becomes is the father's. So the word is addressed to fathers: "Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord."

That is the way a father subjects himself to his children – by deliberately avoiding the things which make a child rebel. "Provoke them not to anger." The word for *anger* here is not the common word which describes irritation or temporary upset, for obviously in any home even proper discipline can sometimes make a child angry. Children are not mature, they do not always react as they ought, and even necessary discipline will make a child angry. This word is not saying anything against that. The word used here means "anger which results in a rebellion." It is the word from which we get our English word *paroxysm*. "Fathers, do not provoke your children to the place where they completely lose control and break out against authority." That is the word to the parents.

What causes this?

There are two things which cause rebellion in children, two things which provoke a child ultimately to rebel against his parents: Indulgence and harshness. These two things are the negative of the two things he instructs the father to do: "Bring them up in the discipline and the instruction (or the exhortation) of the Lord." The opposites of these are indulgence and harshness. Those are the things which provoke a child to wrath.

During the last century the father was often a tyrant in his family. Children had to toe the mark and often had very little contact with their parents in a loving relationship. Consequently there was a breaking out against this. In our day it is the other way around. We have swung to the extreme of indulgence. We give our children everything and let them have their own way, let them raise themselves.

But notice that the word says, "Fathers ... bring your children up." Do not let them bring you up. Once, in a church in which I was speaking, I saw that the subject of the young people's meeting in the evening was "What's Wrong With Our Parents?" That indicated the difficulty those children were having in raising their parents. But the word is not, "Children, bring up your parents," but, "Parents, bring up your children," and do so by avoiding harshness and indulgence, for either one

will produce the same results – rebellion and an outbreak of violence.

Lack of discipline will make a child insecure, miserable, and self-centered. That is what we call “a spoiled child” – one who grows up to expect to have his way in everything and who rides roughshod over the feelings of everyone else. This is created, in our day, by a spirit of indulgence on the part of parents who allow their children to make decisions which no child is capable of making. Parents must learn that they need to make decisions for their child for quite a while in his life, and only gradually help him to learn to make those decisions as he is able to do so. In the early years of childhood parents must make almost all the decisions. One of the terribly tragic things about life today is the degree to which many parents let children make decisions they are totally incapable of making.

I was in a home not long ago with a Christian father and his little three-year-old daughter. The little girl was watching the television set. She had turned on a murder mystery, or something similarly unsavory. The father saw what she was watching and, whether it was because I was there or not, something made him feel that this was an improper diet for his child. He stood at the set, and said to her, “Now, dear, you don’t want to watch this, do you?” She nodded her head, “Sure!” He said, “But I don’t think this is good for you. Don’t you think you’d better turn it off?” “No.” “Well,” he said, “you ought to turn it off. This is not the kind of thing you should watch.” But she shook her head again indicating she wanted to watch it. He stood there for three or four minutes, pleading with her, and, since she would not give her consent, he finally let her watch the program.

A three-year-old child is totally incapable of making that kind of moral decision. Though it need not have been made with harshness, the decision should have been made with firmness that the child was not to watch that program. It was no wonder that I observed that the child was a bundle of frustrations, striking out against everyone, for she had no security. A lack of proper discipline, more than anything else, will create insecurity in a child. The child without discipline feels unwanted and terribly unhappy. The limits which parents set for their children are like walls. I know that walls can sometimes be prisons, frustrating us, but that is usually the extreme. Walls are much more frequently beneficial to us, and we often long for them

because they are symbols of safety. Who does not feel more secure at home at night because of the walls which are there. Disciplinary limits are like that to a child.

Some time ago, the *Saturday Evening Post* had a story of a stepfather who was trying to win the acceptance and approval of his new stepson by indulging him, buying him everything he wanted. But he was getting nowhere. Finally, they went out on a hike together and came to a place where a waterfall came down over a cliff and spread out in a big pool at its foot. Suddenly the father noticed the son’s blue cap floating in the middle of the pool. Without hesitation he dived in and tried to find the boy. He made several dives, and at last, unavailing, he flung himself exhausted on the bank. Just then he heard a noise and there was the boy standing behind a tree. He said to him, “Did you throw your cap in the pool?” The boy said, “Yes, I did.” The father said, “What did you do that for?” The boy answered, “I wanted to see what would happen.” The stepfather said, “Well, you’re going to find out right now,” and he spanked him as few boys have ever been spanked. On the way home in the car, he suddenly found hot little fingers gripping his hand, and choked voice saying, “I’m sorry, I’m awful sorry, but I didn’t know whether you really liked me, because you never spanked me like the other children’s fathers do.”

It is an imperative necessity that children find discipline, for it is the mark of love. As the apostle tells us in Hebrews, no father ever had a son but that he chastened him because he loved him. God’s chastening is that to us, a sign of love. It is the same to a child.

The other extreme which provokes a child to revolt is harshness – harsh, demanding discipline which is never accompanied with love, concern, or understanding. Rigid, military discipline which says, “Do this, or this, or else,” will inevitably drive a child to revolt as he comes to adolescence. I remember hearing of a father who ordered his family about like a martinet. He had been in the military, and he tried to run his household that way. He assembled the family every morning, lined them all up, the wife and the children, and gave them their orders for the day. One day when he had them lined up, he said to them, “Now, any questions?” One little boy raised his hand. The father said, “What is it?” The boy said, “How can I get out of this outfit?”

That is certainly the first question any child will ask as he comes to maturity, if that is the kind of regime under which he lives. I know a father who has five children. One by one, as they have come to adolescence he has driven them away. They had to leave home, and had no other alternative. Finally, with the last one, the wife left too, driven out by a harsh, unbending rigidity which would not allow any expression of love or understanding.

Opposed to this the apostle puts two things – discipline and instruction (or exhortation) in the Lord. The word for instruction is really “putting in mind” in the Lord. Discipline, and putting in mind in the Lord. As the child grows older, physical discipline is to be replaced by exhortation, by understanding – helping a child to see what lies behind the restrictions, and always showing concern and love. It does not mean a total relaxing of limits, but it means a different way of enforcing them.

I can point you to nothing better in this respect than the very excellent summary by Howard Hendricks entitled *Pointers For Parents*. The seven pointers he gives are excellent:

1. Provide an emotional climate in the home – an atmosphere that builds our personal relationships with them – a place of warm welcome and acceptance.

That means spending time with your children until they know you and you know them.

2. Be a good example – convictions conveyed by a life, admitting that we make mistakes but showing that the grace of God is at work in us.

There is nothing more important than this. How can we possibly convince our children that material things are not the most important things in life if they only see us saving money in order to buy a new television set or a new automobile, and never see us saving to help in the extension of the Lord’s work or to invest in some cause for Christ’s sake. How do we ever expect them to think the Lord can be in them a “present help in time of trouble” if, in every crisis in our home, they find us reacting with bitterness and resentment or sharpness toward those who injure us. How can we ever show them that there is a greater way of handling things than

force, that love is more powerful than enmity, if we do not practice it ourselves.

3. Allow gradual emancipation from the apron strings of parental authority. Begin early to feed them responsibility – evaluate the results and adjust according to their ability to handle it.

I once asked our high school young people, “What are the areas which create the most resentment toward your parents?” The one thing that was most widely experienced was this: “They don’t let us take a chance. They don’t let us make mistakes.” Most Christian parents have this attitude. We think we are there to keep them from making mistakes. We are not. We are there to help them make mistakes early enough that they can learn from them while they are still not too serious. If we keep them from making mistakes until they get into adolescence, then the ones they make will ruin them. A parent’s job is to help his children have an opportunity to make mistakes and thus learn.

4. Provide counsel in an informal setting. Spend time to build a relationship which makes our counsel acceptable.
5. Set limits. Build in some restrictions. But discipline demands a context. You have no right to discipline unless you have also given them time and interest.

This is a parent’s task – to set limits – and it is one which, as I have already suggested, builds security in a child. He wants to have some limits. He desperately needs them, but the limits are to be made with understanding.

6. Apply the law of natural consequences as they grow up. Discuss pros and cons, let them decide – then let them live with the results. (Alternative: we make all the decisions for them so they lose the ability to make decisions. Or – they decide wrongly, then we bail them out.)

This is again a further elucidation of the need for gradual emancipation from apron strings. Let them make some mistakes, let them see what the results are, but early enough that they are not the kind which will damage them all their life.

7. Surround them with a fortress of prayer, trusting the Spirit of God to do for them what he did for you!

This is most important, for prayer is a mighty force to keep children true and honest and open. Keep communication lines clear, so that our children may grow up to be an honor to our homes and an honor to Jesus Christ, and so that they may experience what we so desperately want them to experience: the beauty and glory of womanhood, and the freshness, strength, and vitality of manhood, so that they may be men and women as God intended them to be.

This is what we are called to, as parents.

May God help us to do so in the light of the truth.

Prayer:

Our Father, forgive us for the many times we have blundered and stumbled along in darkness and ignorance, with the light shining right above our heads. Lord, teaches us to look to thee. Teach us to remember your great promise: "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it." Make us, who have made so many mistakes already, aware of them, and ware that whenever we start walking with you, grace and blessing will result. You are the God of the future, and the God of the present, but also the God of the past as well. You can change those mistakes into opportunities for advancement in our children's lives, as well as in ours. Thank you for this. In Christ's name, Amen.

Employers and Employees

by Ray C. Stedman

It is a remarkable coincidence – not at all planned – that in our study of the relationships of the Christian the consideration of employers and employees has fallen on Labor Day. I have experienced this phenomenon at other times when the Holy Spirit has led in such a way that the study of an appropriate text has fallen on a very appropriate day.

The apostle begins this section with the word *slaves* rather than *employees*, and it is, of course true that in the 1st century the relationship was that of slaves and masters. At the time the apostle wrote this letter it has been estimated that one-half of the population of the Roman Empire were slaves and many of them were Christians. The Christian message did not come first to the upper or higher classes; it came among the working people and even among slaves. Many of these slaves were highly educated people who had been captured in the war and brought to other parts of the empire and made slaves. They were not unintelligent, but they were slaves, literally in bondage to others. It was among these that the Christian message found its initial reception.

There were also among them some who were in the category of masters who were likewise Christians. As they came together in worship, as the Christian community, they were taught from the Scriptures that in Christ there is neither bond nor free. There is no slavery in Christ, there is no race, there are no sexual distinctions. The Christians all met together as brothers in Jesus Christ. They found that the ground is absolutely level at the foot of the cross.

But, of course, when they went back to their homes, and to their work, the question arose: “Well, what about us now? Are we to continue this relationship as brothers in our work? Does this mean that we are to be free from any bondage, or

responsibility, to another Christian?” This question soon came up and had to be settled, and this is what the apostle is doing here. He is settling this question and declaring the great principles that apply for all time in the relationship of an employer to an employee.

I do not think it is difficult for us to see that the same principles prevail in the question of management and labor. It is true that employees are no longer slaves. In most of the world, slavery has been eliminated. But it is also true that, in seeking employment, we voluntarily sell our bodies and minds to another for a limited period of time. We work out a mutually agreeable relationship, and, within the limits of that agreement, we are slaves to those to whom we sell our time and our freedom. So the issues are exactly the same. The question is, “How should we conduct ourselves toward those to whom we have responsibilities of obedience in the realm of work?”

Here again we are made continually aware of the terrible failure that exists in our day. Periodically, as we know from recent experience, the whole nation is made to suffer because of the quarrels and divisions that exist between capital and labor. Strikes paralyze the nation from time to time, and wreak havoc in our economy. Further, this strife between labor and management is frequently the scene of violence, and even murder. Newspapers are continually reporting the trouble, strife, misery, and bitterness that occurs in this area.

What is wrong? Why is there such strife? As we have seen in the other relationships previously discussed, strife is always a symptom of the violation of a fundamental order. It is evidence that something has gone wrong and there is a failure to observe the simple principles that resolve conflict.

Those principles, remember, were given to us in one sentence. As the apostle said earlier “Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ,” {Eph 5:21 RSV}. That is the whole key.

Now Paul applies this to the world of capital and labor, and he begins with the workers, the employees:

Slaves, be obedient to those who are your earthly masters, with fear and trembling, in singleness of heart, as to Christ; not in the way of eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but as servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, rendering service with a good will as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that whatever good any one does, he will receive the same again from the Lord, whether he is a slave or free. {Eph 6:5-8 RSV}

In this very illuminating passage, the apostle deals with three things:

- First, there is activity which is required by this relationship.
- Second, there is an attitude in which that activity is to be performed. And,
- Third, there is an awareness of a fundamental principle at work that keeps this whole relationship from degenerating into tyranny.

This is what we desperately need to hear today. I suggest that there is nothing more important to consider in the realm of economics or of human relationships in the world of capital and labor than this great section of Scripture. Here we have set before us the principles which, if observed, would resolve these great conflicts that tear our nation apart from time to time.

Now let us examine them more closely.

First, there is an activity required on the part of employees, and it is put in one word – obedience. “Be obedient to those who are your earthly masters.” This is the same Greek word that occurs in Chapter 6, Verse 1, with regard to children. “Children, obey your parents.” We looked at that before. It means to follow orders. It is a military term, and it means that Christian employees are

under obligation to those who hire them to do what they say. It is really very simple. Do what the boss says, obey him.

Perhaps the most amazing thing about this section of Scripture is what is not said, especially in view of what is being so widely said today. You will notice that in this very delicate, sensitive area of the relationships of slaves to masters, or, as in our day, of employees to employers, there is not one word said about strikes or pickets or sit-downs or stand-ups or lay-ins or any other activity along that line. Not a word is said about how to protest unfair conditions. No advice is given on how to organize in order to bring pressure on the right places. This is such a far cry from some of the propaganda that many churches are putting forth today in this respect.

I strongly suspect that if the Apostle Paul were writing to churches today he would be regarded as one totally out of touch with practical matters. He probably would be rejected as one who did not know how to get involved in the problem.

Perhaps someone is saying, “Well, this is obviously totally inadequate advice. It is not intended to cover the whole situation, it is only dealing with a part of it, and a very small part, at that.” But, if you look at the whole context, you will see that Paul is dealing with a far more acute problem than that of labor-capital relationships. He is dealing with the most sensitive and hate-filled relationship that ever existed in humanity, the institution of slavery. If ever there was an opportunity for the apostles, and even for the Lord, to have spoken out against an entrenched evil, an evil obviously apparent in society, it was against the institution of slavery. But the amazing thing is that

- The New Testament says nothing to encourage slaves to rise up and revolt against their masters.
- It says not one word to incite rebellion or overthrow the yoke.
- Not a thing is said about organizing these downtrodden people who occupied half of the population of the Roman Empire to overthrow their masters.

- No appeal is made to the masters to meet with these slaves and work out a way to free them, and
- No pressure is brought upon them to accomplish this in a civic way.

Yet the interesting thing, as we look back upon twenty centuries of history, is that slavery has been largely eliminated in the world, and the force that did it was Christianity. But it was by another principle, not by direct attack. As we have ample evidence of today, direct attack only serves to perpetuate strife and violence and even to increase it. The black backlash creates a white backlash, and the white backlash, in turn, creates a counter black backlash, and so it goes.

This is also true in the realm of capital and labor. The very attempts we make to solve these problems by direct methods only perpetuate the problem. We are so close to the situation that we cannot see that we are only serving to stimulate more violence. Christianity allays violence, but it does it by an entirely different principle. The wonderful lesson of history is that even an evil institution like slavery can be eliminated, and, in large parts of the world, has been eliminated without violence. It is true that there has been plenty of violence over slavery in the past, but it was because of an incomplete application of the very principles the apostle is bringing out to us here.

Some of you remember that one section of Edward Gibbon's *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* begins with these words:

While that great body [the Roman Empire] was invaded by open violence or undermined by slow decay, a pure and humble religion gently insinuated itself into the minds of men, grew up in silence and obscurity, derived new vigor from opposition, and finally erected the triumphant banner of the cross on the ruins of the capital.

That is how Christianity threw slavery out of the Roman Empire. It was not by direct appeal. And today, unless we wake up to the fact that the methods we are employing to solve these problems only perpetuate them, we are in for a greater siege of violence than we have ever seen before. The modern method only causes the power structures to

shift from one side to the other, in ceaseless cycles. First power is on the side of the labor, then it is on the side of management, then it is back on the side of labor.

Across the centuries the conflict rages back and forth, the power structure moving from one side to the other and merely perpetuating the conflict.

Now, there is a better way, and the apostle puts his finger on it. It is a way that takes faith, because it does not look like it is the way. But in the realm of history, wherever it has been tried, it has always worked. It is the way that Paul specifically states: "Employees (slaves), be obedient to those who are your earthly masters." That is the activity.

Now, with that activity goes a very essential attitude. Paul has two things to say about that attitude, and the second is so important that he finds a way to say it four times over in the brief compass of this passage.

- The first thing is this: Be obedient "with fear and trembling." The fear and trembling is not to be directed toward the boss! He may be an ogre, he may be an unjust man, but no Christian is ever exhorted to be a trembling, spineless, chinless individual toward the boss. He is not to be "a mouse studying to be a rat." The fear and trembling that is mentioned is to be directed toward himself. It is a healthy recognition of the danger of a Christian going along with the philosophy of those around, and acting as they do, thus destroying the possibility of God working through him and the power of God being released in that situation. It is fear and trembling lest we abort the greatest force of all in these situations of strife and difficulty.

Paul speaks thus of himself as he writes to the Corinthians: "When I came among you I came in fear and trembling," {cf, 1 Cor 2:3}. Why? "Lest I come in the wisdom of the world" {cf, 1 Cor 2:4}, he says – lest I come to you reflecting the philosophies, the ideas, and the dominant attitudes of those around and merely titillate your minds with the mental acrobatics that you Greeks so love to hear. No, he says, I came in fear and trembling lest I succumb to that and thus rob you of the great and transforming manifestations of the power of Jesus Christ at work. He writes also to the Philippians, "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling," {Phil 2:12 RSV}.

Why? Because it is God that works in you, “both to will and to do of his good pleasure,” {Phil 2:13b KJV}. Be afraid lest you fail to reckon on that and turn to these empty cisterns, these false forces that are so dominant in the thinking of those around you. Therefore, that is the first thing. Face this relationship with fear and trembling, lest you fail to trust in a living God.

- Second, and this is the important thing which he says four different ways,
 1. Obey “in singleness of heart, as to Christ.” What does “singleness of heart” mean? It means without divided loyalty, freedom from the tension that is created by conflicting loyalties. In other words, settle it once and for all in your mind that you are not there merely to please the boss, you are there to please the Lord. You are to carry your relationship of concern for the Lord to your work as well as to your church. You are to work as unto Christ, and your supreme concern is your loyalty to him. If you are trying to please two different forces, those around you and the Lord, you will be torn apart with a conflicting tension that never lets up. So he says, obey “in singleness of heart, as to Christ.”
 2. Then Paul expresses the same idea negatively, “not in the way of eye-service, as men-pleasers...”
 3. Then positively, “... but as servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart.”
 4. Once again, Paul says, “rendering service with a good will as to the Lord and not to men.”

Four times the idea is put forth: never work for men, you Christians, work only for God. You can work under a man’s direction, but remember that you are working unto the Lord, that your daily task is work that he has given you to do, and you do it unto him. What a glory this gives to every task. If you approach your work like this you will never have another dull day. You will never be bored

stiff with the routine and humdrum of what you have to do if you recognize that you are doing it with the eye of the Lord upon you, with a desire for his approval, and with the recognition that one day it will be made open and clear to all whether you did it as unto the Lord or unto men.

Now, what are the signs of the failure to do this? Paul picks them out for us. What are the indications that you are not doing this?

- The first sign is eye-service. Do you know what that means? That means working only when the boss is watching. When he turns his back, you quit working. That is eye-service.

Some years ago I read an account of a foreman in Africa who had several African nationals under him. He found that they were afflicted with this disease of eye-service; they only worked when he watched them. But this particular foreman was the proud possessor of a glass eye and he found that he could take his eye out of the socket and lay it on a stump where it could “watch” the men and they would go right on working, whether he was there or not. But one day he came back to find them all lounging around. He had placed the eye on the stump, but one of the men had found a way to sneak around behind and had come up behind the eye and put his hat over it so that it no longer *see* them.

It is that attitude that so widely pervades our society today, the idea of working only when the boss is watching. If you are a Christian, this is absolutely forbidden if you want to be faithful to your Lord. Remember, the eye that watches you is not a human eye. Therefore, the first sign of a divided loyalty is eye-service.

- The second sign of failure in this respect is men-pleasing. Notice how the apostle is putting his finger on the attitudes that are found so frequently in this relationship of labor and capital.

Men-pleasing! What is it? It is toadying to the boss, apple polishing, or perhaps some other terms that are not as publicly presentable. It is playing office politics, buttering up the boss. It reveals a double heart, the lack of a single eye. It reveals that we are trying to get

on by making men happy but disregarding what God thinks. These are the signs of failure.

Christians are called away from these things. No Christian has any business engaging in these types of activity if he wants to be faithful to his Lord because, for one thing, they do not work. They do not accomplish a thing. They seem to accomplish something, but in the end they do not because there is another factor at work, as we will see in a moment. The Christian is saved from all this if he remembers that what he does is the will of God. Did you notice that phrase? Paul says that we are to obey our earthly masters in singleness of heart, “doing the will of God from the heart.” What is the will of God? Your work! The very work you are doing, where you are doing it, with the people you must work with, under the present circumstances and conditions under which you have to work – that is God’s choice for you, that is the will of God. So the attitude that accompanies the activity of obedience must be a fearfulness of trusting the flesh and a faithfulness in doing all things, as serving the Lord who is ever present.

One other factor is added by way of motivation. There is to be an awareness, Paul says, of an unseen but powerful fact: “knowing whatever good anyone does, he will receive the same again from the Lord, whether he is slave or free.” That is a principle that is always at work in any situation facing a Christian.

“Knowing that whatever good any one does, he will receive the same again from the Lord, whether he is a slave or free.” It does not make any difference what your status in life is. When work is done unto Christ, he undertakes to correct the conditions that make for unhappiness, or else to make recompense on another level. Notice that he does not promise always to correct the condition, because God’s will is that Christians must sometimes live as his Son lived, under very difficult and contrary conditions, and manifest his grace anyhow. But God does promise that he will recompense any conditions like this.

All of us know that many poor homes that have had little of material gain have been so filled with merry hearts as to be the envy of every rich man in the neighborhood. They are poor homes, but homes where happiness dwells. It does not take wealth to be happy.

The other day I was struck by a plea that was made in the newspaper for a family in East Palo Alto. I was interested to observe that the basis from which this plea for help was made was that this family was living in a home that had no running water, no electricity, only an outside toilet, and they had to heat the house with a coal stove. As I read, it suddenly dawned on me that this was an exact description of the home where I grew up in Montana, a home in which we were wonderfully happy.

Now, I understand that there is human need in these areas, and I certainly am not speaking against relieving such need – by all means, we must. But the marks of real need are not these things. The need exists, but not because there is a lack along these lines. The fact that we may be materially deprived is in no way a hindrance to being wonderfully happy. Oh, there is need, I know, for elementary supplies of food and shelter, and Christian compassion can do none else but seek to supply these to all. But granted these, material gain does not contribute at all to happiness, one way or another. Our happiness is built on other ground entirely. Therefore, remember that even though God calls you to live on a lesser income than someone else, he is quite prepared to make this up in other ways that will make you the envy of those who have nothing but wealth.

Now, note that these relationships always have a certain reciprocity about them. We are to be subject one to another, so there is a word now for the employer as well.

Masters, do the same to them, and forbear threatening, knowing that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and that there is no partiality with him. {Eph 6:9 RSV}

Here are the same three-fold divisions that we found in the word to the employees. Here, too, there is to be an activity required by the relationship, an attitude which accompanies it, and an awareness of a hidden fact. The activity is “do the same to them.” That is an amazing thing to say. What did he say to employees? “Be obedient to your masters.” What does he say to the employers? “Do the same to them.” Are employers to obey their employees? Yes, certainly – but not by doing

their work for them, for that would be reversing their roles. What the apostle means here is for the employers to hear the suggestions of their employees. Listen to them, adjust their complaints, and pay attention to what is wrong. Obey them in the sense that you hear what is wrong and give serious consideration as to how to change it so as to make their conditions right.

In the parallel passage in the letter to the Colossians the apostle puts it this way: “Masters, treat your slaves justly and fairly,” {Col 4:1a RSV}. That is what this means.

Treat them justly and fairly. You Christian bosses have no right to treat employees as chattel. They are not existing for your enrichment. You have no right merely to extract money from them, to exploit them, to use the sweat of their brow only that you may become richer. No Christian master has the right to think this way. Treat them as people with problems, and listen to their problems, do something about them. This is his exhortation.

The attitude that is to accompany this action is put in this negative way: “Forebear threatening.” Why does Paul say that? Because the primary cause of employee unhappiness is to have constantly hanging over their heads a sword of Damocles, a threat of dismissal or of some kind of retribution such as the cutting of wages, in order to motivate them to better work. This does nothing but create resentment, bitterness, and incipient rebellion in the employees’ hearts. It is absolutely wrong. It creates more problems than it solves. The relationship of Christian employers to their employees must not be that of threatening. It does not mean that they cannot discharge someone who is unqualified, but they are not to be constantly holding over them some kind of threat. This is wrong in the eyes of God, and Christian masters will answer to God in these things. Their basic relationship must not be one of fear, but one of mutual respect for their employees.

Again Paul mentions a hidden factor that makes all this of extreme importance: “knowing that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and that there is no partiality with him.”

When Paul says Christ is in heaven it does not mean he is in outer space. Most of us, I am afraid, think of something remote in this respect. But heaven is that invisible spiritual kingdom that surrounds us on all sides. It means that he who is both their Master and ours, as employers, is watching

us. He is right here in the situation and he is dealing with us without partiality.

He is not impressed by our Cadillacs, or by our status in society, or by the fact that others bow down to us, or run our errands for us. He is totally unimpressed by this. He will deal in utter honesty with us, as men before him, regardless of our social standing. Remember that he is the one who said, “Inasmuch as ye have done it unto the least of these, my brethren, ye have done it unto me,” {Matt 25:40b KJV}. Also, “inasmuch as ye have not done it unto these, ye have not done it unto me,” {cf, Matt 25:45 KJV}. He is the one who says, “Love your enemies. Pray for those who persecute you. Do good to those who despitefully use you,” {cf, Matt 5:44}. Therefore the whole of life is to be lived with the awareness of the Lord’s watching eye.

What a far cry this is from the common attitude that Christians frequently take –

- That, “we are not to mix religion and business,”
- That, “church is one thing and business is another,”
- That, “we can be kind and gracious and tender toward one another in church, but don’t get in my way in business or I’ll run right over you.”

This is absolutely wrong. Anyone who takes that stand will find that God, who sees all things, has a remarkable way of adjusting the situation. Happiness drains away from a home where reliance is put upon status and wealth, and that home becomes an empty, hollow shell, having all the outward things that contribute to luxury and ease, but having nothing within, a hollow place. But God has a wonderful way of taking a home where there is not very much materially, but there is trust in him, and filling it with joy, and peace, and a glory of relationship and happiness with one another.

Now, that does not mean that all the poor are happy and all the rich are sad. Of course not. It all depends upon how honestly and faithfully we live our lives in the light of his searching eye, and the awareness of his unchangeable faithfulness to us.

May God help us to face life on this basis.

I am confident that, if Christians begin to live like this in their business, it will do far more to eliminate the strife that periodically paralyzes our nation than anything else that can be done. The problem is that Christians have not been doing this. Christians have gone along with the philosophy of the world, treating their bosses, or their employees, like everybody else does. As a result, there has been no salt in society and it has become corrupt. That is what we are living with now.

May God give us grace to face our own individual responsibility in this respect.

Prayer:

Our Father, how searching these words can be as your living Spirit takes them and probes the depths of our individual hearts. We live before you. There is no area of our life that is not subject to your gaze and to your judgment. Surely the time has come when judgment must begin at the house of God. Grant to us that we correct what is wrong in our own lives in the light of this word. In Christ's name, Amen.

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