

Main Idea: We learn two important grace-saturated truths about caring for one another from Ephesians.

I. On the basis of grace, we have received care (ch 1-3).

A. We possess every spiritual blessing in heaven (ch 1).

B. We belong to God’s household on earth (ch 2-3).

1. To appreciate God’s intent for the church now, we must think about what He intends to do in the coming ages (1:6, 10, 12, 14, 21).

2. In the coming ages, God intends to put His grace on display (2:7; 3:10-11, 20-21).

II. On the basis of grace, we are called to give care (ch 4-6).

A. This involves bearing with one another (4:2).

B. This involves remembering we are members of one another (4:25).

C. This involves being kind, compassionate, and forgiving to one another (4:32).

1. God does this with us.

2. What God does with us, we are to do with each other.

D. This involves speaking to one another with God-honoring songs (5:19).

E. This involves submitting to one another (5:21).

1. We do this by fulfilling our roles in marriage (5:22-33).

2. We do this by fulfilling our roles in parenting (6:1-4).

3. We do this by fulfilling our roles at work (6:5-9).

Make It Personal: Some questions to ask regarding caring...

1. How have I responded to God’s care?

2. Am I living in light of God’s eternal purpose for His care?

3. Am I sharing with others what I have received from God?

I’m not sure I could pick a favorite book of the Bible, since Jesus Himself said we need every word that proceeds from the mouth of God (Matt 4:4). But in the top five of the books I find myself turning to again and again, and to which I would point your attention, is the magnificent letter known as *Ephesians*.

Years ago in seminary I first read John Stott’s commentary on Ephesians, and I recommend it. John Stott, who went to be with the Lord two years ago, was a pastor in London and evangelical church leader for 65 of his 90 years of life. In a November 2004 editorial on Stott, New York Times columnist David Brooks cited Michael Cromartie of the Ethics and Public Policy Center as saying that “if evangelicals could elect a pope, Stott is the person they would likely choose.” In 2005, *Time* magazine ranked Stott among the 100 most influential people in the world.<sup>1</sup>

I’d like to share a quote from Stott’s introduction to his commentary on Ephesians:

Nobody can emerge from a careful reading of Paul’s letter to the Ephesians with a privatized gospel. For Ephesians is the gospel of the church. It sets forth God’s eternal purpose to create through Jesus Christ a new society which stands out in bright relief against the somber background of the old world. For God’s new society is characterized by life in place of death, by unity and reconciliation in place of division and alienation, by the wholesome standards of righteousness in place of the corruption of wickedness, by love and peace in place of hatred and strife, and by unremitting conflict with evil in place of a flabby compromise with it.

This vision of a renewed human community has stirred me deeply. At the same time, the realities of lovelessness and sin in so many contemporary churches are enough to make one weep, for they dishonour, contradict the nature of the church, and deprive the Christian witness of integrity. Yet increasing numbers of church members are seeking the church’s radical renewal. For the sake of the

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\*\*Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

<sup>1</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John\\_Stott](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Stott)

glory of God and the evangelization of the world, nothing is more important than that the church should be, and should be seen to be, God's new society.<sup>2</sup>

Do you think Stott's overstating his case? *Nothing* is more important? I think he's right on, even though he wrote those words back in 1979. If God is going to receive the glory He deserves, if lost people are going to be reached as God intends, then the church needs to be what God created it to be, His new society.

That's what our current series is all about. *A People to Live With in the Crucible of Suffering*. That's what God has established the church to be, a *people* to live with, a caring community that we must cherish, commit ourselves to, function in, do life with, and make Him known to the world through.

We're learning what being a caring community involves by looking at the "one another" commands in the New Testament. We've already examined the one another commands in Romans, and last time in Galatians. This morning we turn to Ephesians.

There are five one another texts in Ephesians, but since these texts have a context, I want us first to explore the message of the whole epistle. I appreciate Stott's basic outline of Ephesians. He suggests the flow of the letter goes like this:

- 1:3-2:10      The **new life** which God has given us in Christ
- 2:11-3:21      The **new society** which God has created through Christ
- 4:1-5:21      The **new standards** which God expects of his new society
- 5:22-6:24      The **new relationships** into which God has brought us<sup>3</sup>

That's helpful. In Christ we have *new life* as individuals. But God doesn't intend for us to remain alone, but is forming us into a *new society*, the church. And He hasn't left the nature of this new society up to human opinion, for in Ephesians 4-5 He spells out the *new standards* and the *new relationships* that He intends for His people to fulfill.

If there's a word that functions as glue that holds the structure of this letter together, it's *grace*. Paul uses the word "grace" eleven times in six chapters. And there are actually two grace-saturated sections to this letter. In the first three chapters Paul talks about our grace-generated resources in Christ. In the final three chapters, he addresses our grace-enabled responsibilities in Christ.

So it's all about grace, what God has done for us in Christ. Here's what we're going to see today. When we walk through this God-inspired letter, we learn two important grace-saturated truths about caring for one another.

### I. On the basis of grace, we have received care (ch 1-3).

Divine care. The Triune God's care. Paul begins his letter by praising God the Father for His demonstration of care for us—He chose us to become His children, says Paul in verses 3-7. Then he praises God the Son for His care for us—He shed His blood for our forgiveness, says the apostle in verses 7-12. And finally he praises God the Holy Spirit for what He did to show His care for us—He marked us with a seal that guarantees our inheritance, says verses 13-14.

Beloved, we are the recipients of undeserved, Trinitarian care! God the Father planned our redemption, God the Son accomplished it, and God the Holy Spirit applied it to our benefit. And for this the Triune God deserves our praise, Paul says, as three times he bursts into praise in his opening doxology.

Verse 7—"To the praise of his glorious grace"

Verse 12—"To the praise of his glory"

Verse 14—"To the praise of his glory"

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<sup>2</sup> John Stott, *The Message of Ephesians*, pp. 9-10.

<sup>3</sup> John Stott, *The Message of Ephesians*, p. 25.

And because of this incredible divine care, we who are in Christ now possess two breath-taking benefits, one Paul details in chapter 1, and the other in chapters 2 & 3.

**A. We possess every spiritual blessing in heaven (ch 1).** Notice verse 3, “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.”

What do we have? *Every spiritual blessing.* Every resource we need to please God and enjoy eternal life as He intends.

On what basis does God give us every spiritual blessing? These blessings are extended to us *in Christ.*

And where are these blessings? They are *in the heavenly realms.* And why are they there? Because that’s where Christ is. He who left heaven to do His rescue work on earth has returned to heaven, where He is seated on His throne. The blessings He has secured for us are as secure as His eternal rule.

This is very personal. If you are in Christ, you now possess every spiritual blessing in Christ, and it’s secure in Him in the heavenly realms. If you’re not in Christ, it’s not yours.

You say, “Well, how does a person move from being *in his sin* under God’s judgment to being *in Christ* with every spiritual blessing?” Paul reminds the Ephesians how it happened for them in verse 13, “And you also were included in Christ when you *heard the word of truth*, the gospel of your salvation. Having *believed*, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit.”

There’s how it happens. You must *hear*, and you must *believe*. You must *hear* the gospel, the good news that Jesus lived a perfect life, died on the cross in the place of sinners, that He rose from the dead and offers forgiveness and eternal life to sinners. And you must *believe*, that is, put your total trust in Jesus and His finished work and entrust your life to Him and for His purposes.

And when you *hear* and you *believe*, then you *receive* something, every spiritual blessing in Christ in the heavenly realms. It’s all yours.

But it’s not yours alone. While salvation is personal, it’s not isolational. While God saves individuals, He doesn’t save them to enjoy His benefits alone. He’s not just saving people. His intent is to form a new people, a community of people, a family of people called *the church*. Paul concludes chapter one with this announcement, saying in verses 22-23, “God placed all things under his [Christ’s] feet and appointed him to be head over everything *for the church*, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.”

Beloved, we’re not just saved individuals. We’re a saved people. In Christ we have every spiritual blessing in heavenly places. But in Christ, we also have something else, another benefit, and this one isn’t in heaven but on earth.

Think of it this way. Christ is in heaven, and our resources are secure in Him. So how do we experience these resources? He’s given us another benefit, this one on earth. But it’s not a benefit in addition to Himself. It *is* Himself. It’s His Body, the church. And it’s this benefit that Paul explores for us in chapters 2 & 3.

As we come to chapter 2, we move from personal to interpersonal, from individual to community. Paul changes metaphors, because no one metaphor can capture the full essence of who we are as God’s redeemed people. Who are we? We’re a Body, Christ’s Body, says 1:23. But we’re also a building project, says Paul in 2:19-22: “Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God’s people and members of God’s household,<sup>20</sup> built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone.<sup>21</sup> In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord.<sup>22</sup> And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

Let me put it this way. As individuals we possess every spiritual blessing in Christ, and those blessings are in the heavenly realms, for that's where Christ is. But the Lord intends for us to experience those blessings collectively, and so we possess another amazing benefit, and it's on earth.

**B. We belong to God's household on earth (ch 2-3).** Who's in this household? Saved Jews are—that's the "we" Paul uses in this section (see 1:12). But so are saved Gentiles—that's the "you" Paul uses (as in 1:13 and 2:11). God's purpose is to save a people from all kinds of backgrounds, Jew and Gentile, as mentioned here, but also slave/free, male/female (from Gal 3:28), barbarian/Scythian (Col 3:11). And not just save them, but make them *one*. One people, one household where He lives with and in them.

I don't need to remind you that in the world these classifications divide. We divide by race, by economic standing, by gender, by nationality. Unfortunately, it happens with God's people too.

In 1952 Billy Graham was preparing to do an evangelistic crusade in Chattanooga, Tennessee. The local organizers of the crusade refused to desegregate the arena. In other words, they put up signs to keep people with black skin color from sitting with people of white skin color. That's the way it was in the world in those days, and tragically, that's the way it was in many churches. Billy Graham went to the tabernacle and walked up and down the aisles, and started tearing down the ropes. Horrified ushers ran over and protested, "No, no, please Reverend Graham, this will be misunderstood." Graham replied, "Either these ropes stay down or you can go and have this revival without me."<sup>4</sup>

The sad reality is that many Christians stop reading Ephesians once they finish Ephesians 2:8-9, and then they pick it up again, maybe, in chapters 4-6. Praise God that He saves us by His grace and not by our works. But why does He save us? We are His workmanship, says 2:10. And His work is to bring down barriers by forming a new society called the church.

Paul explains it this way in Ephesians 2:15-16, "His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility."

What brings people together? Legislation? Education? There's place for such, but they can't change the human heart. Only the cross of Jesus can do that. *Through the cross*, says Paul. That's how God reconciles the alienated, and that's what makes the church a reality. We're people who share the cross, and therefore, we're one people.

In preparing for this message, something struck me as I read through Ephesians, namely...

*1. To appreciate God's intent for the church now, we must think about what He intends to do in the coming ages (1:6, 10, 12, 14, 21).* The church has a purpose, and the purpose has to do with His praise in eternity future. "To the praise of his glorious grace," says 1:6.

But not just praise right now, as important as that is. God intends there to be praise in the coming age. Paul talks about eternity future throughout Ephesians 1-3.

Notice 1:10, "...to be put into effect *when the times will have reached their fulfillment*—to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ."

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<sup>4</sup> Gibbs, Nancy; Duffy, Michael (2007-08-14). *The Preacher and the Presidents: Billy Graham in the White House* (Kindle Locations 1438-1441). Center Street. Kindle Edition.

We see this forward look in 1:14 as well, “who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance *until the redemption of those who are God’s possession*—to the praise of his glory.”

And Paul is very explicit in 1:21, “...far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, *not only in the present age but also in the one to come.*”

The purpose of the church is not just the here and now. God’s ultimate purpose is yet to come. He’s creating a people now who will praise Him then. Individual praise isn’t enough. Collective praise is what He’s after, and that by people who previously couldn’t get along with each other, until He saved them and made them one.

Puts a new light on the importance of corporate worship now, doesn’t it? Why make corporate worship a priority now? Because it’s warm-up for what’s coming!

And it’s not just generic praise that God intends. According to Paul...

2. *In the coming ages, God intends to put His grace on display (2:7; 3:10-11, 20-21).* And specifically, according to Ephesians 2:7, His grace on display through this new society He’s forming, “In order that in the coming ages he might show the *incomparable riches of his grace*, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.”

What is God like? He’s gracious. That’s why He extended unmerited kindness to those who were once His enemies. And that’s why He sent His Son into the world to endure unspeakable agony in their place. It’s because He’s gracious. And for this He deserves praise.

To the praise of His grace, to the praise of His grace, to the praise of His grace, says Ephesians. Again, not just individual praise, but corporate. And not just here and now praise, but praise in the ages to come.

Friends, the church is the trophy of God’s grace that He intends to put on display in the ages of eternity future to come.

“Who’s going to look at this trophy?” you ask. God will, for sure. But Paul mentions another beneficiary in Ephesians 3:10, “His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known *to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms.*” That seems to be a reference to powerful angelic beings, who, according to 1 Peter 1:12, look at God’s saving plan with amazement. In the ages to come, they will praise God, not only for His grace, but also for His wisdom in the formation of the church.

And it took His power, too, for which He also deserves praise according to Ephesians 3:20–21, “Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, *according to his power that is at work within us,*<sup>21</sup> to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.”

Is this what you think of when you think of the church? Beloved, we’re not just another social or civic organization. We are the very Household in which God now lives and through which He will put His glorious grace, wisdom, and power on display forever and ever.

John Stott is right, once again, when he says, “It may be wise to pause a moment and consider how much all of us need to develop Paul’s broad perspective. Let me remind you that he was a prisoner in Rome. Not indeed in a cell or dungeon, but still under house arrest and handcuffed to a Roman soldier. Yet, though his wrist was chained and his body confined, his heart and mind inhabited eternity.”<sup>5</sup>

Do you think that if we thought this way about the church, it would affect us? Paul says it would, in fact, he shows us how in chapters 4-6. On the basis of grace, we have received care—that’s Ephesians 1-3. It follows then that...

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<sup>5</sup> John Stott, *The Message of Ephesians*, p. 44.

## II. On the basis of grace, we are called to give care (ch 4-6).

In Ephesians 4:1, Paul transitions from heavenly indicatives to earthly imperatives. He says, “As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received.”

We’ve received a calling—that’s what Ephesians 1-3 is all about. And now we’re to live worthy of, in light of, in ways that are consistent with, this calling. We have received care. Now we’re called to give it.

But how? Here’s where the “one another” commands come in. In the final three chapters Paul spells out for the saints at Ephesus five “one another” responsibilities. You’ll note that though related, these “one anothers” are different from the ones we saw in Romans and Galatians. That’s because no two churches are the same. Their calling is the same, but the areas in which they need to grow to fulfill that calling differ.

When it comes to caring, some wonderful things are happening at WBC, for which God deserves praise. Last week, a new member told me how much encouragement he’s received recently from this body. The week before, another went out of his way to tell me something similar about the blessing of being part of a caring community.

And then, from time to time, I hear and see and what you hear and see. We still have room to grow. And this will help us. Let’s look carefully at what the Ephesian church needed to do, five things, and take inventory. Here’s what’s involved in caring.

**A. This involves bearing with one another (4:2).** Ephesians 4:2 says, “Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love.” The KJV says, “Forbearing one another.” The NASB says, “showing tolerance for one another.”

The verb *anéchomai* means “to endure, bear with, put up with, accept, hear.” The reason we’re told to do this is because it’s not natural. We tend *not* to endure, bear with, put up with, accept, and hear. We’re more prone to throw in the towel, lose patience with, reject, and refuse to hear.

In Paul’s parallel epistle he said this, in Colossians 3:13, “Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.”

I love the reality of God’s Word, and this is reality. If we’re going to be a caring community, we need to learn how to bear with one another. The truth is, sometimes we do things that irritate each other. I’m not talking about sinful things, for when that happens, there’s an objective standard for dealing with sin. But what about when our opinions and preferences differ?

Several years ago someone came to me quite upset and said, “It’s too hot in the auditorium!” And of course, I’ve also had people say, “It’s too cold in the auditorium!” So what are we going to do? In addition to working on airflow issues, we’re all going to need to bear with one another in love.

The services are too long. No, I wish they’d go longer. The music is too loud. No, I can’t hear it. I like casual. I prefer formal.

Brothers and sisters, differences are nothing new. In the early church you had Jews and Gentiles in the same church. Talk about differences! Prior to coming to Christ, they ate different foods, wore different clothes, cut their hair differently, enjoyed different music, and to top all that, they hated each other.

So how will they ever experience unity? Here’s how. By celebrating what they have in common, namely, Jesus Christ, and learning to bear with one another.

There’s a second related responsibility involved in giving care.

**B. This involves remembering we are members of one another (4:25).** “Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for

we are all *members of one body*.” While it’s not apparent in the NIV, in the Greek text Paul actually uses the same Greek word, *allelon*, that we’ve seen in the other “one another” passages. The ESV captures this with the translation, “We are members of one another.” Later in 5:20 Paul will emphasize that we are “members of His body.” But here in 4:25 he wants us to remember we are members of *one another*.

In other words, we’re connected. We belong to each other. When we have differences, we don’t look for the door. We don’t assume it’s time to find another church. No, we remind ourselves of this fact—we’re members of one another. Why is that? Because our common Savior reconciled us, not only to God, but to each other. And so we affirm our connection as we work at our differences.

And of course, that takes communication, which is what the first part of verse 25 calls for. Each of us must *speak truthfully to his neighbor*, because we’re all members of one another. Speaking the truth in love, says 4:15. No falsehood, rather truth telling. No saying, “Oh, there’s nothing wrong,” when there is. Rather, “Yes, we do have a problem, so let’s work on it together, for the honor of our Savior.”

**C. This involves being kind, compassionate, and forgiving to one another (4:32).** That’s Paul’s charge in verse 32, “Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.”

Notice the triple assignment here. First, be kind to one another. When we have differences, it’s not enough to just *speak the truth*. We must exhibit *kindness*. A good question is, “How would Jesus say what I’m about to say?”

Next, be *compassionate* to one another. I love the picturesque, “Be tender-hearted,” that’s in the AV and NASB. If my heart isn’t tender, I probably shouldn’t speak. “Lord, give me a tender heart, then let me speak.”

And then comes, *forgiving each other*. That, again, assumes that there will be sins along the way that necessitate forgiveness. What should we do when we’re sinned against in the church? Leave? Make the offender leave? No. Forgive.

Of course...

1. *God does this with us*. He is kind to us. He is tender-hearted. And He forgives us. It follows then that...

2. *What God does with us, we are to do with each other*. So apply that to forgiveness. How does God forgive us?

First, we must ask. “Oh God, I was wrong for what I just did. Will you forgive me?”

Then what happens? He forgives us, right? He chooses *not* to hold our sin against us. From this point on it will *not* affect our relationship. He will *never* bring it up again. Why not? Not because it wasn’t worthy of punishment, for it was. It’s because it’s already been punished. Where? At the cross.

And so we are to do with one another as has been done with us. *Just as in Christ God forgave you*. So when we sin, we seek each other’s forgiveness. And when it’s sought, we grant it. And when it’s not sought, we pray for it, and prepare ourselves to give it, when the time comes. And we even treat our offending brother with such unmerited love that he will want to seek and receive the forgiveness he so needs.

You say, “That’s hard to do!” Actually, it’s not just hard, but impossible without grace. But grace is what we have, grace that made us right with God, and grace that enables us to live right with each other (to the amazement of the angels who are watching now and will in the ages to come give praise to the Giver of such grace!).

In chapter five we see two more expressions of caring.

**D. This involves speaking to one another with God-honoring songs (5:19).** “Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord...”

It's interesting that he doesn't say, "Speak to God with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs." He says first, "Speak to *one another* these psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs." Then he says to *sing them to the Lord*. There's a horizontal emphasis before the vertical.

Why? For one reason, God's not after simply individual praise, but corporate praise. He wants His people to agree on what they're about to sing to Him, and then sing it in agreement *together*.

I'm not opposed to closing my eyes when I sing, and often do. It helps me focus on the words. But the danger is the sinful notion that all that matters in this moment is *me and God*. Not so. When the Lord saved me, He connected me to His household, and He wants me to sing with the full recognition of and appreciation for this connection.

Which leads to a second reason the horizontal comes before the vertical. If I can't speak these words to my brothers, that is, if we're not cherishing together the truths of the psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs that celebrate His amazing love for us, then I have no business singing these same words to the Lord. Jesus said something else needs to happen first. Remember? He said, "Leave the altar, and go be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift (Matt 5:24)."

Friends, you may differ when it comes to your brother's music preferences, and he may differ when it comes to your clothing preferences, and that's just a fact of life. But the question is this. Do we have anything in common that's big enough and powerful enough to enable us to overcome our differences and experience joyful unity that will amaze the onlooking world? Do we? The answer is...it's what we sing about every week.

Beloved, this is so practical. It's pretty hard to stay at odds with a brother over some difference of opinion when we're taking time each week to speak to each other about the great things God has done for us, with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs.

So if you want to show that you care for your brothers and sisters, show up to sing when the church sings. Put your voice with the multitude's and say, "This is what we believe. This is who we are. This is why we're here. Grace. Grace. Grace!"

One more, and it's a big one. Being a caring community...

**E. This involves submitting to one another (5:21).** "Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ." Submit is actually *submitting*, for it's a participle in the original. Submitting modifies the main verb, "Be filled with the Spirit," in verse 18. So if you want to tell if a person is filled with the Holy Spirit, look here, says Paul. Look at his relationships, and specifically, look to see if he is submitting to his brothers and sisters in the Body of Christ.

Now what does that mean? What is submission? The Greek word, *hypotasso*, is comprised of two smaller words, *hypo* for "under," and *tasso* for "to order, to place." Put it together and you have, "to place under, to order under, to subordinate." As Stott observes, "Submission is the humble recognition of the divine ordering of society."<sup>6</sup>

It's actually a military term. Submission pertains to function, not worth. God has established authority structures, with checks and balances. He holds certain people responsible to lead, and others to support and follow, for the good of the institution. So government leaders are to lead, and citizens are to support. Husbands are responsible to lead their homes, and wives to support them. Parents are to lead, and children are to obey. Masters/employers are in positions of authority, slaves/employees in positions of support.

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<sup>6</sup> John Stott, *The Message of Ephesians*.

And by God's design, the church, God's new society, is to pave the way. We are a connected people who *submit to one another*. Okay, in practical terms, how do we do that? How do we recognize God's authority structures in our relationships? Here's how.

1. *We do this by fulfilling our roles in marriage (5:22-33)*. Roles aren't a bad thing, but a gift from God. Paul says wives have a good role. They are to submit to and support their husbands, and in so doing, model the church's relationship to Christ. And husbands have a good role, too. They are to love and lay down their lives for their wives, and in so doing model Christ's relationship to the church.

2. *We do this by fulfilling our roles in parenting (6:1-4)*. Children have a role. They're to obey their parents. And parents have a role too, with fathers leading the way. They're to use their God-given authority to bring their children up in the training and instruction of the Lord.

3. *We do this by fulfilling our roles at work (6:5-9)*. If you're a slave (in our context, an employee), then obey your earthly master (i.e. employer), as if you were obeying Christ. And if you're a master/employer, remember you too have a Master in heaven, so make sure you treat those under you as He would.

Back in 5:21 Paul says we are to submit to one another *out of reverence for Christ* [lit. 'in the fear of Christ']. So our motivation in fulfilling our roles is the honor of Christ, who Himself modeled submission, to His heavenly Father, to His earthly parents, even to ungodly political and religious leaders.

Is there a limit to our submission? An important question, especially since we live in a sin-cursed world with sinful people in positions of authority. The answer is *yes*, there is a limit. We are to submit to the point that further obedience to the human authority would involve disobedience to God's authority. At that point we must respectfully say, as Peter did to the authorities that commanded him to stop preaching in the name of Jesus, "We must obey God rather than men (Acts 5:29)."

Brothers and sisters, as we, by the grace of God, live out these one another commands, we are experiencing what it means to be a *caring community*, as God defines it. And we're experiencing life in the new society called the church, as God intends it. And we're sending the lost world around us a compelling message of what it needs, as God offers it.

#### Make It Personal: Some questions to ask regarding caring...

1. *How have I responded to God's care?* What have you done, first of all, with the gospel? Have you received it? Have you received Christ? And then, what have you done with the church? God intends for His saved ones to embrace and live in meaningful connection with His church. Are you doing that?

2. *Am I living in light of God's eternal purpose for His care?* We have received care, His care, and now we're called to give care, yes, to all men, but especially to the household of God, the church, says Galatians 6:10.

So answer this. Are you participating meaningfully in God's new society called the church? Are you serving in it, and through it, and for the advancement of it? So many of you are, and I can assure you that in the ages to come when God puts His grace and wisdom on display through the church before the applauding hosts of heaven, you will be grateful you did. If you're not, please take inventory. Go back through Ephesians and see again what God says about His church, and become devoted to His new society, not because it's perfect, and not because it doesn't get messy at times, but because it's *His*, and it exists *to the praise of His glory*.

3. *Am I sharing with others what I have received from God?* The grace we've received isn't ours to keep. Let's share it, starting with each other, and then with the needy world.