

“Connecting the Gospel to Life: Learning from Ephesians”¹*Series: “The Gospel Disconnect”*²

Main Idea: Ephesians shows us how to connect the gospel to life. In Ephesians, we see gospel realities (ch 1-3). In Ephesians, we see gospel responsibilities (chs 4-6).

- I. In Ephesians, we see gospel realities (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. In Ephesians, we see gospel responsibilities (chs 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 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).

Take Inventory: Two questions to ask ourselves...

1. Have I received God’s care?
2. Am I living in light of God’s care?

This morning we’re returning to our Gospel Disconnect series. There’s a glaring problem in the American church that we’re seeking to address. It’s all over our country and all over the Tri-State region too. There are thousands and thousands of people who say they believe in Jesus, but live in ways that contradict their profession.

There’s a gospel disconnect. The gospel many claim to believe doesn’t seem to be connected to the life they are living.

Thankfully, God has given us a solution for the gospel disconnect. What is it? It is the New Testament epistles. In the four gospels the Lord has given us four beautiful versions of the gospel panorama, and how we need them. But in the 21 epistles He gives us something else we need, something often neglected, or misinterpreted. In the epistles, the Lord shows us how the gospel connects to life.

Thus far we’ve looked at 1 Peter, and Romans. Today we have the privilege to behold God’s glorious gospel connections in Ephesians. Simply put, in Ephesians, we see gospel realities (ch 1-3). In Ephesians, we see gospel responsibilities (chs 4-6).

Scripture Reading: Ephesians 5:22-33

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 this 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 about a decade 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

¹ 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.

² For a previous look at this passage, see the message preached on 3/17/13 as part of our series, “A People to Live With in the Crucible of Suffering”.

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.³

Stott shares this insight in his 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 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.⁴

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. *Gospel Disconnect*. This is a far too prevalent problem. People believe in Jesus, but then fail to see the significance of His body. He established His church to be a living community that we are to cherish, commit ourselves to, function in, do life with, and make Him known to the world through.

We’re learning what these gospel connections look like by searching the epistles for “one another” commands. There are five one another assignments given in Ephesians, and 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.

- 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 us⁵

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.

It’s the gospel that’s the key to this letter. The word “gospel” appears five times (1:13; 3:6, 7; 6:15, 19), but the gospel itself stands behind every word. According to my count, there are twenty-two gospel panorama sightings in Ephesians (in other words, twenty-two times Paul makes specific reference to the death and/or resurrection of Jesus). But there are countless other *indirect* gospel panorama sightings, summed up in phrases like “in Christ” or “in Him.”

³ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Stott

⁴ John Stott, *The Message of Ephesians*, pp. 9-10.

⁵ John Stott, *The Message of Ephesians*, p. 25.

For instance, when I say, “Remember 9-11,” what comes to your mind? Terrorists attacking our country, fire-fighters giving their lives in rescue missions, etc., right? You know that those numbers (9-11) represent a series of events.

So it is in Ephesians. When Paul says “in Christ” or “in Him” or even when He simply says “Christ”, it’s shorthand for the person and redemptive work of our Savior.

For instance, in Ephesians 1:3 Paul writes, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places.” Paul doesn’t mention Christ’s death and resurrection here, does he? Actually, he does. When he says that God has blessed us “in Christ”, he’s using a loaded prepositional phrase, which refers to all that Christ has done for us, namely, He died for our sins, was buried, and raised from the dead. That’s what it means to say that God has blessed us *in Christ*.

So in this letter, Paul is going to address all kinds of problems, including marriage, communication, parenting, and much more. Why these topics? Because this church had problems, as all do. How does Paul address them?

For starters, please note that he *does* address them. Problems must be addressed, or we end up with a disconnect.

But how must they be addressed? By simply telling church members to “do better”? No. That’s moralism, and that’s what the religions of the world do. What Paul does, and this sets Christianity apart from all world religions, is to connect the needed action to the to the gospel. He offers gospel-connected solutions.

To put it another way, he gives gospel realities, then gospel responsibilities. He spends three chapters developing gospel realities (which provide the power and incentive for the necessary changes), and then spends three chapters unveiling practical, gospel responsibilities.

I. In Ephesians, we see gospel realities (ch 1-3).

Paul begins his letter by praising the Triune God for what He has done for us. He praises first God the Father, who chose us to become His children, says Paul in verses 3-7. Then he praises God the Son who shed His blood for our forgiveness, says the apostle in verses 7-12. And finally he praises God the Holy Spirit who 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”

This is the glorious gospel of grace, and because of it, we who are in Christ now possess two breath-taking benefits. The first, Paul details in chapter 1. The second, in chapters 2 & 3.

A. We possess every spiritual blessing in heaven (ch 1). Look again at verse 3, this time in the NIV, “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*, through the merit of His perfect life, His substitutionary death, and His triumphant resurrection.

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. But it could be.

How? 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. You receive 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 experienced in isolation. 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,²⁰ built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone.²¹ In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord.²² 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. It's called the church (1:22). It's also called a body (1:23), a building (1 Cor 3:9), and in 2:19 Paul refers to it as "the household of God".

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. If you doubt that, just think about the war in Ukraine, and the recent killings in Israel, and closer to home, the tensions over our southern border. The world divides by race, by economic standing, by gender, by nationality. And unfortunately, it happens at times with God’s people too.

I’ve been reading Philip Yancey’s book, *Where the Light Fell*, which is the story of his life. Yancey, a best-selling Christian author, grew up in the south, the *segregated* south. He talks about going to a large, very influential fundamentalist, Baptist Church near Atlanta, in the 1950s. He recalls that Blacks were not welcome. A few could attend, and sit in a special section, but none were allowed to join the church.

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.”⁶

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 what is His work? 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 both, but they can’t change the human heart. There’s only one thing that can do that. *The cross*, says Paul. That’s how God reconciles the alienated, and that’s what makes the church a reality. We are people who share the cross, and therefore, we are one people.

This brings us to an important gospel connection.

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.” 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

⁶ 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.

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, rings the melody of Ephesians. Again, not just individual praise, but corporate. And not just here and now praise, but praise in the ages to come.

Friends, think of the church as a trophy. It’s 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,*²¹ 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.”⁷

So how do we connect the gospel to life? According to Ephesians, it starts with gospel realities (ch 1-3). Then it moves to gospel responsibilities (chs 4-6).

II. In Ephesians, we see gospel responsibilities (chs 4-6).

⁷ John Stott, *The Message of Ephesians*, p. 44.

In Ephesians 4:1, Paul transitions from heavenly indicatives to earthly imperatives, from gospel realities to gospel connections. 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.

Through five gospel connections. This is where the “one another” commands enter. In the final three chapters Paul spells out for the saints at Ephesus five assignments, all made possible by the gospel. As we’ll see, these “one anothers” are different from the ones we saw in 1 Peter and Romans. That’s because no two churches are the same. The areas in which we need to grow to fulfill our calling differ.

For the church in Ephesus, Paul identified five gospel responsibilities. These were the gospel connections they needed. Let’s take inventory as we consider them.

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

The verb *anechomai* 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.⁸

I love the reality of God’s Word, and this is reality. If we’re going to be the kind of church that God intends, 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!” That would be an easy fix, expect for this. Others were saying, “It’s too cold in the auditorium!” So what were we going to do? In addition to working on some airflow issues, we were all going to need to bear with one another in love.

This is life in the real church. 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 there were Christians from Jewish backgrounds and Gentile backgrounds 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, prior to Christ, they’d been taught to hate each other.

So how could they ever experience unity? Here’s how. By celebrating what they had in common, namely, Jesus Christ and His glorious gospel, AND learning to bear with one another. This brings us to a second related gospel responsibility.

B. This involves remembering we are members of one another (4:25). “Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are *members one of another*.” Later in 5:20 Paul emphasizes 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. The gospel has connected us, so we belong to each other. Churches are not like grocery stores. If the prices are too high at Kroger, I go

⁸ 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.”

to Walmart. If the meat selections don't look so good at Walmart, I head to Deemers. I am a shopper, a consumer.

Church is not like that. We are not consumers. We are members of one another. So 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 are connected.

And why is that? Because on the cross, our Savior connected us, to God, and to each other. And so we affirm our connection as we work at our differences.

And of course, this takes communication, which is what the first part of verse 25 calls for. Each of us must *speak truthfully to his neighbor* (NIV), because we're all members of one another. Speaking the truth in love, says 4:15.

So we have a problem? Here's what we do, says God's Word. 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 speak truth in love and deal with what problem, for the honor of our Savior."

C. This involves being kind, compassionate, and forgiving one another (4:32). That's Paul's charge in verse 32 (NIV), "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*. So if we have a problem and I'm coming to talk with you about it, a good question is, "How would Jesus say what I'm about to say to you?"

Next, be *compassionate* to one another. I love the picturesque, "Be tender-hearted," that's in the ESV, AV and NASB. If my heart isn't tender, I probably shouldn't speak to you, not yet. I need to speak to Him, and say, "Lord, please tenderize my heart, so that I can speak in a way that pleases you."

And then comes, *forgiving each other*. This 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. Paul says we are to forgive one another as God in Christ forgave us.

Don't miss that. It's another gospel sighting. Is it hard to forgive people? Yes! But here's what gives us the power to do it. Gospel realities produce gospel responsibilities. Think of it this way.

1. *God does this with us.* He is kind to us. He is tender-hearted. He forgives us. Since that's true, so is this.

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

This is so practical, and liberating. Because of the gospel, we have the power to do with each other what God has done with us. Forgive.

So how does God forgive us? First, we must ask Him, right? We say, "Oh God, I was wrong for what I just did. Will you forgive me?"

And what does He do? He forgives us, right? He chooses *not* to hold our sin against us. From this point on, the sin which He forgave 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.

In chapter five we see two more expressions of caring.

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

Notice Ephesians 5:19, "...addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart." The NIV says, "Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord..."

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

Why? For a couple of reasons. First, 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.

This 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 am in no frame of mind to sing them 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 fine. We are different. But the question remains. 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, yes, 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, here's a very practical way to do it. Show up ready to sing when the church sings. Gladly add your voice to the congregation's collective voice. Sing out! Let your brothers and sisters here your voice as you affirm, what they too are affirming.

Amazing love! How can it be that Thou My God shouldst die for me!

The gospel, the gospel, the gospel! This is what unites us! One more connection, and it's a big one.

E. This involves submitting to one another (5:21). "Submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ." *Submitting* is a participle in the original, which 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 or her relationships, and specifically, look to see if he or she is submitting to the brothers and sisters in church.

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."⁹

It's actually a military term. Submission pertains, not to worth, but to function. 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

⁹ John Stott, *The Message of Ephesians*.

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.

And by God's design, the church, God's new society, is to model this. We are a connected people who *submit to one another*. How?

1. *We do this by fulfilling our roles in marriage (5:22-33)*. Far from being a bad thing, roles are 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, think 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, this is God's solution for the gospel disconnect. When we live out these one another commands, we are experiencing what the gospel produces, life in God's new society. And we're sending the lost world around us a compelling picture of what it needs, and of what God offers to them too, through the gospel.

Take Inventory: Two questions to ask ourselves...

1. *Have I received God's care?* My friend, what have you done with the gospel? Have you received it? Have you received Christ as your Savior? If not, why not now? And if so, praise be to His name!

2. *Am I living in light of God's care?* If we have received His care, we're now called to give care, yes, to all men, but especially to the household of God, the church.

Are you participating meaningfully in God's new society? 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 meditate on these glorious gospel connections. Take heed to 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*.

Closing Song: #388 "I Would Be Like Jesus" (all four verses)

May Benediction: 2 Thessalonians 3:16 (NIV)