

Our Gods On Display

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[0:00] of the book of Ephesians. You know, it was really normal. I think this is helpful to know. It was really normal in the Hellenistic world! to end a letter written by someone in authority with some household codes.

You can find this in Greek philosophy and so forth. In other words, there's usually some sort of, you know, expansion, kind of philosophy, metaphysical stuff, and then it kind of gets to this, like, well, what should we do about this?

And it usually terminates in a section on household codes. So this form would have been really pretty expected to the early Ephesians. Now, I think that we need to make sure we're remembering that this is all one consistent thought, and so let me take a little bit of time just to review what we've seen up to this point, especially in chapter 4, 4 and 5.

We're deep enough now into Paul's letter that we should be able to feel the current beneath the surface, and that is that Paul has really, since chapter 4, been building a single argument that the old self lives in its futility of mind, and that futility of mind produces wrong thinking and wrong feeling, which produces wrong living.

That's what Paul's been talking about. In the second half of chapter 4, he gets specific. He starts listing particular sins, like lying, and sinful anger, and theft, and corrupt speech, and bitterness, and wrathful slander, and wrath, and slander, and malice.

[1:33] And one thing that we want to make sure we notice on the list is that those are all relational sins. Those are all things that happen within the context of relationship.

This is the thesis that Paul is developing that's going to affect our analysis of chapter 5 and 6 today, and that is simply this. The way you treat people is determined by the God you serve.

The way you treat people is determined by the God you serve. And so chapter 4 is not simply Paul saying, new God, new behaviors. It's a little bit more specific than that.

It's new God, new way of treating people, new way of interacting with people, new way of seeing people. That's really what's happening here. You know, Augustine's great book, *The City of God*, he goes into this, the whole thesis of that book is that there are two societies most fundamentally, and both driven by one particular kind of love.

The city of God is driven by people who have a love for God, and the city of man is driven by people who have amorosui, a love for self. They have a love for self.

[2:45] And all the interactions that happen in these two metaphorical cities are driven by these two great loves, the city of God driven by people who love God, and the city of man driven by people who love themselves.

You know, we need to understand that when we talk about idolatry, for instance, that idolatry is just a tool that we use in what is most fundamentally a worship of self.

I was thinking this week about Dagon, the old story of Dagon and 1 Samuel. If you're not familiar with the story, the Ark of the Covenant, which at the time represented the presence of the Lord, is put into, captured by the Philistines and put into their temple next to their idol, the thing that they worship, named Dagon.

And one morning, the priest of Dagon gets up, the Philistine priest gets up and goes into the temple and he sees Dagon, you know, flat on his face. He had fallen in the presence of God.

And so, what does the priest do? Well, he and some other, you know, priests, they prop him back up again. And this repeats over and over again in the story. And I think the thing I just say is, it's

like, do you have idols?

[3:56] Yeah. Jesus is doing a marvelous thing in your life to knock those down. But there's a part of you, the flesh, that comes in in the morning and sets them back up. And that you're not doing that because you love your idols.

You're doing that because you love yourself and you're using your idols as a tool to accomplish particular ends. And I think that's a good metaphor to keep in mind today because a lot of what's happening in Ephesians 4 and 5 is Paul saying, you have a new God but you still kind of have an old way of doing things.

And that inside of you is both the God who would, inside of you is both the Holy Spirit who's knocking down Dagon but the flesh who keeps standing and back up again. You know?

And that that's actually the tension that Paul's speaking into. If it wasn't a tension, if it was just automatic that we would immediately start treating everybody exactly like we should in God's eyes, like, he wouldn't have to write all of this.

The tension is is that just repeatedly we keep standing up those idols because there's part of us that still really loves ourself. Okay, so let's go ahead and understand then that the fundamental kind of structure of Ephesians 4 and 5 and 6 is that what you worship is affecting how you interact with people.

[5:18] And that even if you're a Christian, you're not entirely free from the prospect that you're really loving idols and loving yourself and that that's what's guiding your interactions with people.

James says in chapter 4, verse 1, what causes fights and quarrels among you and it's plural because that's the other tricky thing. Not only do you still have this tendency to stand up the idols over and over again but there's more than one and they are at war within you and they're affecting your relationships.

You see that in verse 1 of James 4? Like, what causes fights and quarrels among you? It's a sinful, love of self expressing itself in disordered desires, let's say.

And it doesn't just immediately go away when you become a Christian. Otherwise, half the New Testament wouldn't exist. So it's important to understand that when you're interacting with people, you're worshiping either the true God or the God of self.

When you're interacting with people, you're either worshiping the true God or the God of self and you're somewhat sophisticated about it in this sense. You tend to sort people by your various cravings.

[6:33] Like, you don't interact with everybody according to your lustful desires but there's some people that get into that category and there's some other people that you treat and interact with driven by your desire for esteem and respect and so on and so forth.

But the whole idea I just need you to see before we get into the text is that your worship life is guiding your interactions all the time with all people.

If you have a desired craving for respect, that's going to dominate certain interactions. It's going to keep you silent and sometimes when you shouldn't be, it's just going to dominate you in certain places.

It's going to cause you to say things you shouldn't say. If you have a disordered craving for acceptance, access to that inner ring, that's going to be guiding you as you interact with certain people.

If you have a disordered craving for comfort or for control or for approval or whatever, all of the stuff you're worshiping, all the mechanics of your true worship life, that's what guides your interactions with people.

[7:40] And that's the pivot Paul is making as we get into our text. And one more thing before we get into the text, it's worse than I say because the problem is, like me and my wife, I've got these idols that are at various levels of being stood up or not.

Like, you know, I'm either worshiping the Lord fully or not. You know, it's like a room full of mousetraps. You know, I don't, is my heart right with the Lord or not? Am I interacting with her with idols in my heart?

Am I interacting with her because I really want to be respected in this or that? Well, that'd be, that'd make a relationship really difficult. But she's got the same thing going on in her heart.

And it's just like, if you want to understand why relationships are hard, it's because of that. And so Paul is giving us such a gift, the Holy Spirit's giving us such a gift in Ephesians 5 and 6 because some of that can get ordered rightly even today.

So I'm going to read 19 verses. All I need for you to do is two things. One, just try to understand what's happening and just focus on the word as, A-S. Just note that word, okay?

[8:58] I'll just read the text. Ephesians 5, 22. Wives, submit to your own husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the body, his body, head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior.

Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to everything, in everything, to their husbands. Verse 25. 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, so 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.

In the same way, husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. No one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body.

Therefore, a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. This mystery is profound, and I'm saying that it refers to Christ and the church. However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband. Chapter 6. Children, obey your parents and the Lord, for this is right.

[10:20] Honor your father and mother. This is the first commandment with a promise, that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land. Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and administration, instruction of the Lord.

Verse 5. Bondservants, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, with a sincere heart, as you would Christ, not by the way of eye service as people pleasers, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, rendering service with a good will as to the Lord and not to man, knowing that whatever good anyone does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether he is a bondservant or is free.

Masters, do the same to them and stop your threatening, knowing that he is both your master and yours in heaven and that there is no partiality in him. Okay, so, a lot of as's there.

Probably noticed that. What Paul is doing here is he is doing something remarkable. He is showing that there is always a worship dynamic and play in your interactions with people.

There's always a God in view that dictates certain outcomes in your relationship, certain behaviors that you'll embrace. For instance, if the God in view is self and reputation, the temptation to lie in an interaction is very high.

[11:44] You know, to withhold, you know what I'm saying, the temptation to boast and so forth. Every relationship is just happening on top of basic worship mechanics. Every interaction, whether it be in traffic or in your home, it's all just the surface level of something going on deeper inside of you in which you are interacting with your concept of God, either the God of self or the true God.

And these worship mechanics that are happening underneath you, in your heart, they're going to drive really surprising behaviors sometimes.

And if you're in, and really bad behaviors often. and in certain relationships where you're interacting with that person every day for decades, which are the relationships Paul's addressing in Ephesians 5 and 6, those broken worship dynamics can really jam up a relationship.

They really can mess things up. And the answer, fundamentally, is to get your God right. get the right God going in your heart.

I was thinking a lot about 1 Samuel this week, and there's another story in 1 Samuel where David, his dad sends him to the valley of Elah to bring food to his brothers.

[13:16] And man, if my brother showed up with food right now, I'd just be glad. You know, I'd just be happy. It would be that simple for me. I'd

like bread and cheese.

That sounds great. Thank you. But David shows up in a moment when basically all the men in Israel are failing to be men. Goliath is shouting his taunts over the valley into the camp of the Israelites, and he's saying, just send one out here as your champion, and we'll do battle, and we'll see who gets to win.

We'll see who wins. And the men are shrinking like little, like the tulips did or whatever flowers did after the frost the other day.

They're just nothing to them. And there's an incredible amount of sin and defensiveness in the hearts of all these men. Well, David, you know, he hasn't said no to Goliath.

He's the only one there that hasn't. And so he shows up, and he's open to the possibility of fighting Goliath. And so he just says, what will be done for the man who takes this challenge on?

[14:26] And David's brother just rails into him. It's in chapter 17. He says, what are you doing here? Who did you leave this few sheep in the wilderness to?

You're just here to gawk. You're just here to watch the battle. It's like, just observe that calmly and coolly. Just imagine you're a counselor, and that just manifests itself.

It's like, where did that come from? Well, David's brother was worshiping at the idol of self, and his heart was just loaded full of mousetraps.

And the smallest thing provokes this chain reaction of nonsense. And listen, friends, I know some of you are actually extremely godly and very well controlled.

I can't imagine that there's anybody in this room who hasn't done something like that to someone else. I would imagine we all know what it feels like, maybe even surprising ourselves.

[15:32] And what's going on is Paul is saying, your worship life, the things you are holding most dear and ultimate, the person whose glory you're seeking, all drives certain behaviors.

And so, when we're dealing with this issue of relational conflict, whether it be children or marriage or even in the workplace, in the church, we have to be honest about the underlying mechanics.

There's always a God in view that is driving a particular set of actions. So, the big thing Paul is doing in this section, and I'm covering a big section so I'm not going to be able to get super specific. But the big thing he's doing is he's pointing out these mechanics to you. And he's saying, honor Christ as Lord in your hearts and do the thing you're supposed to do because he's seeking him and not your own glory, so on and so forth.

Does that make sense? The next thing I want to point out to you, and we're actually pretty close to being done, is I want you to go to the end, so the bond servant section there, in chapter 6.

[16:39] And we're going to go backwards. And I have a strategy for why this is. But there's another thing Paul's doing. He's not just reminding us of the basic worship engine that's driving all of our interactions with people.

There's one more thing. It's connected to that. Look at verse 5 of chapter 6. Bond servants, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, with a sincere heart as you would Christ, not by way of eye service as people pleasers, but as bond servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, rendering service with a good will as to the Lord and not to man, knowing that whatever good anyone does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether he is a bond servant or is free. Same mechanics as we've talked about. The way the God that he has in his heart is driving how he interacts. In this particular case, Paul is isolating one particular temptation that is very common to workers.

And that temptation is to be eye pleasers. What does that mean? It means, it means not working when no one's paying attention. It means slacking when no one's around.

Now, anybody ever experienced that? I would imagine we've all had to sort that out and maybe we're still struggling with it, but that's just a thing. Paul's nailing some very common problem to slack off when no one's watching you or to kind of load your head up with possibly real injustices that excuse you from working hard, so on and so forth.

[18:16] And Paul's just saying, nope, worship mechanics here, underlying your interaction with your employer, with your master here, and that is worship the Lord in your heart and certain vocational habits form.

Worship yourself in your heart and certain vocational habits form. Now, is Paul only saying that this is the only problem that a worker has? No, of course not.

A worker could have the exact opposite problem, which would be what? Eating the bread of anxious toil, like being overly consumed.

But Paul, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, remember God wrote our book, and he knows you, and he knows me, he said, we're going to talk about worship mechanics, underlying interactions, and we're going to name the one thing that is most commonly associated with this particular relationship.

You can think of it as like, this is, it's not a fair game of roulette. You spin the wheel ten times, eight times out of ten, it's going to land on, slacking off because the boss isn't looking.

[19:31] Right? In the next section there, he does the same thing with, with masters, with employers. And he says there, don't be cruel and heavy handed and think you're better than them.

Why? Because the Lord God is in charge of this. Again, worship mechanics, therefore, you know, treat him like a brother, basically. Now what's going on there is the thing I want you to notice before we go to children is, through the Holy Spirit, Paul is saying, these are the things that are most likely to be the tension points that show what you're worshiping.

Make sense? And then we get, we can go backwards to the next section, where in chapter, 6 verse 1, we're told about children. Children, obey your parents and the Lord, for this is right.

Honor your father and mother and so forth. Same framework. Children, worship the Lord. If you worship the Lord and not yourself, you will be honorific towards your parents.

Same basic idea. Children could do a lot of wrong things, but the most common thing that's going to happen, the most common replace where they need to make check their worship mechanics is in their willfulness versus their submission to their parents.

[20:56] Fathers are mentioned in the next section, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in discipline. Same idea, fathers can do a lot of possible things in those relationships with their children.

Worship mechanics are needed for the whole thing. You've got to constantly be asking. For instance, I've been a father. I've sinned as a father. Here's one easy way to talk about this. I want to look good by having successful, well-behaved children.

Well, what am I worshiping there? Am I worshiping the Lord God? No. My worship of self is driving how I'm interacting with my kids.

There's like a million of these things. Paul's speaking about one that is most common through, again, the inspirational Holy Spirit who knows people. And he says, this one's pretty common. Kids have a tendency towards self-willfulness.

They need to keep the Lord in mind as they interact with their parents. Fathers have a tendency to provocations. They need to have the Lord in mind as they interact with their children.

[22:06] Now, the reason why I took these in reverse order is because I started with the least personal for many of us and the least controversial in the culture so that you could now be primed to see that there is an inescapable logic happening in this passage.

That logic is twofold. One, what we worship dictates how we interact with people. And two, in particular situations, according to our roles, we have particular temptations.

Got it? Now, let's go back to the first section in verse 22 of chapter 5. Wives, submit to your own husbands. So, what are our mechanics?

Number one, we need to be worshiping the Lord in our hearts and it will drive certain behaviors.

Number two, there are certain temptations that exist in particular roles that God is speaking into and he's addressing here in his holy word and he has addressed it here in verse 22.

Wives, submit to your own husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the body, the church his body and is himself its savior.

[23:24] Now, as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands. The text doesn't just say worship the Lord in your relationship with your husband, don't worship yourself, worship the Lord.

It goes one step further than that and says, here is the area of your life, ladies, where you are going to be most tempted to worship self. Just as the employee has this particular area of temptation, the employer has this particular area of temptation, the child has this particular area of temptation, women have this particular area of temptation.

That is the inescapable logic of what God in his holy word is saying here. Is it the only temptation? No. But God knows us and he's saying, we can see what he's doing here.

That's my point. Now, modern men and women have been lied to so much and one of the most damaging lies that women have been told is that men are emotionally obtuse and unsophisticated and I think men believe this about themselves.

It's not true. Men, you're not emotionally obtuse. You have the good sense to cry during Field of Dreams like any normal non-psychopath would do but when I sit with my wife and watch Field of Dreams, she doesn't even shed a tear.

[24:48] Men, you're not emotionally obtuse. You sense things. Your survival depends on it. You're verbally obtuse. You don't know how to put words to things and I bring that up because ladies, I would encourage you to assume that your husband can often sense when in spite of all of your Bible words, you are going to have it your way and that's that.

I would encourage you to understand that that's a vibe that permeates your relationship and that men don't know how to talk about it or maybe don't even desire to talk about it but when it's I'm going to have it my way, you feel it.

And here's what I would encourage you. Good luck, ladies, being led, good luck, ladies, being fed with a spirit of willfulness consistently lurking underneath your dynamics in your relationship which is the worship of self expressed in one particular area related to your inclination to your husband's leadership.

The mechanics are really sound and it works all the way through Scripture. So, you not only have to worship the Lord if you're responding to this text rightly, you have to worship the Lord with a careful attention to the thing he's saying is most likely to be an issue for you and that is a struggle with your own will, a struggle with your worship of self expressing itself in the manifestation of willfulness in spite of how many books you've read and how many Christian words you're trusting and struggling in seasons you go through.

Sometimes it's pretty obvious that you're just worshiping yourself and you want your own way and then you're asking me later why isn't my husband doing a better job as a spiritual leader? Maybe that's why.

[26:53] I mean, that's not an excuse but maybe that's why. Alright, now we'll go to verse 25. 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 so 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.

Now here again the worship dynamic is laid bare. Does this man love Jesus? Is this man loving Jesus right now or did he in his flesh as the priest of Dagon go and stand up all of his idols again in the middle of the night?

Is this man interacting with his wife out of a love for Jesus or not? That's evident here as it is in every other section of scripture but what is the problem that is most characteristic of men according to God's holy word?

What is his most characteristic temptation? temptation? I would say this needs to be said very explicitly it is man's specific temptation as taught in this scripture is the failure to sacrifice for his wife's sanctification.

temptation? Is man's main problem a failure to sacrifice? There are cemeteries full of counter examples to that being man's main problem.

[28:20] They're the ones that all have the white headstones that all look exactly the same scattered throughout the world. Is man's main problem an inability to sacrifice? It doesn't look that way.

Is man's main temptation not to be loving toward a woman? Not at all. There are broken men all over the world who have foolishly gave everything to the girl they shouldn't have given everything to.

What's the main problem? What is man's main problem? What is the word saying here? It's not that he doesn't sacrifice for a woman or love a woman. It's that he does not sacrifice or love a woman in the way that Christ loves his church.

And that has nothing to do with pouring yourself out. It has to do with the purpose for pouring yourself out. And that is holiness. The main temptation a man has is not to not sacrifice for his family.

The main temptation a man has is to not give himself for the sanctification of his family. The growth of holiness.

[29:40] Love and sacrifice is not the main problem. Plenty of men routinely grind their lives into the ground for nations and for mortgages and ill-conceived family bonding vacations that they couldn't afford.

They don't have an ammo problem. They have an aim problem. Almost every man in this room is sacrificing his life, his body, everything for something.

But very few of us understand exactly what that aim should be. And that aim is to one day when you stand with your bride in eternity for the Lord to look at her and say to you, well done my good and faithful servant.

This woman knew me better because of you. And most men are just terrified to be their wife's spiritual leader.

They're terrified of making their wife's holiness and not just her happiness, their life's work. And so men, I just leave in the sermon by saying this.

[30:48] You're not merely called to love your wives and decide what that love looks like. You are called to love your wives as Christ loved the church.

And how did he love the church? By making her life easy? By letting her pick the restaurant? No. He suffered to make her holy.

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, so 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.

Friends, the great error of man, coming all the way from Adam, is to think that you can have a productive life without a holy wife.

It doesn't work that way. It comes all the way down from your first father, to think that you can have a productive life without a holy wife.

[32:05] Nope. That's on you. And it will make all the difference. And it's the greatest evidence that you're truly loving Jesus Christ and not some version of yourself, is that you are doing the thing that Jesus does.

Is he gives his life not to give his bride an easy life, not to, I mean, Jesus is great. He gives people food, he heals diseases, he's not indifferent to need, but it's always driving toward holiness.

So, conclusions. Friends, relationships are extremely complicated because we never know which idols are standing up in which situation and it's sort of like, almost like cryptography.

It's like, there's a lot of things to figure out. And really, truly, the only hope anyone has to have good, harmonious, God-pleasing relationships is to ensure, whether husband and wife, child and parent, is to just consistently pursue a life of beholding and loving Jesus Christ.

I just want to say, like, he's so worthy of it. Every single thing described in this passage is Jesus. Jesus was submissive to the Father. Did not consider equality with God something to be grasped.

[33:29] Jesus gave his life up for the bride. Jesus was the obedient son to the Father, doing only that which his Father commanded him. Jesus is, in some ways, the Father of the church, and he is careful and kind and provides for us.

Jesus was the slave who had no form of appearance that anyone should be impressed by him at all. He became a slave even to the point of death on a cross, trusting God who judges justly.

And Jesus is the king of the universe. He's the boss of bosses. But friends, he treats us like brothers and sisters. Jesus is worthy of your worship.

