

Introduction: Good morning, sisters and brothers from Dawlish Christian Fellowship! It is always a pleasure and a privilege to share God's word with you. You are special people to me and Albetiza, my wife. Mark and Jo are good friends of ours. God has been giving us the privilege to walk on this journey together.

As you may know that the subject of my talking is 'A relational church' part 7 of the series based on **Ephesians 5: from verse 15 to chapter 6 verse 9**. Ephesians is one of my favourites, Paul's letter. The Church is pictured as the body household relationship. "The structure of the letter is very clear. The first half is about our relationship to God in Christ, and the second half is about our relationship to others in the Lord. When Paul writes about our relationship to God, he uses the word 'Christ', but when he writes about our relationships with each other, he uses 'Lord'. It is Christ who gives us our relationship to God, and he is the Lord who governs our relationships with each other."

A question: Why should we talk about 'relational church'?

1. God is a relational God. He has created mankind with the purpose to have a relationship with Adam and Eve. **Genesis 1:27** 'God created mankind in His image'.
2. His wide vision is to have a family of many children like His son Jesus. The Church is a family. The base of the family is the relationship.

Back to the main text, I will split it into three parts, helping us to highlight Paul Apostle of Christ's advice.

The **first one** is about our relationship to God and members of His family, the Church, the body of Christ – **Ephesians 5:15-20**.

Verse 17 – '**Understand what the Lord wants you to do**' – Fundamentally, we understand God's purpose for us. The life given has to be aligned with His will. Jesus' commission to His disciples is in Matthew 28 – '**Go and make disciples.**' Simply, Jesus is trying to say, 'In the same way that I have been sharing my life through a relationship with you, go and do the same with others. Disciples who make disciples. Making disciples is the main reason Why the Church exists, discipleship is all about relationship. God desires to have a big family. The Church is a family, God's family. The relationship is the base of the family. How to make disciples? I would encourage you to start praying for people of your relationship. Also, try to find some ways to serve them.

1. Verse 18 – '**Be filled with the Holy Spirit**' – No Holy Spirit, no life. The Holy Spirit cannot be ignored. Our service in God's kingdom has to be in

partnership with the Holy Spirit. We are co-labours with Holy Spirit. The intimate relationship with the Holy Spirit is the key to the success of making disciples. We can preach the gospel, but the Holy Spirit is the only one who can convince people. Shifting our minds from programme church to a relational church without the Holy Spirit can be very frustrated. Jesus said: 'You will receive power on the Holy Spirit comes on you'. This power will enable us to go and make disciples.

2. Verse 19 – **'Sing – Make music to the Lord in your heart'** – Paul is encouraging the family to sing - worship God. Singing is one of the ways, but there are so many ways to worship Him. The relational Church has to be creative in finding different ways, especially in this lockdown time, when cannot meet in person.

Verse 20 – **'Give thanks for everything'** – It talks about accepting His will and circumstances he has been allowing to be at the moment. We cannot forget that He has been looking after us. His love is unquestionable even sometimes we do not feel. **1 Thessalonians 5:16-18**: **'Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.'**

The **second one** is about our relationship as a family. The relational Church starts from our homes – **Ephesians 5:21-6:4**

1. Husbands and wives – 5:23 **'Each man must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband'**. The relationship in the family will reflect over the whole Church as our extended family. As Church, our families have to be model. Husband and wife's relationship are compared in the Bible with Jesus, as the groom and Church, as the bride.
2. Children and Parents/Parents and children – For the children 6:3 – **'If you honour your father and mother, "things will go well for you, and you will have a long life on the earth."** For the parents 6:4 - **'bring them up with the discipline and instruction that comes from the Lord'**, how our biological family can express God's kingdom. It is a challenge for many parents and children due to the model of our society and all influence from social media develop a good relationship. If you are struggling, keep praying because there is a prophecy in **Malachi 4:6** says that **"He will turn the hearts of the parents to their children, and the hearts of the children to their parents; or else I will come and strike the land with destruction."** Again, it does not matter the circumstances of your family at the moment; God can change everything and everyone. I want to encourage you to keep praying. **Matthew 7:7-11** – **"Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened to you. 8 For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the**

door will be opened. Which of you, if your son asks for bread, will give him a stone? 10 Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? 11 If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!”

3. **Personal testimony** – Last October, my whole family were tested positive for COVID-19. For two weeks, physically, emotionally and mentally, we felt sick with headaches, fever, cough, no smell and no taste. We stay at home isolated, waiting for our physical bodies to react and control the virus. Even on this circumstance, we could feel loved by God through brothers and sisters. They prayed for us. Cards, flowers, cakes were delivered at our front door. Many encouraging messages through phone calls, social media, emails. Our family were praying and supporting us in this challenging time. The Church is a family. In the family, we care to each other.

The **third one** is about our relationship with the community – **Ephesians 6:5-9**: Talks about

Slaves and Masters – but actually, the Bible are not supporting slavery as we are living in another social context, but these verses talk more about our relationship with the community; colleagues from workplace, Schools, Universities, neighbours, families, relatives, people around us. A relational church has eyes for the community. The early Church is the example for us - **Acts 2:47** ‘**enjoying the favour of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.**’

A relational church will not be just waiting for people to attend the Sunday morning services, but will get involved with people loving, caring, serving, becoming light and salt; allowing people to encounter Jesus, experience Him, commit themselves on becoming His disciples and be transformed in His image by the Holy Spirit, in a day-by-day process.

Conclusion: I am sure that these Scriptures are giving instructions and also challenging us.

How to respond this morning bearing in mind that our calling is to be a relational church? Maybe the lockdown has been stopping us physically, but The Holy Spirit is creative God, and I am sure if you pray, He will give you the right way on how to build each other up as God’s family.