

Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost

October 8, 2017

Christ the Rock Ev Lutheran Church

Farmington, NM

Ephesians 5:21 - 6:4 Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.

22 Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord. **23** For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. **24** Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.

25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her **26** to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, **27** and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. **28** In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. **29** After all, no one ever hated their own body, but they feed and care for their body, just as Christ does the church— **30** for we are members of his body. **31** “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.” **32** This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church. **33** However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.

6 Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. **2** “Honor your father and mother”—which is the first commandment with a promise— **3** “so that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth.”

4 Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.

God Builds the Christian Family

You probably aren't surprised that there are disturbing trends for families in America today. Statistics show a steady decline in marriage health and satisfaction over the past 40 to 50 years. The divorce rate is nearly twice the rate it was in 1960. In 1970, 89 percent of all births were to married parents, but today only 60 percent are. Most, tellingly, over 72 percent of American adults were married in 1960, but only 50 percent were in 2008. Maybe more distressing are the attitudes toward marriage today. It is generally accepted that most marriages are unhappy, most marriages will end in divorce, and since marriage is in such rough shape it's better not to get married or to live together before getting married to improve your chances at staying together.

But what if I told you those assumptions are just that: assumptions? What if the evidence shows couples who live together before marriage are more likely to break up after marriage? While it is true that way too many marriages end in divorce, what if I told you that “by far the greatest percentages of divorces happen to those who marry before the age of 18, who have dropped out of high school, and who have had a baby together before marrying”? What if surveys actually reveal the number of married people who say they are “very happy” in their marriages is high - about 61-62%? And that 2/3 of the people who

report being unsatisfied actually become happy within 5 years of they stay married instead of getting divorced?

But we aren't here today to beat the odds or tilt the percentages in a positive direction. We are here today to learn what God has to say about families. And the reality is, when we take a closer look at what God actually says, we find great reason for hope. That's because our hope is founded on Christ. Real hope comes from realizing God builds the Christian home.

1. Founded on God's Grace

That's good news. And it gives us a sense that there is a chance. Families have a chance. yet it must not be obvious how to get there, how increase the odds and improve success rates and find the firm foundation for families. Here's a hint: it's not easy. At least, not in a way that is simple and adopted by a majority of people in our society, probably not the majority of people you know. In these verses from the Book of Ephesians, the Apostle Paul acknowledges that. He calls the key to sturdily built families "**a profound mystery.**" (Ephesians 5:32) In his original language he says it is a "mega mystery." That's different than a secret, something you want to keep hidden and protected. It's a mystery because it is something only God knows first hand and needs to be revealed to us so we can understand it and then reveal it to others.

Let's tackle this issue head on. But it requires us to develop a healthy dose of humility. Then we will see my ego and your ego is the biggest barrier, not the truth of God's Word. Have you ever had a bad day? Raise your hand if you've had a bad day. If you have, whose fault was it? You had a bad day at school because you didn't understand the lesson and you ended up with lots of homework. You had a bad day at home because someone woke up grumpy and got everyone in the house off to a rough start. You had a bad day at work because someone didn't do their job and you had to do more than you were supposed to. You had a bad day because something broke or malfunctions and made everything more difficult that it had to be.

But did anything or anyone or any single event actually force you to have a bad day? Those things happened. You could have chosen a different response than anger or bitterness, resentment and frustration, violence and cursing.

Now, put that in the context of families. Whose fault is it when families break down? I can tell you the answer 100% of the time when a couple comes into a pastor's office for counseling: it's her fault, it's his fault. He didn't do his job. She failed to do her part. So the first thing I tell couples now is that I'm not going to be a referee. And once you have done what God has called you to do perfectly 100% of the time, then you can start criticize what your spouse is or isn't doing.

Marriage reveals flaws and failures like no other relationship. Those are failures I have to own. Those flaws I have to acknowledge. Marriage shows how each husband and each wife lives with almost constant disappointment for the people to whom we've made the most important promise of our lives. Every husband and every wife knows first-hand our failures to live up to God's standards. In other words, marriage reveals more clearly and more

powerful the daily, constant need for God's forgiveness. That shows us the way God builds the Christian family. First of all, **The Christian Family is Founded on God's Grace.**

When we take a closer look to God's guidance for families in the Bible we get the power and the pattern for the journey. It all comes back to Christ. This profound or mega mystery is based on "**Christ and the church.**" (Ephesians 5:32) And when we take a look at what God actually says, we get that hope we are looking for, the hope so badly needed for our society.

2. Window into God's Grace

Building a family on God's grace is not easy, but it's worth it. If the family is built on a different blueprint, if it is design around a different model than Christ and his church, then it is destined to fall apart. The most common blueprint for families we see around us is based on the myth of finding a soulmate. That person should help me to reach my full potential. But that building is destined to collapse because it doesn't rely on Christ, it relies on another sinful person, just like me.

Our specific roles are first defined by our relationship to Christ. That relationship is defined by Christ's relationship with his people, the church. So he says: "**Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.**" (Ephesians 5:25-27) Jesus didn't love us only based on what he could get from us. Jesus saw you in your worst selfishness and he still loved you. His love for you isn't based on your beauty or the projects you perform for him, but purely on his undeserved love. He loves you with a love that pledges himself to you with unwavering dedication. He loves you enough to sacrifice all, even his life for you.

In God's grace we see ourselves as God sees us. Jesus loved and surrendered himself for people with stubborn egos. Jesus took deliberate and decisive action in love for you even though you and I so often refuse to lower ourselves for anyone else. And by his selfless sacrifice Jesus cleanses you of your dirty attitude that refuses to budge in compliance to God's will. Jesus brings you to the waters of Baptism and drowns in you the filthy selfishness that expects to give only when you get, is only willing to act once you have received. Jesus makes you holy. By conforming his life and death to the arrangement mapped out for the promised Savior from the beginning of time, Jesus is able to present you without stain or wrinkle as you stand in your relationship with him by faith. Each filthy sinner is clothed in the beautiful bridal garments of our baptism.

Marriages modeled after Christ's love for sinners are a window into God's grace. I love the way one Bible scholar put it: "With all the sensuality and sordidness and self-centeredness many marriages are surrounded by today, it is like coming out of smog into pure mountain air to have the Lord tell us what marriage is to be." (Habeck) Families have a unique goal under God's grace. We want to live in that grace. We want to partner with each other to remain in that grace and grown in our relationship with God and reach our ultimate heavenly home.

3. Reflection of God's grace

A family built on Christ might not always be neat and orderly, following the exact design specifications of God's Word. But it will be a reflection of God's grace. When every person in a family sees himself or herself under Christ, families will give a glimpse of the relationship God wants to have with all people.

So a Christian's first and most important question is always, how can I show my family God's grace? Husbands ask: how can it put the needs of my family before my own? How can I make every sacrifice necessary for the good of my wife? How can I reflect the unselfish love of Jesus to my wife? Wives will ask: how can I reflect God's perfect arrangement and beautiful design in my attitude and actions? How can I voluntarily, willingly, and joyfully line up my life under the headship of my husband as all believers do to Jesus? How can I yield out of respect with trust in my heart? Children will look at parents not as ogres who order them around, but as God's gifts who shower you with love and concern. How can I respect them and honor them as God's gifts who look out for me and provide for me and build up my faith?

And I know there are plenty of people here who are single. Some of you have no desire to be married. Some of you have been praying and praying, only to learn God is telling you not yet. For every single person here, whether it is something you struggle with or something you celebrate, realize God gives you a role to play in building up families too. Remember who was the one penning these words to the Ephesian Christians? The Apostle Paul. He never married. He had no desire to get married. He knew his life's calling was to serve God without any other responsibilities. And yet Paul was a strong advocate for the Christian family. He saw its value. he knew how important it was for Christians and their communities. By your faithfulness to God's arrangement for you, you can be a powerful advocate for God's grace in families too.

And the more those families reflect God's design, the more they reveal the mystery of the gospel, Jesus bringing us into an intimate relationship with our God. When husbands live in a thoroughly self-sacrificial way, they proclaim Christ to their wives and to themselves. When they put to death the selfishness that comes so naturally, they free Christ's sacrifice to take the driver's seat in the family. When wives entrust themselves to their husbands, respecting the role God gives to them, they are learning more and more about the relationship of the believer to our Savior. Our families have the goal of living according to God's arrangement. But the ultimate goal is becoming more and more a reflection of the gospel.

So, is marriage in trouble? If past trends guarantee future results. If attitudes toward marriage continue on the same trajectory based on the same assumptions. But if marriage is redeemed the way husbands and wives are redeemed, if they find their life and source of life in Jesus Christ, the assessment is the exact opposite. If families find their foundation on Christ's unconditional love, there is nothing that can overcome God's grace. If families see their roles primarily as a window into the heart of our God, then Christian families can give a beautiful witness to our culture full of so much of the bitterness and brokenness. If husbands and wives and children reflect the grace of God in their lives, then God can build

something amazing in your home and build up entire communities. By God's grace, this is our very real hope. Amen.