**GOD’S DESIGN FOR THE FAMILY**

**Ephesians 5:22 to 6:4**

In our passage this morning, Eph 5:22 thru 6:4, Paul focuses on the family – specifically God’s design for the family unit and for marriage. The challenge for me in teaching a lesson like this (can’t just skip over it and ignore it) is threefold: (1) My credibility. I realize that some of you may question my qualifications to teach this lesson, married 18 years, divorced. I confess to you and to God that I am certainly no expert on this subject. However, God is. And what I will be telling you this morning is God’s truth, not Chris’s opinion. So that’s my first challenge. (2) I realize that not every one of us in this class is married. You have been before and you may be again someday. Only God knows that. My challenge is how do I make this lesson relevant for you today? (3) We have already raised our children. We did the best we could, but some of us are heartbroken at how our children turned out. We feel helpless. There’s nothing we can do about it now other than to pray for them. Several of our kids, kid’s spouses, grandkids are mentioned on our prayer list for various spiritual needs including some for salvation. My challenge then is making this lesson relevant for us.

As I prepared this week, I prayed for each one of you by name and specifically I prayed that those who would be here – that you would hear something from God that you needed to hear. I don’t know what that is in your life. But God does. And so I trust that His word will in your life not return void, Isaiah 55:11. God speaking thru His prophet said, “So shall My word be that goeth forth out of My mouth: it shall not return unto Me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it.” I believe that God has a spiritual purpose for each one of us here in this room today, including me. I believe that every time God’s word is opened and taught or preached that God has something He wants to see accomplished in the lives of those who hear it.

Let me go ahead and read this passage. Think of any questions while I’m reading thru the passage and then we’ll discuss them. READ Ephesians 5:22 thru 6:4 *(quotes from Gen 2:24 and Exo 20:12)*

[Discuss any questions that are brought up]

In Ephesians Paul is following a logical line of thinking. He makes a point, establishes it, then says, “therefore” – he does that throughout this letter – and then moves on to the next thought. Two very important points Paul has already made which we need to keep in mind as we think about this passage. (1) In 5:18 Paul tells us to “be filled with the Spirit.” The Holy Spirit must be in control of every aspect of your life. That is a prerequisite moving forward. (2) In 5:21 Paul says, “submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.” This is the key to all relationships Paul discusses in Ephesians – between Christ & the church, husbands & wives, children & parents, employees & employers.

Let’s talk about what it means to submit. The best definition is found in Philippians 2:1-4. Paul talks about how our Christian behavior is predicated on our unity in Christ (similar to Ephesians) and then he says, “Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.” That is exactly what it means to submit. A submissive person is not domineering. They don’t force their agenda and plans on others. And they’re not selfish. The Philippians 2 passage goes on to describe how Christ is our example of this. He submitted Himself to the Father’s will. He was obedient to the point of death on the cross. So being submissive is not a sign of weakness but of humility. It seeks after what is in the best interests of others.

V 22-33 deal with husband-wife relationships. This passage is not about man-woman relationships. It is specifically about husbands and wives. [mention parallel passages] Paul spends 3 verses addressing the wives and 9 verses on the husbands. So, men when we start looking at v 22-24, Paul’s words to wives and we point our finger at our wife, just remember we each have 3 fingers pointing back at us. There are 3 times as many verses written to us husbands, as there are to our wives.

V 22 says, “Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord.” If you desire to honor Jesus Christ, then you will submit to your husband. V 23 gives you the reason why you submit – because “the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church.” A marriage relationship pictures the relationship between Christ and His church. V 24 says, “as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands.”

In all the relationship discussed in Ephesians God has designed a head. Christ is the head of the church. Husbands are the head of the wife. Parents are the head of the children. Employers are the head of the employees. There is an intentionally designed hierarchy and the reason is to prevent complete disorder and chaos. We all understand in physical terms what the head does for the rest of the body. It controls the body’s various function *[chicken with its head cut off]*. The head has authority over the rest of the body. Let me make this clear: Authority does NOT mean authoritarian. Remember, our model is Christ. In God’s design the wife follows the model of the church and submits to her husband. God delegated a husband to be head over his wife – God had a reason (not just a coin flip) – because of the husband’s unique role in the relationship. In God’s plan, Gen 1-2, the husband was to be the provider, the protector, the security, the preserver, the rescuer, the savior. He was to care for his wife. Husbands, we are to be your wives’ heroes! And so, the wife submits, she places herself under the divinely ordained headship of her husband. That’s God’s design. This is not at all popular in today’s culture. In fact, there’s a lot of push back against this. But it’s what God’s word tells us. And if the husbands are modelling Christ like they should, then this won’t be an issue at all with their wives.

**I** Now to you husbands… In v 25 Paul says, “Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her…” Notice it does NOT say, Husbands rule your wives!” The Greek word for love here is *agapeo.* It is unconditional and intentional love; selfless, self-sacrificing love. It’s the kind of love Christ has for His church. V 26-27 mention how the husband, like Christ, sanctifies his wife. He cleanses her. He presents her as holy and without blemish. All of this speaks to how the husband seeks his own wife’s spiritual and physical purity. In doing so he takes on the role as spiritual leader of the relationship. Again, God’s design.

The husband is to take very good care of his wife. V 28 says that he loves his wife to the same degree as he loves himself. Men, how much time do we spend daily caring for our own bodies? How much time and effort to we spend eating, drinking, grooming, showering, combing our hair, brushing our teeth, manicure, pedicure, deodorant, cologne, etc. We should nourish and cherish our wives to the same degree that we do our own bodies. Whenever I leave the house, I make sure I have my keys, wallet and cell phone. I make sure I fasten my seat belt. I need to have the same sense of well being and security for my wife as I do for myself.

**I** V 29 and following go right back to Paul’s earlier thoughts to the wives where he compared the husband-wife relationship to the relationship between Christ and His church. Paul’s driving this point home again. He must think it’s important! His closing thought for husbands and wives, v 33 – every husband must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.

So, the question is, “why are so many of our marriages full of conflict and unhappiness?” It gets back to the basic problem we have as Christians in general. It is a spiritual problem. You see, even though we’re saved, we are still fallen human beings and we still battle against our sin nature. We must constantly as Eph 5:18 told us, “Be filled with the Spirit.” None of our human relationships, marriage included, will be successful (what God wants them to be) if we aren’t first controlled by the Holy Spirit. This is what allows us to submit to each other out of reverence for Christ.

To summarize, in a Christian husband-wife relationship both wives and husbands submit to each other, 5:21. Wives submit to their husbands by placing themselves under his leadership and honoring him as the head of the house. Husbands likewise submit to their wives by understanding them and being sensitive to their needs and feelings (1 Peter 3:7). Marriage is a give and take relationship. Though it can be very fulfilling, enjoyable and rewarding, sometimes we need to put your own plans and agenda aside for the other person’s sake. That’s what love is. That’s what love does. We don’t do this grudgingly, but happily, as unto to the Lord.

**I** Now onto the parent-child relationship, 6:1-4. This will be brief. V 1-3 give instructions to the children. “Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.” The term “children” here is not age specific, but Paul is obviously addressing children who are old enough to know the difference between right and wrong and children who are living under their parent’s authority in their home. Children submit to their parents by obeying them. By doing what they tell them to do and by not doing what they tell them not to do. And whenever a child asks, “why?” the Christian parent can point back to Eph 6:1 and say, “because it’s right.” So then, the action that God requires of children is obedience to their parental authority. In our world the parental authority that God has placed over them may not be their biological father or mother. In fact this is most often the case. It may be a stepmother or a stepfather or a grandparent or even a teacher. The principal is the same no matter who the authority figure is. Obey them.

In v 2 Paul adds, “Honor your father and mother…” Respect them, speak to them respectfully and graciously. Treat them with dignity. Don’t embarrass them in front of others. This is a quote from the Ten Comm and I personally believe this applies to all children for life. While our parents are still alive we should honor them. How do we do that? We make sure they know we love them. We care for them. We spend time with them in person or on the phone. We live our lives in a way that our parents will be proud of us. Paul says that this particular commandment carries with it a promise, a blessing which is tied to the covenant promises found in Deuteronomy. For us today these blessings are twofold – (1) we will have a good quality of life, God will bless us because we honor our parents; (2) a quantity of life. There are a number of things that might contribute to one’s life being shortened that are outside of our control (shootings, disease, accidents). However, there are some things we can control. We should live our lives in such a way that we will not incur divine discipline which could shorten our lives. Under the OT Law parents could have their children killed for disobedience. Perhaps Paul had this in mind, I don’t know. What I do know is that when we honor our parents, God is pleased with us. And I believe He rewards us for it.

Finally, a word to parents. That word “Fathers” in v 4 can also be interpreted as “Parents.” I believe that is the appropriate context here in Ephesians. First of all, “do not provoke your children to anger.” Be fair. Don’t exasperate your children. Don’t frustrate them. Don’t show favoritism toward your other children. A parent’s responsibility is to help their children grow. To develop their mental capabilities, to help them become physically stronger, to develop their social skills and to develop them spiritually. V 4 says, “bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.” The Book of Proverbs is devoted to a child’s spiritual growth, their discipline, their understanding of God. Children will not develop properly on their own. They need parental guidance and discipline. When left to themselves children will not read and study or practice. Instead they’ll spend their time watching TV or playing video games. They won’t eat what’s healthy for them but instead they’ll consume all kinds of junk food. They won’t give of themselves to others and make their world a better place. Instead they will become self-centered and often hang with the wrong crowd. If you ask them what they want, they won’t want to go to church. They won’t read or memorize the Bible. None of that. The parent’s responsibility is to guide these little people, little sinners, little reprobates, and to help them develop into responsible and godly adults. And some of us grandparents have taken on this role because, frankly, their parents aren’t doing it.

[Example of me and Robin, my talk with Memphis]

To summarize, children who live under parental authority are to submit to that authority by obeying what they say because it’s right. Children of any age are to submit to their parents by honoring them, by treating them with respect. Parents, likewise, are to submit to their children, by doing for them whatever is in their child’s or grandchild’s best interests – even if it means sometimes sacrificing our own time, money and plans. We do this because we love them. That’s what love is. That’s what love does.

Are you all ready to sing?