

The Second Great Christian Institution

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Ephesians 5:21-33

Paul follows a consistent pattern in most of his Letters

First comes doctrine – following that comes application

Putting it another way – first comes the great truths of salvation

Then comes the way we work out those truths in our lives

The first half of Ephesians is great doctrine

The second half of Ephesian deals with the Christian life

And with relationships

You see

Applied Christianity is never just a matter of the individual and God

It always involves other people

Martin Lloyd-Jones wrote an 8 volume series on Ephesians

And he titled the book on this passage – “Life In The Spirit”

His point was this

The Spirit filled life is not measured by spiritual experience

The Spirit filled life is measured by how well you live with in community

Here the apostle highlights three sets of relationships

Husbands and wives to each other

Children and parents to each other

And slave to master or in today’s economy worker to boss

I titled today’s message – The Second Great Christian Institution

The first great institution is the body of Christ – the church

The second is the family

The family is under attack today like at no other time in history

What this country believes about marriage

And the relationship of parents and children is changing

And it is not changing for the good of the family nor for the good of the country

I want us to look at the institution of the family

I discussed husband wife roles in depth a couple of years ago

So I am not going to go as in depth as I might normally

Today I want to discuss the foundations of Christian marriage

And the roles of the wife the husband

Next week \we will finish with a look at parenting

Let's begin with the foundation

Vs 21 - Be subject or submissive to one another in the fear of Christ

The foundation of Christian marriage is submission

It is no accident that Paul begins the subject of family with submission

His blueprint for the family is based upon mutual submission

And his blueprint is impossible for the world to achieve

For the ability to be subject to one another

Comes only as a result of the filling of the Spirit

Only by being subject to Christ are we able to be subject to each other

One of the worse tragedies of our day is the progressive death of the family

Every Christian idea about the family is under attack

From its structure to its permanence

The day I got married I thought of making a break for it

I was sitting in the back room of the church - the door was open

I watched cars race down the road and thought about joining them

I could have been gone before anyone noticed

Why was I considering making a break for it

Because I strongly believed that marriage was forever

And I didn't know if I was capable of forever

Nothing about me or my background said that I was

The funny part is this

At that same time Jackie's dad was telling her

That it was not too late to turn around and leave me behind

My point though is this –

I came from a broken home – and it wasn't fun

I didn't want to do to my kids what my parents had done to me

When I got married – no matter what – no matter what
I was going to stick it out
Has our marriage been a bed of roses – you bet it has
I sleep on the petals and Jackie gets the thorns
But the Christian concept of marriage is under attack
People get married with the mindset that
It doesn't matter if the marriage works – we can always get a divorce
Or they don't get married they live together
Gays and lesbians are demanding the right to get married
They are adopting kids and calling the resulting unit a family
This new morality about marriage is advanced by some psychologists
Who want to eliminate marriage altogether
They believe man has come of age
We don't need these outdated restrictions and boundaries
That once seemed essential for a satisfying life
And the forces arrayed against marriage seem to be winning
If you love this country you need to be involved in the family debate
You see the family is the cornerstone of our society
It is our future and the hope of our future
If the family disappears – shortly after so will our society as we know it
You can look back through the centuries and you will find
The disintegration of the family always precedes the disintegration of society
To preserve our society we must begin by preserving the family
And the gr`eatest way to preserve the family
Is for the church to model to the world what God intended for the family
John MacArthur writes – it is time for Christians to live what the church has taught.
**God's standard for marriage and the family produces meaning, happiness,
blessedness, reward and fulfillment, and it is the only standard that can produce
those results**
But as Bob Dylan so accurately wrote – The Times They Are a' Changing
60 years ago only 1 in 500 couples in the church divorced

I don't know if it's true

But they say the divorce rate in the church is about the same as the world

Somewhere around 50%

God will forgive, cleanse and restore the repentant believer – however

God will not change His standard of righteousness to meet the cries of the world

Nor does He promise to remove the consequences of disobedience

Sometimes He does – But He doesn't promise that He will

You cannot willfully disobey God

And count on there being no consequences

There is no such thing as a painless divorce

Particularly when there are children

Paul's model on how the family is to function

Works whether the family unit is composed of believers or not

But what he advises is so contradictory to the message of the world

So contrary to the desires of our fleshly nature

That it is almost impossible for nonbelievers to follow it

And difficult for many within the church

So before Paul gives us the word on how to fulfill our role in the family

He tells us to be subject to one another in the fear of Christ

You see the family can only be what God designed it to be

When the family members are what God designed them to be

God designed us to be conformed to the image of His Son

That is not only the plan – it is also the standard

And until God works in your heart

You will neither want what God wants for you

Nor will you be able to comply with His standards

Now as we go through this study

It wants you to avoid two things

First don't think about what Paul's standard means to someone else

Don't sit there thinking – I hope they hear this

Ever bring someone to church and all service long
All you are thinking about is wondering what they're thinking
And in the meantime you are missing the message
Don't be like that – consider how this teaching applies to you
Then some of you will be thinking – what pastor is saying isn't possible
You don't know my husband – you don't know my wife
I can't do it - I won't do it
The truth is you can't and you won't without the help of the Holy Spirit
And you will not receive the Spirit's help if you don't want it
So desire a Biblical marriage
And ask God's help in your own heart to achieve it
Beginning with you is the only way to influence your marriage
Now when the church was founded some 2000 years ago
Marriage was upside down from God's standard
Pretty much like it is today
Many Jewish men regularly prayed – God I thank you that I am not a gentile a slave or a woman
Although Scripture gave reasons for divorce
Jewish law had been expanded
To include almost any offense or disfavor in the eyes of the husband
In Greek society divorce was rare
But men had concubines and they went to prostitutes
The wife's only role was to bear children and keep the house
In Roman society divorce was so common
That many women did not want to bear children
It might ruin their body for the next man
It was in this setting that the church was founded
And marriage instructions given
Today just like 2000 years ago
God wants the Christian family to be in total contrast
To the corrupt standards of the society that surrounds us

And the relationship between husband and wife

Is modeled on that of Christ and the church

First of all that means Christian marriage is to be holy and forever

That is why the wedding vows have that phrase – ‘til death do us part

Some couples have taken that out of the vows

And others have little intention of honoring it even as they say it

In many weddings it would be more honest if it read – ‘til trouble boredom financial problems or somebody better comes along so us part

God’s standards are high and you might even call them severe

Diametrically opposed to this standard is the advice of the world

Telling us all we deserve to be happy fulfilled and free to do our own thing

Only those who have died to self and are alive to God

Will rejoice in the privilege of living in the Lord’s standard

Now many Christians who stay together grit their teeth and stick it out

The love is gone – the passion is dead – what is left is endurance

- Story of the old couple getting divorced -

That is not what God intended

When God’s guidelines for marriage are followed

The result is a loving secure tight knit family unit

Who display God’s love through the marriage

Have you noticed - we are drowning in a sea of marriage information today

Marriage conferences and seminars TV programs

Take place in this country 365 days a year

A new book on improving your marriage comes out about once a month

Yet with all this information the divorce rate has doubled in the last 50 years

In 1960 the divorce rate for first marriages was about 20%

Today it is about 40%

For those who have learned from their first marriage and remarried

The divorce rate is 60%

For the third marriage the rate climbs to over 70%

I think we can assume from this that most people do not learn from their mistakes

In case you think the right idea is to live together first
Here are the statistics – the average cohabitation is 5 years
They ought to know each other pretty well by then don't you think
The average marriage for those who lived together first lasts 3.5 years
The problem with marriages isn't lack of information
It isn't lack of marriage manuals – or even training or counseling
It isn't that the couple doesn't really know each other

The problem with most marriages is the corruptness of the human heart

Many believe the problem with their marriage is their partner
And while that can be true
The major problem of most marriages is selfishness
It is expectations about marriage that can't come true
It is the incorrect belief that we can find fulfillment in another person
And it is the disappointment when our perceived needs aren't met
That breaks most marriages
Our fulfillment comes from Christ

And Christ is the only person who can bring us fulfillment

Look for it elsewhere and you are walking down a blind alley towards a dead end
Most of the world's marital advice
And all of its self help advice is literally destroying the family
The destruction of the family is most felt by the children
Kids raised in single parent homes are more likely to drop out of school
Less likely to go to college
More likely to become involved in destructive behavior
And today 1/3 of all children are being raised in single parent homes
This is what the wisdom of the world brings upon itself
This is what the "me" generation has brought to society
For marriage to work as God intended
We must first submit to Christ and then to each other
That is the foundation

Now let's look at God assigned roles

The reason seminars books TV programs and DVDs haven't helped

Is because the basic problem with marriages isn't lack of information

The basic problem with failing marriages is the twisted human heart

James – What is the source of quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you

Set against this philosophy of life that happiness is to be gained at all costs

Stands the Word of God

The creator of mankind knows how we are built

And what we need to be happy – and it isn't self-fulfillment

What men and women need to be happy is servant-hood for Christ

It's the only way to get it

And serving Christ is the only place the world will not look for it

Do you want a good marriage – do you want fulfillment in your marriage

The NIV puts it this way

Submit yourselves to one another out of reverence for Christ

That is the key verse for the rest of this chapter

The rest of these commands are impossible

If you are not both submitted to one another out of reverence for Christ

It is not possible for the wife to be subject to her husband

Unless she is submitted to the Lord

She will want her own way

She will push against her husband when she disagrees

Her husband will never be able to do enough to satisfy her

In time she will find her satisfaction outside the family unit

It is not possible for the husband to love his wife as Christ loves him

Unless he is submitted to the Lord

He will be a selfish tyrant

Never able to give sacrificial love

And in time a different woman will seem appealing

There is a basic difference between the makeup of men and women

You've heard all the patterns

Women are nurturers – men are problem solvers

Women are gardeners – men are hunters

Women are shoppers – men are conquerors

Women need love to be fulfilled; men need respect

And when we fulfill the roles in marriage that God has assigned us

We will find satisfaction and comfort for our entire lives

When both do not fulfill their roles – what happens

Well there was a movie out last year called – There Will Be Blood

Well there might not be blood but there will be pain heartbreak and agony

So the order is this

Submit yourselves to Christ submit yourself to each other

Then fulfill the role God has assigned you

The Greek word translated “subject” in NASB or “submit” in the NIV

Means to arrange in rank or order

The main idea is to surrender your rights to another person

Neither an army nor a country can function without rank and order

A marriage cannot function without rank and order

The functional structure of the family - like government like the army

Like the church requires both authority and submission

But in the church and in the family the leader is required to be a servant

The leader of the home needs to have the same attitude in themselves

Which was also in Christ Jesus.

Christ emptied Himself and took the form of a bond-servant

The one not in leadership must surrender their rights to the one who is

The one in leadership is to surrender their rights to the one who is not

Spirit filled Christians rank themselves under one another

And it will not - cannot happen without a work of the Holy Spirit

Only Spirit filled Christians are able to rank themselves under one another

For the heart that isn't Spirit filled will be all about itself

You see it all the time in work situation or in school

But it is never uglier than when you see it in the church or in a marriage

Now listen

Every obedient Spirit filled Christian is a submitting Christian

The husband who demands his wife's submission to him

Without being submitted to Jesus and through Jesus to her

Is distorting God's standard for the marriage

And cannot function as a godly husband

The parents who demand obedience from their children

But are not submitted to God and meeting their children's needs

Are not being obedient to God

And cannot rightly function as godly parents

The Christian life is not hard – it is impossible

There is no aspect of the Christian life

Which can be lived effectively by our own effort

Only Christ can live the Christian life

And when we try to obey God or please Him with our self-effort

We will fail miserably

That applies to Christian service

It applies to marriage

And it applies to parenting

In 1Cor Paul writes

Christ is the head of every man, and the man is the head of the woman, and God is the head of Christ

Just as the Son is submissive to the Father in function

But equal to Him in nature essence and power

Wives are to be submissive to their husband

While being equal to them in moral and spiritual nature

Remember this is not whose best or who is favored by God

It is how God has ordained the family to function

I want to leave you with a couple of verses

Eph 5:32 – The mystery is great, but I am speaking with reference to Christ and the church. Nevertheless let each individual among you also love his own wife, even as himself, and let the wife see to it that she respects her husband

These are the keys to a successful marriage

Love your wife – respect your husband

If nothing else happens but that - your marriage will last a long time

Both the husband and the wife are to be imitators of Christ

The wife is to voluntarily submit to her husband

Just as Christ voluntarily submitted to the Father

Being submitted means that when the discussion is finished

The husband is the leader and final decision maker

Now the wife isn't lower than her husband

She voluntarily places herself under the authority of her husband

Just as Christ voluntarily placed Himself under the authority of the Father

And remember Christ was exalted because of His voluntary submission

Then the husband is to love his wife sacrificially

Just as Christ loved the church sacrificially

Sacrificially means that the husband gives up what he desires for the good of the wife and the good of the family – she comes first

The husband isn't better than the wife or more loved by God

He has a role in the marriage given to him by God

I think there is no doubt that at least **part of your reward in heaven**

Will be based upon how well you fulfill your role in marriage

God has placed you underneath this man – did you respect and submit to him

God has given you the responsibility to care for this woman

Did you sacrificially love her or did you take care of yourself first

The final verse I want to leave you with is this one

Gal 3 – There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor freeman, there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Jesus Christ

All believers are spiritual equals in every sense

No one is better than you in the sight of God

In the marriage God has assigned you a role

Are you fulfilling it

Have you submitted to Christ and then to each other

You can only do it as the Holy Spirit influences you to do so