

Jesus Is Precious As the Foundation of the Family

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Ephesians 5:21-6:9

Jesus is precious because he removes our guilt. He is precious because he gives us eternal life. And he is precious because through him we become authentic. Jesus Christ is the most important man that ever lived. To know him is more valuable than knowing all the most famous and powerful people of history. To be known and loved by him is a greater honor than if all the heads of state were to bow in your presence. When this world is over and we all stand before the judgment seat of God, many of you will look back with shame and dismay at how small was the place granted to the Son of God in your daily lives: how seldom you spoke to him, how little of his word you learned, how half-hearted your resolve to obey, how narrow the sphere of life in which you eagerly sought his Lordship. And on that day you will wonder no more why you were so unhappy in this life: unhappy at work, unhappy in school, unhappy at church, unhappy at home. It will all come clear: half-hearted allegiance to the Lordship in Christ in the practical affairs of everyday life not only robs Jesus of the honor we owe him, but also robs us of joy and purpose.

If it is true, as we saw last week from Romans 14:9, that Jesus desires so much to be Lord in your life, that he died for that purpose, then is it not plain that in every part of your life Jesus wants to be Lord? There is no time or place or activity in your daily routine where Jesus does not want to be your owner, your provider and your commander. And you will never know joy and authenticity in the minute by minute doing of your daily duties until you are wholly surrendered to him. That is, until you say, "Anything you say, Jesus, at work. Anything you say, Jesus, at school. Anything you say, Jesus, at church. Jesus, I will do anything, anything you say at home."

Everybody wants a happy home. And most people want a purposeful home—a home with a mission and destiny beyond the mere satisfaction of our own daily desires. We want homes where each person flowers rather than fades. Homes with the aroma of respect rather than the odor of continual belittling. Homes with laughter instead of bitterness, eye to eye conversations instead of sporadic comments, peace instead of conflict, a sense of common mission instead of festering introversion.

The importance of family life in society and church can scarcely be exaggerated. O how crucial in the development of a child's personhood is the life of his family. And not only little children—but also the lives of husbands and wives are made more or less fruitful by their experience at home. We want a happy home and a family with a purpose and a mission. And my message today is that the Lordship of Jesus Christ is the only lasting foundation of such a home. Trusting Christ as Savior, surrendering to him as Lord and orienting all of your family relations on him, transforms the home into a little heaven on earth. And even if some member of your family is not a believer, there is more grace and power for your love under the Lordship of Jesus than anywhere else. He is precious as the foundation of the family.

What I want to do this morning from our text in Ephesians 5 is make one main point and illustrate it briefly in the relationship of husband and wife. The main point is this: Christian family life is a work of God's Spirit in the lives of those who do everything for Christ's sake.

Ephesians 5:21-6:9 is a fairly familiar text. It deals with wives and husbands, children and fathers, slaves and masters. In a typical household of that time those were the three dominant relationships that needed to be regulated. Paul was answering the question: what difference does it make in a family when its members become Christians? The very existence of such a text in the New Testament (and there are several of them--Col.3:18-4:1; 1 Pet. 2:18-3:7; Titus 2:4-10) shows that God is not indifferent about the ordinary give and take of home-life. If Christ is your Lord, he is Lord of all your daily life.

But what is not as familiar about this text is the context in which Paul puts it. Look back to verse 15: "Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise, making the most of the time because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit . . ." And then comes a series of phrases which tell us the effect of being filled with the Spirit of God: "addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with all your heart, always and for everything giving thanks in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God the Father." And then most of the English versions do something that makes it very hard to see Paul's intention. They put a period or semicolon at the end of verse 20 and translate verse 21, "Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ." But in the original "Be subject" is not a new sentence

or a main verb. It is another participle like "addressing," "singing," "making melody," and "giving thanks." In other words, verse 21 belongs with verses 19-20 as an explanation of what it means to be filled with the Spirit in verse 18. Literally then the passage says: "Be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord in your heart, always and for everything giving thanks in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God the Father, being subject to one another out of reverence for Christ." The purpose of verses 19-21 is to spell out what happens when you are filled with the Holy Spirit. In verse 19 your heart overflows in song to each other and to the Lord. Verse 20 says that thankfulness is at the center of those heart songs. And verse 21 says that when you are filled with the Spirit you will submit to one another.

When the Holy Spirit is holding full sway in your life, then your heart brims with a song of gratitude and your heart humbly submits to serve those around you. Submitting yourself to someone means not rebelling with a sense of superiority or a feeling that you are too good to stoop and help when someone puts upon you for service. It's what Paul means when he says in Ephesians 4:1-2, "Lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called in all lowliness and meekness, with patience, forbearing one another in love." And in Romans 15:2, "Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, to edify him." And Romans 12:10, "Outdo one another in showing honor." And Philippians 2:3, "Do nothing from selfishness or conceit, but in lowliness count each other better than yourselves." That kind of humility and readiness to serve rather than be served, to honor rather than be honored is a fruit of the Spirit. And when we are filled with the Spirit we will be submissive to each other in this way. That is the connection between verses 18 and 21.

But now comes the crucial connection with family life. Verses 22ff are clearly an extension and application of the principle in verse 21. We know this mainly from the grammar of the text. The command in verse 22, "Wives be subject to your husbands," has no verb in the original. It simply says, "Wives to your own husbands." Which means it is a continuation of verse 21. The flow of thought then from verse 18 to 22 would be: "Be filled with the Spirit... submitting to each other out of reverence for Christ, wives to your own husbands as to the Lord."

So now it should be evident where I got my main point: Christian family life is a work of God's Spirit. The submission of a wife to her husband and a husband's love to his wife (vv. 22-33), the obedience of children and their nurturing by parents (6:1-4), the obedience of servants and the forbearance of masters (6:5-9) all are expansions of the principle in 5:21: "submitting to each other in reverence to Christ." And this submission in verse 21 is a description of how people act when they are filled with the Holy Spirit (v.18). Therefore all of Christian family life is a work of God's Spirit.

But my main point had another part. I said, "Christian family life is a work of God's Spirit in the lives of those who do everything for Christ's sake." Even though the Spirit of God is free to blow where he wills, there is a God-ordained correlation between submission to Jesus as Lord and the work of the Spirit. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 12:3, "No one speaking by the Spirit of God ever says, 'Jesus be accursed!' and no one can say, 'Jesus is Lord' except by the Holy Spirit." Wherever a person bows in humility under the Lordship of Christ there the Spirit of God is at work. It is the mission of the Spirit to exalt Jesus Christ. Jesus said in John 16:14, when the Spirit comes "He will glorify me." Therefore, when we are filled with the Spirit we are in love with the glory of Christ and we delight to bow to him as Lord. Or to put it the other way around, if we desire to see the Spirit of God transform our family life we must surrender totally to Jesus as Lord and turn all our daily doings into an offering of worship to him. When the Spirit reigns in your life you do everything with a view to honoring Jesus. And in that way Jesus becomes the foundation and focus and goal of the family, and life at home is transformed.

Notice the evidence for this in the text. After commanding us to be filled with the Spirit in verse 18 almost every verse that follows all the way to 6:9 shows that the Spirit's work is to exalt Christ and orient all of life (especially family life) on him. Let's follow his thought. First in verse 19 the Spirit produces songs to the Lord (Jesus). Then in verse 20 he produces gratitude to God in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then in verse 21 he produces submission in reverence for Christ. In verse 22 wives submit themselves to their husbands as to the Lord. In verse 25 husbands love their wives as Christ loved the church. In 6:1 children obey their parents in the Lord. In verse 4 fathers bring up their children in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. In verse 5 slaves obey their earthly masters... in singleness of heart as to Christ. And in verse 9 masters leave off threatening because they too have a Master in heaven. When a family is filled with the Spirit, everything is oriented on Christ. Christian family life is a work of God's Spirit in the lives of those who do everything for Christ's sake. That's the main point.

And now I want to look briefly at two of Paul's applications of this truth in our text: first a word to husband, then to wives, then a closing challenge to us all to be filled with the Spirit yielded to the Lordship of Christ for the

sake of our families. The word to husbands is this: Be filled with the Spirit! Yield to the Lordship of Christ! And then recognize this: your God-appointed headship in the family is to be exercised in love on the pattern of Christ's love for the church. I believe many people today make the mistake of saying that since mutual submission of all believers to each other is taught in verse 21, therefore there is no distinction between the roles of husband and wife. But the text simply will not allow this. What verses 22-33 do is spell out the peculiar forms that lowliness and submissiveness of husband and wife will take. And they are not the same. The wife is compared to the church, the husband compared to Christ. The husband is compared to the head, the wife is compared to his body (v.28). If all Paul wanted to say was "Submit to each other," he could have left out verses 22-33 altogether. But we know from other letters he wrote (1 Cor. 11, 1 Tim. 2) that Paul sees in the created order a God-appointed distinction between male and female that makes the man's headship or leadership in marriage fitting and beautiful.

But what the apostle stresses here in Ephesians 5:25-33 is that husbands should be filled with the Holy Spirit, eager to exalt Jesus Christ and therefore ready to conform their leadership to Christ's. Christ fulfilled his headship or leadership over the disciples through sacrificial service. Jesus did not cease to be the leader of the disciples when he stooped to wash their feet (John 13:13-15). And when he hung on the cross, the weakest of the weak for the sake of his bride, the church, he was no less her head. Woe to the husband who thinks that his maleness requires of him a domineering, demanding, attitude toward his wife. This is not the mark of a Christ-like head but a childish bully.

But the subordinate point of this text for husbands is just as needed today as the main point, namely, you are to be the leader and head of your household under Christ. Do not let the rhetoric of contemporary feminism cow you into thinking that Christ-like leadership in the home is bad. It is what our homes need more than anything. Husbands, for all your meekness and all your servanthood and all your submission to your wife's deep desires and needs, you are still the head, the leader. What I mean is this: it is you who should take the lead in the things of the Spirit; it is you who should lead the family in prayer, in the study of God's Word in worship; it is you who should lead out in giving the family a vision of its meaning and mission; it is you who should take the lead in shaping the moral fabric of the home and in governing its happy peace. I have never yet met a woman who chafes under such Christ-like leadership. But I know of many women whose lives are unhappy because their husbands have no moral vision, no spiritual conception of what a family is for and therefore no desire to lead anyone anywhere.

Have you seen the Camel Cigarette billboards—the curly-headed, bronze-faced, muscular macho with the cigarette hanging out the side of his mouth? The sign says, "Where a man belongs." You know what I pray when I think about that sign? I pray that Bethlehem will be filled with men who, when they see that sign, say, "To hell with such lies!"—men who know that where a man belongs is on his knees beside his wife, leading in prayer. Where a man belongs is at the bedside of his children, leading in devotion and prayer. Where a man belongs is in the driver's seat leading his family to the house of God. Where a man belongs is up early and alone with God seeking vision and direction for the family. Men, I challenge you in the name of Jesus Christ our King, be where you belong!

And now a brief word to wives. In its context Ephesians 5:22 means: if you are filled with the Spirit and yielded to the Lordship of Christ, then you will be subject to your husbands as to the Lord. That little phrase "as to the Lord" has two implications. One is that a woman's first and ultimate allegiance is to the Lord Jesus and that other allegiances are subordinate to and derivative from this one. The other implication is that, therefore, the subordinate allegiances are limited by the revealed will of Christ. This means that the form which a wife's submission takes will vary according to the quality of her husband's leadership.

If the husband is a godly man who has a Biblical vision for the family and leads out in the things of the Spirit, a godly woman will rejoice in this leadership and support him in it. She will no more be squelched by this leadership than disciples are squelched by the leadership of Jesus. If she thinks his vision is distorted or his direction is unbiblical, she will not sit in dumb silence but query him in a spirit of meekness and may often save his foot from stumbling. For husband-headship does not mean infallibility or hostility to correction. Nor does the wife's involvement in shaping the direction of the family involve insubordination.

But if a Christian woman is married to a man who provides no vision, gives no moral direction, takes no lead in the things of the Spirit, the form of her submission will be different. Under the Lordship of Christ she will not join her husband in sin even if he wants her to. And where she can she will give a spiritual vision and moral direction to her children. But even in this she need not communicate a cocky spirit of insubordination. Even when she must, for Christ's sake, do what her husband does not approve of, she can try to explain in a tranquil and gentle spirit that it is not because she wants to go against him but because she is bound to Christ. Yet it

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will do no good to preach at him. At the root of his being he is dreadfully guilty that he is not assuming the moral leadership of his house. You must give him room and in quietness win him by your powerful and sacrificial love (1 Peter 3:1-6).

In conclusion, there is a God-ordained pattern of headship and submission, of leadership and joyful support of that leadership within the family. It has been conceived by God and revealed to us that we might discover happiness at home and a meaningful mission for our family. It is the work of the Spirit of God in the lives of those who do everything for Christ's sake. Therefore the question for you who want a happy home and a meaningful mission and destiny for your family is: are you filled with the Spirit of God and yielded to the Lordship of Christ?

If you would like to pray with one of the pastors and seek this Spiritual enabling for new relations at home, I invite you to make that choice very definite by coming and meeting Pastor Glenn as we sing "Happy the Home Where God is There."