

The Christian Family in Biblical Perspective
Seven Essentials in the Christian Family
“Why is this Series Important?”
Ephesians 5:21-33, 6:1-4
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April 19, 2009 – Morning Sermon

I would like to add my invitation for you to come back tonight as our covenant children perform. Some may say, “I don’t have children there.” Oh yes you do. They are your spiritual children. You are their spiritual fathers, mothers, uncles, aunts, and grandparents. Come and encourage them and please use the church picnic and VBS as wonderful opportunities for outreach. Let’s look now to the Word of God. It’s the Truth.

Ephesians 5:21-6:4 says, **21** *submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.* **22** *Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord.* **23** *For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior.* **24** *Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands.* **25** *Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her,* **26** *that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word,* **27** *so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.* **28** *In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself.* **29** *For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church,* **30** *because we are members of his body.* **31** *“Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.”* **32** *This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.* **33** *However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.* **6:1** *Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.* **2** *“Honor your father and mother” (this is the first commandment with a promise),* **3** *“that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land.”* **4** *Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.*

The grass withers and the flower fades. The Word of God abides forever, by His grace and mercy may it be preached for you.

May I invite you to go on a journey with me? We start this Sunday. We won’t finish the total journey but we’ll finish the study part on June 21st. In fact, by June 21st I’m praying that you will be able to whistle and your Bible will be able to open to Ephesians 5. We are going to dig into this text, the Christian family and be necessary therefore a Christian marriage, Christian parenting, Christian childhood – what it means to be a covenant child. We will take a look at this passage of Scripture and we will see what Christ brings to us about the distinctiveness of the Christian family. I have a put a definition in your notes that I am going to keep bringing in front of you. This is a definition for the family and then a specific definition also for the Christian family which is the definition for the family but with some additives.

What about the family? The family Biblically defined by God, is one man united to one woman for one life with parental responsibility for their children. That is the basic definition. One man united to one woman as his wife united together the two becoming

one and resulting children by adoption, or by biological reproduction, the fruit of the womb, those children they then bear responsibility for. Please notice it is sustained in creation. It is marred by the sinfulness of man and it is Biblically defined. Have you ever found a society where family wasn't in place? Why? It is because God has built this into us. This is a creation law. It's not a cultural development. It's not social evolution. Now because of sin wherever we find family it will be marred, distorted and in some cases even perverted – things like boligamy, polygamy, today's notion of same sex marriage. It will constantly be marred but in our heart there's something called family. It's a creation ordinance, Biblically elucidated, defined and declared – one man, one woman for one life with parental responsibility for their children.

What about the Christian family? Let's build on this just a little bit. The Christian family is not only the definition of the family but the Christian family is empowered and enabled by the Spirit of God. The Christian family has dwelling within the home the power of the Spirit of God, sanctifying it, setting it apart. The Christian family is committed to the promises, precepts and the privileges of the Word of God. It is committed to the promises. If I am a Christian woman or man with an unbelieving spouse then I bring Christ to that marriage and I sanctify, set apart and make an impact in that unbeliever. God has promised that in 1 Corinthians 7:14. God has promised that He will work through believing parents and into the lives of their children. I believe that promise to covenant believers for their children that God works through them. *“Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved, you and your household”* (Acts 16:31). *“For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to Himself”* (Acts 2:39). God works in the life of the family with the Gospel power that is promised.

Not only are we committed to the promises and privileges of the Gospel in the marriage but we are committed to the principles of God's Word. We are not looking to the world for the latest notion of what is a family, a husband, a wife, or parenting but we go to God's Word to enact its precepts and its principles. We are also passionately existing as a family to enjoy God and glorify Him forever. The family is there for the glory of God and our joy in the Lord as our family glorifies Him. This is very important. The family is not there to glorify the members of the family. The family is a gift from God to better enable the members of the family to glorify God and to better enable the family to enjoy God. Members of the family do not exist to make my joy complete. I am a member of a family so that my family might know the fullness of how God has designed us to glorify and enjoy Him together in the Lord. We are going to try and unravel that in this study.

Would you go on this journey with me? It is eight studies and I am devoting time to it because I think it's important. I am going to give you five reasons why I'm going on this journey and I want you to go with me. I want you to prioritize these studies in preparation and attendance and in application. This subject has laid on my heart so much that the 7 essentials of the Christian family became eight sermons/studies because the more I looked at the introduction the more I knew that had to be a sermon. Then the more I looked at the 7 essentials unraveled from this text the more I realized that there are things we need to address so on the next Lord's Day I'm going to publish for you the schedule of the titles of these sermons, the dates each one will be preached as we move toward the 21st of June. By the way, there is an auxiliary series that I'm going to preach

on Sunday night because how can I talk about one man, one woman for one life and not address the issue of what the Bible says about divorce and remarriage.

How can I develop the whole concept of what a marriage is without addressing the implications for our Christian singles? How can I talk about the enemies of marriage and God's victory without identifying them and what the Biblical antidote is that brings sexual purity and joy and communication that's redemptive? Also I need to talk about financial freedom instead of financial bondage. So on the Sundays that are appropriate we will talk about these things. How can I talk about what it means to be a Christian husband without talking about what it means to be a Christian man? How can I possibly talk about Christian wives and Christian mothers with out us grasping at least to some degree Biblical femininity in a world that has totally rejected it and lost it? Please don't get mad at me but Genesis will have to be pushed back just a little bit further but I'll get there. I will not leave Joseph's bones in Egypt. I promise you.

Look with me in this text. This is an amazing text of Scripture. It is hard for us to grasp how counter cultural this text was when it landed at the church of Ephesus to be circulated in the daughter churches around Ephesus. In one sense even these pagan cultures had already been taught by the Greeks that you put your life in order and your look at your marriage and family. Did you notice the order in this text? The order starts out husbands, wives, wives in marriage, marriage parenting and then it goes on to talk about how to deal with masters and slaves and slaves and masters.

Here is what has happened in the book of Ephesians. The first three chapters start out "in Christ" and talk about the blessings of Christ to the elect of God who are in Him. Then chapters 4 through 6 deal with the responsibilities of those who are in Christ to live for Him. As you go through it, how does he start it off? He starts it off by saying "I want you to walk in a manner worthy of your calling. You've been called. I've given you your blessings." Now what does it mean to walk in a manner worthy of that? It is not worthy to be called and not worthy to stay called but worthy of that calling. What is the worthy testimony of a saved man or woman? He will tell you all about it. He has his own way to develop the fruit of the Spirit to the Ephesians in Ephesians 4 and 5. Then he will tell you to put off the old man and put on the new man. Everyday you are to kill the old man and put on the new man. Then he will tell you to "walk wisely" in this world and then he will say to submit yourself to one another in the fear of the Lord. Now here is how wives are to do it. Here is how husbands are to do it. Here is how parents are to do it. Here is how children are to do it. Here are how masters are to do it. Here is how slaves are to do it. Your relationship with Christ impacts every role and every responsibility in your life. This order is not unusual even for the Greeks, the pagans and the Romans.

Here is what was drastically unusual. Masters weren't told what to do for slaves but slaves existed for masters. Parents weren't told what to do for children but children existed for parents. Certainly, fathers were not singled out with responsibility to children but children existed for the fathers. Husbands were not in a pagan culture told what to do for their wives much less lay down their life for them. This is like a social atom bomb going off in a pagan culture. There is something called a Christian man who becomes a Christian husband who lays down his life and leads as a servant and a Christian wife who comes before her husband and respects him and submits to him. Then the two of them are blessed with these covenant children and then these covenant children are raised in

the nurture and admonition of the Lord. Now look at that warning about fathers do not provoke which would have never been said in a pagan culture. “Don’t provoke your children to anger and frustration.” Then there is a call to children to honor and obey and the wonderful promise of God in His law for this. This is amazing.

I know there are things in it that have to be addressed for us to understand it so this is just laid upon my heart. Here are the five reasons why this study has absolutely captured my heart for you and for me. The first reason is this is no burden but this is a pastoral responsibility and privilege to equip you that you might serve and know the Lord and there is nothing more foundational in the Christian life than understanding the Christian family. Let me back up here to the family. The family is the head waters for the well being of every sphere in society for every institution in society for every relationship in society. By the way, do you think Satan greatly desires the well being of society? Well, if I want to destroy culture and society what would I do? I would just pollute the head waters.

That brings me not only to my privilege to equip God’s people to know the glories and majesty of the Christian family that is Christ centered and Gospel driven which did not escape us in our reading when it said, “Husbands love your wives as Christ loved the church” and when it said, “Wives submit to your husbands as the church submits to Christ.” It also said to “Raise your children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.” It shows how the family is Christ centered, Gospel driven, Holy Spirit empowered and drenched by God’s grace and love. But not only is there the attack upon the Christian family there is the attack upon the family in general. Therefore it is incumbent upon me as a minister of the Gospel to speak, not only for the equipping of our people but to the culture, particularly a culture that has known the blessings of the creation family.

We have recently seen the attack, haven’t we? Many of our children here are in systems of education mandated from Washington DC, from seats of power, an educational curriculum that now defines as a group of people committed to one another. We find these initiatives for civil unions in the replacement of marriage, like same sex marriages which is an obvious mockery of God’s revealed Law in creation. We find all of that around us and how do we respond as a church? We are to respond graciously but truth must always accompany love. Love never minimized truth. Recently one noted author responded to this whole issue of marriage which is at the core of family because family comes from marriage and marriage is one man, one woman for life with parental responsibility. This author having once responded to hold to that now says, “I’m sorry I did that.” When this author was asked to comment on Supreme Court rulings of States that strike down on that basic definition of marriage the author’s response was, “That’s not on my agenda.”

I think there are a couple of reasons why that happens. One is something that is very valid. If I go to a mission field that has polygamy, is my first job to get monogamy? No, my first job is to preach the Gospel. That is what will change their family structure. That is valid and I am on a mission field but I am not on a mission field to be rescued from polygamy and bigamy. I am on a mission field that has known the blessings of monogamy and when it now calls what is good evil and what is evil good, that has to be addressed. So what I now have before me are the examples in the Bible. When faced with adultery and the violation of the covenant marriage what did Nathan say to David?

He said, “You’re the man. See this murder you have done, this killing of this man? See this destruction of a family that you’ve done with your adultery? See what you have done David? Do you see what it’s going to cost God’s people because you did it? You’re the man, repent!” Praise the Lord that David did.

When it was put on the agenda of John the Baptist with his audience in front of Herod, dealing with the fact that Herod is there with a legally incestuous relationship of adultery, John did not look at it and say, “Herod, I’ll deal with that later.” No, John said, “It’s not lawful for you to have her.” When Jesus steps into His culture and He’s preaching and teaching and come to seek and save the lost, they ask Him a question in the Gospel of Mark 10. They had no fault divorce in their culture and men were just walking out on wives. Men were having mistresses and we’re walking out for any reason at all. So the question came to Jesus, “Rabbi, can a man divorce his wife for any reason at all?” Jesus didn’t say, “I’ve come to seek and save the lost so that’s not on my agenda.” Jesus said, “No, but from the beginning of creation God made them male and female. For this cause a man shall leave his father and mother and shall cleave to his wife, consequently they are not longer two but one. Therefore those whom God has joined together let no man put asunder.” Jesus addressed the issue. We have a responsibility to address the issue. The well being of any society that knowingly, systematically destroys the fountain head of the family, that society will, not having that blessing of common grace, soon dissolve particularly when it has walked away what it has once enjoyed.

So I have a pastoral privilege to equip God’s people with Christ centered Gospel driven marriages, parents and families and then we have this enormous challenge in front of our culture and this brings me to the second reason of a response to Satan’s two-fold assault. You need to know this. You have an enemy. You need not to be ignorant of his enmity or his assault. He always assaults from the outside and the inside. So you live in a moment in the midst of an all out assault that Satan has brought through the elite of the culture which are the cultural shapers, in the world of the academy, media and government. We cannot put this assault aside. With all due respect, I will share Jesus, I will bring people to Christ but we cannot be silent with the assault that is destroying the lives of men and women and selling that which is unattainable and which will bring to demise a culture. This all out assault must be spoken to where Satan is deconstructing our present notion of the family with a monogamous covenantal heterosexual marriage. He is reconstructing it and deconstructing it in anything and everything. How does Satan do it? The first thing he does is he attacks the glorious blessing of gender difference and distinctive that men and women are equal but praise the Lord different.

Secondly, not only is there an all out assault on gender distinctive and difference but then there is an all out assault on marriage itself. It can be defined any way we want it to be.

Thirdly there is an all out assault on the family in which government authority and power is being promoted over parental responsibility and authority. I’m not talking about the valid things of keeping children safe and making sure they are not neglected. I am talking about governmental decisions on what should be taught, who should teach it and all. I am not a conspirator, a naysayer, or a prophet of doom. In fact, if you talk to my wife she will tell you I’m the most naïve person you have probably ever met in your life. But it must be recognized what is being done in Satan’s assault upon the family in

general and the Christian family in particular through the cultural elite, the culture shapers.

We also need to know that Satan has crept into the church too with false teachers. Some of these will be silent on the issue of the Christian family and on the issue of family itself. We in our pulpits and lecterns bear some deep responsibility that our marriages are more conformed to the world's concept of marriage. We have allowed the "love boat" fantasy to ascribe marriage. Do you remember that program? It is the "love boat" fantasy that life is a cruise ship and you fall in love instead of doing and committing love. Then we have allowed our parents to fall into the trap of declaring their worth in life by the performance of their children. Therefore a child bears the weight of their parents self esteem. The child thinks, "Am I going to do good enough to be on my dad's bumper as a sticker?" We are constantly facing the issues of Satan's attack of this sex drenched culture and we find it creeping into the church as we as ministers and teachers are not addressing it. The way we address it is "come to this series of sermons on the family and I will give you five techniques that will change it." It's not technique that is going to change and make our marriages those places of glory and joy in the Lord. It's Truth. It is Gospel grace and truth that does it and that alone.

Look how we are conforming to the family. That last thing I got from the Alabama Policy and Institute it said in Alabama divorce among professing Christians is at a higher rate than upon non professing Christians. I know I am in a fallen world and I know God has provided divorce for a reason but let me make this clear. Divorce is never a solution. It is there simply as a last gap protection for the one being victimized by covenant immorality. We'll deal with this. I have had to deal with this in my own family for one of my own children. Listen to me. It is never a solution. There are always casualties, even when it has to be invoked for protection. Yet the professing church in Alabama is a head of the curve. Then we who lead the church bear responsibility.

We then move to the idolatry of the family where our whole life becomes our family. Instead of the family being the conduit of God's grace and mercy, the family replaces God as the fountain head of grace and mercy. My life is then in my marriage, my spouse, my children and my family and now substituted as a reaction to the deconstruction of the family come the idolatry of the family and the idolatry of marriage. One may say, "Harry, how do I know when idolatry is in my life?" Any time you qualify, quantify or excuse your life in Christ because of something you don't have like saying, "I don't have a husband, I don't have children, I don't have a wife." I don't say this unfeelingly but anytime we get to the place where God's good gifts become the necessary issue of our life instead of the Giver Himself who is enough, then we are allowing idolatry to slip in. There is no way that a family that has become the fountain head of our life can become an instrument to the glory of God. I don't want mere survival. Is there a word called thrival? It is not the survival but the thrival of the Gospel in a marriage.

The third reason why this subject has captured my heart is because of the five pastoral concerns for the family that drive and lead me in this direction for this journey and seeing the cultural adversity. We are in an X rated culture and I know this affects your family. As of four weeks ago fast food hamburger restaurants started a campaign where these commercials in my childhood would have been called pornography. Now, we use it to sell hamburgers to kids. I am concerned about technology in culture. One

may think, “Harry what do mean, isn’t that a means of communication?” I want communication but it can also become an obstacle to communication as you sit down at the dinner table and answer your email or phone instead of talk to your wife. It is absolutely amazing how instruments that are valid can affect relationships negatively. There is nothing evil about cell phones but anything that is an instrument of communication does not make a relationship. There are many times that we are sitting somewhere but we are not “there” so to speak. By the way, you really don’t have a relationship you are talking to on the phone texting or emailing and some are probably doing it right now while I’m talking. You have just said, “God, forget You, I’ve somebody else I want to talk to. I don’t want to listen to You and I don’t want to worship You.” Technology which is a valid instrument from our culture brings adversity, X rated from our culture, the mobility of our culture and narcissism from our age where its all about me and my entitlements, the lack of truth where there is no truth. I always ask the people that say that, “is that a truth?” All of those things are working against our marriages.

A second pastoral concern is your hurts and fears. Many of you are coming from broken homes and marriages and many of you are the victims of abandonment and adultery. Some of you are children that are dead, checked out with a mid life crisis. A mom walked off following a silent call of a chat room. Now you have hurts and fears about your own marriage. What about family? You look at the culture and you’re fearful about your children.

A third pastoral concern is I know there is a lot of hopelessness or misplaced hope where people are placing their hope in the wrong places.

My fourth pastoral concern is I know there is an absent of models and an absence of teaching. I know there are a lot of seminars on marital, family, parenting techniques but I’m not sure there are Christ centered, Gospel driven relationships in a family drenched with the power of the cross.

My fifth pastoral concern is a disconnect. I have watched something from my childhood to this time and its not good. There was a time where people said, “I am personally responsible” and they were focused on their family, involved in their community and engaged in their church. Today personal integrity is gone. Family has become a utilitarian thing that is there and one says, “As long as my wife meets my needs I’ll be there” or “As long as my husband meets my needs I’ll be there.” Even children become throw away children because if they are not making the grades I want them to make, or if they are not the star I want them to be on the athletic team then they are really not up to par. So instead of a Biblical focus on the family there is an idolatrous focus on the family or a neglect of the family for the things of the world. Instead of cultural involvement there is cultural conformity and then we are kind of dating the church where we just do drive by church. I may drive by on Sunday morning. I think the average now for church is one out of every three Sundays. If anything else comes along that is a little bit more appealing then I’ll forget my covenant vows. Then what happens is we get disconnected from those spiritual uncles and aunts. My concerns are rampant through all of that.

The fourth reason this study captures my heart has to do with my pastoral hope. Some may be thinking that this study is a little bit down for you. I’m not through. I was just reading about a family court judge and this was his comment. I don’t know if this

judge is a Christian but he said, “Don’t call me judge. I’m not a judge. I’m a mortician. I am burying my society one family at a time everyday.” So one may think, “Harry what is your hope?” Have you seen the pictures where the preacher stands up and they get to the point in the service where they say, “is there anyone here that can show cause why these two should not be joined together, let him speak now or forever hold his peace?” You have never heard me say that because I’m afraid somebody might speak up so I don’t do that. What would you do if somebody said they had a reason?

I was reading an account of this, but I don’t know if it is true or not, where this guy spoke up and said, “Yeah, why do you all think this is going to work? Why do you think your commitment for life is going to work? What hope do you have that this is actually going to be accomplished?” What would be the answer to that? Well, they have good parents, their parents are Christians. They went through premarital counseling. They have a good church. I’m all for Christian parents, premarital counseling and a good church but that’s not my hope. My hope is nothing less than Jesus and His righteousness. My hope is what Paul says in this text – I’m not speaking of just a husband and wife, I am speaking of Christ and His church. I am speaking of the One who gave Himself for His Bride and who will save His people, transform their lives and that the Lord will build the house. That’s my hope. I’m all for the other things to be in place but my hope is built upon Jesus Christ.

That means I have a vision about this which is the fifth reason why this is on my heart. My vision is that God with His Gospel will not only save the souls of men and women, will change their lives with the power of that Gospel so that Christ centered, Gospel driven men step into their marriages and they’ll be men with chests. Those chests won’t be puffed up pride but they will be chests that will be filled with the grace and hope of the Lord Jesus Christ. Their wives will know that when they get older they won’t be gone. When they are not quite as pretty as the other thing around the corner they won’t lose their husbands affection and encouragement. These are men with chests. They are chests of God’s grace and truth that is at work. These are men with chests that their children know that their dad’s baptismal vows and his commitment when he brought them into this world will be fulfilled. Men with chests who make a difference in their family that their family might know the glory and joy of the Lord.

There are also women who say no to the siren call of the world of womanhood and say yes to the Word of God and without fear take on the image bearer of the Holy Spirit as the helper and without fear, respect and submit to their husband. In all those things that it means Biblically, women then in turn shape the hearts of little boys and girls that will shape the world when they leave that home and they will shake the world when they leave that home. There are children who sense the power of the Gospel in their home and wouldn’t think of dishonoring their parents or speaking to them in a common way. There are parents who focus with consistency and Gospel truth, who call their children to the Lord that they might know the Lord as their Savior.

I’m not talking about techniques where one says, “You want a good marriage then get a date night.” I’m not against date nights because I’ve had one for 36 years now. This isn’t just to keep the little woman happy. No, I’m talking about pursuing your wife. Date night is just another opportunity to take it to another level. This is about pursuing your wife as Christ pursues His bride. I’m not talking about family worship because if we do family worship then the family that stays together prays together. It is getting the

family together to worship the Lord as a way of life, before we go to sleep at night, to call upon Him who has given us everything, to declare His glory together. If your marriage or your family is to be the blessing that God designed it to be to glorify Him and to enjoy Him forever, then it can't be neglected and it can't become a substitute for Him. It is not the source of God's living water, the fountain Jesus flows through it. It's a conduit.

Here is my takeaway. Would you join me with the first step this week? You may be thinking, "The Bible says Satan is throwing fiery darts and after this sermon I think they are fiery balls he is hurling." I say "good." Feel the heat. Do you know how to put out that fire? If you had been trained as a firefighter and dropped in the middle of a forest fire by a parachute, do you know what your number one weapon is to put out that fire? It is to start another one. You start a fire to put out a fire. You start a fire that overwhelms that fire. That is what I'm hoping for. I'm not just looking for the government to douse the waters of cultural depravity. I want to see God's people light a fire, a reformation, an awakening for the love of the Gospel that transforms not only their life but their families. They will take on this X rated culture, this media, this technology, and the tendencies of this society that's culturally dissipating and shaking at the foundations. Yes there are big problems but I have a bigger Gospel. Yes there are big great enemies but I have a big great Jesus. I want Him to light that fire of the Gospel in me that overflows to my marriage, my parenting and then through that into my community.

So I am asking you to take a step this week of integrity. Would you please read through five times Ephesians 5:21 through 6:4? Secondly, ask yourself, I know not accurate all the time but what would be the evaluation of my children of me as a parent? What would be the evaluation of my spouse of me as a husband or wife? Don't rest there. I'm just trying to move us away from where I know most of us go in times like this like, I sure hope my wife hears these sermons, I'm going to get the tapes for my kids, I'm going to make sure my husband doesn't travel over the next eight weeks. God, light the fire in me. In fact, the real question is, Jesus are You in me, and in my marriage and in my family? If not, then its time to do some housecleaning.

This past Saturday was the first Saturday after Easter. I woke up shaking. Do you know why? Every first Saturday after Easter my mother always said "It is spring cleaning time." It was all day. Okay, so let's do some housecleaning. Let's clean out the world from our house and Lord, build my house that we would know You and my children will become arrows in the hand of the Divine Warrior, Jesus Christ. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father thank You for the moments we could be together in Your Word and thank You for the privilege. Lord, please speak to our hearts. Speak to us and move us forward in serving You, knowing You and loving You. God, help us do business with Jesus and Jesus do business with our families through us. O God, clean the house that the home is the Lord's. Turn our hearts toward home that it's Yours. I pray in Jesus' Name, Amen.