

The Christian Family in Biblical Perspective
Seven Essentials in the Christian Family – Essential #7
A Gospel Call To Commit Marriage: The Best Defense Is A Gospel Offense
Ephesians 5:15 – 21
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June 21, 2009 – Morning Sermon

This is our concluding Lord's Day on the study of the family. I would like for you to be back tonight if the Lord would so lead you. We will study the three traps that Satan uses that come up in my marital counseling. Satan has laid out these traps to destroy Christian families and I want to show you how you might triumph over them but also I will give five commitments for renewal of our marriages in the Lord for those who sense and desire to participate in that tonight. We will take these five commitments and ask the Lord to renew our covenants of intimacy in our marriages as we conclude this series together. I want to talk with you next Lord's Day about the evil of tolerance and the virtue of intolerance. One may think, "Harry how could that possibly be?" I hope to intrigue you enough to come back, to hear it and show you something absolutely unique about what Christ has brought to this country that we need to see. Then that night Marvin Olasky will be with us who is the publisher of *World Magazine*. The following Sunday is July the 5th and one of our own PCA pastors who was a chaplain in Iraq, Colonel Mac Griffith will preach the Lord's Day morning service and the Lamb Family will be here for the concert that night. Please come because you will be blessed by some extraordinary music with most of being from violins. We will only have one service on Sunday morning July the 5th at 10am. Now let's look at our passage in Ephesians.

Ephesians 5:15-21 says, **15** *Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, 16 making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. 17 Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. 18 And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, 19 addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, 20 giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, 21 submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.* The grass withers and the flower fades. This is God's Word and it abides forever; by His grace and mercy may it be preached for you.

As we conclude this series on the effective Christian family and marriage, if you could change one thing in your marriage or family, what would it be? Write it down. What would the one thing be to change for your marriage and family to move forward? We'll find out at the end what you wrote. I'll share with you what I know I need to write down. I have been so blessed to go through this series with you. I'd like to lay something out before we proceed with this study.

So why did we go back and read Ephesians 5:15-21? I would like to briefly go back over these 8 Sundays we have been studying this together. We have covered Ephesians 5:21 all the way to Ephesians 6:4. Most of the time when this text is used which is the most definitive text in the Scripture on the Christian family rightly used, everyone just starts at Ephesians 5:22 which says, **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...etc.* then study all the way through Ephesians 6:4 covering the

husband, the wife, the parents, the children, and the children to the parents. Normally that's the way we do it. But I am asking you not to do that way with me. Two months ago I asked you not to start at Ephesians 5:22 but to start with that text that sets up Ephesians 5:22-6:4 and that is Ephesians 5:21.

(Ephesians 5:21 says, *submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ*. The phrase the *fear of the Lord* is throughout the Bible but the *fear of Christ* or the *reverence for Christ* is only found one time in the Bible and its right. This is saying there is a way of life that marks out those who have been filled with the Spirit of God. What is that way of life? It's not tongues. It's not one particular gift. It's not an experience but what marks out those who have been filled with the Spirit who are in Christ and Christ is in them, it will be seen by a reverence for Christ. Where the Holy Spirit is there is a reverence for Christ and that will be manifested by submitting to one another. Now he says let's go to the most basic relationships and I want to show you in this pagan world the distinctiveness of the Christian life.

The first thing he says is wives will submit to their own husbands. In submitting to one another out of the reverence for Christ, how will that be manifested in a marriage? The first thing you will see is wives who are fear less and faith full. When they are fear less they come along side and submit to their husband. They are faith full, full of faith, and it's shown in the respect that they give to their husband as to the Lord. This isn't confidence in the husband. It's confidence in the Lord. They are submitting as to the Lord with fear less ness in the Lord, with faith full ness to the Lord and it is manifested by them embracing that wonderful name of God that they bear. They are the completer, the helper to the husband and that's what Jesus said about the Holy Spirit – "I will send to you the other Helper." Wives embrace that call of being fear less and faith full.

How do you see husbands submitting out of reverence for Christ? They submit by leading their wife as a servant and loving their wife sacrificially. They love their wife as their own body because they are one with her. You have been joined together therefore to love her is to love yourself. She is one with you and how do you love her? You love her the way Christ loves His bride. How does Christ love His bride? He laid His life down for her through sacrificial love and servant leadership. These are lion hearted men like Jesus who is the Lion of Judah, but I saw Him standing as Lamb. These men are lion hearted and lamb like. They are gentle men. I like the way C.S. Lewis said it about such men. He said they are men with chests. Oh how we need men with chests, not empty suits but men with chests. I am not talking about chests that are puffed up, arrogant and self reliant but chests that are full of confidence in the grace of the Lord Jesus. These are men who are there to the end for their wives and their children ready to finish strong. These are men who are lion hearted by God's grace and for His glory to their wife and their children and say, "I'll be here" yet lamb like for it is not self reliance but God reliance that fills their soul.

Then how do parents submit to their children? They do this by bringing them up in the nurture and admonish of the Lord. They are born in the valley of sin bringing them up to Mount Calvary. How do children manifest their submission? They do this by honoring and obeying their parents because it is right in the Lord to do this. That's how it is seen.

Where does it all start? It starts back here with reverence for Christ. Where does the reverence for Christ start? So what we have done is we have started with Ephesians

5:21 that has set up our life in our Christian family, out of reverence for Christ submitting to one another. We have covered husbands, wives, parents, and children and when we got to the end of all of that we said in the last study that we have an adversary. We have Satan who is defeated but he hasn't surrendered. We have enemies outside of us and inside of us. We have an old man inside of us. Sin has been defeated but it hasn't surrendered either. By the way, Satan and sin defeated and un-surrendered is greater than me. I need power!

So we said there were five power sources you plug into. One is the power of the Holy Spirit. One is the power of the Word of God. One is the power of intercessory prayer. One is the powerful weapons of the Spirit and lastly the power of the cross or the power of the Gospel. So we are not only cross bought to take to heaven but we are cross shaped and trained for our walk to heaven. You have a Spiritual Coach and Trainer. Jesus by His Spirit through the cross shapes you and trains you. So how does that happen? Well, we looked at Ephesians 5:21 and then we saw the family in Ephesians 5:22 through 6:4. Then we saw spiritual warfare and our power sources in Ephesians 6:10-20.)

Now I want to back up and very briefly lay out for you the foundation of the cross shaped believer who makes a difference in their marriage and their family. Ephesians 5:15-21 set up the Christian family by giving us the picture of the effective Christian in the effective Christian family. From this text, I want to draw out for you seven things that are said about this Christian that makes a difference in the Christian family. The seven things are all built around this notion of a walk. Ephesians 5:15 starts out, *Look carefully then how you walk...* So I'm going to heaven but I've got a walk on the way there.

This last week at the General Assembly I had a wonderful experience and time to be able to talk with a guy that I listen to regularly and I finally had the chance to put a face with the voice. I listen regularly to Mars Hill which is an audio magazine. The man that does it is named Ken Myers. Ken was at the General Assembly and I had the chance to see him. I looked at him and I had the same experience I have on many Sundays where people come here and say, "Oh I wanted to come meet you because I listen to you on the radio." They find out I have a face for the radio because they will say, "You don't look anything like you sound." I say, "I'm not sure quite how to take that." I said the same thing to Ken, "You don't look at all like you sound" but we had a wonderful talk.

One of the things I wanted to ask Ken about was something he had brought out that I thought was interesting. He said, "Have you ever noticed how the last 15 to 25 years how we talk about Christianity as a lifestyle. Style is making choices about how you want to appear. Up until about 15 to 25 years ago we didn't talk about Christianity as a lifestyle. You know, we have our designer theology for our designer lifestyle. Back then it was just the way you lived. Then it was a way of life. It was a walk in life."

That's what Ephesians 5 is talking about. What is the walk of a Christian who makes a difference out of reverence to Christ? Looking at Ephesians 5:21 how do I get to a life of submitting to one another in reverence for Christ that's being lived out in my family, in my marriage and in my parenting? Here are seven things from this text. The first thing is it is a careful walk. It's not a careless one. Sometimes we think that we are really proving that we're trusting in God's grace by careless living like how close we can get to sin and temptation. The Bible talks about fleeing temptation and not even letting

upon our lips those things that are despised, destructive and polluted. Ephesians 5:15 says to look careful then how you walk. The Christian life is a careful walk.

The second thing is it is a wise walk – wisdom. Have you ever noticed when the Bible talks about wisdom it doesn't talk about esoteric thoughts, abstract meditations but wisdom is seen in behavior. Wisdom is shown by how we live. Ephesians 5:15 says, *Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise...* So it is a wise walk.

Thirdly, it is an intentional walk. Ephesians 5:16 says, *making the best use of the time, because the days are evil.* It is an intentional walk he says, in light of two things. One is you have the time. What does that mean? That means that you and I were born into this world with a finite number of sun rises and sun sets and most of mine are behind me. Bruce Stallings was making fun of me because I forgot to stand up a while ago. It was not because I forgot to be a father but just for a moment. I'm getting to the age where I can hide my own Easter eggs now. You and I have been born into this world with a finite number of days. If you have ten dollars you go spend ten dollars. There's a resource that's renewable. Spend a day and it's gone. You don't get it back. That day is gone. Those 37.5 hours that most families spend in front of a television each week is gone. You just spent it. We talk about time management but you cannot manage time. Every Sunday morning I try to hold this clock back. I know you're trying to speed it up but I'm trying to hold it back. Time manages itself very well. It's more like self-management instead of time management and how do you spend your time? Secondly, because the days are evil I live in a broken in world and I have something called the time. I have a certain amount of time that has been allotted to me in this world. I want to live it wisely, carefully and I want to make the most of my time. Literally it means I want to buy back the time. I want to redeem the time to make the full use of it that I can.

Number four it is a discerning walk. Ephesians 5:17 says, *Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.* Harry what's God's will for my life? I don't know His secret will and you don't either at least not until it occurs but I do know His revealed will which is in His Word. I can dig into His Word and know that this is the lamp unto my life and the light unto my feet. I know this is the path to walk in. It gives me discernment on decisions in life.

Number five is that I am to have a Spirit filled walk. Ephesians 5:18 says, *And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit...* Debauchery leads to a loss of self-control, degeneration and dissipation but be filled, controlled, and led by the Spirit. It's here that I started to pull out my volumes on Martin Lloyd Jones. Martin Lloyd Jones preached on this text – do not be drunk with wine but be filled with the Spirit and he used six sermons. Don't get fearful because I'm not going to give you all six. His point that he brought out is really interesting. Dr. Lloyd Jones was a medical doctor as well as a theologian and pastor. He said, "Alcohol is not a stimulant, it's a depressant and as a depressant it dulls the senses. As it dulls the senses you lose self control. When you lose self control it leads to dissipation and degeneration." Don't be that. Be filled with the Spirit. The Holy Spirit is not a depressant, He's a stimulant. He makes you alive, sensitive and wise. He is the One who gives you desires and passions that are right. He propels you by God's sovereign grace to that which is holy and right. This is the Spirit filled life which leads me to number six.

What is number six? Number six is the Spirit filled life will always be seen with God centered participatory worship. Do you want to know who has the Holy Spirit? It is

someone who loves to assemble with God's people and gives worship. By the way, worship is not a noun describing the event I'm going to but worship is a verb describing what I have come to do. It is not that we worship the act of worship itself but it's that we worship the living God. So what does he say here in the text? Here is how you can tell if someone is Spirit filled. Ephesians 5:19 says, *addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart...* In other words, this is not talking about private worship, this is talking about public worship where we assemble together and that becomes the priority. It's not something you work in and you don't have anything else to do. It is the priority of life to gather with God's people to give worship that is in Spirit and in Truth and I have come to worship. I haven't come to experience worship upon me but I have come to worship the Lord. When I am worshiping the Lord it is from my heart where melody rises to His praise and what's in the heart will come out of the mouth where I am speaking to people around me.

Don't get mad at me but when we assemble for worship we don't go to back rows to be alone. I'm not saying you can't be on a back row but I don't go there to be alone. It is assembled worship and when I am singing it is not only coming out of my mouth because it's in my heart because I want to stimulate those around me. We are to be speaking to one another in psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. I have been amazed at how we have kind of turned the worship of worship into worshipping worship and then we worship the worshipping experience and we start closing our eyes and swaying. There's a place for personal private worship. I am not opposed to it and I love it but when we have come together, while there may be moments I understand where reflection lays hold of me, we are there to the Lord with one another and the Holy Spirit produces that. That's where you know we make much of Jesus in worship and we love to worship our Triune God. We love to encourage one another in that worship.

That brings me to the seventh thing. The seventh thing is a grateful walk. So to recap, it's a careful walk, a wise walk, an intentional walk, a Biblically discerning walk, a Spirit filled walk, a worship walk and it is a grateful walk. It is a walk of giving thanks to the Lord in everything. Does that include disappointments too? Yes it does and there is a process we go through for that. Does that include triumphs? Yes. Does that include trials? Yes, count it all joy my brethren when you encounter various trials knowing that the trying of your faith produces endurance (James 1:2, 3). God is doing a work in our heart and life even at that moment and time.

I want to take these 7 things and simplify it a little bit more. I believe these 7 things come from our personal, passionate engagement with the Holy Spirit and the Word of God. I don't think these are just 7 things to check off a list. I believe these are the 7 things in our walk when we passionately, intentionally and with integrity embrace and engage the Word of God and the Spirit of God. I'd like to show you this from the text. Ephesians 5:15-18 says, **15 Look *carefully* then how you walk, not as unwise but as *wise*, 16 making *the best use of the time*, because the days are evil. 17 Therefore *do not be foolish*, but *understand what the will of the Lord is*. 18 And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but *be filled with the Spirit*.**

The secret things belong to the Lord our God but the things revealed are to us and to our children. How can I have a careful, wise, discerning, intentional walk? It all comes from the Word of God. It is a lamp unto my life and a light unto my feet. It doesn't come by intuition or by sitting in a corner and contemplating my navel. That's a

terrible thought even to think about that. It comes from study in the Word of God and meditation. It comes from loving the preaching of the Word of God to my soul. It comes from the private personal reading of the Scriptures. It comes from that small group that you would not miss because in that small group with God's people there is the in-depth relationship of disciple making that's taking place and my life is being challenged to be conformed to the way of Christ. I have those around me who will encourage me in Christ and not only is there an intentional integrity and intensity to the commitment of God's Word but out of love for Christ the reverence for Christ is also fed by the Spirit of God who is come to bear witness of Christ. There is an engagement of the Spirit of God in one's life.

So if I am in Christ and Christ is in me then I want to be engaged in His Word and engaged in His Spirit so let me give you the seventh essential from all that we have studied on the effective Christian family. Here it is. The effective Christian family is the consequence of believers who out of a passionate love to Christ have minds saturated with the Word of God and hearts saturated with the Spirit of God which propels us to God's sovereign stubborn grace. If I was a better theologian I would say "irresistible" grace but I just believe its "stubborn" grace. He won't let you go even though you would go and even though you would wander. He will not let you go! God's loving, sovereign, stubborn, sufficient grace has laid hold and will not let you go. So you are saturated in His Word that you might have the mind of Christ. You are saturated by His Spirit that you might have a heart for Christ.

Do you know why most of us pass on evangelism training like the Bridge for Life we offer? It is because we don't love lost people. Do you know why we don't love lost people? It's not because the preacher has manipulated us enough to love lost people. It's because we don't love Jesus. If you love Jesus you will love what He loves. Folks, I love Cindy. I even love Sudoku now. I didn't know what that was until I got to know Cindy. We love what those whom we love, love. We start to embrace it because we love them. Jesus love His Word. I love His Word. Jesus loves His people. I love His people. Jesus loves His church. I love His church. Jesus loves the lost. He came to seek and save the lost. Our need is not manipulation or even inspiration. Our great need is to have the mind of Christ and the heart of Christ, saturated by His Spirit and His Word. God's stubborn grace says to me, "Harry that's your wife. You took vows before Me and My grace is sufficient and stubborn to keep you, now you keep her. And these children I've given you, you keep them. When you falter I have redeeming grace so confess your sins. I'll renew you, but My grace is not only sufficient to renew you but My grace is sufficient to strengthen you that you may stay the course."

Dear friends, this is my concluding thought. It's not technique. It's not therapy. It is the redeeming delivering power of God's sovereign, sufficient, stubborn grace that saturates our minds with His Word and saturates our hearts with our Spirit and that's what changes families. Has my spouse failed me? Then I want to commit marriage right now. That's not the time to walk out of the marriage. That's the time to commit marriage. Have we heard about being Gospel centered through the text? "Husbands love your wives as Christ loves the church. Wives submit to your husbands as to the Lord. Parents raise your children in the nurture and admonish of the Lord. Children obey your parents in the Lord." Have we not heard a Christ centered, Gospel driven family? When

and not if, the sinners we are married to falter, what do the sinners who are married to them do? We forgive just as we have been forgiven.

I know we have covered, are there times where the marriage vows have been broken irreparably? Yes we have covered that but we don't get married with our fingers crossed. It is God that has joined us together and this marriage points to the marriage of Christ with His Bride and nothing can separate Him from His Bride. What is our great desire as parents? Is it not the Gospel driving us in the lives of our children? Oh that we might be liberated from raising our children for personal significance where we will not put a burden upon our children where we say, "If you do really well I'll feel good about myself." We raise our children in the Lord and for the Lord and there is no greater joy than our children walking in the truth. That's our joy.

His name was James Henry Thornwell. He was a premier pastor, preacher, and theologian. He was the pastor of First Presbyterian Church in Columbia, South Carolina. He was the initiator of the Columbia Theological Seminary to stand for Truth. He was the first president of the University of South Carolina. He was a brilliant man, a Godly man. In 1859 he was away at the General Assembly. I thought about him this last week as I was away at General Assembly. When he was at General Assembly he received a letter that simply said, "Come home quickly" and he did. He had one daughter and she was 19 years old. He had married into the Jonathan Witherspoon family and he had so named her accordingly. Before he had left for General Assembly they had announced her marriage. Invitations had gone out all over the states, particularly in the South where he resided in ministry. People were traveling from everywhere to come to that wedding and little did they know that when all of the wedding guests arrived they would not arrive for the wedding of this dear elect lady.

They would actually arrive for her funeral because when he came back she was in the last moments and throws of typhoid fever. James Henry Thornwell looked at the apple of his eye, his dear daughter, and he came upon his knees beside the bed weeping uncontrollably. It was this dear daughter that put her hand upon him and said, "Father you have taught me well, do not weep." He said, "Daughter, my dear one, your wedding, your groom, your life before you, I am devastated." She said, "Father, do not weep. I am prepared to meet a greater Groom. Come and rejoice with me." If you go to Elmwood Cemetery in Columbia, South Carolina, go to the Thornwell plot and you will see where he, his wife and his family are buried but go to his daughter. She was buried in her wedding dress with a wedding party now assembled for a funeral but what was declared is today on the gravestone – "As a bride prepared for her groom."

Oh that parents are ready to descend to their grave when we know that our children have ascended to Christ. That is a Gospel driven parenting. That is Christ centered parenting and it comes from Gospel centered and Christ centered marriages in which when we sin against our spouse we are now free, not to cover up our sin, but to confess our sins. When one comes confessing we are free to forgive them of those sins for it is that Gospel that has secured us, God's stubborn grace that we can bring stubbornly to that marriage.

I'd like to finish this study this way. I want to tell you a true story of a young man raised in a Christian home who was very ungodly, immoral and profane. Yet in the emptiness of his sin he sensed something was desperately lacking and more of this would not be the answer but he would not come to Christ. He met a young lady who was so

distinctive and so different that he set about to win her heart. He found out she was a Christian and so he went through some behavior modification. He didn't become a Christian but he modified his behavior. He went to church. He took her to church and even talked about Christianity. It was a two and half month world wind romance and then a three month engagement. Five and a half months later they were married. Then behavior modification disappeared. Then the unregenerate, ungodly, profane heart was manifested.

It was even manifested on a Sunday morning when she dressed for church and said, "Let's go to church today, I'm looking forward to it." He said, "No." She said, "Come, let's go." He said, "Go if you want to but if you do, don't come back." What an arrogant, ungodly man! While she had not been properly trained in her church to be able to discern the difference between behavior modification and regeneration, she had been trained to discern what to do by those who had disciplined her. Wives, if any of your husbands are disobedient to the Word they can be won to the Word without a word as they observe your chaste and respectful behavior, not being frightened by any fear. With calmness and security in the Lord she continued to follow Christ yet with faithfulness and respect to this unregenerate, arrogant, ungodly man. That very morning that he uttered those words pain began to take hold of his soul that later God alleviated by His Providence. Through that marvelous, fear less, faith full witness he came to Christ just two and a half months later. That man was me.

Harry, what's the one thing that I need to change in my family? I will only quote G.K. Chesterton, "Change me, Oh Lord." Through me change others but simply change me by Your Word and through Your Spirit, change me. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for these moments that we could be together in Your Word. Friend, perhaps today your first step in this Christian walk has not yet been taken and that step is not to the Word and the Spirit but by the Word you heard today and the call of the Spirit, to Christ today. Has the Lord's stubborn grace declared to you today to come to Him? Just put your trust in Christ alone. Kind Father, may I ask You not only to secure those who have not come to Christ to come to You that Christian men and women might lay hold of marriages, parenting and children for Your glory with confidence being led by Your Word and filled with Your Spirit but Father, would You allow us today to commit our families and our marriages to You? May we not live for our marriage or for our children or for our parents but may we today live to and for Christ and in Christ take my life, my marriage, my family, and my all to You O Christ I give. Amen.