

The Christian Family in Biblical Perspective
Seven Essentials in the Christian Family – Essential #7
Three Traps Transformed Into Three Triumphs
Ephesians 4:29, 30 - Hebrew 13:4
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June 21, 2009 – Evening Sermon

Turn in your Bible to Hebrews 13 and also to Ephesians 4 and we will look at this in a moment. Let's pray.

Prayer:

God, thank You so much for these moments together. Lord, You know how deeply and we desperately need Your hand of grace, not only to save us from our sins but to give us Christ centered, Gospel driven families. Thank You for the privilege over these last couple of months to have studied Your Word, to extract these seven essentials. Now Father as we spend time in this study help us to anticipate the traps that Satan would plant in his assault on the family and for us to rejoice in Your goodness to us and redeem us and that the power of the Gospel is sufficient to bring us not only from death unto life but to grant us families that will honor the Lord and tell the next generation the greatness and goodness of our Lord. Thank You, in Jesus' Name, Amen.

I would like to take this time momentarily to recognize an elected official who upholds the sanctity of life and who is here tonight and that is Hank Erwin. What are you doing on the back row? Are you a Baptist? You are a Baptist. Thank you Hank for being here tonight. Please encourage him and thank you for your service.

(In these past weeks we have covered 7 essentials and in this study I will only outline them for you because I need to get to the meat of the study. I also want to spend some time in consecrated prayer tonight at the end of this service. The first thing we said was that most series on marriage usually go to the issue of techniques or therapy in marriage. While I'm certain there are good habits of life to learn, the fact is that it is not technique that wins the victory. It is truth that triumphs over technique and trials in life. It is the truth of God's Word, it is the truth of the Gospel and the truth of the glory and majesty of Christ.

The second essential is that marriage is not a social invention through the involvement of humanity. Marriage has been designed by God. It is a temporary relationship that God has designed for us in light of creation but God designed it ultimately to point to the eternal relationship that the bride of Christ will enjoy with Him. In Christ God has joined us to Him. We are the bride. He is the Groom. Most of us think that God made marriage and then He sent Jesus for His bride, the church and God says, "Oh marriage is a good illustration, I think I'll use that." No, according to our study in Ephesians 5:21 through 6:4 the very purpose of marriage was to accommodate us as a temporary relationship to point to the permanent relationship where God has designed it to point to the majesty of the redeeming work of Jesus Christ for His bride. So it's one plus one equals one and only God can pull this off.

Last night I had the privilege to officiate a wedding and I love at the end when I can say "Upon the consummation of this union I pronounce you man and wife." I don't make them man and wife. I can't join them together. No, upon the marriage bed God has joined them together. That is why the Scriptures are so clear about the sanctity of our

relationship together in the Lord. God joins us together and those whom God has joined together let no man put asunder.

Now, are there Biblical grounds for recognizing a broken covenant? Yes we have covered those but we don't start off marriages with our fingers crossed. We start off marriage as one man, one woman for one life and any nation, any culture, any society that abandons that plan will not long be upon the earth. It is one man, one woman, covenantal, monogamous, heterosexual and covenantal reunion in the Lord.

The third and fourth essential is we need Christ centered and Gospel driven men who will be servant leaders for their wives and sacrificial lovers. And we need fear less and faith full women who are fear less in submission and faith full in respect to their husbands because of Christ's work in their lives. We need lion hearted, lamb like men and faith full and fear less women.

Then we studied the fifth essential which was God's call to us that we are to remember the purpose of parenting that we parent from God's promise which is "I'll be a God to you and to your children after you. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved you and your household. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are a far off even as many as the Lord our God shall call to Himself." Do you not know your children are holy (1 Corinthians 7:14)? It doesn't mean they are saved. They are born sinners but they are set apart in a covenant home with God's blessings having been directed. So we don't parent hoping we do well enough to gain God's favor, we parent beginning with a promise from God that He works in and through parents. The goal of Christian parenting is to bring our children up in the nurture and admonish of the Lord from the valley of the death of sin into the Mount Calvary of life.

The sixth essential is that this is a war. The family is a war zone. We find it today. We find the onslaught against the family in our culture today. We find Satan not only attacking God's Word, attacking Adam, attacking Eve but also attacking the very institution of marriage. We find the curse of sin affecting marriage as a woman's desire, meaning her impulse to control her husband, was pronounced a curse of sin upon Eve and the daughters of Eve. Then a man would tyrannize his wife but "he shall rule over you (the woman)." The word 'rule' here means to tyrannize. So what does the curse of sin bring? It brings men who would intimidate and ignore their wives because of the curse of sin and women who would compete to control their husband and desire his place. But Paul says, "No, the Gospel can turn all of that around." The power of the Gospel can change us so that instead of competing a woman compliments and instead of ignoring and intimidating, a man lays down his life for his wife. So we need power.

There are five power sources to win the battle. Satan has been defeated but is un-surrendered. Sin has been defeated but un-surrendered. Therefore for us who are inferior to Satan, even defeated, and sin, even defeated, we need to be fixed on Jesus. We need to be plugged into the power of the Word of God. The Word of God is powerful. We need to be plugged into the power of prayer, the power of the Holy Spirit, the power of the Divinely fashioned weapons that have been deposited in Christ's church that God has given us to take captive every thought to the obedience of Jesus Christ. The fifth source of power is the power of the cross. We are to be cross shaped in our lives and in our marriage. When I say cross shaped don't think of the form cross, think of the shaping of something.

The other day someone said to me, “do you have a trainer?” I said, “Yes she is about 5 foot 4 and she won’t let up on me.” It’s my wife and you need to be careful about this and be careful about that. We have a trainer and the trainer is Christ and Him crucified who shapes us so that when we sin against each other we are now free to confess. Why? It is because we’re not Christians by how well we perform. We are Christians by the blood of the cross. So when we falter we are free to confess, not cover up. If we confess our sins He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins (1 John 1:9). Because we have been freely forgiven now we can freely forgive one another. We can not only confess our sins but we can forgive one another. We can bring our grief to the Lord who is sufficient even over the failures of our spouse. He receives our grief when we pour it out and He says to us, “I am enough so rise up and take the next step.” What is the next step? It is how will you in the triumph or the trial secure the glory of God in your response to this moment?

Then we finished up with essential seven which is a mind that is saturated with the Word of God and a heart that is saturated with the Spirit of God. The best defense is a Gospel offense. Go on the offense with the Gospel and attack sin and our own weaknesses and frailties with the power of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. This is God’s sovereign, sufficient and stubborn grace. He will not let go.)

Where do the traps come? I haven’t asked him but I think Dr. Barker would agree with me that most of the time the flash points in marital traps are usually in one of three areas – destructive communication, financial difficulties or sexual immoralities. Let’s take them up one at the time. With the first one let’s make a few steps to make sure the pressures of financial difficulties, financial bondage, do not bring an occasion for the faltering of our marriages and our families. I want you to go from financial bondage to financial freedom. So how can I get there?

I strongly encourage you to consider a number of helps offered in our church. Make sure that you are in a small group and being disciplined, whether it’s a men or women’s or a home small group. Take advantage of classes like the Dynamic Marriage Clinic that’s being offered regularly. Utilize the counseling ministries. Take advantage of the Crown Ministries Classes of financial freedom offered regularly. They are well fashioned to help us. I think those classes last about 10 weeks. I’m going to give you the 10 weeks in 10 seconds. Figure out what your income is, set aside your tithe because the first fruits belong to the Lord, then whatever offerings the Lord lays upon your heart (i.e. Save-a life, Young Business Leaders, Campus Outreach etc...) then create a budget. Make sure that you are not spending more than you have left. That’s the short cut. That is the 10 second download. We don’t live on the backs of indebtedness.

I was hesitant about saying this but one of my great concerns right now in our nation is that our children are learning to handle financial issues by seeing either irresponsibility in parenting or irresponsibility in our government. That is a great concern I have. What if I were to tell you I just lost my job and I am in debt but I want you to know that everything is okay. One would say, “Why Harry?” I then would say, “Well I find a guy who is going to loan me 2 million dollars. So I can live the rest of my life just like I want to.” You would say, “Harry how did you find someone to loan you 2 million dollars?” I would say, “Well, I had to sign over my children and my grandchildren but I’m not going to live long enough to pay for it but I can still live the way I’m used to.” You would say, “Harry just for the sake of your own living standard and convenience you

have put your children and grand children into debt?" I would say, "Things could turn around real quick but if they don't I'll let them handle it." What would you think of me if I would do that to my children and my grandchildren?

I'm a simple man. That's the way I look at finances. I believe that God teaches us to live within our means. It's that simple. I believe it starts with the tithe and I don't think it starts after the tithe. I want to share with you my story and some have heard it and some haven't. I became a Christian. My background is about 85 percent Scotts Irish. We are known to be rather frugal. When I got saved graciousness and liberality did not attack the way I spent money at that moment. Therefore as I was going through school working three jobs, the offering plate would pass and I would put 10 dollars in. What is a tithe? A tithe is a tenth of what you make. To me a tenth was 10 dollars but I was actually making \$350. My wife is over there in unbelievable angst because she knew this was not the way we were supposed to be doing this. I would say, "Honey we're okay, tithe, tenth, ten." Long story short, it wasn't a matter of but a couple of months when I was in Chattanooga Tennessee in my junior year that 2 of my 3 jobs were removed. Can you guess how much I was making at the one that was left? It was a hundred dollars. Now, I may have been a theology and history major but even I could figure that one out. God was saying, "Harry you want to call 10 dollars a tithe? I'll make it one." I wished I could tell you I learned my lesson but I didn't. I got all the way down to one job at \$75 a week with an unbelievable school bill, a living bill and a child.

Then I remember on an October day at 402 Carter Lane turning to Cindy under deep conviction, realizing that if you can't be faithful in a little you won't be faithful in much so please hear that. I always hear people say if you make more you'll start tithing and I say "no, you won't." You'll just have more reasons not to tithe. Here I am going into the ministry and I didn't even have a \$35 faith. I got down to \$75 but I had a \$7.50 faith and in fact I told my wife to write it out for \$7.75. There was a .25 cent faith promise commitment to missions. That was the beginning of financial freedom and two years later I graduated from a private college with no debt whatsoever. I'm not telling you that because I believe God gives you money. I think God works in your life in many different ways in that. I just want you to know the freedom and joy when you bring the first fruits to the Lord in worship every Lord's Day and how that began to fill my soul. Then that began to spill over into my spending life. It wasn't my receiving and spending that set up my giving, it was my giving that set up my receiving and spending. So may I challenge you to make sure you are living within your means.

Say, "Lord, here's the income, here's the tithe..." One may say, "Harry, I'm in a difficult situation right now." I want to encourage then to seek out Godly counselors who can help you work your way through that situation step by step. The Lord's people can assist you in this but this is the only thing that the Lord ever says testing in. He says, "Bring the whole tithe and test Me in this" (Malachi 3:10), says the Lord. So instead of financial bondage, financial freedom is saying "Here's my income, here's my tithe and my offerings, here is our budget and we will live within our means. We will not spend more than we have after we give to the Lord."

The second trap is the matter of communication. Ephesians 4:29, 30 says, **29** *Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear.* **30** *And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.* Here are five

thoughts relating to this passage. One, to move from corruptive communication to redemptive communication starts first of all with our choice of words. What words do we choose to use in each others life? Say “no” to corrupting language. The word corrupting in this verse literally means polluting language. Lord, don’t let me say what will pollute and hurt. I may have to deal with difficult things. We may have to deal with sin but God, would You allow me to make the right choice of words?

That’s where it starts and it’s not just simply using the word “please.” I don’t care how degenerate the cultural language of the day becomes, please do not descend into the depths of off color language, profanity and vulgarity. Any time you have to resort to that language for a point you haven’t much of a point. Ask the Lord to deliver us from that adolescent infantile language that is permeating our media. I want you to go beyond that. I want you to say “no” to corrupting language and “yes” to language and words that build up even if I have to deal with difficult situations. Proverbs 25:11 says, “*A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in a setting of silver.*” Here is the importance of well chosen words. Think of a banquet table and here’s all this silver that’s laid out. In the center piece are these golden apples – well chosen words are like apples of gold in settings of silver. We need to thoughtfully choose our words.

The second thought relating to Ephesians 4:29 is we thoughtfully choose our tone. What is our tone? Our tone is so important in our language. I love the Greek because there are like six words for love. In our language you don’t have six words for love. We have one word for love and it’s all up to tone. My illustration is my wife. I say to my wife, “Honey I loooove you.” Then there are my friends, my buddies and I say to them, “love you man.” I don’t say to my buddy friends, “I loooove you.” I don’t do that and I don’t say to my wife, “love you man.” I don’t do that. Folks, tone is so important. I can come up to someone and say, “Is that a new dress?” or I could say it with a tone of not liking it by saying, “Is THAT a new dress?” With the first way I would get an answer and on the other I’d get hit and yet I said the same thing. It’s all in the way you say it. Our tone is so important in our language with each other.

Not only right words and tone but the third thought is the right time. Ephesians 4:29 says, “*Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion...*” Some of us come up with some great insights but we just have bad timing. Job’s friends are like that. If you read what Job’s friends said there is a lot of good stuff but their timing was terrible. There is a time to speak. There’s a time to hear and there’s a time to be silent. Silence can be golden. Sometimes it can be yellow. It can be cowardly but most of the time we need to think “Maybe this is the time for me not to say anything.”

So there are right words, the right tone, the right time and fourthly there is the right purpose. I want to build them up. Even if we have to deal with sin I want to edify. I don’t want to corrupt or pollute. I want to build them up. Edify is where we get the word “edifice”. An edifice is a building. I want to build them up.

The fifth thought is the biggie. Here is where you really separate Christian communication from worldly communication. Ephesians 4:29 says, “*Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, (here’s the dividing line) that it may give grace to those who hear.*” We don’t speak for our own benefit. We speak for the benefit of those who hear us. Christian communication is listener centered, not speaker centered. First of all the Lord is listening

to us. Secondly, our audience is listening to us. So we want to speak carefully – right words, right tone, right time, right purpose and for the right reason which is to build up our hearers. We don't speak to get something off of our chest. One may say, "Harry there is just something I need to get off my chest." But hey, maybe I don't need it on mine. Here's what you say. Think and pray about it. Have I got the right words? Is this the right time? Have I got the right purpose? Do I have the right tone because I want to say it for the benefit of the one listening to me? It is not personal satisfaction where someone says, "I just have to say this!" It is other-centered communication. Do they need to hear it, at this time, with these words, for this purpose?

Do you know what that would do in marriages? Cindy and I didn't have a lot of counseling at the beginning of our marriage and it was pretty obvious when I told about the story of how arrogant I was in the start of our marriage but the one thing we were told was to never go to bed angry at each other. Matthew 6:34 says, "*Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.*" So I ask everybody who gets married before I do their weddings to make that commitment. I'm not asking you to make a vow but I had one person say to me, "Pastor, could let us out of that promise of not going to sleep until we settle our arguments?" I said to them, "You just misunderstood because I did not say stay awake until you win an argument. I said, stay awake until you solve the issue." You may have to do like Cindy and I do sometimes where we get so wrapped up personally in it that we just have to write the issue out on a piece of paper and put it between us on the bed and say, "Let's attack this and not each other." Are we always effective? No, but what you go to bed with is what you are going to wake up with the next morning. Each day has enough trouble of its own. So attack those issues and deal with them.

I know many of you already do this but I would encourage you also to get a date night. We started our date night when I was in college which was 38 years ago. Ours now is on Tuesday nights. Back then we didn't have much money to much but we could get a sundae at Shoney's for 50 cents. We would then walk around the mall and I would say to Cindy, "Now honey you have a thousand dollars to spend but don't ask me for it, just tell me how you would spend it." We'd walk around while doing window shopping and then we'd sit down and have our sundae. Here is what we tried to ask each other at the end of that date every week – did we miss anything in each other's life this week? It is easy for me to miss something. What did I miss in our communication this week? Keep the accounts short in your life. Build in a daily and weekly stop gap, so that we have redemptive communication in each other's life.

The third trap is sexual immorality. Hebrews 4:13 says, "*Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, (then comes a promise) for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous.*" We may laugh about it. We may make it the subject of comedy but God takes it seriously. You break God's law and it will break you. There are judgments of sexually transmitted diseases that come with promiscuity and sexual perversion. There are the judgments of broken hearts, broken lives, broken bodies and broken dreams. Sin is never private. It always has ripple affects beginning in our own lives. The sexual relationship is sacred. It is that which belongs in the marriage bed and it is that which is to be celebrated in the marriage bed.

1 Corinthians 7:1-5 says, **1** Now concerning the matters about which you wrote: "*It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman.*" **2** But because of the

temptation to sexual immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband. 3 The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband. 4 For the wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. Likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. 5 Do not deprive one another, except perhaps by agreement for a limited time, that you may devote yourselves to prayer; but then come together again, so that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control. I want to give you 6 brief insights from this text about sexuality.

Number one is that God has ordained sexuality to be found only within the covenant of marriage. It is good for a man not to sensually touch, sexually excite, or sexually take a woman, so when do a man and woman have the privilege to have a sexual relationship? It says to let each man have his own wife and let each woman have her own husband. Sexuality is marital, covenantal.

Number two, is sexuality is heterosexual. It is between one man and one woman. Let *each* man have his own wife. Let *each* wife have her own husband. Sexuality is marital and heterosexual.

Thirdly, sexuality is not just pro-creational but also recreational. It is clear that we don't merely have sexuality simply to produce the next generation, although praise the Lord for that blessing. But it is also to minister to each other.

That brings me to the fourth thing in which sexuality is ministerial. We are to minister to one another. When it says the body of the wife does not belong to her but to her husband and the body of the husband does not belong to him but to his wife, it is saying that a man's sexuality and a woman's sexuality, the appetite, the ability for arousal and passion, is there to propel us to give pleasure and not to take pleasure. So that when we enter into to the sexual relationship, if both come to give, both are blessed. If one comes to take then one is emptied. So here I commend to you the study of the book of Proverbs which is very clear. Men are motivated by sight and women are motivated by touch and words. That will be perfectly obvious in any marriage.

As a man and his wife are having a few words, not really cross words, at the dinner table and they go up stairs and in she walks. He says, "Boy you sure look good" and she says "Don't even think about that. We were just down there arguing." The man says, "That was 45 minutes ago." It's amazing how men are just drawn by sight to their wives. Isn't interesting how every single species that God has made, beauty resides in the male except one and that's the human race. Guys I don't want to burst your bubble but you're not good looking. You're not even close. God has given beauty to femininity. Isn't it amazing how we have mutated to the point to appreciate that beauty? God has so wonderfully designed us. The woman has beauty and the man to appreciate it and respond to it. The woman has been so designed to respond to a man's call to gently and courageously care for her.

So sexuality is marital within the covenant. It is heterosexual. It is ministerial. It is reciprocal. Notice there is no hierarchical relationship here. It's not the woman simply responding to the man. The man's body belongs to the wife and the wife's body belongs to the husband. Fifthly, it is also monogamous. It is between one man and one woman. Let each man have his own wife and each woman her own husband.

The last thing I want to share with you is it is to be regular. Don't defraud one another. The only time sexually you take any vacations from each other is when you

have agreed to for a period of prayer and the Word, for spiritual focus in your life. These are to be regular relationships of giving in one another's life. That is what God has called us to and that relationship is only within marriage and therefore a woman not only embraces modesty but she refuses to display herself to other men. She does take care of beauty because God has made a woman to be beautiful but she does not allure. A man does not touch another woman or speak to her, or any touch or any words that only belong martially to his wife. She alone hears those words of endearment. She alone receives that touch, only her.

Those are some traps that deserve much more attention than I have been able to give them in this study but I want to conclude our time and this entire series by asking you to commit yourself to the Lord in giving you these five simply statements that God's grace, Christ and the Gospel, would allow us to commit ourselves to Him. The first statement is that we would commit ourselves, by God's grace and humble reliance on the work of the Holy Spirit, to keep our marriage vows for the glory of God all the days of our life.

The second statement is to faithfully and regularly pray and read the Bible not only personally but with our spouse and our families that God's Word will be in our home. I will not only bring my family under the preaching and teaching of God's Word but I as, prophet, priest and king in the home, I will bring the Word of God to my spouse, to my wife, and to my family.

The third statement is to be a participative and productive member of God's family that He has designed. I will not arrogantly live independent of the Lord's family. I will live interdependent and in covenant with God's family and His children.

The fourth statement is I will commit myself to Biblical financial stewardship, redemptive communication and sexual purity with devotion to love and honor my spouse and my covenant children.

The fifth and final statement is I will focus my family upon the preeminence of Christ, the blessings of the Gospel and the call of the Gospel to make the sovereignty, supremacy, and sufficiency of Christ both the foundation and the capstone of our family.

Take a few moments and read through those five statements again and if the Lord has moved in your heart and in your life would you consider physically or in your mind and heart reaching out to your spouse. If you are single would you look at this and say, "God give me wisdom to be the man or the woman you've called me to be to embrace this calling in my life if You so allow me." Read through these five statements with a desire and prayer saying, "Lord, would you have me commit afresh and anew to this with my spouse."

There's no fanfare. There are no public displays but if the Lord has moved in your heart to renew where it may mean going home to confess and talk to each other. It may mean you need to work through these things and how they become more deeply embedded in your life. But if God has moved in your heart to renew covenant with each other before the Lord then pray with each other and allow me to pray for you.

Prayer:

Father I ask You to work in our lives, our marriage and our families that the ravages of sin in this world have battered. Would You renew them and refresh them with the Gospel message that they might love one another in the Lord and for the Lord and that

they might take hold of their children to set those parameters and give them directions to Christ. Father, may they know the joy that You make all things new through Christ and You are ready to do a new thing and give these marriages a new song to sing. Father there are marriages that have known great blessings, would you take these moments to life them up to greater heights. Christ is the foundation. Christ is the capstone. Lord would You save our children? Would You allow this church to be a place where families and marriages are nurtured and singles are prepared with the sufficiency of Christ for life and Your calling in the future? God would You please make us a place where broken lives and marriages are healed with the Gospel? Would You make us a place where any triumphs in our marriage and our family will all be used to point men and women to Christ? Oh God thank You for the sacred family. May our words to one another be in love and truth. May our finances not drag us into the oblivion of fear and anxiety. May our communication be sweet, clear and redemptive. May the blessing of sexuality be honored in the sacred marriage bed and may it be undefiled. Father, not if, but when any of us falter may we be quickly restored with confession, repentance and forgiveness, in Christ with one another. Oh God please do this work I pray that as hands are being held together, husbands and wives, hearts are being knit together, lives are being melded together and children will rise up and bless you because of what you are doing today and we might see Your hand and give You glory. For our brothers and sisters who have lost loved ones because of death or divorce or whatever it might be may they even this moment know that they have a Savior who delights in being a husband, who delights in filling their lives, who is sufficient. Father, would You make the family of God not only a place of disciple making, not only a place of healing but a place that declares the glory to the world. Christ saves, renews, redeems, restores, refreshes and revives and Father we will give You the praise, in Jesus' Name, all the glory belongs to You, Amen.