

GODFIRST:

Kingdom Priorities for Christian Living 3;

“Making GODFIRST in our Family”

“Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and he will give you everything you need.” Mt 6:33

One of the most obvious occurrences currently shaping our cultural landscape are the changes affecting the institution we call “the family”. What exactly is a family? Defining this in recent years has had to make room for ‘blended’ families, ‘single-parent’ families, ‘two-mom’ families, ‘two-dad’ families, ‘grandparents parenting’ families, ‘childless’ families, ‘adopted’ families, ‘surrogate’ families; just to name a few of the more obvious changes...or challenges. And don’t think it’s just a modern phenomenon; these changes in definition have been with us for many years. Is this a family? (picture of Cleavers) Is this a family? (picture of My Three Sons) How about this,(picture of the Brady Bunch) Or is this a Family? (picture of Andy Griffith’s family) Or is this? (Osbournes) Or this (picture of single mom) or this (picture of punk changing diaper)?

You see my purpose today is not to try to define or judge any or all those family units; it’s not to criticize certain models of family life and condemn others; it’s not to ignore certain types of families, and I’m not going to enter our current cultural and political debate about defining families as one man and one woman, though I strongly believe that to be accurate and true. My purpose today is to help us figure out what the Kingdom Priorities are for Putting, Making, and Keeping GODFIRST in our Family; no matter its makeup or configuration. I’m limited as a Biblical Preacher to using the model presented in the Scripture most predominately; one woman, one man, usually some children; though we must each admit that even that model was variously defined throughout the history of the Bible.

Think concubines and multiple wives for instance, or adultery committing David fathering incest committing sons and daughters! Even the Biblical model of family is not always clearly defined. I will limit my discussion this morning by trying to help us interpret the meaning of this definition of a Kingdom Priority, GODFIRST Family as defined by the Apostle Paul in Ephesians chapters 5 and 6:

Out of respect for Christ, be courteously reverent to one another. Wives, understand and support your husbands in ways that show your support for Christ. The husband provides leadership to his wife the way Christ does to his church, not by domineering but by cherishing.

So, just as the church submits to Christ as he exercises such leadership, wives should likewise submit to their husbands. Husbands, go all out in your love for your wives, exactly as Christ did for the church—a love marked by giving, not getting.

Christ's love makes the church whole. His words evoke her beauty. Everything he does and says is designed to bring the best out of her, dressing her in dazzling white silk, radiant with holiness. And that is how husbands ought to love their wives.

They're really doing themselves a favor—since they're already "one" in marriage. No one abuses his own body, does he? No, he feeds and pampers it. That's how Christ treats us, the church, since we are part of his body. And this is why a man leaves father and mother and cherishes his wife. No longer two, they become "one flesh."

This is a huge mystery, and I don't pretend to understand it all. What is clearest to me is the way Christ treats the church. And this provides a good picture of how each husband is to treat his wife, loving himself in loving her, and how each wife is to honor her husband.

Children, do what your parents tell you. This is only right. "Honor your father and mother" is the first commandment that has a promise attached to it, namely, "so you will live well and have a long life." Fathers, don't exasperate your children by coming down hard on them. Take them by the hand and lead them in the way of the Master.

Eph. 5:21-6:4

Consider with me then this description of the Kingdom Priorities for a GODFIRST Family:

1. MUTUAL SUBMISSION IS GOD'S PLAN FOR LASTING RELATIONSHIPS

...submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. 21

It is sad to me that this whole passage has fallen out of favor in the Christian Church and world, and especially in modern Christian marriages because of the verses that come after verse 21. This verse is the key, this could have been a one point sermon, (you wish...) all the rest of this chapter and even the next is built and based on this one verse.

All other instructions, commands, requirements and expectations within the family relationship grow out of this mutual submission! We either get this, or we'll get no more! We must understand this or nothing else that follows will make sense! I don't think I'm overstating the case. The problem has been that until just recently, most translations of the Bible attached verse 21 with the paragraph that precedes it, instead of attaching it to the ones that follow verse 21. I believe it more naturally connects, defines, illuminates, describes, and interprets what is to follow. Ok, then what does it mean?

Mutual submission happens only as individuals recognize who and what they are...in Jesus Christ. Whether husbands, wives, children, or parents; our individual identity cannot be determined or defined by our spouse, our parents, our children, our careers, or even our best understanding of who we think we are! We will only understand exactly who we are when we live in an intimate and ever-growing relationship with Jesus Christ! Does that mean that unbelievers can't have happy, mutually beneficial marriages? NO, it just means that neither humans nor marriages will ever be all they can and are intended to be unless Jesus is at the center of our lives, and our marriages!

And when we begin to get a handle on exactly who we are in Jesus Christ, submitting ourselves to the person, or persons who love us most deeply, and with whom we love most intimately, only makes sense, and in fact becomes quite natural. When a person is "forced to submit" to another by coercion or expectation, there's probably a problem with our basic understanding of ourselves in Christ!

People who love each other (In Christ) find mutual submission a joy not a chore, a reward not a task, a benefit not drudgery, a blessing not a curse. People who love each other (In Christ) find fulfillment in trying to live their lives out pleasing each other. But again, remember it must be based on our intimate relationship with Jesus Christ.

2. WIVES SUBMIT YOUR SELVES TO YOUR HUSBAND AS TO THE LORD

For wives, this means submit to your husbands as to the Lord. 22

Please note first of all that wives are to submit to their husbands...as to the Lord ...not to a knucklehead! Wives submitting and husbands loving are each based on Mutual Submission. Submitting has little to do with subservience, and much to do with honor and respect. Most wives know that in spite of their macho bravado, most husbands have weak egos, and shaky self-confidence. Most of us need loving wives who reassure us of our importance in the family, and in their hearts. Many of us husbands get repeatedly beat up from a work place that grows daily more inhumane; we need wives to reassure us that we are valuable, capable, and cute...well, we don't want to make them liars!

A wife submitting has nothing to do with waiting on and serving a husband's every wish; but much to do with understanding God's plan for husbands and wives, and for the family. God has created husbands and wives differently, in case you didn't notice. But also notice this: Someone has written: "Woman was not made out of man's head to be dominated by him, nor out of his feet, to be trampled upon; but out of his side that she might be equal with him; from under his arm, to be protected by him, and from near his heart to be loved by him."

Wives being submissive is not about catering to his every whim, or caving in to his every desire, but recognizing he is created by God to be the spiritual leader of your home. That doesn't mean he gets to make all the decisions, but he is responsible for the spiritual welfare of your home, and you are to support him in that, and encourage him in that. We all know many homes and relationships where the wife is more spiritually attune than the husbands, and that needs to change as each person submits to God, each person submits to the other, and together they grow closer to God. Now to you husbands.

3. HUSBANDS LOVE YOUR WIVES WITH CHRIST-LIKE LOVE

For husbands, this means love your wives, just as Christ loved the church. He gave up his life for her. 23

A scientific study was conducted recently at a leading university in the US. It found after thorough investigation that hardly any wives have killed their husbands while...the husband was doing dishes! That is one example of loving our wives with a Christ like love. Note before we go to far, that in this passage, Paul tells the wives once to be submissive, but reminds the husbands THREE TIMES that we are to love our wives. And Paul goes further, defining what that love ought to look like: It ought to look like how Jesus loves the church...and how is that? By dying on a cross for it!

Maybe fewer wives would have so many issues with being submissive, if more husbands loved their wives in more sacrificial ways. Two things continually amaze me about couples getting married. 1) How stupid men get after they get the ring! Suddenly football replaces romance, courtship, civility, and even basic bodily hygiene as the most important thing in life. 2) It amazes me the unspoken assumptions each party brings to a marriage. Most men don't want to change anything about their new wives, don't ever want them to change. And most women can't wait to get the ring, so they can start working their magic; changing their beloved into the kind of person they know they can be. This is a simplistic attempt to be funny, but contains a seedling of truth, agree?

Husbands; love your wives by making sure that she continually and repeatedly knows she is the most valuable thing in your life. More important than the car, the lawn, the guys, the garage, the guns...and even more important than having a clean house, and well cooked meals! Love your wife to the utmost, being willing even to die for her. That's what Paul means, and what mutual submission does!

4. CHILDREN OBEY AND HONOR YOUR PARENTS AS GOD COMMANDS

Children, obey your parents because you belong to the Lord... "Honor your father and mother." This is the first commandment with a promise... 6:1

Kingdom Priorities for GODFIRST families includes children obeying and honoring your parents. Mutual submission in the parent/child relationship is different than the husband/wife relationship. Kids need to understand they are kids, and parents need to understand they are parents, not your kid's older friends, and not your kid's parole officer! Obeying and honoring parents is always difficult, but never impossible, even when your parents might be! Children, youth, and young people, I want to encourage and challenge you to obey this command. Learn ways to honor your parents, and parents do the same. When was the last time you filled up your son's car, or washed it just for fun? When was the last time you made your daughter breakfast in bed?

One of the catastrophic consequences of the breakdown in American families has been the unbridled and undisciplined behavior of many American teenagers. Some of them are beyond hope, but most, if loved, nurtured, cared for, given encouragement and a chance to succeed, might just surprise...even their parents! We are not given children just to do the family chores, but as gifts from God to refine our faith, grow our love, and humble us repeatedly! The last priority for making a GODFIRST family is:

5. PARENTS DISCIPLINE AND INSTRUCT YOUR CHILDREN IN GOD'S WAYS

...bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. 6:4

Most parents I know believe that the 3 most important things they can give their children are Love (which is always spelled t-i-m-e), Discipline, and Instruction. We need to love our children unconditionally, sacrificially, especially when it comes to time. I remember when the boys were young a friend with an older son lamented how little time he had spent with his son. He told me: "Spend time with your kids when they want you to, if you wait till you think you have time...they'll be grown-up and playing with someone else." Sad to report that dad is now in prison, and his son is doing well. Loving our kids is not always just for their benefit!

In this modern advanced day and age, disciplining our kids has to be more than just spanking or hitting or using that dreaded belt. Kids need boundaries, clearly defined, sometimes negotiated and change, and eventually removed almost completely by loving parents. Discipline is not easy, but is essential to raising healthy kids. Kids don't like it, but deep down they need it, whether they admit it or not. It is the parent's job to lovingly discipline our children.

We are also charged, commanded even, to instruct our children, not just in the ways of the world, not just in the ways of work and business, not just in the ways of the birds and bees, but in the ways of the Lord. That last one might be the hardest, maybe, maybe not, depending on the current state of our own relationship. You see, your kids learn from you whether you are consciously teaching or not. They learn by observation about the priorities in your life, they learn about love by watching you parents love each other, they learn prejudice by hearing your talk, they learn kindness by watching how you treat people, they are like little sponges, soaking up what we are doing, way more than what we are saying.

So there you have it, no matter the make up of your particular family unit, single, divorced, with kids, without, widowed, single mom, or dad, grandparents; these are some priorities from God's Word for making GODFIRST in our Family. I know that's what we all want.

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