The Divine Pattern for Relationships
Selected Scriptures
90-97

No one needs to prove to us that we may be watching the death of the germ-cell of civilization, the family. All the signs are abundantly clear all around us. We could drag out all kinds of statistics to indicate the dire situation in the families in our culture. We are all constantly looking at the parade in the media of divorce, sexual rebellion, abortion, sterilization, delinquency, infidelity, homosexuality, women's liberation, children's rights and so on. That has been continually paraded before us for the last ten or twelve years. We are watching the formation of the rope that strangles the family to death.

And many, frankly, are gladly carving out the tombstone for the family, and really doing it happily. In a book entitled, The Death of the Family, a British physician suggests "doing away with the family completely...he says...because it is a primary conditioning device for a western imperialistic world view." Kate Millet(?) who is a very prominent feminist wrote a book called Sexual Politics and in it she writes that the family must go because it oppresses and enslaves women.

The people who hold these perspectives are aggressive, forceful, forthright, domineering and they find their most fertile ground for the propagation of their viewpoints in the universities and the colleges of our society, and consequently they are in the process of significantly reeducating the youth who eventually fall into the category of the leaders and movers and shakers of our society. Mrs. T. Grace Atkinson(?) of The National Organization of Women, seeks to eliminate all sex, all marriage, all motherhood and all love. I'd say that's fairly fatal. She says, "Marriage is legalized servitude and family relations are the basis for all human oppression." What a warped sad view. But in many cases it is the reigning view among the thinkers, the professors, the teachers in our society.

On the other hand, others who are watching the death of the family see it as a disaster, a virulent disease. If the family cannot function, who will raise, who will socialize, who will moralize the next generation?

Dr. Armand Nicolai II (?) of Harvard Medical School sees the trend to destroy the family as a devastating trend. He points to married women with children working outside the home, the tendency for families to move frequently, almost constantly, the dominance of television in the home, the lack of controls in society, the chaos of moral confusion, the lack of communication among families and divorce, and all of those things, he says, are threatening the very life which we live. Let me quote from him. He says, "These trends will incapacitate the family, destroy its integrity and cause its members to suffer such crippling emotional conflict that they will become an intolerable burden to society. What about the future? First, the quality of family life will continue to deteriorate producing a society with a higher incidence of mental illness than ever before. Ninety-five percent of our hospital beds may be taken up by mentally ill patients. This illness will be characterized by a lack of self-control. We can expect the assassination of people in authority to be frequent occurrences. Crimes of violence will increase, even those within the family. The suicide rate will rise. As sexuality becomes more and more unlimited and separated from family and emotional commitment, the deadening effect will cause more bizarre experimentation and wide-spread perversion," end quote. A

frankly frightening picture and we are watching it being painted right before our very eyes.

There is no question about the fact that the family is under a major assault, that people want to redefine family in absolutely any terms they want. There's no question that we are watching a generation of young people rising up who have no socialization skills and no moral sense at all. There is chaos. There is murder. There is crime at a rampant level. There is even pleasure in shooting people incidental to you, just for the sheer thrill of killing.

Sociologists, psychologists, analysts and so-called marriage and family experts, psychiatrists and all the rest are scrambling all over the place to try to come up with some kind of solution, and they've been doing that now for a couple of decades with absolutely no impact on the slide. Nothing that they are doing seems to slow down the process of the disintegration of human relationships at the very core of life which is the family. You can tamper with society in a lot of places, but if you destroy the family you destroy society.

It's a fascinating, in a sense, to be alive right in the middle of this. The family is certainly at the head of the endangered species list, much more dangerous than the elimination of some species that occupy people's attention.

And at that point we interject...can the family be saved? And I suppose for the sake of some people we should ask...should the family be saved? Is it worth fighting for? And if so, how? I would add that the church has made some efforts, certainly in the last ten years, the last twenty years there has been a great preoccupation on this subject. Christian bookstores are literally filled with books on marriage and the family. There have been endless sermons and messages and tapes and seminars and conferences go on to deal with the issues of the family. But that, too, doesn't seem to make much difference.

I can remember not too many years ago when I was reading statistics such as...divorce rate among those Christians involved in an evangelical church is one in 500 couples. And now we understand that the divorce rate among Christians in quote/unquote "evangelical" churches is about the same as the national average, one out of every two marriages. And that, at the same time, that we've been trying to escalate our defense of the family indicates that somewhere we've been fighting with the wrong weapons or fighting the wrong enemy.

God has an answer to...should the family be saved?...and God has an answer to...can the family be saved?...in fact, the Bible makes it very clear when it says marriage is the grace of life and children are a blessed heritage from the Lord that we must understand the blessedness, the bliss and the purpose of God that unfolds in the matter of marriage and raising children. Family is still the heart and soul of human society and family as it is defined by God. It is the place of intimacy. It is the place of joy. It is the place of memories that build the foundation of life. It is the place of love. It is the place of socialization. It is the place of morality. It is the place of security. It is where you build confidence.

I was talking to one of our professors out at the Master's College the other day who graduated with a Ph.D. from USC particularly emphasizing the field of working with children in education. And he said all of the literature, all of the existing literature today done on the study of children indicates that there is a period of time between the ages of six and twelve when everything foundational is either put down or not put down and those are the determinative years in what that child will become. You can

look at the pattern of life in those years and predict almost perfectly whether they will be anti-social in their behavior or whether they will socialize in a normal way. We can see all of the roots of criminal behavior in that period of time in the life of a child.

That makes a lot of sense that the secular world would pick out that time because even in the case of Jesus there is an illustration of the fact that when a Jewish child reached the age of twelve, he was ready on his own to be a son of the Law. I talked about the fact that God has designed parents to strengthen and build up children between the ages of six and twelve so that they can cope with puberty that starts at about that time. And if they don't have the foundations of morality and they don't have the affirmation and self-discipline and self-control that is built in during those years of six to twelve, then they run amuck when their passions take over during that period of time. There is a divine pattern for how a family is to deal with that, for how a marriage is to set a model to be followed, for how a marriage is to be fulfilled and happy and rewarded.

And when we look for that model we need to go no further than the Word of God. It's all laid out there. It's not that complicated and it's not that difficult. When I was preaching this week after I left Illinois I went over to Ohio and I was preaching and after I had preached a lady came up, a sweet young lady, I suppose about 35 years old and she had a whole bunch of little kids, a couple in her arms and some hanging on to her. And she wanted to tell me that she was struggling ten years ago to find some direction in her marriage and she wanted to thank me for some messages she heard that I preached on this particular subject that led she and her husband, led her and her husband to determine the direction based upon the Word of God which in the ten years intervening God had so blessed that she came on a long trip in very difficult weather to express her gratitude to me for the joy that she's experienced both in her marriage and in her family. It's not me, it's the truth of the Word of God that makes the difference. And until people get in line with that truth, they will continue the devastating drift downward that's going to be far worse in the future than it is even now. One can only guess what the next generation is going to be like. Frightening thing to think about.

Now for us to get a grip on what God says about the family, we really find ourselves best served by looking in Ephesians chapter 5. Paul's letter to the Ephesians sort of gives us a place where all of the pertinent material is pulled together and it's a great launching point for us. Around 60 A.D. the apostle Paul wrote this letter and sent it off to the saints who are at Ephesus. It may well be too that the original manuscript didn't say Ephesus and it could have been a circular letter gone through all the churches in the area of Asia Minor of which Ephesus was the first of those churches. But Paul wrote this letter to the Christians in that part of the world and one of the things that was on his heart was the matter of marriage. And when you come down to chapter 5 and verse 18 you begin to get in the flow that leads you to verse 22 and following where the issues of family and marriage are addressed. We're going to talk about a lot of things in this series over the next number of weeks. We're going to touch on a number of subjects and interact with the divine revelation from God, but we'll constantly come back to Ephesians 5 as home base because it's a perfect launching pad for us. And keep in mind, this is not human opinion. I'm not here to give you my opinion. I really don't value my opinion at all. All I want to do is show you what the Word of God says and the applicable wisdom that comes from that. This is the last word on the issue. We don't need experts and psychiatrists and psychologists and analysts and marriage and family people, we can go right to the Word of God. We're not looking for tricks and gimmicks, we're looking for truth that can become part of our lives.

Now in this wonderful epistle that we are familiar with, the epistle of Ephesians, as Paul begins to launch into this subject he starts, at least for us, in verse 18 with a very key premise. And let's begin

there. He says, "And do not get drunk with wine for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit." That really is the key that unlocks all the rest. From that great principle flows the instruction to the wife in verse 22, the instruction to the husband in verse 25, the instruction to the children in 6:1 and the instruction to the parents in 6:2. All of that marriage and family teaching flows out of this principle in chapter 5 and verse 18. In fact, it is the first of several necessary prerequisites for any successful marriage or any successful relationship.

And the contrast in that verse, as you see it there, "Do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit," it's quite dramatic and remarkable contrast. If you just pick up the book of Ephesians and read that, you might stop and say, "Well why in the world would he contrast drunkenness with being filled with the Spirit? What is the point here? When a person is drunk, they've lost control of themselves and they wander around in an out of control kind of behavior. Is he saying I want you to be out of control but not by wine but by the Holy Spirit? What is he saying here? I want you to yield up the control of your faculties to the Holy Spirit rather than to wine? Why make such a comparison?

Well the answer is found in a bit of the historical context. Let me give you a little bit of background. Ephesus, of course, was in Asia Minor and was dominated by Hellenistic or Greek culture called Hellenistic from the Greek word hellene which means Gentiles. But the Greeks believed that the great god Zeus, they, of course, had a pantheon of gods and Zeus was one of the formidable ones, they believed that the great god Zeus had given birth to a son. And that it had occurred in a very unusual way. And I'll give you a little of the background. They believed that the child was snatched from the womb of its mother, and its mother's name in Greek mythology is Semele. And the child was snatched from the womb of Semele while Semele was being incinerated because she got too close to the burning glory of Zeus. I don't know how Zeus produced this child in her in the mythology but in some way he did it without destroying her but when she sought to get too close to him, she became incinerated and in order to preserve the child of Zeus, the child was snatched out of her womb during her incineration. The child-god who had not yet come to full term was then sown into the thigh of Zeus and kept there until time to be born. That stretches your imagination.

So here is Zeus with this fetus in some point of formation sewn into his thigh. The infant god destined by Zeus to be the world ruler was born eventually out of the thigh of Zeus and then kidnapped by the envious Titans. Titans were called in Greek mythology sons of earth. They took the child, the Titans did, this child of Zeus, tore the child limb from limb, cooked it and ate it. But Zeus found the heart, according to the mythology, revived it and it was reborn as Dionysius. Now if you ever study Greek mythology you come across the name Dionysius quite frequently. Zeus found the heart, swallowed it and eventually the heart formed into the personality of Dionysius and was reborn.

Zeus then blasted the Titans with lightning, incinerating all of them from whom...whose ashes all of humanity came. So that's their creation story. Dionysius was then really someone beyond humanity because all of humanity just rose out of the ashes of the Titans and Dionysius along with Zeus was a god.

Dionysius then, according to Greek mythology, spawned a religion, a religion of ecstasy, ectasia(?) and emotionalism. And the Dionysian cult, this religion of ecstasy and emotionalism, this frenzied kind of religion, saturated the Greek and Roman world. The Dionysian cult was a debauched form of worship and a popular, a dominant form.

The worshipers committed atrocities with human organs. They engaged in orgies of sexual perversion, along with music and dancing and feasting. But there was one common element to all of the Dionysian debacle and that was drunkenness...drunkenness. In fact, if you ever circulate in the Middle East or in the ancient Roman world, you will see Dionysius associated with grapes. When there is a statue or a tribute to Dionysius, some monument to Dionysius, it is always marked out by clusters of grapes because he became known as the god of wine.

The Greek name of Dionysius became in the Roman language, Latin, Bacchus. And Bacchus is the Roman god of wine. When people engaged in these unbelievable drunken brawls, they were called Bacchanalian feasts. And if you've studied any of that, that's a familiar term even today. Take your dictionary out and look up Bacchanalia and it will say a drunken orgy.

The key element then, the key element in pagan worship was drunkenness. That's how...that's how they got their inhibitions out. That's how they dealt with their normal restraint. That's how they dealt with normal feelings of guilt. That's how they dulled their senses sufficiently to quiet their conscience. That's how they dispelled their anxiety and fear and guilt over such vile behavior as they engaged in. That's how they induced a kind of giddiness that substituted for real joy and just catapulted them in to this kind of horrible behavior. They did it by getting drunk and losing all their inhibitions.

So they believed that drunkenness was simply the door into ecstasy, the door into religious expression. And at such drunkenness elevated the believer, the worshiper, to total communion with the deities. So drunkenness was the key to worship, to communion to the deities. The more inebriated they were the more likely they were to get in to the ectasia(?) and enthusiasmos(?), two Greek words, ecstasy and enthusiasm, that spoke about these horrifying often demonic kind of activities.

A number of years ago when I made a trip to Israel, I had the privilege of taking a special trek up through Lebanon, up through Beirut, back east of there in a fascinating journey to the city of Damascus. Damascus is pretty deep into the Middle East at this particular point. And when we went into Damascus, a fascinating opportunity on the way to Damascus, we went to the city of Baalbek which was the easternmost point of the Roman Empire, the great Roman Empire extended way to the Middle East, east of Israel. And we went to the city of Baalbek because there are some of the most marvelous ruins that have been preserved there and restored. And they have some obelisks that are almost impossible to understand, to understand how they made them and how they moved them is an ongoing dilemma...massive, massive pieces of stones.

There also has been reconstructed there an incredible temple. And all across this temple, it was devoted to Jupiter, but all across this temple there are grape vines hanging on the columns and across the colonnades at the top. And you are told by the guides who take you through there that this is representative of Bacchus, that the Romans erected at the most eastern point of their empire a temple to Bacchus and there they carried on their orgies. What is fascinating about it, for example, is that in the very center of this large place where they did this, there's a decorated area and then a hole, a deep hole and that was in order that the people might vomit in the process and go back and indulge themselves even more. An unbelievable kind of conduct in which they believed and they did it in temples that they were ascending to communion with the gods. That's what Paul has in mind.

Now go back to verse 18, it takes on different meaning in the light of that context. He is saying to them do not get drunk with wine, all that does is produce dissipation. All that does is take you down.

If you want to commune with God, be filled with the Spirit. Our religion is not brought about in its fullness and its richness and its reality by drunkenness but rather by the filling of the Spirit. Don't be filled with alcohol, be filled with the Holy Spirit. Literally, be being kept continuously filled by the Spirit.

If you want true religion, if you want true communion with God, if you want true worship to take place, if you want godly living, if you want to please God, then you must be filled with the Spirit...not controlled by alcohol but controlled by the Holy Spirit. The parallel to this is in Colossians 3:16 where instead of saying be filled with the Spirit, Paul says let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly because that's really the same thing. When the Word of Christ dominates your life and you respond in obedience to it, it's the same as being controlled by the Holy Spirit, of course, who is the author of Scripture. Obedience to the Word is being filled with the Spirit. It's not some kind of mystical experience. It's not some kind of ecstatic thing. It's not something that comes over you and catapults you into some unconscious behavior. It's not being knocked over into a dead faint, as you see so often on television. It's not launching off into some ecstatic speech. It's not going out of yourself or being beyond control. It simply is to be continuously controlled by the Spirit who does it through the Word and that means we are obeying the truth.

So we have to start at that point. Whatever we're going to do in terms of our Christian life, whether it's our marriage or our family, it has to flow out of a life controlled by the Holy Spirit. And that's why the society really has no chance, no hope. They're not regenerate. They don't know God. They have no more hope of getting it right than the people at the Bacchanalian feasts did. It's not going to happen. A right kind of marriage relationship and a right kind of family relationship is built on a redeemed life, empowered and energized by the Holy Spirit in obedience to the Word of God.

Now look at verses 19 and 20. "Speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord." Let me tell you something. Where the Spirit of God controls a life, where there's a life devoted to the Word of God and obedience to the Word of God, there is praise...that's the first thing. There is praise. And I suppose obviously we could conclude that a worshiping life, a praising life comes from a heart that is filled with joy. It's this simple. You give me an obedient person, obedient to the Word of God, I'll show you a positive, happy, praising, worshiping person whose heart is filled with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, who is singing and making melody in his heart to the Lord, and I'll show you a person who can get along with anybody because they're lost in wonder, love and praise because they're worshiping the Lord.

Verse 20 adds, "Always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, to God even the Father." I'll tell you what, it's very hard to argue with somebody who is thankful for everything...everything. You find a person who is filled with the Spirit, I'll show you a happy person, I'll show you a thankful person. A person obeying the Word of God, a person filled with joy and praise and worship, a person who has nothing but thanks for everything God has done is going to be wonderful to live with. That's the bottom line. We're really talking here not about some kind of gimmicks to make your marriage work. We're not talking about, you know, the kind of things that I read about all the time. And you remember some years ago I told you about a book I read about marriage and said if you really want to have a great relationship with your wife, here's a good suggestion. Go buy her a Teddy bear...a nice little Teddy bear, one of those real soft ones. And bring it home. Wrap it in tin foil and stick it in the back of the freezer. This is in a book. Stick it in the back of the freezer. On the Teddy bear before you wrap it in the tin foil and stick it in the back of the freezer write words of romance and love and then just stick it back there...you know, behind the old

lasagna. And some day, and you don't know when, when she is looking for the old lasagna, and she pulls that thing out and unwraps it and finds a frozen Teddy bear with a romance note, the book says when you get home from work it's going to be bliss. Are you kidding me? If you have a bad marriage, it's better to get hit with one that's not frozen. My suggestion would be, leave it thawed, just in case. Stick it in the closet.

Look, we're not talking about that. You're not going to be able to prepare a marriage like that. You're not going to be able to make a meaningful relationship like that. I hear suggestions all the time, take your wife on a date, take her out to dinner. That's all fine. That's not going to repair a marriage that isn't right. There's only one way to cultivate a right relationship with anybody and that's to be filled with the Spirit of God, filled with praise and gratitude to God so that your heart is overflowing with joy. And that's what makes a person someone that you can live with, someone who is a blessing to you. It should be, frankly, almost impossible to start a fight with you because you're just too blessed, too full of praise, too full of thanks, too full of the overflowing grace of God, too controlled by the Holy Spirit. You're so filled with love, joy, peace, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness and self-control that your spouse may just get upset at their inability to cause conflict. It has to start there.

Now out of those things flows yet another element, verse 21. "And be subject to one another in the fear of Christ." It doesn't mean you're afraid of Christ. It just says be subject to one another. Now look here, we're not talking about who this...this isn't talking about wives to their husbands, this isn't talking about children to their parents, it's talking about everybody. But this is the ground work, folks, this is what makes meaningful marriages. It's a spiritual issue here. It's not a matter of cleverness, it's not a matter of ideas, it's not a matter of scheduling events, it's not a matter of buying her gifts or whatever, or reverse, buying him gifts or cooking his favorite meal. Those are nice little things to do. But with two people who live according to the standards that we've just read, it wouldn't matter whether you did those or didn't do them. That's not the stuff that makes for lifelong joy in a relationship.

Submission does though, and we're talking here about a generic kind of submission, without regard for any specific relationship within the context of a family. The word "submit," by the way, is very graphic, hupotasso, it means to...well it means to rank under, to rank under, it's a military term. We're called on to place ourselves under each other. Here is what makes for meaningful relationships. Someone controlled by the Spirit of God, obedient to the Word of God, filled with joy and praise and thanksgiving to God for every single thing in their life and eager to submit their will to everybody else. That's what we're after here.

We're called on to place ourselves under each other. This principle is dominant in Scripture, by the way, expressing the idea of humility, expressing the idea of meekness that is so basic to Christian character. Now lest you think this is sort of a wandering verse here that just got dropped in, it's all over the New Testament. First Corinthians 16:16, "Submit yourselves to everyone." Hebrews 13:17, "Submit yourselves to the leaders of the church." First Peter 2:15...2:13 rather, "Submit yourselves to the laws of the land." First Peter 5:5, "Submit yourselves to those older than you are." James 4:7, "Submit yourselves to God." And here, "Submit yourselves to each other." This is the idea of humility.

If you want to go back to John 13 you can look at that marvelous illustration of this where Jesus washed the disciples' feet. And then said to them, "I want you to love each other just as I have loved you." And how had He loved them? Enough to humble Himself though He was the incarnate God and wash the dirty, filthy feet of a bunch of proud, self-centered disciples who were arguing about

who was going to be the greatest in the Kingdom while the Lord was on the brink of giving His life for them.

You can look at Philippians chapter 2 and see the same thing. "Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit but with humility of mind let each of you regard one another as more important than himself." That's just standard fare. Whoever you live with is more important than you are...their longings, their desires, their needs, their life is more important than your life. And so you set your life aside for them. That's a spiritual issue.

Verse 4, "Do not merely look out for your own personal interest but also for the interest of others." And that is precisely the attitude of Christ who didn't grasp being equal with God but gave it up and humbled Himself and became obedient to death, even the death of the cross.

Now listen, if marriages and families are to fulfill the divine purpose, these are the issues at stake here. And it becomes a matter of spiritual commitment. If we are willing to be obedient to the Word of God, thus allowing the Spirit of God to control our lives, if our hearts are filled with such overwhelming joy that we sing songs about God, spiritual songs about our own conversion, hymns about the gospel, our hearts are constantly filled with melody. If we are ever thankful for every single thing that comes into our life, if we are willing to submit ourselves to one another in the fear of Christ, that is out of devotion to Jesus Christ, then...then we're going to have meaningful relationships. But apart from unselfish devotion to God and unselfish devotion to each other, it isn't going to happen.

And you look at our society today and you can see that's exactly why it won't happen. Because the mind set today, the current trend today is self-centered pride, isn't it? I'm going to stay with you as long as you give me what I want. And when you don't give me what I want, I'm out of here. Today the emphasis is on individualism, rights, freedoms, liberties, self-esteem. All of that individualistic thinking is absolutely deadly to any meaningful marriage and family relationships. In gaining the rights that the humanists have sold us and gaining the rights of individual freedom, we have lost the privileges of meaningful relationships. The price for our sought after freedom in the end is going to be isolation and loneliness. People become like objects to be used and discarded. They become like strangers and families are more like a bunch of disconnected people living in a boarding house, more interested in self-fulfillment than giving, more desirous of material goods than relationships, more longing to be independent than dependent, more concerned about themselves than anyone else, in fact almost exclusively concerned about themselves...seeing wives or husbands as a burden, an obstacle in their path toward personal freedom and fulfillment, seeing children as a barrier to the fulfillment of their overwhelming selfishness. The Bible is saying if that's the way you choose to live, you can kiss meaningful relationships goodbye.

Families, meaningful marriages which are so essential to society and its preservation...listen...which are so essential to real fulfillment in life are only possible where you have unselfish attitudes, where personal desires are constantly sacrificed for others. And if that's not happening, there cannot be meaningful relationships. You cannot have the collision of two independently selfish individuals and build a relationship. It is a battle of people struggling to humble themselves. That's essential. That's the key to all relationships, to be Spirit filled, to be speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, to be saying thanks and to be submissive. Just those four things, that's the foundation. That is where you have to start this whole thing. Where you have people who walk in the Spirit fulfilling the Word of God in obedience to the truth, where you have people with a song in their heart and a song on their lips, where you have people who say thanks for everything that comes into

their life and where you have people who are eager, in fact they're in a hurry to take every occasion to humble themselves and submit themselves to those around them, you have meaningful relationships. That's how you build relationships.

You know, people will ask me...what's the key to your marriage, or what's the key to your family? How is it that your family is so close? Or you're close to your wife and you have such a wonderful relationship...and I can just go back to this. There's no magic. There's no formula. There's no gimmicks. It's not a question of how many times did we do this, or how many times did we do that, or who was in charge of this, or what kind of processes or methods did we use. It's simply a question and it has to start in my heart, am I committed to obedience to the Spirit of God? Am I committed to the controlling influences of the Word of God? Am I going to live out a Christian life? Because that has to be there. Am I filled with joy and happiness or am I ugly and cantankerous and unkind and ungracious and...or is my heart so filled with joy that it touches everybody around me and makes me attractive and makes everything that I believe and love attractive to them? Am I thankful for everything in life, every difficulty, every misunderstanding, every mistreatment that occurs in my life, in family, in marriage? Am I going to be thankful for that and accept all of that with joy in my heart? Am I going to submit myself to them? Am I going to get into their life and do what pleases them? Those are the kinds of issues that we have to have addressed.

And if we don't start there, the rest is just hopeless. Now if you look at that and look at our society, you can see that there's just no way...no way. You have people consumed with iniquity, they're not interested in a Word of God, consumed with doing whatever their driving lust tells them to do, fulfilling their own desires all over the place...infidelity, sexual perversion, whatever it might be. You have people who basically have no joy or very little of it and occasionally find it in a bottle, or because they get a raise at work, or because they're going on a fishing trip, or because they had some great experience somewhere. But generally they don't...their hearts aren't filled with overwhelming joy bursting out all the time. I don't read our society like that. It's a very depressed society. They're not thankful. They never have enough. And they aren't willing to submit anything to anybody else, they want to run their own agenda. There's just no chance.

And you add on top of that the ideological lies, the fortresses of human speculation that are being erected against the Word of God, as Paul describes in 2 Corinthians 10, these ideologies that have to do with humanism and sexual freedom and lesbianism and homosexuality and all the things that destroy family, the ideology that you don't need to get married, you can just have sex until you're tired of sex and then you can go find somebody you're not tired of and have some more of it. The idea that you can pregnate women all of the place and just leave them with children in every direction and that's fine, that's fine, that's wonderful, we accept that.

All of those ideologies compounded with this personal selfishness leave nothing but disaster, absolute disaster. This

whole idea of submission I want to address a little further. Look at 1 Corinthians chapter 11 and we'll get in to this a little more when we talk about husbands. Somebody at this point might misunderstand and say, "Well wait a minute, if everybody is submitting, nobody's in charge." And I just want to defer to that query for a moment.

God has designed authority into a family. And in 1 Corinthians 11 verse 3 Paul says, "I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man and the man is the head of a woman and God is the head of Christ." We aren't saying that there's no authority in the family, there is. There is authority at the father level and there is authority over children at the parent level, we understand that. We're not talking about the responsibility of leadership. We're not talking about the responsibility of caring and protecting which is what that authority is. We're not talking about the authority of teaching them and raising them and nurturing them in the Lord when it comes to children.

What we are talking about here is this kind of mutual submission that says, "Though I may be your leader and protector and your provider, your longings and your heart desires and your needs compel me more than my own." That's what creates the balance that is necessary. I'm not abdicating my responsibility as a husband to lead, preserve, protect, care for my wife. I'm not abdicating my responsibility as a father to provide for my children, to protect my children, to give them direction in leadership and discipline and build self-control into them, but I do that with the passion of my heart being the recognition that this best serves their needs. And whatever other needs they would have, I would eagerly desire to meet to the sacrifice of my own, if my heart is right, and I'm speaking that as anyone would.

And the perfect picture of that right there in verse 3 is that Christ is the head of every man and God is the head of Christ. Is God superior to Christ? No. Is God of a different essence than Christ? No. Are God and Christ one? Yes. It simply means that in the economy of redemption Christ submitted Himself to the purposes and plan and power of the Father. In every sense He was equal and yet submissive. And the Father was completely sensitive to the heart of the Son.

Christ totally and willingly submitted to the needs of man, submitted Himself to the purposes of the Father. Came and committed really what was the greatest act of unselfish love ever, dying on a cross to satisfy the Father and to satisfy us. He was Lord over mankind, He was the sovereign who submitted. He was the King who became a servant. He was the rich man who became poor. He was the sinless one who bore sin. He was the author of life who accepted death. He was God dying for man. That's the heart attitude.

There's no question that He's the head of man and yet He's the servant of man. The picture there in verse 3 is a marvelous one. He was equal with God and yet He submitted to God. He was over man and yet He submitted to man and to the need of man. He stooped to meet man at the deepest point of His need. On both counts we see the illustration of the submissiveness of Jesus, to the Father's will, to the need of man. Even through great anguish and drops of blood He said, "Not My will but Thine be done." Do you remember that the Scripture says, "Be kindly affectionate one to another with brotherly love," the book of Romans, "in honor preferring one another." That's the idea. That's the idea.

Before we can talk about the role of the wife or the role of the husband or the role of the parents or the role of the children, we have to talk about the role of everybody. With Christ you have equality with God and yet submission. And in all of our relationships there will be a spiritual equality, there will be spiritual authority and there will still be a spirit of submission. In Galatians, just to kind of wrap this thought up, in Galatians 3:26, it's important to note this, "You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were immersed into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. Now there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor freeman," and then this, "there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus."

When it comes to the spiritual, we're all one. My wife is a believer, my children are believers, we're all one in Christ. None of us is superior spiritually to one another and we are all equal on the spiritual level. And yet there is authority in that family given to the father and given to the parents. That does not preclude spiritual equality, it's simply a duty, it's simply a role, it's simply an assignment for the wisest care of that unit which God has ordained. You have the same thing in the church. We are all one in Christ. There's neither male nor female, bond nor slave, Jew nor Greek in the church, whether you're a man or a woman, whether you're an employee or an employer, whether you're rich or poor, whatever culture you might have come from, we are all one in Christ. And yet though we are all equally...we are all equally spiritually, 1 Timothy 5:17 says the elders that rule well are worthy of double honor. And 1 Thessalonians 5:12 and 13 says, "We beseech you, brethren, know those who labor among you who are over you in the Lord." Acts 20 verse 28 tells the elders to take the oversight over the flock. First Peter 5, your shepherds over the flock. Hebrews chapter 13, the elders live a life of faith and the people are called to follow that. The people are told that those elders are over them in the Lord and have to give an account to God. Spiritual equality but differing responsibilities. But even in those responsibilities we operate with an attitude of submission.

I suppose to bring it into a very vivid illustration, just because it's so obvious tonight. Here I stand in a position of authority by virtue of teaching you the Word of God. You sit in a position of submission. And somebody might conclude that I am a sort of a demigod, I am some kind of an autocrat who stands up here and all of you just sit there and do what you do and there's some kind of disparity between us spiritually. That's not true. We are spiritual equals. I simply have a responsibility and a duty that gives me this task.

Not only that, I have to render this task with a greater concern for you than for me. What drives me to do what I do is not me but you. You understand that? And that's how it works in a family. I already know this stuff. I'm not here telling me this, I'm here telling you this because my concern is for you. And that's how it has to work in a marriage. We all submit in the marriage even though we have different roles.

One other passage comes to mind as we just kind of lay this foundation tonight. First Corinthians chapter 7, this is a very interesting section on the mutual submission in marriage, just to sort of drive the point home. Verse 1, "Now concerning the things about which you wrote, it is good for a man not to touch a woman." Now what he's saying here is celibacy is good. There were some questions among the Corinthians about should you get married, shouldn't you get married and so forth. He's saying celibacy is good, it's not bad, it's okay. "Touching a woman" is a euphemism for intercourse, for the union in a marriage. So what he is saying is concerning the things about which you wrote, they obviously had a question about it...it is good for a man never to have that relationship, it's good, it's okay, it's fine. Later on, by the way, he makes this really clear in verse 26, "I think then that this is good in view of the present distress that it is good for a man to remain as he is," meaning he's single, stay that way, it's good. Verse 29, "This I say, brethren, the time has been shortened so that from now on those who have wives should be as though they had none, those who weep as though they didn't weep, those who rejoice as though they didn't rejoice, those who buy as though they didn't possess, those who use the world as though they didn't make full use of it, for the form of this world is passing away." He's saying you're living in troubling times, you ought not to get too attached to those. Verse 32, "I want you to be free from concern, one who is unmarried is concerned about the things of the Lord how he may please the Lord. But one who is married is concerned about the things of the world how he may please his wife."

Listen, folks, marriage brings complications. You can't be single minded for the Lord, you have to be concerned about your wife. Verse 34, "Thus your interests are divided. But the woman who is unmarried and the virgin," unmarried referring to someone divorced, "and the virgin never married is concerned about the things of the Lord that she may be holy both in body and spirit. One who is married is concerned about the things of the world, how she may please her husband." Oh you, if you want to stay single, it's great to stay single, it's...it's much more focused. It isn't necessary but it certainly isn't bad, it is good. Some of the orthodox Jews of Paul's day believed marriage was an obligation. If a man didn't marry and produce children, the Jews said he has slain his posterity and he has therefore lessened the image of God in the world. The idea was you want to proliferate the image of God and since the image of God is in every person, you want to proliferate persons. If you don't marry, you slay your posterity and lesson the image of God in the world.

The Jews even went so far as to say seven kinds of people are excluded from heaven. And the first one on the list, the Jew who has no wife. And the second one, a wife who has no children. Pretty serious to say you couldn't get into heaven under those conditions. And that's probably what brought rise to these questions and Paul is saying being single is good, not wrong.

But verse 2, "But because of immoralities, let each man have his own wife and let each woman have her own husband." What are you saying here? It's good to be single but because single persons might be tempted into immorality, it's better to marry. That's the general rule, for the sake of purity, and, of course, Genesis 1:28, for the sake of procreation, and Genesis 2:18, for the sake of partnership, a help meet, and Song of Solomon, Hebrews 13:4, for the sake of pleasure. It's good for the sake of purity, procreation, partnership, pleasure. So it's better if you have those longings and those desires for everybody to have his own wife or husband.

And then we come to verses 3 to 5, and that's what I'm driving at here. "Let the husband fulfill his duty to his wife and likewise also the wife to her husband." In this context it's talking about a conjugal duty, the marriage obligation, to give yourself physically to one another as well as in love. But the idea is now that you're married you don't withhold that kind of thing because you're preserving yourself from impurity by getting married on the assumption that you can enjoy the richness of that relationship which God has wonderfully designed. And so, let the husband fulfill his duty to his wife, and likewise also the wife to her husband. And then this wonderful thing, "The wife does not have authority over her own body but the husband does. And likewise, the husband doesn't have authority over his own body but the wife does." Stop depriving one another.

In other words, you have to mutually submit to one another. You've got to dispense with "I have a headache" argument. Verse 5, "Stop depriving one another, except by mutual agreement for a time that you may devote yourselves to prayer and then when that time is over come together again, lest Satan tempt you because of your lack of self-control."

Marriage carries a mutual obligation. And the language here indicates that you have a debt to your husband, ladies. And, gentlemen, you have a debt to your wife. Pay that debt. At the very basic level of sexual desire, this mutual submission can be seen. Marriage then becomes a permanent surrender of all you are to your partner. She is what you are to one another, it's an equality. I belong to you, and you belong to me. Mutual agreement is necessary, by the way, for withholding. It's not fair to say, "Don't bother me, I'm praying." It's mutual, only for a set time.

And yet, even in this mutual submission in marriage, obviously we're not negating authority. In 1 Timothy chapter 2 verse 11, "Let a woman quietly receive instruction with entire submissiveness. I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man but to remain quiet, for it was Adam who was first created, then Eve. It was not Adam who first was deceived but the woman being quite deceived fell into transgression," and so forth. There's still authority in submission but the heart of it is mutual, humble service.

When we've said all of this, we've laid all the ground work, really. Our authority is soft, gentle, tender, caring. It's the authority of one who provides. It's the authority of one who protects, who cares, who meets needs, who by strength and wisdom insulates, preserves, secures. It's illustrated so wonderfully in the teaching about how you deal with your children, you don't provoke them by your harsh leadership. You nurture them.

And I'll tell you, if you don't start with this, there's not much hope, in fact there's not any. Oh I suppose you could grit your teeth and decide to stay together for the sake of whatever. But apart from this kind of pattern laid out in Ephesians chapter 5, marriage and family becomes an incredibly difficult struggle, very unfulfilling. It becomes a battle for individual rights. It becomes a terrible conflict. And we watch the conflicts blow up. Every year millions of hopeful couples pledge themselves in marriage or live together with a view to building a life, and half of them end in a fight that splits the marriage. And those who have that one split to on to marry again, two thirds of them will split. Ministers are even designing divorce services, like running the film backwards, I suppose. Divorce is epidemic and where you don't have divorce you often have conflict or you have ongoing infidelity. Men are often oppressive and insensitive. And women, as well, can be disloyal, unresponsive and seeking liberation. Children have no real examples. The chaos is absolutely tragic...absolutely tragic.

So when we think about this whole subject of family, we have to start with these spiritual issues. And from there we can start to talk about specifics. If you have a Spirit-filled, obedient, praising, worshiping, thankful, submissive heart, you've got the stuff that's going to make a wonderful family, a wonderful marriage and a wonderful life. Anything else is a battle for your own way, it's that simple. Only the power of the Holy Spirit can overrule this and produce joy.

D.L. Moody, the evangelist, once asked his audience a simple question. He said, "I want you to tell me how to remove the air out of a glass," and he held it up in his hand.

One man yelled, "Suck it out with a pump."

Moody replied, "That would create a vacuum and shatter the glass."

And several other impossible answers were called out, such as, you can hardly believe this, "Turn the glass upside down." Finally, Moody reached over on the side of the pulpit where the water and the glass stood, picked up the pitcher, filled up the glass. "There," he said, "all the air is out now."

It's perfectly simple, in that sense. You can eliminate the stale air of marriage but not with the pumps of human psychology. Only when you fill your life with the living water, the Spirit of God and divine truth. And that's the key. That's where we have to start. You have to make that commitment. If you

do, I can promise you all the bliss of the grace of life and the joy of marriage and family will be yours. Let's pray.

Father, we thank You for the foundations which You've given to us in Scripture. Lord, we know these things start deep down in the heart, spiritual matters have to be dealt with. I pray, Lord, for each person here that You would lead them to the place of devotion to the Spirit of God to be filled with the Spirit so that they might have a rejoicing, happy heart, thankful and submissive and thus be so easily to live with. Lord, we want happy marriages, we want fulfilled families and You've showed us how. And when it doesn't happen, we need to get off the superficial issues and get back on our knees and get our heart right with You. You want us unselfish, more concerned about others than ourselves, filled with thanksgiving for everything in our lives, no matter how difficult. And we know how much conflict comes into marriages and families where we don't think things are going the way we'd like them to go. But where there is incessant thankfulness, constant praise, constant obedience, humility, there will be joy and fulfillment. May it be so in all of our lives. That's Your plan for our joy and Your glory. We thank You for it in Christ's name. Amen.

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