

The Divine Pattern for Marriage

Scripture: Ephesians 5:21

Code: 1943

INTRODUCTION

A. The Peril of Marriage and Family

Our generation is watching the death of marriage and the family as we know it. Among the many factors contributing to its destruction are immorality, adultery, fornication, homosexuality, abortion, sterilization, women's liberation, delinquency, and sexual rebellion. All those things are like strands in a cord that is strangling the family.

There are many opinions about the restructuring of the family. Some sociologists say marriages need to change. They say we need "open marriages" or "non-marriages" and that it really doesn't matter whether marriages continue as they have in the past. People are groping, without any base authority, to try to find out how to make meaningful relationships in a disintegrating society.

B. The Preservation of Marriage and Family

It's time for Christians to reiterate the divine pattern. Our marriages and families should demonstrate a way of living that is rewarding, meaningful, and fulfilling. That divine pattern should be evident to the world as it looks at Christian marriages and families. Unfortunately, the world's problem of divorce has also become a problem of the church. But God has the divine standard that can make marriage and the family what they ought to be.

1. The priority

If we don't preserve the family, society will crumble. The family is the basic building block of society. When it goes, everything goes. The ability to pass on meaningful advice to the next generation is lost when there is no communication and discipline. Every society becomes an end in itself, and those who are loudest and most vocal will dominate.

2. The presupposition

Before you can know the divine pattern that can make your marriage and family life meaningful, you must meet one requirement; you must be a Christian. The book of Ephesians, which discusses the

divine pattern, is written to believers. If you're not a believer, there is little hope that you can make your marriage and family anything near what God intends it to be. Now I'm not saying that non-believers can't have meaningful relationships. They can---but only up to a point. They will never know total fulfillment. As an individual can find fulfillment only in a relationship with God, a family can find fulfillment only if its definition is designed and authored by God Himself. So, apart from knowing Jesus Christ, we can't expect a family to be fulfilled, because God is the One who created man, invented marriage and the family, and wrote the book on how marriage is to function.

3. The power

There's more to having a meaningful and fulfilled marriage and family than just being a believer. There are many Christians who know and love the Lord who are not living according to His moral, marital, or familial laws. Why? Because they are not filled with the Spirit. It's one thing to possess the Spirit of God and another to be filled by Him. Ephesians 5:18 says, "*Be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit.*" In other words, every Christian possesses the Spirit but is not always controlled by, or filled with, the Spirit. And when we're not controlled by the Spirit of God, our family life will manifest that. A carnal believer is going to have discord in his family because he has discord between himself and God. So, to be a believer is the starting point; but being controlled with the Spirit is what brings results. We're drowning in a sea of information on marriage today: marriage seminars, marriage conferences, marriage encounters, marriage books, and marriage counselors. People think the first thing to do when they have a marital problem is to see a counselor, psychiatrist, or analyst, buy a supply of books, go to a seminar, listen to tapes, or fill out charts. I don't want to oversimplify this, but if you're not filled with the Spirit, you can do all those things, but none of them will matter. On the other hand, if you're filled with the Spirit, He'll control your relationships. Now, counseling books, and seminars can be helpful in giving you practical hints on how being filled with the Spirit should work itself out in your relationships, but the epitome of the Christian life is to be filled and controlled by the Holy Spirit. Only when that happens will our families be what God wants them to be. That is what Paul is saying in the passage beginning in Ephesians 5:18.

LESSON

I. The Spirit-filled Relationship (v. 21)

Ephesians 5:21 says, "*Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God.*" When we genuinely reverence, fear, and worship God, we submit to one another. Submission is vital in the church. James 4:1 says, "*What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members?*" (NASB). Conflicts in the church arise because people want their rights, they want their way, they want to lead the group, and they want their opinion to dominate, so they push their way to the top. But someone who is Spirit-filled doesn't fight for the top; he fights for

the bottom. Throughout Scripture we are called to submit (1 Cor. 16:16; 1 Pet. 2:13; 5:5; Heb. 13:17).

A. Submission Explained

The word **submit** is from the Greek word **ὑποτάσσω** (**ὑπο** "under"; **τάσσω**, "to line up," "to get in order," "to arrange"), which, in a military sense, means "to rank beneath or under." As Christians, we are to rank ourselves under one another, not over one another. The whole mentality of the Christian life as we relate to each other is one of humility and submissiveness.

B. Submission Exemplified

Philippians 2:4-8 says, "Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others. Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross."

C. Submission Examined

1. The principle of mutual submission

In our relationships we are to be submissive. That is a general principle for all believers to follow. Now, in terms of structure and function, there is to be authority and submission; but in terms of interpersonal relationships, there is to be mutual submission. The principle of authority and submission is in the church, in the government, and in the home; but that doesn't change the fact that we are to mutually submit to one another. It's mutual submission the apostle Paul is after in Ephesians 5:22-6:9. Paul uses the family to illustrate the concept, starting in verse 21.

Note that wives receive the brunt of this section in Ephesians 5. I'm sure the statement of verse 22, "*Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands,*" is etched in granite in many homes. There's a tendency for men to grab their wives and yell, "Submit!" But did you know that the verb *submit* does not appear in the original manuscript in verse 22? It's only implied from verse 21. What is Paul saying then? He is saying everyone is to submit to everyone else---and he shows us how from the family.

a. Illustrated in the family

In verse 22, wives are to submit to their husbands; but in verse 25, husbands are to submit to their wives. You may ask, "In what way?" Verse 25 says, "*Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it*" I don't know of any greater act of submission than to die for someone---and that's the way husbands are to treat their wives. A husband is to submit to his wife, not in the sense of abdicating his responsibility of leadership, but in the sense of getting under her to

bear her burdens, carry her cares, meet her needs, and sacrifice his own desires to fulfill her needs.

In Ephesians 6:1-3, children are to submit in obedience to their parents; but in verse 4, parents also are to submit (the word *fathers* in verse 4 could be broadened to mean "parents"). Parents are to submit to their children in the sense that they are not to provoke them to wrath but instead "bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord."

We are all to submit. A servant needs to submit to his master (vv. 5-8), but a master needs to submit by never doing wrong to that servant (v. 9). We all have to submit. Every relationship in the family illustrates mutual submissiveness. We need to keep that in mind. Remember, Paul was talking to the whole church when he said, "*We are all to submit to another*" (v. 21).

b. Illustrated in the marriage relationship

Even though there is authority and submission in the marriage relationship, there is also a beautiful mutuality. First Corinthians 7:3 says, "*Let the husband render unto the wife her due.*" The husband has a submissive part to play in that he is to submit and render to his wife what she needs. However, verse 3 continues, "*And likewise also, the wife unto the husband.*" Verse 4 says, "*The wife hath not power of her own body, but the husband: and likewise also the husband hath not power of his own body, but the wife.*" That is mutuality. It does not negate the leadership responsibility, but it recognizes the mutual submissiveness that must occur in a marriage and a family at every point. It is the basic principle of family life.

2. The principle of authority and submission

Even though we are all equal in the sight of God according to Galatians 3:28, authority and submission must be present in terms of function. That is illustrated in many ways.

a. In the Godhead

In 1 Corinthians 11:3 Paul says, "*But I would have you know, that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God.*" You may ask, "Does that mean God is the head over Christ? I thought they were one." Jesus said, "*He that hath seen me hath seen the Father*" (John 14:9), and, "*I and the Father are one*" (John 10:30). John 1:1 says that the Word (Christ) was face-to-face (Gk., **prov ton qeon**) with God. Hebrews 1 says that Christ was exalted to be equal with God. What does it mean that God is the head of Christ? God's headship over Christ is a not matter of essence; it is a matter of function. Within the function of the Godhead, it was deemed necessary that Christ submit Himself. The same Jesus who said, "*All authority is given unto Me in heaven and in earth*" (Matt. 28:18) also said, "*My food is to do the will of Him that sent Me*" (John 4:34). In essence and nature, Christ and God are the same; but by God's design, the function

of the Son demanded that He submit to the father in a beautiful act of humiliation.

b. In marriage

The same is true in marriage. The essence, the spiritual quality, and the position before God of both husband and wife are the same; but in the family, for the sake of function, the woman is to take the place of submission to the leadership of man. God has made the man stronger, capable of harder physical labor, and has given him the responsibility of taking the brunt of difficult circumstances. The wife's tenderness and gentleness, then, are to support and balance the husband's strength. The point is that there is mutual submission in marriage, but it doesn't negate the principle of authority and submission.

c. In government

In government we have both authority and submission. Now those in authority are not necessarily godly people. You may ask, "why aren't the spiritual leaders the ones in authority in the government?" Romans 13:1 says, "*the powers that be are ordained of God.*" It's God's responsibility to deal with that, not ours. Verse 4 says God has given authority to policemen, soldiers and government agents. Peter said we are to submit to every ordinance (law) of man, to the king, to the governors, and to everyone in authority over us (1 Pet. 2:13-18). Why? Because God knows society is maintained on the basis of authority and submission. It doesn't mean there is a spiritual, intellectual, or essential inequality; God is simply talking about function.

The largest unit of relationships is the government. And according to Romans 13 and 1 Peter 2, nations must function with authority. On the one hand, there will be rulers, kings, governors, policemen, soldiers, and leaders; and on the other hand there will be those who follow their leadership. Why? Because they are better than everyone else? No, because there has to be authority and submission or there will be anarchy, and no society can survive anarchy.

d. In the family

In the smallest unit of relationships, the family, the same principle holds true. You cannot have anarchy in a family, with no one responsible for discipline, for earning wages, for controlling behavior, or for giving direction. That would bring nothing but chaos. Unfortunately, that is precisely what is happening in America today. The dissolution of the family is the beginning of the dissolution of the nation---the beginning of anarchy. If we have anarchy in the family now, we will soon have anarchy in the nation, and then we will see the death of American society. Mankind cannot function apart from the principle of authority and submission. It's not a matter of who's better---it's just that God made it that way to preserve society.

e. In the church

We also have to have authority and submission in the church. Men are to preach in the church. Why? Because that is how God designed it. In 1 Timothy 2:11, Paul says this in reference to when the church comes together: *"Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection."* There is no allowance in the Bible for women preachers. Further, in verse 12 Paul says, *"But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence."* That is the standard for the church. Now does that mean women are inferior? Of course not! The Old Testament as well as the New shows us many examples of godly women. Women have touched the globe in a way that men never could, framing and forming society. But there has to be some order in the church, so God has designed men to be the strength, the force, and the leadership of the church.

In 1 Timothy 2:13-14 Paul tells us that the submissive role of women is designed by the order of the creation, *"For Adam was first formed, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression."* However, Paul gives a beautiful balance in verse 15: *"Notwithstanding she shall be saved in childbearing."* The woman needs to submit to the leadership of the man in the family and church, but she doesn't have a second-class role. She is able to bear, nurse, love, and influence children in a way that a father never can.

So, while there is equality, mutuality, and a beautiful balance in the family, there is still authority and submission. We're going to see as we go through this passage (5:22-6:4) that we are *all* to submit; yet that in no way negates the fact that God has also designed a tremendous authority-submission principle to function in the family.

Today's Marriages and Their Effect on the Next Generation

I'm concerned about today's marriages. Each year several million couples pledge themselves in marriage, vowing to love each other for better or for worse. But many of those marriages will end in divorce. That contributes to the problem of unwanted children. There are as many abortions by married women as non-married. Couples often don't want children. One-third of all couples in their child-bearing years have been sterilized. Why? Because children interfere with divorce. If you don't have children, you can leave easier. Children get in the way. We have a generation of children growing up in families that are in chaos. Many children are saying to themselves, *The last thing I want to do is get married. I don't want to repeat this mess.* They've lived in chaotic and totally unfulfilled families, so they don't want anything to do with marriage. But they want to fulfill their sex drives, so they go from person to person with no commitment. The next generation may never get married.

Even marriages that do hang together are often characterized by adultery, unfaithfulness, lying, cheating, loss of respect, loss of trust, pride, self-centeredness, materialism, laziness, and loneliness. Our nation is a mess, but the sad thing is that those characteristics have crept into the church. Believers are having marital problems, too. The answer is not more counselors, more marriage seminars, or more books on marriage; the answer is in Ephesians 5:18: *"Be filled with the Spirit."* When that is accomplished, God Himself will produce the virtues that make for a meaningful marriage. People are good at patching up symptoms but not so good at dealing with reality. What we need to do is back up and look at God's principles.

The Condition of Marriage in Paul's Day

When Paul began to preach about the divine standards for marriage, the situation was much the same as it is today.

1. The Jews

The Jews had developed a low view of women. To them, women were servants. In fact, when a Jewish man would get up in the morning, he would pray, "God, I thank you that I'm not a Gentile, a slave, or a woman. Amen." In Deuteronomy 24:1 Moses says that if a husband found uncleanness in his wife, he could divorce her. Some rabbis interpreted "uncleanness" as adultery and said that was the only grounds for divorce. But others said that "uncleanness" could be anything from spoiling the dinner to not being as pretty as another woman. Basically the two views among the rabbis about the proper grounds for divorce were: (1) adultery only; and (2) for any reason at all. When those two choices were offered to the people, which do you think they accepted? By the time of Jesus and Paul, the Jews were divorcing their wives on whim.

2. The Greeks

The Greeks were worse than the Jews. In the Greek world, there wasn't a legal procedure for divorce, because it wasn't necessary. Wives only cleaned the house and had legitimate children. Demosthenes, an Athenian orator and statesman, said, "we have courtesans for the sake of pleasure; we have concubines for the sake of daily cohabitation; and we have wives for the purpose of having children legitimately and being faithful guardians for our household affairs." Because Greek men found their pleasures outside of marriage, fornication and prostitution were rampant. And according to historians, Athenian society was also dominated by homosexuality, lesbianism, and pedophilia (the sexual abuse of children).

3. The Romans

The Romans were even worse than Greeks. Divorce was not the exception but the norm. Jerome, an ancient writer, tells of one Roman woman who married her twenty-third husband---and she was his twenty-first wife! Marriage in Rome became nothing more than legalized prostitution. In other words, you could get married when you found someone you wanted, stay until you got tired of her, dump her, and then marry someone else. Rome also had a rampant women's liberation movement. Women didn't want to have children because they thought it hurt their looks. Women wanted to do everything men did, so there were women wrestlers and women fencers. According to Juvenal, the first- and second-century Roman satirical poet, women joined in men's hunts "with spear in hand and breast exposed, and took to pig-sticking." Then he went on to write, "What modesty can you expect in a woman who wears a helmet, abjures her own sex, and delights in the feats of strength?" (*Satires* 1.22-23, 61-62, 6.246-64).

That was the condition of marriage when Paul wrote: "*Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church*" (Eph. 5:22, 25). He was not saying, "Now, I just want to remind you of what you already know." He was calling them a new standard of living. He was telling them to live in a way they knew nothing about.

The Song of Solomon: A Look at God-Designed Marriage

While authority and submission is to exist in the home, our relationships should be bathed in love so that they melt together with mutual love and respect. This is illustrated in the Song of Solomon, where we will see a beautiful picture of a right marriage relationship. It is a beautiful example of how leadership is to work.

1. The perspective

In 2:13-15, the Shulamite woman acknowledges her husband as the head of the home. She saw him as her protector (v. 3), her provider (v. 4), her sustainer (v. 5), her security (v. 6), and her leader and initiator (v. 10-15). There is no oppression or dictatorial spirit in this passage. She desired his leadership, and he took the role that God had given him. Now, even though authority and submission are present, verse 10 describes a beautiful mutuality: "*My beloved is mine, and I am his*" (cf. 7:10).

2. The portrait

In 5:10-16, we see a marvelous portrait of the Shulamite woman's husband through her eyes of love. She saw him as handsome (v. 10) and bronzed (v. 11), with soft, tender, misty eyes (v. 12). There was color in his cheeks (v. 13), his lips were fragrant (v. 13), his hands were bronzed (v. 14), and his stomach and legs were muscular and strong (vv. 14-15). She saw him as a strong, handsome,

rugged character. In verse 16, when he opens his mouth, he isn't crass or rude. Then at the end of verse 16 she says, *"This is my beloved, and this is my friend."* She didn't see him as a dictator; she saw him a beloved friend. The mutuality and the spirit of love fits beautifully with authority and submission when love bathes the relationship.

3. The problem

Now you may say, "If my husband or wife was like that, we'd never have a problem." But in chapter 5, we find that this couple did have a problem---the wife would not submit to her husband. In verse 1 the husband comes home late at night, after his wife is already in bed. He was full of love for her, and he knocked on the door, asking that she let him in (v. 2). Her response to him, however, was basically, "Don't bother me now; I'm asleep. I'm not interested" (v. 3). But when she heard his hand on the door, love welled up in her heart, and she felt sorry for her lack of submissiveness (v. 4). So, she got up, put her robe on, and opened the door (v. 5). Unfortunately, it was too late---he had already gone (v. 6). Note that he was submissive to her, in that he didn't force himself on her. She panicked and ran all over the city trying to find him (vv. 6-9; 6:1). Finally, she decided he was in the garden (v. 2) and found him there (v. 4). When she found him, he didn't say, "Where have you been? Why didn't you let me in?" Instead, he said some of the same things he had said to her on their wedding night (vv. 5-7; cf. 4:1-3). In confirming his love for her, he told her that even though she had rejected him, he still loved her as much as he did the night he married her. The problem was solved, and they had a wonderful time renewing their relationship (chap. 7).

The Bible has two important things to say about having a meaningful relationship: (1) we are all to mutually submit to each other; and (2) functionally, we must have authority and submission. When we learn the meaning of those two dimensions of truth, our families will be what God wants them to be.

Focusing on the Facts

1. What are some of the things that are contributing to the death of marriage and the family?
2. Although the divine pattern should be evident to the world as it looks at Christian marriages and families, why isn't it?
3. What is the basic building block of human society? What happens when the building block is weakened? Why?
4. What is required before a person can make his marriage and family what God intends them to be? Explain.

5. How can believers be empowered to have meaningful and fulfilled marriages and families?
6. Why do conflicts arise in the church? For what position does Spirit-filled person fight?
7. Identify and explain the supreme example of submission (Phi. 2:4-8)?
8. Although there must be a balance of authority and submission in a society, what type of submission was Paul referring to in Ephesians 5:21?
9. How are husbands supposed to submit to their wives? In what sense are parents to submit to their children?
10. Even though all believers are of equivalent worth in the sight of God (Gal. 3:28), what must be present in terms of function?
11. Explain how God can be the head of Christ when Christ is the same as the Father in essence and nature (1 Cor. 11:3)?
12. How is the principle of authority and submission supposed to operate in a marriage? What general qualities designed by God does each partner contribute?
13. Although a government may not be godly, why does the New Testament instruct Christians to submit to the government in general?
14. Without the principle of authority and submission in operation, to what will a society degenerate?
15. How is the dissolution of the family related to the dissolution of a nation?
16. What two events confirm the submissive role of women in the church (1 Tim. 2:13-14)?
17. Explain why a woman doesn't have a second-class role in the family and the church.
18. Why is there concern about the state of marriages today?
19. What is the answer to marital problems that Christians are having?
20. Describe the condition of marriage among the Jews, Greeks, and Romans in Paul's day.
21. How did the Shulamite women acknowledge her husband in Song of Solomon? How did he demonstrate his submissiveness to her?

Pondering the Principles

1. To whom are believers called to submit in Ephesians 5:21, Hebrews 13:17, and 1 Peter 2:13? Are you submissive in each of those areas? In which area are you least submissive? Why? What steps do you need to take to help you become more submissive? Meditate on Philippians 2:3-8.

2. Some couples choose not to have children so they can remain independent and avoid the responsibility of raising children. They see children as a financial burden rather than a rewarding investment that yields present dividends of joy and personal growth. Read Psalm 127:3-5. If you have children, how are you treating your "gifts" from the Lord (v. 3a)? Do you acknowledge them as rewards that must be treasured (v. 3b)? Do you benefit from their usefulness (v. 4)? How have your children blessed you? Have you told them how thankful you are that God has given them to you? Take every opportunity to allow the children of unsaved neighbors to interact with your household. Let them see the harmony that is nurtured in a family committed to biblical principles.

Available online at: <http://www.gty.org>

COPYRIGHT (C) 2015 Grace to You

You may reproduce this Grace to You content for non-commercial purposes in accordance with Grace to You's Copyright Policy (<http://www.gty.org/connect/copyright>).