

The Chapel Ministry



CLEARCREEK
CHAPEL

Family Enrichment 2001

Pastor Russ

Savoring the Supremacy of God
Studying the Word of God
Shaping the People of God
Spreading the Gospel of God

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Introduction

Who is setting the agenda for your home? I was struck in reading Paul Tripp's *War of Words* this week about the home. Are our homes governed by God's mission and methods?

At first, we hear that question in terms of the instruction and discipline of our homes. Its as though that question really were, "Are we rearing our children God's way?" or "Are we being God's kind of partners or parents?" Now these are important considerations. We do need to interact with one another in ways that please God. We need to obey the Scriptures in how we rear our children. Young people, you need to so honor and obey your parents that you please and obey God. We all know this.

Yet, I find that even here, where we have taught and encouraged and held you accountable, there are problems with our communication, our child-rearing, our responses to parents, our handling of finances and stewardship that simply ought not to be there. Why is this so?

I want you to imagine a house with a basement. The basement is a part of the foundation. It is usually underground (or partially so) and unseen. The rest of the house sits on top of the basement. It is what is visible and gets the most attention. How you behave, the do's and don'ts of your striving to please and obey God is the main floor of Christian living in the home and in the world. It is the visible stuff that gets the attention. Underneath is the heart, which is like the basement. It is foundational to the rest. And we have emphasized this year the importance of real heart change (basement level stuff) that issues in real transformation in life (main level stuff).

I have come to believe that a great deal of our thinking about Christian living in the home has become a matter of painting, re-siding, arranging the furniture and cleaning windows type stuff. It is the main level change. And we adopt those changes because they are evident in the indicatives and imperatives and illustrations of the Scripture. But below this is another basement level idea that we are not getting. And because we don't get this, we are struggling with the indicatives, imperatives and illustrations.

In other words, there are basement truth levels on which Christian living are built. We don't see these partially because we are not taught them and we do not recognize them for what they are. I aim over these next three weeks to expose what I have come to believe are three basement level, foundation truths on which all Christian living is based, particularly in the home.

I want to consider:

- Christ, the family's treasure of wisdom
- Cross, the family's pattern of self-denial
- Community, the family's basis for relationships.

Understanding these three things will shape of God's agenda for your home. Let me illustrate.

Most of us believe that our homes ought to be a place of retreat and rest. Our Christian how-to books reinforce this and make it an important goal for a Christian wife. She should strive to make her home into a place where her husband and her children can have a sense of calm, refreshing security. (Now frankly, even though we believe that, a lot of our homes aren't like that at all). Now this is a good thing. It is good when our homes are places of calm and rest and secu-

rity. But, this can easily become an idol to me. I can want that so bad that I will sin when it isn't that way. For example, I hate the telephone. The telephone is one of the great helps in ministry and great invaders of my home. I sometimes get in the evenings (just ask my girls if this is not so) to where I loathe to hear the phone ring. This is my place of retreat and rest and I don't want the phone to bother me. At those moments, I am not being shaped by God's agenda. You see, God allows my home to be a place of retreat and rest, but He has designed and determined that my home will be an outpost of the Kingdom of God. That often puts our home on the frontlines of God's rule and reign in the hearts of people.

So as we go through the next three messages, I admonish you to think about how these three central truths are the foundations for God's mission and methods of Christian living. It will be helpful to think of these in three questions:

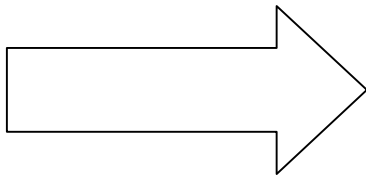
- Do I so treasure Christ that His wisdom and agenda control every aspect of my life?
- Does the call of the cross to self-denial motivate me to self-sacrificial deeds of love?
- Does the fact of being in the community of believers affect all of my relationships?

My prayer and aim is that these three messages will transform the way you think about your life as a Christian, helping you to live authentic Biblically Christian lives in your homes.

Christ: The Family's Treasure of Wisdom

Colossians 1:28-2:5

Introduction



In this text, Paul stresses the centrality of Christ, not only for his ministry, but for all of life.

I come to this message very carefully this morning. One of my great concerns in Biblical Counseling is a tendency that we have observed to take texts with one purpose and intention and bend it to another purpose. As we read through and study Colossians 1:18-2:5, I will come back again and again to Paul's intention. Paul's aim and theme is to stress the importance of a Christ-centered ministry by pointing to the how's and what's of his own ministry. So, at the primary level this text is talking about the ministry of the Word to a community of believers and to the larger Kingdom of God.

But I want you to understand something that is foundational to our teaching during this Family Enrichment. In the New Testament, the church as a gathered community of Christians is assumed to be the primary context or sphere of all of Christian living. In other words, if you draw a larger circle labeled the community of the church, all the rest of the life of a believer exists with that sphere. This is critical to the selection of elders. To be an elder, a man must govern his household well. I have come to believe that it is not merely that the household is the training and proving ground – it is that. But that the household exists within the community of the church and leadership in the church is an extension of leadership in the home.

So, let's think about Christ, our families' treasure of wisdom.

The Powerful Communication of It

(1:28-29)

Paul first stresses the importance of being Christ-centered by indicating how hard he worked in ministry. Just as a truly Biblically authentic ministry cannot exist without hard work (K. Hughes) neither can a truly Biblically authentic home.

How We Go About It

(v.28a)

First and foremost, ministry in the home and the church is a ministry of communication. It is the hard work of making Christ known. So the center of our communication is Christ. Paul constantly proclaimed Christ to his congregations. Beyond anything, he wanted people to

come to Christ – not just for salvation, but also for every aspect of their lives. This ought to be so in our families as well. We should take every opportunity God's providence brings us to point our spouses and our children and our extended families to Christ.

But how do we go about bringing our families to Christ in their salvation and sanctification?

- *BY ADMONISHING THEM.* To admonish in the Scriptures is to bring truth to bear on the person in such a way that they begin to change. This involves confrontation, communication and change. Admonition is never passive, but rather is always active. So many families fail because there is no admonition in them. Parents wait too long to begin confronting, correcting and chastening. They allow their children and their young people to develop deeply ingrained sinful habits. And sometimes this is true with spouses as well. Husbands allow wives to go on sinning without loving confrontation because they want peace at home. Wives find their own admonition undercut either by the constant slow drip of griping and complaining and nagging or by the lack of a meek and quiet spirit out of which to admonish.
- *BY TEACHING THEM.* There must be a constant emphasis in our families on teaching and learning. It means that it is the primary responsibility of the home to teach and instruct children. We may delegate it at times to others. But we will stand before God as to what we taught our spouses and our children. Did we help learn their native language as well as their capacity allowed so they could read and communicate well? Did we teach them the importance of thinking and analyzing and being discerning? Did we teach them to learn by rote, giving them the basic tools and categories to understand God's Word later? Did we teach them God's Word? Further, do we teach them the basic wisdom and common sense of knowledge that begins with the fear of the Lord? How many of our young people are simply unprepared for life or marriage because parents left it up to someone else to teach them.

So our homes, just like our churches, are to be places where we work hard at instruction and admonition.

What We Aim At

(v.28b)

There can be no higher aim for our churches and families than that everyone be brought to being complete in Christ, to a full maturity in Christ. In other words, you do all you can in your family so that your spouse and children become as Christ-like as possible, understanding what it means to be in Christ.

What are your aims for your spouse and children? Let's think about that for a moment. Our tendency will be to establish goals and aims for our children that will reflect our own heart loves and pursuits. The problem comes when those heart loves and pursuits *are not Christ-centered*. If you prize sports, then you will have some kind of sports orientation with your kids or frustration when it is not realized. If you prize material things and money, then you will give your children way too much and will train their hearts to prize things. If you prize your ease and comfort, then you will teach your children to dislike hard work and will set goals and aims for them accordingly. If you are seeking God's Kingdom first as a matter of your heart, then you are going to prize that for your children as well. If you value pleasing God above all things, then you will aim your children towards the high mark of pleasing God in all things.

Who We Rely On

(v.29)

This requires a commitment on our part. We must be committed to the hard labor this involves. Paul says that he labored with real toil and struggle. The word here refers to work which left one so weary it was as if the person had taken a beating. We even can say, "Boy, I am just beat." So Paul wore himself out in the hard work of proclaiming and teaching and admonishing.

Yet it is not pure self-effort. He worked hard because he relied on and knew for certain that God was at work in him. Because he was going about work God was committed to, he was confident of the resources, spiritually and physically, to do that work. It has been one of the most amazing revelations to me that when I am most weak and most unable and therefore most dependent upon God, that He moves within me in His mighty power to accomplish His work the most. This means that we must be very careful about allowing physical difficulty (sickness, weakness or handicaps) to deter us from God's work.

We can work hard with diligent labor to bring our families to spiritual maturity because we depend on the enabling power of God, His grace. So we work hard because God is at work in us. Do your efforts to bring yourself and each other to full maturity in Christ look like God-relying hard work, especially in teaching and admonishing?

The Personal Investment in It

(2:1-3)

The next paragraph highlights the importance of being Christ-centered by relating his personal investment in it. Quite simply Paul has invested himself deeply in them to help them to value Christ as a matchless treasure.

In a Sacrificial Struggle

(v.1)

Paul's personal struggle involves a sacrificial struggle. Here we see the *intensity* of Paul's concern for them. Paul agonized over them using a word to portray his struggle that was used to describe the place and the efforts of an Olympic athlete. Think of a Triathlon. Here is one of the severest tests of human endurance and physical stamina. At the end, even the best exhibit in their strides the horrible agony of a deep inner and physical struggle. We know that this person has a huge personal investment in training and toil, in preparation and participation. The price is prohibitive. The effort is extraordinary. The reward is rich.

Paul has poured out this investment *in people he does not even know personally*. The statement he makes here, other internal evidence of the book and the external evidence from history indicates that Paul, at the time of writing the letter to the Colossians, had never been there and knew of them primarily through the men who messengered back and forth.

If this sacrificial struggle can be invested in the life of men and women, boys and girls that Paul does not even know personally, then how much more ought to be invested in a sacrificial struggle for our families? Now hear me. I am not talking about an effort of time and trouble that takes you away from ministry. I am talking about turning your whole life investment in family and pouring it out in the context of ministry. Yet too often, we can barely be bothered. Our work is too important. Our homes are too important. Our stuff is too important. So we teach our children that church is something you go to but don't get too involved in. We teach our children that it is not important to give cause they never see us give, nor give sacrificially. We teach our children that Sunday Bible School is not as important as sleep. We teach our children that flock (SALT) is not important because we don't go or don't require them to go. We teach our children that Sunday Evening *Closer Walk Service* is not significant in a closer walk with God or with one another.

Beyond that, there is no sacrificial struggle in family worship (I am painfully aware of how difficult it is to get up myself in time to be ready to get the family together at 6:00 AM). Our kids see us indulging ourselves financially instead of investing ourselves for the Kingdom. We don't teach, train, talk or discipline. There is little toil. The price is too prohibitive. The effort required too extraordinary. The reward is too little esteemed.

In a Spiritual Maturity

(v.2a)

Why is this so? Because we little value the spiritual maturity described in verse 2a. Look at what Paul is agonizing over.

Paul is agonizing over being encouraged in heart. Heart encouragement comes when there is a sense of hope. Our spouses and children and families ought to have hope even in the most difficult of problems and troubles. This comes by believing and teaching and living in a way that affirms that our good, wise and sovereign God is in control. So we point them to Christ, to His help and solutions from which true heart encouragement and hope come.

That hope and encouragement arises from hearts unified in love and minds enriched by an assurance in understanding. In other words, Paul is investing his life to give hope through love and faith. Here is the great trinity of core Christian experience: faith, hope and love. This then results in really knowing Jesus by knowing the unique New Covenant truths about the Messiah.

In a Christ-Centered Focus

(v.2b-3)

What does a Biblically authentic spiritual home centered around? It is centered on Christ, not just in theory – but by treasuring Christ through truth.

KNOWING CHRIST PERSONALLY. This is where the economy of words in the Bible can be difficult. The essence of Christian living is being united with, placed into, believing and obeying and communing with Jesus. The New Testament describes Christ Jesus in this way. Jesus is the incarnate Son of God who was crucified for sin and raised for justification and rules for His people. Christ is the mystery of the Messiah being both a Person and a People. So Jesus Christ is Jesus Himself *and* His people seen as united with and in Him. So there is a real union that does not confuse the identities, like there is a real union of man and wife that is a one flesh without merging them. So we struggle with all our might to see our families brought to know what union and communion with Christ is, both propositionally and personally. I am working to help my family know about Jesus Christ, and know Him personally.

TREASURING CHRIST FULLY. This prepositional phrase frames two great transforming truths.

OR ---

The wisdom for life and living in the Christian home are hidden in Christ.

➤ Describe the Wisdom

➤ Illustrate

➤ All wisdom and knowledge are hidden in Christ. There are many ways to understand this. Proverbs can personify wisdom that clearly points to Christ. In John, Jesus is the very Logos of God. In Corinthians, Jesus is to us our wisdom. I believe that all of the great mysteries in the universe are rooted either in the Trinity or the Incarnation. The relationship of the persons in the Godhead as a Tri-Unity and the union of the Divine and human in the incarnation are the truths on which all reality is built. For example, light is both a wave and a particle. But it is never observed as both at the same time. It is a dual nature united in a single entity without

confusing or confounding the unique properties of each. Light is what it is because of the principles of wisdom that lie in the incarnation.

- All the wisdom and knowledge hidden in Christ are treasures. The idea here is not that they are themselves the valuable jewels buried in a rather common chest. It is the fact that they are hidden in Jesus Christ that makes them treasures. And they will only be treasured to the degree to which we value Christ.

This is powerful for our families. I am not just teaching my family facts. My children are not to learn the amazing wonders of the world as *isolated from Jesus* truths. We are not admonishing you and teaching you principles for Christian living that are separate from Christ. In fact, when you separate principles and practices and techniques from Christ, you turn living letters into deadening law.

At about this point, many of you are itching for me to give you a set of practical instructions on how you can implement this. I am not going to do that other than to say to you – to parents and young people. Do you treasure and value Christ? If so, will you seek in Him and from all the knowledge and wisdom you need for faith to work by love with hope?

Now, let me put this another way. I know that to many of you, what I have just been saying has not been clear. The issue comes down to who will you treasure, who will you serve, who will you love? Listen once again to Paul Tripp (*War of Words*, p. 61)

Romans 1 brings this issue to clearer focus for us: "They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator – who is forever praised. Amen" The operative word of this passage is *exchanged*. This is fundamentally what sin is all about. In the heart of every sinner is a tendency to exchange worship and service of the Creator for worship and service of the created thing. All human beings are worshippers: the issue is only what or whom we worship. Idolatry gives the worship that belongs to God to some aspect of His creation. It might be craving for human love, respect, appreciation, or applause. It may be a certain person, position, economic state, or living situation. There is no end to the created things that can replace God as the object of our worship.

There is a constant migration in the heart of every sinner away from the worship and service of God toward the worship and service of [something or someone else]. It can be a lifelong migration – that is, a theme of heart idolatry can characterize a person's whole life – or it can be more spontaneous and short-term.

The constant pull of our hearts and push of the world is to love, esteem, serve – to worship self or someone or something more than we

treasure Christ. So we will deeply invest our lives in the hard work of helping our families to be centered on Christ – to love God more than all other loves.

The Practical Results from It

(v.4-5)

What are the practical results of Paul's great efforts in the lives of these Christians? And thus, what can we expect in our own families as well?

A Fortified Mind

The dangers facing our families – our parents and our children – are lurking everywhere. We are more universally subject to carefully crafted and deceptively argued error than at any time in human history. You will hear in one day more lies from radio, TV, books, music and friends (and even some pulpits) than Christians would hear in a lifetime.

So we must bring our families to so think on and to so treasure Christ that their minds are protected from and fortified against the deceptive delusions of error and sin. We cannot do this by just teaching them a few regulations to live by, a few principles for Christian living in the home, 4 rules for communication, simple tips for practical holiness. We must work hard in our teaching and admonition to bring them to know Christ – to know Him in such a way that the idols of our hearts and the delusions of our world and even the distracting good things of our age are seen as passing pleasures and lesser loves because we desire Jesus above all.

So I want my wife to learn to think clearly with the Word and love Christ deeply. I want my children to have sharp discernment and careful minds and Christ-filled affections.

An Orderly Discipline

Paul expects a fortified mind and he rejoices in their orderly battle lines. This is what is meant by their good discipline. The word here was used to describe the unbending and resolute lines held by the Roman soldiers. They would form up in a line with shields interlocking. They would stand unwavering and unyielding against wave upon wave of enemy soldiers. This standing firm was described as a good discipline.

O that we might rejoice when we see our families standing firm against the deceptive and destructive and deluding attacks of sin and Satan. There is no greater joy than to see a spouse or a son or daughter love Christ from the heart and turn away from sin for sake their heavenly reward, communion with God.

A Steady Faith

Finally Paul rejoices in the stability of their faith. Now in this day of faith this and faith that and faith in faith, it is the stability of an *in Christ* kind of faith that brings delight to Paul.

Thus, families will learn to treasure Christ *in the midst of battle*. We need this word. We are so prone to look for the easy way out. Your Biblically authentic Christian living in the home will be hard work and a deeply committed and painstaking investment over against the relentless assaults and subtle deceptions and ruining temptations that will distract and disable your faith in Christ.

So what I say to you this morning is glorious. It is a high and holy task that quickens the heart. But what I say to you this morning is also hard and difficult. And whether or not we pursue this is a measure how much we prize Christ.

Conclusion

So I want to call you to love for Christ. May you treasure Him, His salvation, His wisdom and knowing Him above all things. May you pour out your life for the sake of your family to shine the spotlight of your own faith and faithfulness to illuminate our Savior and our Sovereign.

Commit yourself this morning to whatever new strategies and efforts and changes are required.

As one has written: (K. Hughes, *Colossians*, p.57)

*Thou O Christ, art all I want;
More than all in Thee I find.*

Let us journey toward the Son,
until He fills the whole sky.

Cross: the Family's Pattern of Self Denial

Philippians 1:27-2:11

Introduction

Pigtails bobbing, that sweet child tears into the kitchen, “Mommy, mommy, sissy wont’ give me my...”

Hands on hips, that delightful son grits out, “I don’t know what makes you think you can invade my space...”

The joy of your life stares steely eyes down your throat, “You never want what I want so I’ll do it anyway...”

“Why do I have to...” as the garbage can gleefully tips over, scattering and splashing over concrete frozenness...

From the dark drip of a dungeon, these words are scratched out, “For me to live is Christ, to die is gain.”

Do you ever wonder about the gap between the realities of your daily living in the home and the high aspirations of the Scripture? I am coming more and more as I examine my own life and living that what appears to be a great gap on the outside is nothing but enormous distance in the heart. The reason my jaw locks just at the thought of taking out the garbage is deeply rooted in heart pride and a lack of serving humility. So the exterior grumbling and slamming the cans around is evidence that my heart does not sufficiently prize Christ. If I cannot humbly serve my family by taking out the garbage, how will dying be gain (other than I don’t have to do it anymore)?

I bring you, loved ones, to this text in Philippians once again. Just as we are in desperate need of treasuring Christ as our all-sufficient wisdom, we need to come to the cross, and in taking it up daily as humble followers of Jesus find in it *the family's pattern of self denial*.

Perspective – The Context of our Lives (1:27-30)

What Paul writes is deeply shaped by Philippians 1:20-21. *He expected that always Christ would be exalted in his body, whether by life or by death because to live is Christ and to die is gain.* Christ is best exalted when God's people so trust and treasure Christ that dying is viewed as a great gain. It is so simple declare, and so incredibly distant from us: *dying is gain when living is Christ.*

The Exhortation to a Worthy Life (v.27-28)

The church is being exhorted to live a life that is worthy of the gospel. The way we live is to be measured by the gospel, by how it corresponds to death and resurrection. Live in such a way the worth and value of sacrificially serving others for the sake of Christ is clearly exhibited. That worthy living is fleshed out in a deep commitment to unity (v.27) and to courage (v.28). The church's commitment is to unity in the primary purposes of ministry: standing firm as a people and striving together for the faith. So worthy gospel living is the church unified in its standing and striving.

That unity will be challenged by the opposition of the world. There will be opponents who will make their aim, either by overt attacks from the outside or by insidious erosion from the inside, to divide and fragment and destroy the unity of a church and thus their effectiveness in ministry.

What is called for here in the church ought to be true in the home. There must be a sense that Christian living in the home is also measured by the gospel, by dying to self and living for others. There must be unity in the essential purposes of the home. The most important purpose of the home is to be a living illustration of the relationship between God and His people. The love and sacrifice and submission of spouse, the teaching and training and chastening of sons and daughters and their honoring and obeying all show Christ and the church to the world.

As a result, there will be opposition. Our culture is particularly opposed to Christians who will live Biblically. What is particularly distressing is churches and religious groups who will also be opposed to the kind of Christian living in the home this text points us to. My beloved, we must not be alarmed or overcome or swayed. Hold fast and be faithful – it eventually witnesses to the approval of God and His sure judgment on them.

The Explanation of the Divine Grant (v.29-30)

Now it is quite evident that this kind of committed and sacrificial living *that is overtly Christ and cross centered* will entail suffering. The sacrifice itself may well involve suffering. Further, it may eventually entail the suffering of persecution and real physical pain.

Paul wants us to have a fundamental perspective on our life here as believers. For Christ's sake, for His glory and honor, God has granted to us our salvation and our suffering. They are inseparable. God's grace has given us the ability to believe. That same grace gives us suffering. This is why when you are leading a person to Christ, you must bring them, not only to the cross of Jesus, but their own. If you would come to Jesus, you have to take up the cross and follow Him. That is why I can stand here (with fear and trembling for my own life and home) and tell you that if you are a true believer, suffering will come.

Any philosophy of Christian living that is not shaped by or denies verse 29 is simply heretical. Without going on a major diatribe, let me say once again that the health and wealth foolishness being preached and taught all around us is profoundly un-Biblical. Further, we live in a cultural, religious atmosphere of self-actualization and self-fulfillment. My beloved, God did not save me for self-actualization and self-fulfillment but for self-denial and self-discipline for the sake of others.

So we must have a profound transformation in the way we think. For Christ's sake my gift from God is the grace of salvation and suffering.

Problem – The Challenge in our Relationships (v.1-4)

The challenge to this is quite simply, *conflict*. Conflict is both pervasive and personal. Paul points in 1:30 to conflict that both he and the church were experiencing.

Conflict is one of the great challenges to peace and harmony in the home and in the church. Sometimes our homes are filled with a sort-of low level conflict that creates tension and trouble. Conflict becomes so normal that we don't even recognize it anymore. Small words and little actions that promote our interests and protect ourselves are said and done and accepted as the way it is. Eventually, this kind of conflict, as does more open warfare, erodes the joy and peace of our homes (and churches).

What strikes me here is that this conflict is not to be seen as a part of the suffering that we have been granted by God. Internal conflict among members of a family or among the members of the church is seen as a product *of our unwillingness to suffer*. So you need to listen carefully. It is very easy to see ourselves as the wounded, affronted, suffering party in the midst of conflict. When we think like

this, we are not thinking like Christ and the conflict that ensues is not the sacrifice of the cross but is in service to self.

To the Pursuit of Joy

(v.1-2)

The "if" here has the "since" sense. Since these things are so, then do that. These principles or truths are specifically related to the affections and actions Paul is appealing for. Paul's tone is a "There is ... isn't there?" So let me frame these as questions for our Christian living in the home.

Do I have to show and prove that there is encouragement by being a Christian (this is generally what Paul means by being 'in Christ')? Do I have to argue with you that love comforts, that we are to have a spirit of cooperation? Does not the whole intersection of God's love and our lost condition mean that we choose and are spontaneously and deeply affected by the needs of others? Beloved, is it significant for our churches and homes that there is affection and compassion and tenderness in Christ?

So if being a Christian means there is encouragement, spiritual fellowship and cooperation through shared oneness, a comforting love with deep affections and tender compassion, does this show in your home?

Look at how this sentence is put together; "Since... then *make my joy full* (complete) by..." The appeal is to believe certain things that cause us to do certain things because of the joy it brings to others. Now don't miss this. Joy is at the heart of holiness. Joy is at the heart of harmony. Joy for others, ourselves and joy in God is the Bible motivation for delight in our duty. Paul's pursuit of his own joy motivates him to appeal for harmony and unity among others. How is this so? How can this pursuit of my joy not simply be a self-serving pursuit? Because this pursuit of our joy in God and in others is faith working by love.

This is wonderfully easy to illustrate. When you and your spouse have an argument or a fight; when your children are demanding what they want NOW; when you have a young person who is rebellious and disobedient; when everyone is looking out for old number one in the home do you have joy in that? Is unity and harmony without joyous love honoring to God? No! Biblically authentic Christian living has as its fulfillment and completion, joy. A truly God-honoring life comes because we desire and pursue our joy in God in the joy of others and we value and treasure that so much that we will take up our cross and deny-self.

Beloved, listen. There is a way to do our duty that is just doing the duty of it. It's like clearing the table or cleaning our room *just because we have been told to*. Then there is a doing of our duty when we have

no delight in it ourselves but for the joy it will bring God or others (parents); "I don't like cleaning my room, but it will bring joy to Mom and Dad." Then there is a doing of our duty that takes joy in the joy of God and others (parents); "I don't like to clear the table, but I will because I can't wait to see Mom and Dad's joy." Finally, there is a joyful doing of our duty because we are habitually and seriously pursuing the joy of God and others; "I love to take out the trash because God is delighted with this kind of obedience and it brings so much joy to Mom and Dad." So parents, wouldn't it bring you joy to see your children doing their duty joyfully for the sake of joy in God and others? This is the large aim of Paul's appeal and, I believe, the large aim of life: to magnify and glorify God by pursuing my joy in Him and others through faith working by love.

Authentic Christian living *in this way* cannot be dictated or legislated, but emerges from a heart shaped by this text. Begins in our homes with thinking together and thinking alike in harmony with the Word. It cultivates *AFFECTIONS* for others that yield *ACTS* of giving ourselves. It embraces a common perspective on life, our *ATTITUDE*. And its highly focused and intently pursuing a shared *AIM* in life.

So, is this what your home (and our church as well) looks like? Because there is Christian encouragement, loving comfort, spiritual fellowship, deep affections and compassion, you pursue your joy in a harmony of mind, love, attitude and purpose.

To the Promotion of Others

(v.3-4)

What stands in the way of all this? *SELF*. The massive imperative here is to "Do nothing selfishly."

First, in the way *WE THINK ABOUT OURSELVES*. Much of the sin I think and do comes because of the self I seek and serve. I esteem self in a high regard of myself and am looking out for me and my interests. The joy I ought to be pursuing in God and others is replaced and destroyed by seeking pleasure (instead of joy) for myself. This is where the modern self-esteem movement has undermined the foundations of Biblically authentic Christian living. Both self-love and self-loathing are still focused on *SELF*. Doesn't much of the difficulty and division in our homes come simply because each person is self-centered to some degree and is pursuing or protecting their own interests?

But what about when a selfish motive is involved in a good thing? Does this mean that if I am getting ready to do something good and I detect selfish motives that I stop doing what I am doing? If I detect that I do not have a joyful heart at the offering do I stop giving? Is the wrong motivation a reason to halt a right action? Never. I must choose to have a right heart and a right motivation. I must repent of my

wrongful attitude, speak truth to myself and look outward to please God and others in this action.

Second, in the way *WE THINK ABOUT OTHERS*. Do you think of other people in your family at home and at church as being more important than yourself? It is utterly critical to Christian living that we pursue joy in the esteeming and valuing and treasuring of others. We must humble ourselves by holding others up. This is affirmed by 1 Corinthians 10:24, "Let no one seek his own good, but that of his neighbor" and Romans 12:10, "Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor."

Notice that both of these are *the way we think*. This is why Paul says, "With humility of mind." Here is what I find to be true in my own sinful heart and I suspect is generally true. We have a way of thinking that constantly sees ourselves at the center of things. Our minds are self-focused so we jostle for every little advantage, look for the most comfortable seats, wish the heat were higher or lower (after all, when was the last time you thought to yourself, "boy, it is just right!") the music a little louder or quieter, our neighbor a little quieter, the pastor a little simpler or deeper, and so on. Do you see that when we go through life weighing all our experience moment by moment as it relates to us that we are just simply self-centered? I know that if I do not deny self and value others and be serious about my joy in God that the self-focus of my thinking grows ever larger until it dominates and destroys my life.

How do Christian homes become like this? How do churches? Let me remind you in words that I have preached before (as is a lot of this message!)

- Our homes are full of disunity, strife and disharmony because this is what they were like before we became Christians. In other words, you have long practiced out sinful, self-centered affections and actions that have become deeply engrained habits of disobedience. So your home is like this because it has always (in some measure) been like this. And now, it must change.
- Our homes are full of disunity, strife and disharmony because Christian spouses have allowed small and insignificant servings of self to go unmortified. So like the frog in the kettle, the heat has slowly been rising and now we are cooked and we don't know how it happened.

Now let me once again deal with a question, a contradiction, we have dealt with in the past, but I am sure is bothering some of you. It can simply be stated like this: "Isn't pursuing my joy selfish?" On the face of it, appears that way doesn't it? How can Paul say to others to fulfill his joy and in the next breath require them to do nothing selfishly? Why isn't Paul merely being selfish when he is requiring others to be

unselfish for the sake of his joy? Let me, once again, suggest two answers.

- Since Paul (and other New Testament writers do the same – see 1 John 1) place these two next to one another, they must not actually be a contradiction. It is our own presuppositions or doctrine that causes us the problem. At the root of it is that we do not believe that we exist to glorify *AND* enjoy God. We believe that we exist to be made holy and holiness and happiness are simply not compatible. If that is so, then heaven is not a happy place because it is certainly a holy place. And God is not a happy God, because God is certainly a holy God. When we think like this, then any pursuit of my joy will be selfish. Until we have theological criteria that allow us to think of God as supremely holy and happy *in Himself*, then we will have trouble with this.
- The joy Paul is pursuing may be his own, but he is pursuing it outside of himself. His joy is, in this text at least, a joy in others. Further, it is a joy arising from their holy, selfless harmony. And finally, the sacrifice of this self-denying ministry becomes a joyously shared pursuit (v.16-18).

Well, however it happened; however our home and church families became divided and filled with disharmony, what is now needed is a solution. And the solution to sin is always to bring us to the cross. The solution to self is to bring us to Christ.

As D.A. Carson observes, “We must adopt Jesus’ death as the test of our outlook.” (*Basics for Believers*, p.64).

Pattern – The Cross in our Attitudes

(v.5-8)

Jesus’ way of thinking is placed before us as both a motivation and a model for Biblically authentic Christian living. Have Jesus’ attitude; think like Him.

I believe that preaching ought to be *expository exultation*. I love to savor God through studying His Word and being shaped by grace.

I want to savor God here. I want gaze in detailed and delighted wonder by these words at such a Savior and Sovereign, at such a God as this. I want to tremble by truth with holy affections. I want my mind challenged, my heart humbled and my life changed. I want to breathe the fragrant aroma of *His sacrifice for me* and *His supremacy for Himself*. I want by studying to look down deep into its multifaceted truths and hold up each one for careful inspection. But mostly I want to shape you by the text. I want to file away the hardness of your heart, the coldness of your affections and the dullness of your minds so that you are raw and open and sensitive to this text. I want to you

to so hunger for the joy of true Christian living that you will embrace the cross and die to self, just as Christ did, for the joy set before Him.

Then what kind of mentality or attitude or way of thinking is shown us by Christ's cross kind of death? What is the prevailing attitude of Jesus? Humility. How can we have this kind of humility? By constantly reminding ourselves of these two God-delighting truths. For the joy of God and others:

I am a Servant

(v.6-7a)

What Paul writes here is inescapable. In our Sovereignly Supreme God there reigns a servant heart. It is just like Him to take on the nature of man and the servant hood that required, the author of Hebrews wrote (Hebrews 2:9-18). This servant heart displays two chief characteristics.

WHAT IT WILL NOT GRASP. So much of the conflict and difficulty and trouble in our homes comes tightly squeezed in our hands. We are going to grasp at our rights and our recognition for all we are worth. I am convinced that often what we hold on too tightly actually has too tight a hold on us. In the language of the heart, we are hugging our heart idols and will not let them go. Even equality with God was not an idol in Jesus' heart.

WHAT IT WILL GIVE UP. How different our homes would be if we would have a sense of what is vital and what we can give up. Jesus had enormous privileges and standing in heaven. Yet He gave it up to become a man, a bond-servant.

Stop grasping at your rights and prerogatives. I value them for myself so little that I eagerly give them up. Often the pain in the family of our homes and church comes from the tight grip we have that we will not give up. Do you serve in your home? Being a God-honoring servant is a prevailing attitude to be valued and cultivated. Men are to be servant leaders; women are to be submissive servants; children obedient and parent honoring servants.

Have this attitude of Jesus: I AM A SERVANT.

I am a Sacrifice

(v.7b-8)

Look carefully at this sentence. Jesus' humiliation was wrought by an obedience all the way up death, a criminal's kind of death, the cross. For us, this going to the cross kind of sacrifice is *mortification*. It is a death to self and a death of self for the sake of others. When we come to the cross for the sake of ourselves, we will keep a hidden root of self alive to spring up later. But when we die to self *for the joy of God and the sake of others*, this is true death to self. Where do I get this? From the very nature of Jesus' death. Jesus did not die for Himself.

Christ died for God and for His people. Why then do we find it so hard to die to self for the sake of our family at home and at church?

Further, this sacrifice involved submission. It involved obedience to the point of death. Do you get this? Authentic Christian living in our homes comes when we have the kind of humility that will fight with faith for obedience even if it means death.

Have this attitude of Jesus: I AM A SACRIFICE.

Purpose – The Coronation for our Savior (v.9-11)

“For this reason God highly exalted Him...” Here is the supreme motivation, expectation and aim of authentic Christian living arising from the cross. There is in it, exaltation.

His Supreme Worth (v.9)

Now stop just a moment – we must not think like this, “If I humble myself, think of others, die to self, stop grasping and start giving then one day God will exalt me.” No, this is not what Paul is getting at here. The attitudes that lead to sacrificial honoring and pleasing others and the actions that flow from it are not designed to exalt or glorify us. They are to exalt and glorify Christ. I will recognize now in my life on earth what God has already done in heaven. For the sake of my joy in God and in others, I will be a servant and a sacrifice so that Jesus will be exalted and the fame and reputation of His Name will be upheld. I will be a servant and a sacrifice for the glad joy of exalting Christ.

Our Submissive Worship (v.10-11)

He was a servant and a sacrifice so that in the end all creation will serve and submit. This text just vibrates and pulses with what we need when serving and sacrificing is painful. Do you not think that just the simple humility that joyfully obeys and promotes others and pursues harmony will reach an amazing climax of gladness when Jesus is crowned and all around Him are perfected reflections of that multi-faceted glory?

So I have to ask: will you have Jesus' attitude of serving and sacrificial humility for the sake of the unity and harmony of your family? Will this be becoming so true in our homes that it shapes the unity and harmony of our church life together? Will you believe that this is true in an obeying way?

Or will you go from here this afternoon and tomorrow and this week will be little different? Do we so little treasure the glory of Jesus that we will seek and serve self rather than pursue our joy in Him in others?

Conclusion

Over these many years of life and ministry I have learned and tried to live by a simple statement that I believe summarizes God's word for us this morning. It is simply this, "You cannot help how people are, but you can help how you respond to how people are." God knows that there has been a lot of painful joy in having that lesson driven deep into a prideful, self-serving heart.

What is needed in our homes is a denying of self that flows from the two great commandments.

- We will deny self and serve God's agenda as an expression of loving God with our whole being.
- And we will deny self and serve other's needs as an expression of loving others as we love ourselves.

We will do this in our church and in our families modeled on Christ and Him crucified with compassionate and exquisite patience ministering to and serving one another for their good and God's glory. Thus our homes will, even in the midst of incredible hardship, be full of joyous hope and help and harmony.

Community: The Family's Basis for Relationships

Ephesians 5:28-30; 1 Peter 3:7

Introduction

My commitment in the ministry of the Word is to exposition: that is, I want in all my preaching to be preaching a text and preaching its intentionality. There is a kind of exposition that preaches the truths in the text and the truths that undergird the text – though this kind of preaching is important and good, a steady diet of it will lead people to assuming that this is the way the Bible is to be read and learned. Thus, though there is a rightful place and need for preaching by the analogy of faith, preaching the argument of the text ought to dominate the public ministry of the Word.

Why do I say all this today?

- Because this morning it is my aim to show you a repeating structure, a Biblical theme, a foundational category lying underneath a cluster of texts that ought to frame and shape all our relationships.
- Because I will not follow my usual way of developing a message, particularly with a classical outline. This presented a challenge to me in preparation and may stretch us all a bit this morning in our hearing.
- Because I believe that few Christians understand this foundational truth. I have alluded to it in the past and anyone who has gone through marital counseling (pre- or otherwise) has heard it as well. I have come to believe that this is so foundational to Christian thinking that the New Testament writers taught it and then simply assumed it all over the New Testament.

Its Theological Importance

Ephesians 2:18-22

Now what I have in mind here is not the Christian family as the physical relationship of husbands and wives, sons and daughters but of spiritual relationships. That is, all those who are in Christ are brothers and sisters in God's family united by the Spirit in Christ.

Our Union in Christ

Our union in Christ is the work of the Holy Spirit placing us in Christ: Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? 4 Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, in order that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. 5 For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall be also in the likeness of His resurrection. (Romans 6:3-5). Being placed in Christ is explained to us by three analogies in the New Testament. We are a body, a family and a building. As a body, we function to minister and serve one another: For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function, 5 so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. (Romans 12:4-5). As a building we together are a temple and habitation or dwelling place of God offering up spiritual sacrifices pleasing to God: And coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected by men, but choice and precious in the sight of God, 5 you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. 6 For this is contained in Scripture: "Behold I lay in Zion a choice stone, a precious corner stone, And he who believes in Him shall not be disappointed." 7 This precious value, then, is for you who believe. (1 Peter 2:4-7). As a family we have the privilege of the adoption as sons, joint-heirship with Christ, God the Father as our heavenly Father, and all true Spirit born from above people as our brothers and sisters: For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. 27 For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. 28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. 29 And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise. (Galatians 3:26-29; along with Colossians 1:1-2).

This union with Christ is a real, spiritual union. It is a union that is entered into by faith and is understood and lived out by faith. You cannot see or even sense this union by your 5 senses. Further, it is a union from which our communion with Christ flows. We fellowship with God because of our union with Him in Christ. So it is a covenantal and companionship union Thus this union is spoken of in the language of marriage: For this cause a man shall leave his father and

mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and the two shall become one flesh. 32 This mystery is great; but I am speaking with reference to Christ and the church. 33 Nevertheless let each individual among you also love his own wife even as himself; and let the wife see to it that she respect her husband. (Ephesians 5:31-33). It is a true union that maintains the distinctions. It is not that we are merged with deity or He is united with our humanity; it is true union of a shared life by the Spirit yet He remains distinctly God and we remain distinctly ourselves. Beware of theological schemes that teach some mystical union with Christ that do not maintain this distinction.

Our Union with One Another

Because we are all united with Christ, this creates a real union between us. It is like a building where each stone or brick is placed so as to complete the whole. It is like a body where each member is vitally connected to one another and particularly to the head. It is like a family where our common parentage, our shared adoption, our family name and identification makes us true brothers and sisters.

This recognition is vital to New Testament relationships. Between Romans and Revelation, people are addressed as brother or brethren at least 185 times and as sisters 7 times. It is telling that Peter says, "Regard the patience of our Lord to be salvation; just as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given him, wrote to you, as also in all his letters, speaking in them of these things" (2 Peter 3:15-16 [NSAB]).

Our union with one another is not only with those we know personally, but Paul in 1 Corinthians 12:26 implies that the connection between all believers is such that all are affected by the blessings and sufferings of the rest. Hebrews 12:22-23 indicates that there is a real union of all the saints of all the ages, those are "you who are come to Mt Zion" in prayer (v.22) and those who are the "spirits of the righteous made perfect" (v.23).

This spiritual, across time and space and heaven union is initiated and maintained by the Holy Spirit, who is our shared life. He is the spiritually animating life in the soul of every believer. While the animating power in my body cannot be shared or transferred to others (any teaching that affirms such is occultic and horribly dangerous), we do all share the same spiritual life. This life is the very Spirit of God by whom we are raised up from spiritual death to spiritual life: having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead. 13 And when you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions (Colossians 2:12-13).

So we are really one. We are really brothers and sisters, not just at the passing and temporal level of human families and analogies and metaphors, but at an essentially deep level. So much so that Paul turns our thinking on its head to say that every family on earth gets its name/character from the heavenly: For this reason, I bow my knees before the Father, 15 from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name (Ephesians 3:14-15).

Our Union as a Community

Our union in Christ and with one another not only creates a Body, a building and a family but also a community, a gathered, visible oneness. Our union forms a community of believers who linked spiritually. We then by grace and the Spirit live that outwardly in terms of how we care for and minister to one another.



The New Testament church had a real sense of community, of belonging to one another as is very evident in Acts 2:41-47; 4:32. Please remember that many of these believers would not have been residents of Jerusalem; they would have come from all over the empire. Yet, in spite of their geographical distance they immediately began to do what they could to care for one another and to provide for one another in tangible ways. The particulars of their way (selling and sharing property, holding goods in common) are given so that we may sense and emulate the commitment to the principles.

Now there are two ways to wrongly respond to this and down through history the church has tended to one of these down-slope positions.

- *TO IGNORE THE PRINCIPLES ALTOGETHER.* The church talks about its unity and then calls for mutual care, but does not do so as an implicit responsibility of community. The prevailing thinking then is that I live in my community (where my house is) and I go to church either in my community or to another. Thus church and Christians are defined in terms of the location of a building, not the outward expression of a real inward union.
- *TO BUILD CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES AS PLACES* of retreat, refuge and separation from the larger world around them. This is also an extreme. Thus community is tied with geographical location and a definite boundary between the Christian community and the world. The effect is to lose our "out-post" mentality and real "in the world but not of the world" effectiveness in ministry and evangelism.

Biblically, we are a community united by the Spirit under our Sovereign King living out obedient lives, witnessing and representing God's interests and agenda in the larger community around us. What we do here in gathering for church is a "together" outward expression of the unity we have all through the week. In the future, flocks will gain an

ever-greater importance as the real essence of the Chapel. Thus, the Chapel flocks gather on the Lord's Day to celebrate Christ, hear His Word, fellowship together, call the world to salvation and for other corporate efforts in ministry.

Its Biblical Illustrations

Now let's turn to some Biblical illustrations of how this essential, foundational thinking about our relationships is reflected in the New Testament writers.

In Shaping our Appeals

1 Timothy 5:2

Do not sharply rebuke an older man, but rather appeal to him as a father, to the younger men as brothers, 2 the older women as mothers, and the younger women as sisters, in all purity.

The family relationship is established as the standard for the way we appeal. Though someone is in need of correction, we do not rebuke sharply as though they were outside the family. Rather, we appeal to them as fathers, mothers, brothers and sisters. Dealing with younger women as sisters helps us approach them without mixed motives and in all purity.

In Referring to Christian Wives

1 Corinthians 9:5

Do we not have a right to take along a believing wife, even as the rest of the apostles, and the brothers of the Lord, and Cephas?

Here is a prime example where a literal translation is utterly preferred. It is significant that Paul refers to the wives of these church leaders as sisters. It is foundational to his thinking: Peter in his ministry takes along his Christian sister to whom he is married. Don't Paul and those on his ministry team also have the same right and privilege? Yes. So we are to think of other Christian's spouses as sisters and brothers.

In Ministry Relationships

2 Corinthians 1:1; Ephesians 6:21; Romans 16:1

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, to the church of God which is at Corinth with all the saints who are throughout Achaia. (2 Corinthians 1:1)

But that you also may know about my circumstances, how I am doing, Tychicus, the beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord, will make everything known to you. (Ephesians 6:21)

I commend to you our sister Phoebe, who is a servant of the church which is at Cenchrea; 2 that you receive her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the saints, and that you help her in whatever matter she may

have need of you; for she herself has also been a helper of many, and of myself as well. (Romans 16:1)

The relationship of brother and sister is fundamental in our ministering together as well. All through the New Testament those ministering together, while they may be servants and soldiers and saints, they love to refer to one another as "brother". Further, this lady servant (possibly, deacon) of the church at Cenchrea is identified as "our sister Phoebe" who is to be acknowledged and assisted in any way possible. So in ministry let us regard one another, not just as servants and soldiers, but also as dear brothers and sisters.

In Restraining Lawsuits

1 Corinthians 6:5-8

Does any one of you, when he has a case against his neighbor, dare to go to law before the unrighteous, and not before the saints? 2 Or do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world is judged by you, are you not competent to constitute the smallest law courts? 3 Do you not know that we shall judge angels? How much more, matters of this life? 4 If then you have law courts dealing with matters of this life, do you appoint them as judges who are of no account in the church? 5 I say this to your shame. Is it so, that there is not among you one wise man who will be able to decide between his brethren, 6 but brother goes to law with brother, and that before unbelievers? 7 Actually, then, it is already a defeat for you, that you have lawsuits with one another. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be defrauded? 8 On the contrary, you yourselves wrong and defraud, and that your brethren. (v.1-8)

One final consideration in this illustrative list. Paul is shocked that Christians at Corinth are taking each other to court. That shock registers because they are going to court before the world, because they will one day judge angels, because they are disregarding the wise leadership in the church, because they are not committed to the suffering of being wronged and finally *they do all this to brothers*. Paul is shocked! And so should we. In our disagreements we should deal with one another as brothers, even to the point of being short-changed.

Its Practical Implications

Certainly, a host of practical implications can be drawn out from the illustrative material we have already studied. Think about how you are going to confront others in view of the fact we are family. Thinking of younger Christian women as sisters guards our purity. Regarding one another as brothers and sisters will help us to think properly about Christian spouses and finally, about whether we ought to take one another to court.

But this thread of teaching is so woven into the fabric of our authentic Biblical living in the home that I want to trace it out further.

In our Pursuit of a Christian Marriage

First, this has huge implications for how we enter and end a marriage.

- We may only marry in Christ. Consider 1 Corinthians 7:39. Christian widows, and by extension all Christians, are to marry "only in the Lord." I believe that it is wrong to marry outside the faith. Since this is so, it is very unwise to date outside the faith. There is a sense then that Christians marry "in the family." Esther is first my sister, then my spouse.
- We may not break a Christian marriage. There are no Biblical grounds to break the marriage of a Christian brother and sister. In fact, to do so is to violate both 1 Corinthians 6 and 7. What about adultery? Adultery is grounds only if it is unrepented of and the church disciplines the unrepentant one and declares that they are to be treated as an unbeliever. 1 Corinthians 7 basically teaches that believers should not divorce and a believing spouse may be divorced from an unbeliever who does not want the marriage.

But notice that the idea of being brothers and sisters is woven through all these texts. If you want to be married, pursue marriage among believers. If you are married to a believer, seek to live with them in a God-honoring way as with a Christian brother or sister.

In our Care for our Christian Sisters

Though I cannot go to a specific text to underwrite or to illustrate this, our relationship as brothers and sisters becomes the ground of our coming to the defense of an abused Christian sister or brother. As a church family, we ought to rally around such. And we ought to make very clear to an abuser that "you will not treat my sister like that." Imagine if several of our men were to go to the home of a sister here whose husband is abusing her and knock on the door and look this man in the face and say, "She is our sister in Christ. We are her brothers in Christ. You will not continue this without consequence. We will support her and if necessary, defend her."

In our Relationships with our Christian Spouses

Finally, I have come to believe that we ought to view our spouses this way as well.

CONSIDER 1 PETER 3:7. Several important things emerge from this text. Christian men are to treat their wives in a God-honoring way based on knowing her and on acknowledging her “fellow heir of grace” status. In other words, the respect and honor that is due to a wife is due to the fact that she is a Christian sister. That is why praying is hindered. Once again, the issues of our heart, the way we think deeply affects our communion and fellowship with God. You will truly honor your wife when you see her as a sister in Christ who together with you has been chosen by God to share in Christ’s inheritance. It may well be that some of you husbands sitting here this morning have little real communion with God and no answers to your prayers because you are failing to treat your wife as a Christian sister.

CONSIDER EPHESIANS 4:29-32. This text is addressed to Christians. We tend to think of it in our relationships with people in the church. Sometimes, people are surprised when I turn to this text and point out that Christian husbands and wives must be kind to one another or they are sinning against God. Beloved, your Christian spouse is your brother or sister. You must not grieve the Spirit and you must communicate grace in the way you talk to one another, in the words you choose and the tone you use.

So, the Scriptures make the foundational relationship that of brother and sister and then build on that. This is why there are actually very few direct instructions regarding the relationship between a husband and wife. Those that are given are specific to the marital union. Otherwise, Biblically authentic Christian living in the home is to be the sacrificial serving and submission of two Christians.

Finally, my marriage exists within the community of the church. I live with Esther within the community of this church. You live with your spouse in the church. So how you treat one another and how you live *is the church’s business*. So we can nurture marriages in our own gathered community by nurturing our own marriage. We are responsible to one another for the communication, worship, discipleship, nurture and with the world engagement of our lives together.

Our commitment then is not to break faith: not to break faith with God, with the covenant community nor with my covenant spouse. Christian marriage is not a partnership; it is a covenantal relationship. As joint-heirs of God’s grace, we are co-servants in the God’s Kingdom and covenant community. The man, her brother in Christ, is the head and loving provider, leader, manager and home-priest under God. The woman is the companion, fitting helper, wise counselor mistress of the home, mother and mentor of sons and daughters. To-

gether, the primary aim of the marriage is to be a living illustration of the relationship of the church to Christ. All other goals and aims and dreams are to joyfully serve this Biblically authentic Christ-centered goal.

Cultivate in your thinking the concept of a covenant marriage within a covenant community existing in a hostile environment sustained by the Enemy yet all under the providence of our sovereign God.

Conclusion

Here is our commitment. We will love the Lord our God with an ever-increasing devotion in order that we may love our spouse, our brother or sister more.

Will we stand together as a community to call people to Biblically authentic Christian living in the home? Will we appeal to one another, even in our marriages, not just as husband and wife, sons and daughters, but as brothers and sisters.

We will then glorify God here, in this place, with this people for sake of all those whose hope in marriage is shattered and gone.

