

The Gospel-Centered Life | Family

Rob Rogers May 8, 2022

Today, on Mother's day, we're talking about how the gospel works its way out in your family — marriage, and in parenting.

How many of you adults grew up in a good home? *How many of you grew up in a dysfunctional home?* Here's what's true... no matter how good your home was growing up... every single family is a dysfunctional family — our dysfunctions just look different from one another.

PROBLEM: We all carry the residue of our stories, our childhood, just the “little t” trauma of life into our future, our lives, our relationships. And those things — if kept from God and His redemptive healing power — those dysfunctions, mistakes, patterns of negative behavior, misplaced expectations, unmet or uncommunicated expectations — can be absolutely devastating in our families.

Some of you are married, some of you aren't married, some of you have been married. Some of you are married with children at home, some of you are single parents, some of you can't wait to be married, some of you don't want to be married.

What our passage gives us today is *something for everybody* — but it's very easy to tune out the points that you don't think pertain to you. But there is something we see, as God describes what healthy relationships are under the influence of the gospel, that apply not just to family but to all of life.

Ephesians 5:22-6:4

Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. ²³ For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, His body, and is Himself its Savior. ²⁴ Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands. ²⁵ Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her, ²⁶ that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, ²⁷ so that He might present the church to Himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. ²⁸ In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. ²⁹ For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, ³⁰ because we are members of His body. ³¹ “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” ³² This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. ³³ However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.

Ephesians 6:1-4

Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. ² “Honor your father and mother” (this is the first commandment with a promise), ³ “that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land.” ⁴ Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

**MARRIAGE
PARENTING
SINGLENES**

MARRIAGE

One of the problems with the way our Bibles read is that there are headings that break up the text sometimes in ways that weren't actually intended. And this passage is one of the ones that unfortunately is deeply affected by this...

Because in the verses *before* Paul starts talking about marriage are all about being filled with the Spirit...

Ephesians 5:18-21

...be filled with the Spirit, ¹⁹ addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, ²⁰ giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹ **submitting to one another** out of **reverence for Christ**.

What Paul *isn't* doing in Ephesians 5, he's *not* saying... "let's talk about life in the Spirit, and *now* let's change the subject and talk about marriage." No, Paul is saying, "let's talk about life in the Spirit, and how two spirit-filled, gospel-centered people live out their marriage." Marriage is under that banner, the heading, of being filled with the Spirit.

Do you realize how this deeply changes the meaning of the passage?

Example: If you as a husband have ever looked at your wife and said, "Woman," that's a bad start already... "Woman, the Bible says that you're supposed to submit to me. I'm in charge of you! Do what I tell you!"

- If you demand authority and submission from your wife, it is an enormous sign that you don't understand (or at least have forgotten) the gospel that shouts of a God that CAME NOT TO BE SERVED BUT TO SERVE. God came to serve, not to demand authority.
- Secondly, to leverage the authority of scripture to manipulate and coerce someone to do something YOU want them to do... it is such a twisted, misappropriation of God's design for marriage...
 - And if you've done this... listen... there's grace for you, but you need to own what you need to own. If you've leveraged scripture to get your spouse to do what YOU want them to — *what God wants you to do today, is apologize to your spouse*. Own it. Repent of it. And go and sin no more.

Paul in this passage is saying, "If you're filled with the spirit, this is what marriage looks like..."

Being filled with spirit is having the gospel driven so deep into the core of your life that it affects every aspect of it. *It's not just philosophical, it's not just theory... it's practical. It's nuts and bolts.*

And one of the most practical areas the gospel changes life is in your marriage.

EASTERN: Now... In ancient cultures, marriage is basically a business proposition. Essentially, you did not marry for love. You didn't marry to have romance and emotional fulfillment. You got married in such a way that it helped your family's station and security in the world. That's what it was.

WESTERN: However, in our Western culture it's very, very different. You marry for love. You marry for your own individual fulfillment. You marry somebody who's going to make you feel good about yourself, who's giving you incredible affection and romantic love and whom you find completely fulfilling.

The Bible says both of those approaches are wrong, reductionistic, probably very harmful in many ways.

But look what our scripture says...

Ephesians 5:25-27

Husbands, love your wives, as **Christ loved the church** and gave Himself up for her, ²⁶ that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, ²⁷ so that He might present the church to Himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.

This is a description of how Christ loved the church. And it gives us a picture of the purpose of marriage — which is not status, stability or security — and it's also not self-fulfillment. What is it?

***The purpose of marriage
is to see the other person
become everything God created them to be.***

Look at the language — sanctified, cleansed, in splendor, without spot or wrinkle, holy and without blemish... what's that talking about?

- It's talking about the day when the church, who is the bride of Christ will stand before Him one day, having become everything she was designed to be. Pure, perfect, and adorned in splendor.

From a gospel-centered worldview, marriage is not about what you can get out of it — it's one spirit filled person looking at another and saying, "I see what God is doing in you, and I want to be a part of that journey with you. I want to cooperate with God in helping you become all that He's designed you to be."

And Paul says, **the only way that happens is through selfless service and mutual submission to one another out of reverence for Christ.**

Being a follower of Christ means that you don't make absolute judgments about people based on where they are today. You have an ability to see, believe in, and speak life into who they are becoming in Christ. And in marriage it means, I'm going to do for you what Christ did for me. I'm going to give my life. Lay my whole life on the line, to sacrificially love you the way Christ loved me — so that you might become more and more who God is making you. I want to be part of it.

Stanley Hauerwas, ethics professor at Duke University, says the Christian understanding of marriage is neither the traditional (economic) nor the modern (self-fulfillment) understanding — that you just have to find the one person God designed just for you — and everything in your life is going to come out fine.

"Destructive to marriage is the self-fulfillment ethic that assumes marriage and the family are primarily institutions of personal fulfillment, necessary for us to become 'whole' and happy. The assumption is that there is someone just right for us to marry and that if we look closely enough we will find the right person. This moral assumption overlooks a crucial aspect to marriage. It fails to appreciate the fact that we always marry the wrong person. We never know whom we marry; we just think we do. Or even

if we first marry the right person, just give it a while and he or she will change. For marriage, [being the enormous thing it is] means we are not the same person after we have entered it. The primary challenge of marriage is learning how to love and care for the stranger to whom you find yourself married.”¹

~ Stanley Hauerwas, Sex and Politics

What the Bible tells us about marriage is that it’s a picture of the gospel. It’s not consumer relationship – where two people come together to get their own needs met by the other. It’s not consumeristic, it’s covenant. It’s commitment. It’s for better or worse. It’s sacrificial.

Look at Jesus. He looked into the selfishness and sinfulness of the human heart and laid down His life anyway. He forgave, He loved, He pursued, He cherished, He suffered. He died.

Sometimes you feel like you’re being crucified by your spouse – but in Jesus case – it happened! It’s only when you see what Jesus has done for you – when the gospel takes root, can you be good to someone even when they’re not being good to you.

So, *I just let my spouse walk all over me?* Actually, *no you don’t*. Did Jesus do that? No. Jesus set boundaries. He rebuked, corrected, challenged. But everything Jesus did was motivated by love. Is it loving to let someone abuse you? *No*. To let someone repeat patterns of infidelity in your marriage? Is that loving? *No*.

What the gospel gives you is a power to know that the love of your spouse, no matter how good, no matter how faithful, **no matter how wonderful they are, only pales in comparison to the love that God has given you in Jesus Christ** – and THAT gives you the power to love a person who’s not being good to you. That gives you the power to confront what needs to be confronted out of love and service for the person – not causing unnecessary harm out of your disappointment and wounding in a person that you turned into an idol. But relieving them of the expectations of perfection and recognizing the love of Jesus for YOU is what enables you to love others well.

And if you’ve been through a divorce, or your marriage is on the rocks right now – I want you to know God can redeem what has been broken, He can restore what locusts have eaten, He can heal, He can mend. He is the only one that can rewrite the pain of your past into something beautiful for the future.

Some of you are unhappy in your marriage, and sometimes maybe you’re thinking, *“If only my spouse was everything he or she ought to be, then everything would be fine.”* Nope, it doesn’t work like that. You’re essentially looking to a romantic relationship to be your salvation, and no one person can handle that kind of weight, that kind of pressure – you’re idolizing a marriage to a radically imperfect human being. *“Rob you have no idea.”* Exactly... so stop placing unrealistic expectations on a human being that is just as much in need of Jesus as you are!

**Only if the gospel is central to your life,
only if Jesus is the single driving force behind your life
will you then be able to approach your marriage,
not from a place of need.
But from a place of already having all your deepest needs met in Jesus.**

¹ Stanley Hauerwas. *The Hauerwas Reader* (Duke University Press, July 23, 2001) p. 423

PARENTING

A child's view of God is primarily influenced by their parents.

Children filter God, through you. Your words, your actions, your behaviors. How your children view you, directly impacts their view of God. You will show and teach them what God is like – one way or the other.

Ephesians 6:1-4

Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. ² “Honor your father and mother” (this is the first commandment with a promise), ³ “that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land.”

The first part is a reiteration of the 5th of the 10 commandments... and in this commandment there's something very profound being said.

ALL the way back in TEN COMMANDMENTS, God is telling the Israelites, that a nation that undermines God's design for the family, will be a nation that will not survive for very long. A nation of children that hates their parents, dishonors their parents, rebels against their parents, will be a nation that will not last.

But then Paul says this...

Ephesians 6:4

Fathers, **do not provoke your children to anger**, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

1. Abdication & Abandonment.

Emile Durkheim wrote about children who grow up to either be rebellious or apathetic, not all, but many have experienced what it means to have one or both parents be absent. There is an abdication of the responsibility to bring a child up... both rebellion and apathy are different external signs of suppressed anger. She actually wrote about the fact that it would be better to have a bad set of instruction than no instruction at all... because at least they would know that the parent sees them and cares enough to try.²

A counselor shared with me recently that if a child calling for a parent in the middle of the night because they were scared of the dark, had to choose between no parent coming into the room, or a raging parent, they would choose the raging parent, because at least the “monsters wouldn't get the raging parent in the room.” Neglect is a very specific and painful type of trauma... that provokes toward anger.

Another way parents provoke their children to anger is...

2. Command & Control

Your influence in your child's life is directly proportionate to the amount of time you spend with them. If you never invest in your relationship with your children, but expect to be respected by them, that they will obey you at every beck and call... if you have no relationship with them, you will lose influence over them, and they will resent you.

² Emile Durkheim. *Essays on Morals and Education* (Lutterworth Press, February 19, 2014)

If your teenagers are at home and you come home from a work trip and start barking orders at your kids after being gone for a week without checking in with them relationally... how do you think that's going to go? How are they going to feel about that? You might get them to obey you... but they'll eventually begin to resent you, and over time; you will lose the opportunity to influence the most important decisions in their lives... because you have no relationship... it's about control.

What does Paul say TO DO?

Ephesians 6:4

Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but **bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.**

Bring them up. Raise them up. Which requires what? TIME! Intentionality. It means to **nourish, care for, serve, bless, guide, coach.... so relationally rich....** This is all **discipleship** language!

Your influence in your kids' lives when they're small... its positional. I'm bigger than you. You will go wherever I place you. But as they grow older... they care less and less about your position and more and more about your relationship. Do you see them? Do you care about what they care about? Do you delight in them? Do you enjoy them?

Proverbs 3:12

...for the LORD **reproves** him whom He loves, as a father the son in whom he **delights.**

This is about:

3. Delight & Discipline

Do you delight in your children as the Father delights in you? Do look at them in wonder... do you make room to simply enjoy each other, play games, laugh...

But we hear the word discipline for some reason, our minds instantly go toward punishment or spanking...

But what the word discipline literally means is **coaching**. And instruction in the original language means **counsel**.

He who spares the rod, spoils the child.... The rod is a picture of authority. Some children might not need the spanking. Some children, if you just look at them with that look... they melt right in front of you... but it's about knowing what your child needs in the moment... and if you don't delight in them, if you don't have relationship with them, you won't have the first clue in how to discipline or coach them.

How does the gospel influence your parenting?

Look at what the Father has done for you.

He delights in you because of everything Jesus has done for you. If you're being disciplined by the Lord, it's BECAUSE you're His son, His daughter whom He loves. God has never abdicated His responsibility as your Heavenly Father... and God isn't controlling your every move either... you have freedom. But It's freedom with guardrails, why? Because He delights in you. He loves you. And that enables you to love your children no matter how insane they are — with the love the Father has first shown you.

SINGLENES

1 Corinthians 7:26-29

I think that in view of the present distress it is good for a person to remain as he is. Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be free. Are you free from a wife? Do not seek a wife. But if you do marry, you have not sinned, and if a betrothed woman marries, she has not sinned. Yet those who marry will have worldly troubles, and I would spare you that. This is what I mean, brothers: the appointed time has grown very short. From now on, let those who have wives live as though they had none,³⁰ and those who mourn as though they were not mourning, and those who rejoice as though they were not rejoicing, and those who buy as though they had no goods,³¹ and those who deal with the world as though they had no dealings with it. For the present form of this world is passing away.

Here's what Paul is saying. Everything you do here and now, do it in light of the future glory that is coming one day.

If you're wealthy great, if not, don't worry too much about it, because true wealth is right around the corner. Are you lonely, it's okay — because a day is coming when loneliness will be eradicated forever, and you'll be fully known, seen, and loved for who God made you to be.

In other words — some of you are too unhappy about not being married, probably because you think, “If only I were married now, then I'd be happy.” No, you wouldn't. You're envisioning the most happily married person you know and if they were honest... they would tell you, marriage will not fulfill you. Only the gospel will. The one Spouse whose love can really fill your heart and give you what you really need and want *has come down to you*.

Others of you are too afraid of being married. So, you get really picky. They need to have a PhD, be an astronaut, and have been a supermodel — but stopped because they're too genuine to be a part of that fake world. You get too picky — so that you don't ever have to be vulnerable because no one will ever measure up. You're afraid of being let down.

But Only if Jesus is central to your life can marriage be the gospel powerhouse it was meant to be! And you're not putting so much pressure on your spouse to be something that they can never be!

Paul is saying here, no matter what stage of life you're in, that **the ultimate family is in the future**. The ultimate wedding is in the future. All of your deepest desires for love, for intimacy, for connectedness, for friendship, for joy, for laughter, for security, for belonging in this life *will be met in the future one*.

In other words, *we can find ourselves becoming despondent that we don't have it now! But even if you had it now, it wouldn't even come close to being what you NEED it to be in this life*, and even as good as it can be, it wouldn't come close to being what it will be one day.

**Only if your heart is satisfied in the gospel,
will you be able to approach your marriage,
your parenting, or your singleness
with any real ability to be
joyful, humble, patient, selfless.**

If you NEED a spouse, you'll crush them with your expectations. If you NEED children and you don't have them, you'll be utterly crushed, and if you DO have them, you'll crush them under the weight of your demand that they meet all your needs or become everything you want them to be.

The gospel in your marriage, parenting, and singleness is the only thing that gives you the ability to really be a consistently humble, loving, person — because everything you've ever needed and desired is and will be fully satisfied in the person of Jesus Christ.

Discussion Questions

1. Discuss: every single family is a dysfunctional family — they just look different from one another. What kind of family did you grow up in? What kind of family are you in right now?
2. Have you ever had to deal with the *taken out of context misinterpretation* of, “Wives, submit to your own husbands... for the husband is the head of the wife...”?
3. Did today's sermon help deeply change the meaning of this passage for you to be able to explain it to someone else?
4. Discuss: “The purpose of marriage is to see the other person become everything God created them to be.”
5. Have you ever “provoked your children to anger”? The Bible says that the LORD reproves those in whom he delights. How would we emulate that?
6. Although 1 Corinthians 7:26-29 initially sounds negative, discuss what Paul is saying in light of the future glory that is coming one day.

NOTES