



**Ephesians 5:1-2, 21-33, 6:1-4**

**“The High Calling of a Christian Man”**

June 16, 2103  
4<sup>th</sup> Sunday After Pentecost

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**“Following Christ from City Center”**

EPHESIANS 5:1-2, 21-33, 6:1-4 (An early Christian household code)

Christ ✓

1) 5:1-2 INSTRUCTION ON LOVE FOR THE WHOLE CHURCH IN THREE PAIRS. Word Chain

1	1	Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children.	Fathers Are First Members Of Christ's Body
2		And walk (live) in love,	Only Call In NT To Imitate God
✓	2	as Christ loved us,	Two Commands: Imitate/Walk
		and gave himself up for us,	In Jesus We Have A Model Of God's Love That Gives/ Serves
	3	a fragrant offering	Two Examples: Loved/Gave, Rom. 14:15
		and sacrifice to God.	Ex. 29:18, Phil. 4:18
			Two Cultic Images: Offering/Sacrifice
			Love Has A Standard, A Model, Makes Sacrifices

2) 5:21-33 INSTRUCTION TO CHRISTIAN COUPLES ON MUTUAL OBLIGATIONS.

Traditional Form: Col. 3:18-4:1, 1 Pt. 2:18-3:7

a) v.21 Mutual Exhortation To Husbands/Wives, Christian Motivation Of Phobos For Christ.

21✓		Be subject to <i>one another</i> out of reverence (Greek <i>phobos</i> = fear/awe) for Christ.	I Peter 5:5, I Clement 38:1
			Rom. 13:5 (To Rulers), On Fear (Ps. 36:2, Rom. 3:18)

b) v.22-24 Exhortation To Wives: Her Form Of Mutual Service. Addressed As Responsible

22	1	Wives, (be subject) to your own husbands,	Hierarchical Culture Of Honor/Obligation
	2	as to the Lord.	(Verb taken from v.21, no "obey" as in KJV)
23	3	For the husband is the head (source?) of the wife	Important Modifier, Motivational Clause
		as Christ is the head (source?) of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior.	("chief"/"ruler" or "source"??)
24✓	2'	<i>As the church is subject to Christ,</i>	Creation
			Summary, Analogy No. 1
1'		so let wives also be subject in everything to their husbands.	Not To Men In General, Patriarchal Society Then
			Christian Modification Of Patriarchal Model's Trajectory Is Set

b') vv.25-32 Exhortation to Husbands: His Form Of Mutual Subjection.

Section For Men Is Longer, More Power

25✓	A	1	Husbands, love your wives, <i>as Christ loved the church</i> and gave himself up for her,	Analogy No. 2
26		2	that he might sanctify her (make her holy),	Order: 1) Cleanse, 2) Sanctify, 3) Present
			having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word,	Ezek. 16:9
27		3	that he might present the church to himself in splendor,	Glorious Future, 2 Cor. 11:2
			without spot or wrinkle or any such thing,	Church Will Be Perfected!
		2'	that she might be holy	Holy = Set Apart For God
			and without blemish.	
28	1'		Even so husband should love their wives as their own bodies.	They Share Life As One, Plutarch Conj. 142
			He who loves his wife loves himself.	Ancient Marriage Contract: Food/Shelter

29	B		For no man ever hates his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it,	Common Sense, Heb. 13:4
✓			as Christ does the church,	Analogy No. 3

30			because we are members of his body	Christ Loves Us As His Body
31	B'		For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother	Break Old Bond: Parents
			and be joined to his wife,	Form New Bond: Spouse, Egalitarian Reality
			and the two shall become one flesh."	Result = Celebration/Children, Genesis 2:24
				Mystery, 1:9, 3:3, 4:9, 6:19

32	A'		This mystery is a profound one,	Mystery = Divine Truth Beyond Full Knowing
✓			and I am saying that it refers to <i>Christ and the church</i> .	Not Reunion Of Soul And Body, Analogy No. 4
				Latin For Greek Mystery = Sacramentum

a') v.33 Mutual Exhortation For Husbands And Wives On Love And Phobos.

33			In any case, let each one of you love his wife as himself,	Brief Summary Of vv.21-32, Emphasis
			and let the wife see that she respects (Greek <i>phobos</i> ) her husband.	Husband's Responsibility v.28b
				Wife's Responsibility

3) 6:1-4 INSTRUCTION TO CHRISTIAN CHILDREN AND FATHERS ON LOVE.

1		Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is righteous.	Covenant Obligation, Children In Audience, Col. 3:20
2		"Honor your father and your mother" (this is the first commandment with a promise),	Theological Basis
3		"that it may be well with you and that you may live long on the earth."	Exodus 20:12, Deuteronomy 5:16
			Traditional Power Of Paterfamilias Modified
4		Fathers, do not provoke (exasperate) your children to anger,	Col. 3:21, Negative Command: What To Avoid
		but bring (nourish) them up in the discipline and admonition of the Lord.	Positive Command: What A Father Is To Do

# THE HIGH CALLING OF A CHRISTIAN MAN

*“Husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the church  
and gave himself up for her.”*

Designed by Paul to buckle the knees of every husband and drive them to prayer.

## EPHESIANS 5 : 2 5

**M**other’s Day is more sentimental and attractive than Father’s Day. It draws from a deeper emotional well; after all, it’s her womb where you spent nine months floating in an inland ocean before you were rudely expelled into this hostile climate. How can socks and ties ever compete with flowers and chocolate?

One reason for the discrepancy is that- historically speaking- a day for dads came second as an afterthought and conscious balancing act. The idea of a day to honor fathers began in Spokane, Washington just after the West had given up its wildness. Sonora Dodd thought of the idea while listening to a Mother’s Day sermon in 1909. Apparently, all kinds of good things happen during sermons when your mind is wandering, so do not be discouraged! The Holy Spirit is at work.

Having been raised by her father after her mother died, Sonora wanted her father to know how dear he was. He made the sacrifices and was- in her eyes- a courageous and loving man. Since he was born in June, Sonora planned to hold the first celebration the next year on June 19, 1910. Father’s Day did not start with a father and son but with a motherless daughter and a loving dad.

In 1924 President Coolidge made a national proclamation that marked the third Sunday in June as Father’s Day. It was an idea whose time had come, and Father’s Day soon swept the country. Pastors who do not give the day at least a nod will be accused of being insensitive, perhaps even unpatriotic. People wonder, “I thought I would hear a Father’s Day sermon today.”

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The observance- though recent in origin- is grounded in Scripture. The fifth commandment puts dad and mom together, “Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land the Lord your God gives to you.” In other words- and for a nomadic people- it means you don’t leave the aged behind when the caravan moves on and they can no longer keep up! Their dignity is in who they *are*, not what they *do* or *can’t do*. Bearing God’s image is not reduced with age and infirmity.

The fifth commandment is- as Paul reminds us- the first command with a promise added as a motivator. Do you want to have a chance at a long life and be cared for at the end? To honor the link between the generations helps everyone live longer. The older take care of the younger, and then- in the great reversal that comes if you live long enough- the younger take care of the older. “If I the Lord your God rescued all of you- young and old- from Egypt, then honor father and mother. Through them I gave you life. It’s for your good, and when you honor them, you obey me. When the generational link is weakened, everyone loses.”

I often counsel adults concerning the care of elderly, sometimes stubborn- even mean- parents. They are often tear-filled discussions. I remind them that the command is to *honor them*, not obey or be manipulated by them if they are still given to the sins of pulling rank and playing mind games! Not so long ago I had a good man tell me his ninety year old mother said in an angry tone, “You are my Son, and you will do as I say.” When he stood up, walked out, drove home, and gave her time to reconsider, he did a good thing.

Redrawing boundaries can be a healthy exercise. Saying No to parents may feel bad, but it’s not necessarily sin. Paul was clear the command was for *children* to obey their parents, not for adults to obey their parents! Do not confuse *honor* and *obey*, else you will never grow up.<sup>1</sup> It is a pitiful to see an adult man or woman still emotionally and financially controlled by their parents. When they look at me and ask, “What should I do?” I reply, “Have you considered maturity? Like the Apostle Paul you need to put away childish ways.<sup>2</sup> It will be painful but highly beneficial.”

It’s sometimes necessary to look at an adult and ask, Why are you still

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<sup>1</sup> The book by Henry Cloud, John Townsend, et. al., *Unlocking Your Family Patterns: Finding Freedom from a Hurtful Past* (Chicago, ILL: Moody, 2011) gives a map and strategies for sorting through systemic family issues in the direction of sanity!

<sup>2</sup> 1Corinthians 13:11.

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**Ephesians 5:1-2, 21-33, 6:1-4 ..... 5**

following mom or dad's script for your life? Perhaps the umbilical cord was never cut! You're still attached! Let's arrange a bit of surgery and set you free." Parents who obligate their adult children through coercion, threats, money and the misuse of Scripture (God said you *had to* honor me!) are sinning, I don't care how white-headed they are. So while time remains, make it easy for your children to honor you and thus obey God and inherit the promises. If your children don't come around much any more, there may be a good reason. Perhaps you've made it hard for them to obey God. Perhaps you're no joy to be around. Quit whining about their lack of attention and start repenting. Jesus can sweeten-up an ornery disposition at any age!

At the other extreme, if all your father gave was genetic material, then you must- for your own emotional survival and spiritual growth- find a way to honor that link, minimal as it was. You're alive today; you can know and walk with Christ; you can be used of God if you will come to terms with your history and the future God offers. And whatever love or care you didn't get as a child, your heavenly Father can more than fill the gap; God will re-parent you.

In his book *Invitation to a Journey* Dr. Robert Mulholland relates the story of a woman he knew who was the result of an unwanted pregnancy:

"Her mother was a prostitute; she was an accident of her mother's occupation. Although her pilgrimage had brought her to faith in Christ, blessed her with a deeply Christian husband and beautiful children, and given her a life of love and stability, she was obsessed with the need to find out who her father was. It was affecting her marriage, her family, and her life. One day she was standing at the kitchen sink, washing the dishes, tears of anguish and frustration running down her face. In agony she cried out, 'Oh, God, *who* is my father?'

Then, she said, she heard a voice, 'I am your father.' The voice was so real she turned to see who'd come into the kitchen, but there was no one there. Again the voice came, 'I am your father, and I have always been your father.'

In that moment she knew the profound reality of which Paul speaks in many of his letters. Deeper than the 'accident' of her conception was the eternal purpose of a loving God, who had spoken her

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forth into being before the foundation of the world.<sup>3</sup>

Part of the good news is that God the Father will re-parent anyone who turns to him. Substantial healing is a reality. You don't have to live as a lifelong cripple.

It is the task of Christian adults to sort through their relationships with parents- however good or troubled they were, to extract the gifts and forgive the rest. Eat the chicken and spit out the bones. It isn't about putting parents on pedestals or denying they had the same struggles with sin and evil as we ourselves and the same need for a Savior. It's not about naivete or empty sentiment but eyes wide open. The command to honor does not deny that parents sometimes do horrible things to their children. It's about taking the particularities of your life with great seriousness and ultimately- with the help of God grace- a new appreciation, "This is who I am and where I came from. With Christ and his people, I have a great future. With God's help, I will obey the command, even if with tears." Our great God, the God of all the generations, can build on what good you received and heal what's missing.

It is never to late to establish a legacy of faith and to break patterns of inherited iniquity that come down to us through our families and land on our lives with a big thud, to which we then add our own contributions.<sup>4</sup> Because your father was a racist or a criminal or a drunk or an unbeliever or sexually immoral or violent or involved in the occult, or simply lazy and sorry does not mean you have to be the same. To honor him does not mean to carry on his failings and replicate his sins, however easily those patterns may come to you. It's a relief for some men to hear, perhaps for the first time, "You don't have to be like your father."

The insidious nature of the pattern of sin in families is that they comes to us without a thought. It seems natural, the way things are, how life is to be handled. We breathe polluted air and drink from poisoned wells. But where that link of destruction is broken through Christ and the repentance he offers, deep new rivers of blessing begin to well up and flow down the generations. Where this does not happen, the

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<sup>3</sup> (Downer's Grove, ILL: IVP, 1993), 35-36.

<sup>4</sup> See Rick Richardson, *Experiencing Healing Prayer: How God Turns Our Hurts Into Wholeness* (Downer's Grove, ILL: IVP, 2005), particularly chapters 10-12, "The Dialog With Mother And Father," "Healing Mother Wounds," "Healing Father Wounds," 117-148; Norma Dearing, *The Healing Touch* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker), Chapter 5, "Generational Healing," 75-96.

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polluted and fetid waters of the family curse flow down the same channels to poison generations downstream and yet unborn.<sup>5</sup> But fathers, with Christ you can set up a new family legacy. Your great grandchildren will rise up and call you blessed. Put your feet in the path of Jesus; watch him work in you and in your family for good. Let God make you into a father of influence.

When I drive past Gallivant’s Ferry, I often turn left at the famous John Holiday house and make my way back to the now-closed Sandy Plains Methodist Church where I stand in a graveyard of Lewis’ back to the mid- 1800's. I imagine them coming out of the country church on Sunday mornings and talking under the oaks that shade the grounds. I see the circuit rider arrive on horseback with news from other Pee Dee churches and the Conference. I watch as he takes Bible, hymnal and Discipline out of his saddle bags, and I recognize that I stand in and continue this long line of ministry. Perhaps some of their prayers are being answered in me.

Such occasional half-hours stops are good for my fragmented soul. I am the recipient of cross-generational grace through the names Thrailkill and Lewis on one side, Turner and Ward on the other, and I look forward to the day in God’s kingdom when I thank them face to face. Without them, I would not be here as a minister of Christ! I say to myself, “This is where I came from.” I honor my fathers and mothers in this faith.

Go and walk among the dead from time to time; honor those beyond your immediate parents. We did not create this grand and great faith, and for many of us it came down the generations. They got it to us, the only question being, Will we get it to the next generation in tact? Will we make it easy for our children and theirs to honor father and mother and grandfather and grandmother because we let Jesus do the deep work that makes us easy to honor and good to be around? None of us are self made. We all came from somewhere, from the union of male and female bodies who were fruitful and multiplied and before them and before them and before them back to who knows where. “Honor your father and your mother,” said God. It’s a lifelong project.

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<sup>5</sup> For a practical ministry tool to help people in this process, see Neil Anderson’s “Seven Steps to Freedom in Christ,” (Ventura, CA: Gospel Light, 2004). I have seen this workbook and video have great effect in the lives of people. It’s strength is the checklists and specific prayers which are loaded with Scripture.

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**Ephesians 5:1-2, 21-33, 6:1-4 ..... 8**

The conversation God most wants to hear between the generations goes something like this, and absolutely nothing requires more humility and courage because it's so full of feeling and family history:

I forgive you for...., and then you name the sins.

And, will you forgive me for... and then you name them as well.

Once the ground is cleared, you move on to, Thank you for...., and I love you because...., and I remember when....

And finally, How can I pray for you, and how can we pray together?

This is the list I rehearse with families when a mother or father is dying, and I recommend they each go in one-by-one for their ten minutes of hard soul work. And if they do, they are blessed, and it makes the funeral a whole lot easier. I have seen such times profoundly change a family.

Two years ago a grateful daughter came to me after a funeral service, "Thank you, Pastor Phil, for knowing what we needed and showing us how. It let momma die in peace and healed some wounds that hurt us all." When I left the hospital room, there were five of them lined up in the hallway, each waiting their turn. And when the last finished, they all came back in, and she died. My timing wasn't bad, and neither was the Lord's!

Our relationship with our fathers is different from that with our mothers in whose body we were constructed. The link to mother is a given; the link with the father must be learned and developed. And if the father is absent, that link is missing in ways that are never good. Fatherhood is as much sociological and communal as it is biological; this is why it's more fragile and so easily broken. Fathers are as necessary to children as mothers, but in different ways we are only beginning to appreciate because of current research on the devastating effects of father absence.<sup>6</sup> Our prisons are full of angry, young, fatherless men.

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<sup>6</sup> See the National Fatherhood Initiative website, [www.fatherhood.org](http://www.fatherhood.org), for links to the research findings. Also [www.profam.org](http://www.profam.org) and [www.worldcongress.org](http://www.worldcongress.org) for the research of The Howard Center for Family, Religion & Society.

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**Ephesians 5:1-2, 21-33, 6:1-4 ..... 9**

The bad news today is that in America one of three children go to bed tonight in a home that does not include their biological father. Twenty-seven percent live in single parent homes. In around forty percent of all births there is no husband present to claim the birth certificate. Among African Americans it's nearing seventy percent and moving towards a post-marital culture few are willing to talk about, including white progressives and black pastors.<sup>7</sup> The silence is absolutely deafening.

Forty percent of children in father-absent homes have not seen their dads in the last year. A million children a year find their homes torn apart by divorce.<sup>8</sup> On every scale of well-being, children without fathers are at higher risk, and if you as a man are providing both support and faith for your family, you are already way ahead, and we are here to strengthen your faith and service to your family. There is a hole in the heart of America, and that hole is named *father*.

**A LOOK AT THE TEXT**

*Patriarchy* has become a bad word in our day. It literally means *the rule of the Father*, and by extension, the historic power and control men have exercised over women. Sometimes benevolently for protection, but often for control.

Look at the way women and wives are treated in Afghanistan, and you see what patriarchy at its worst looks like. It's a window into a much older Middle Eastern world view. Men with multiple wives. Men with power, women with little. An ideology of inherent superiority. Men with privilege and rights, women with few or none. Men out in public life, women hidden away. Men with education, women with little. We are told it is for their good and their honor; I do not believe it. It is a sign of sin and will one day crumble under the pressures of the modern world for equal rights, dignity and access.

The family model the Apostle Paul inherited was patriarchal. The Greek or Roman father had nearly absolute control over all his extended household: wives, children, slaves. Life and death were in his hand. In Judaism- however, it was modified in the direction of mutuality and respect, but still the father ruled. There

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<sup>7</sup> For an insider's critical view, see Juan Williams, *Enough: The Phony Leaders, Dead-End Movements, and Culture of Failure That Are Undermining Black America-- and What We Can Do About It* (New York, NY: Three Rivers Press, 2006).

<sup>8</sup> Statistics selected from "Father Facts," [www.fatherhood.org](http://www.fatherhood.org).

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was no debate; it's how the world was then run, and few questioned it. Men might be encouraged by philosophers and teachers to exercise their power with kindness and justice, but no one questioned the rightness of the power itself.

This is the social structure into which all the early Christians were born and the social conventions in which they lived. There wasn't an alternative. It was a top-down world from the Emperor at the pinnacle to slaves at the bottom. The job of the one above you was to provide for your needs; your job was to show respect and give them honor through obedience. The senators and generals and provincial rulers to the Emperor, the city fathers to the provincial rulers, the family heads to the city fathers; the wives, children and slaves to the father of the family, the *pater familias*. One unified system of patronage and power from top to bottom. Do your duty, and you would most often- though not always- be taken care of. It was the only Social Security in the ancient world. Being unattached to a family or a male patron made one extremely vulnerable.

But with the coming of Jesus, that assumed structure was radically challenged. As Jesus said of himself, "For the Son of man came *not to be served* but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many."<sup>9</sup> The new chief is not the one at the top being served but the one at the bottom, the one who serves for the welfare of others. The world did not change its structures the minute Jesus spoke those words. It remained for generations of believers to infect the old order with new and subversive meanings. In the beginning they kept the hard outer shells and added a new softer center. Christian families looked like other families, but on the inside they were different. They lived under the rule of a common Lord who loved all. Until you can change social structures on the outside, you change them on the inside. It's an old strategy of subversion slaves in the American south knew well and used often. On Sundays, on the Lord's day, we are a free people; no more life by the work clock!

Think about it. It took us over eighteen hundred years after Christ to rid the Christian world of slavery, and only in the last fifty or so years have we begun to move towards a new model of marriage where power and decision making is shared fully between husbands and wives. It's a new thing sociologists call *companion marriage*.<sup>10</sup> It is egalitarian and based on an equality of dignity and power. Our 1989

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<sup>9</sup> Mark 10:45.

<sup>10</sup> For these thoughts I depend on David and Diana Garland, *Beyond Companionship: Christians in Marriage* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1986.)

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**Ephesians 5:1-2, 21-33, 6:1-4 ..... 11**

United Methodist wedding service reflects this change and overtly states that the whole service is a witness to the equality of men and women.<sup>11</sup> Deep social structures change slowly, and not until a better way is found will the old be abandoned, and only then with real resistance and spotty progress.

In counseling I often find myself taking couples back to the wedding service, reading them the vows, and asking, “Are you keeping *these* promises?” I ask wives, “Why are you acting like a doormat when you’re an equal?” And to the man, “Why are you marching around barking orders as if you were some kind of boss? This is not what either of you promised. You took the same vows to love and to cherish. What happened? Would you like help in learning how to love and respect one another as equals?” It’s hard to say No to that kind of offer, even if you’re a Greenwood good-ole-boy! I then tell him that a nightly six-pack is not good for marital communications!

But let it be clear that this was the trajectory towards which things were moving from the beginning. For Paul to tell a wife to subordinate herself to *her own husband* and not to men in general was a radical step in the direction of the dignity of wives as equals. For Paul to tell a man to *love his wife as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her* is to turn the whole cultural scheme of male control inside out and upside down. Paul is commanding men to *follow Christ* and to sacrifice for their wife’s welfare.

For children to be addressed in this letter as if they were responsible moral agents and fully part of the church was another subversive idea. And note that it is to fathers that Paul gives the instruction of their children in the faith, not to the mothers as is the practice in the church today. A man cannot teach his children to follow the Lord if he is not first following Christ himself! So on Father’s Day the first word to men is, Are you a serious disciple? Are you following Jesus in the company of other men because on that everything else depends?

The goal in our day is not to roll back the clock and recover a patriarchal model of the family with men seen as moral and religious superiors but to move more fully into the model of complementary but different equals living together under the

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<sup>11</sup> *United Methodist Hymnal*, 864.

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**Ephesians 5:1-2, 21-33, 6:1-4 ..... 12**

joint rule of Christ<sup>12</sup>, as Paul commends in verse 21, “Be subject to *one another* out of reverence for Christ.” Mutual submission is the order for Christian husbands and wives, and it is out of observing such loving service and mutual forgiveness that children best learn the faith by heart.

A man who does not take his wife with utmost seriousness is missing the best gift God ever gave. A man who bullies or threatens his wife in any way, particularly with violence, is simply a clod in need of a complete character make over. Our differences are the occasion for enrichment, not for a differential of power. A man who is always buying new guns and boats and tools and car parts and complains when his wife buys a new outfit is a loser who has not a clue about the gift God has given him in a wife. A man who loves and values his wife invites God’s blessings on the whole of his life. You are to pray for her and with her, listen to her, care for her with the same care you show yourself, as Paul said in verse 28, “Even so husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. *He who loves his wife loves himself.*” You will not find the will and blessing of God without her. You are one flesh, and you must learn the art of being one with her in life. A old saying from the Jewish Talmud is fitting, “A man should eat and drink beneath his means, clothe himself within his means, and honor his wife above his means.”<sup>13</sup>

In no culture has the Christian ideal yet been reached on a wide scale, perhaps glimpses in some places, but not beyond that. Men and women, both as followers of Jesus Christ, coming together as different but equal partners to form a new union, a new domestic church into which children may be welcomed and trained in the faith. The older pattern of male superiority and female submission still lingers with us, but this new vision is now before us. It’s why the United Methodist wedding service changed and fathers no longer give their daughters away.

That custom comes from a time under medieval English law when women were

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<sup>12</sup> This is the theological error of the recent changes in the Southern Baptist “Faith and Mission Statement” which limits pastors to males. I understand concerns about the corrosive effects of radical secular feminism, but I do not agree with their solution which is exegetically and theologically flawed. We are ahead of them on this issue, and they are way ahead of us in missions and evangelism. For a devastating critique of this position and its grounding in the doctrine of the Trinity by one of their own theologians, see Millard Erickson, *Who’s Tampering With the Trinity?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2009).

<sup>13</sup> PreachingToday.com search under Ephesians 5:21-33.

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property to be traded among men, in this case a father to a son-in-law like a piece of livestock, “Who gives this woman...” We kept the ritual long after it was no longer law, perhaps so the father of the bride- who was paying for the whole thing- would have something to do besides write checks! Since we no longer see women that way, there has been substituted a blessing of the couple by both sets of parents. It’s a much clearer vision of what transpires in a wedding. The additional word *obey* in the vow of the wife has also been removed; it was never in the Greek text anyway!. The vows are now identical with the groom and bride taking the very same vow as equals who meet each other at the altar of the church and receive the blessing of both families. These are not moves away from the faith but moves deeper into the heart of its full implications. What was said in the book of Genesis can only be said of two complementary equals, “For this reason and man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.”<sup>14</sup>

There is no boss in a marriage; *there is a team*, a new and organic unity as two become one in a bonded pair. No *my way or the highway*; there is now only *our way* which means much negotiation. No *my money and your money* but only *ours*. We lead in our area of giftedness and receive where the other is strong. Social arrangements which say one has more rights than the other, more power than the other, are remnants of a sinful world and not part of God’s design. Odd as it seems, only since 1989 have we had a wedding service that fully celebrates the radical equality of men and women in Christian marriage. It will take some getting used to, but it is profoundly biblical and full of hope.

Look at the best Christian marriages you know, the ones that have ripened over the decades. Watch how the one cares for the other and how their differing gifts have been woven together over time into a deeper unity. There is no boss here, only two lovers who regret that the time ahead is not as great as the years that are behind them. There is wisdom and love enough in the pews of this church to heal any marriage, so don’t throw yours away. As I often tell people: all you need to heal your life is within ten miles of where you now sit. Counselors, pastors, churches, if you will listen!

And ladies, let me remind you that your husband needs many things from you, but what he most needs and likely cannot ask for without feeling foolish, is your respect. Men thrive on respect. Paul knew that and wrote in verse 33: “...and let the wife see *that she respects her husband*.” A critical, nagging, yapping wife will have

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<sup>14</sup> Genesis 2:24.

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**Ephesians 5:1-2, 21-33, 6:1-4 ..... 14**

far less influence than one who prays, respects, and speaks the truth in love. So tell him in public what you are proud of; leave your concerns for private conversations and a calm tone of voice.

A husband who has the support and respect of his wife can face almost any obstacle. Women shape the character of their husbands by what they show respect for. This new world of women as equals in every area is not always easy for us men to negotiate. It's why we retreat some times to be with the guys where the rules are clear. Let us practice with you. Let us learn a new and better way to be men and to lead by the integrity of our lives and the merit of our ideas rather than from a place of inherited privilege or status. It's a new day.

Several years ago the space shuttle Discovery was grounded- not by technical difficulties or lack of funding, but by woodpeckers. The yellow-shafted flicker found the insulation on the shuttle's external fuel tank irresistible for pecking. Without it, ice forms on the fuel tank, ice that can break free during liftoff and damage the giant spacecraft. The shuttle was grounded until the damage was repaired. Marriages are frequently damaged not by big things at first, infidelity or abuse or abandonment, but by little things. Criticism, lack of respect, and taking each other for granted peck away at the relationship and keep us from reaching the heights.

Nagging or its opposite- the silent treatment- by either party is not a virtue. It is a demonstration that you do not expect to be taken seriously. Nagging is an open admission that you have lost your true authority as a spouse. Ruth Graham said it was a great day in her life when she realized it was not her job to change her husband. She said "It was my job to love Billy and God's job to change him."<sup>15</sup> Do not speak to your husband or wife about a character flaw till after you have prayed and examined your own life. And then, never do it in public. Humiliation is not the path to loving change. When you hear couples criticize each other in public, their next expensive purchase is likely to be a separation agreement.

There are a lot of dads in this church who are already doing a good job. We see you at your children's events; we see you at Scout meetings and PTA's; we know you work hard. You show up at worship and come to parenting classes with your wives. But God has more for you. More than just doing the right things and being a good guy, though that's a good start and way above average. The call of God is for you-

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<sup>15</sup> PreachingToday.com search under *Father's Day*.

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**Ephesians 5:1-2, 21-33, 6:1-4 ..... 15**

along with other men- to walk with Jesus Christ as his friend and follower, and to have an inter-generational impact. How you live shapes generations yet unborn.

**CONCLUSION**

As of June a year ago Levi-Strauss was still running an in-your-face ad campaign that targets men for a line of Dockers pants. The following script, titled "Manifesto," was posted on Dockers.com:

“Once upon a time, men wore the pants, and wore them well. Women rarely had to open doors, and little old ladies never had to cross the street alone. Men took charge because that's what they did. But somewhere along the way the world decided it no longer needed men. Disco by disco, latte by foamy non-fat latte, men were stripped of their khakis and left stranded on the road between boyhood and androgyny.

But today,” the ad continues, “there are questions our genderless society has no answers for. The world sits idly by as cities crumble, children misbehave, and those little old ladies remain on one side of the street. For the first time since bad guys, we need heroes. We need grownups. We need men to put down the plastic fork, step away from the salad bar, and untie the world from the tracks of complacency. It's time to get your hands dirty. It's time to answer the call of manhood. It's time to wear the pants.”<sup>16</sup>

That’s a lot of emotionally laden buttons to punch in one ad, but remember what it’s for: to confuse you into feeling that wearing Dockers makes you a real man and a credit to your gender. They push the testosterone button to sell you something!

And yet there’s some truth here beneath the spin; too many males in our day are left on the road between boyhood and androgyny with no reliable map to manhood. Many men are confused about what it means to be a man, and the culture is not much help. But the church has an answer. Whatever your history, what will make you a real man and possibly a good father and a real sign of hope in a world that needs your strength and courage is that you give yourself without reserve to following Jesus Christ as he introduces you layer by layer into just what it means for you to

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<sup>16</sup> Idem.

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**Ephesians 5:1-2, 21-33, 6:1-4 ..... 16**

know God as your Father and for the Holy Spirit to be your companion and teacher in the way that leads to life.

It's a day to honor fathers. Do it, even if it's hard. And if your father has died, take time this afternoon- as I plan to do- and make a list of the good things they poured into you life.

It's also a day to look beyond fathers to the only one who can make us all good men, and that is Jesus Christ. And if there is a flicker of desire in you to be a better man, a good and noble and true and faithful and courageous man, a man who serves others because Jesus is his friend and leader, then that desire is a sign of the work of the Spirit. One way to respond is to join me at this altar in humility and prayer, asking God for mercy and help. I am happy to spend time with any man who wants to learn to walk with Jesus Christ as his follower.

