

Building Up the Church through the Home

Ephesians 5:22–6:4

Dub McClish

Introduction

Wives, *be in subjection* unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord.

For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, *being* himself the saviour of the body.

But as the church is subject to Christ, so *let* the wives also *be* to their husbands in everything.

Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself up for it; that he might sanctify it, having cleansed it by the washing of water with the word, that he might present the church to himself a glorious *church*, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish.

Even so ought husbands also to love their own wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his own wife loveth himself: for no man ever hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as Christ also the church; because we are members of his body.

For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and the two shall become one flesh.

This mystery is great: but I speak in regard of Christ and of the church.

Nevertheless do ye also severally love each one his own wife even as himself; and *let* the wife *see* that she fear her husband.

Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right.

Honor thy father and mother (which is the first commandment with promise), that it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth.

And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but nurture them in the chastening and admonition of the Lord. (Eph. 5:22–6:4)

Of the three institutions ordained by God – the church, civil government, and the home – the home is the oldest. Its stability and health (or lack thereof) fundamentally affect the stability and health of the two other institutions. God created the first home when he created Adam and then Eve and brought them together in a Divine “wedding ceremony” (Gen. 2:21–22). His rule for the formation of all successive homes then appears in the inspired record: “Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh” (v. 24). Both the Lord and Paul acknowledged this statement as God’s permanent will (Mat. 19:5; Eph. 5:31). Thus since God made that first home, every successive

home (that the Bible authorizes) has been formed by a man and a woman who determine to leave their respective parents and marry each other.

Since the home, as described above, is God-originated and thus God-ordained, we should not be surprised to find the Bible filled with instructions and regulations concerning it. These include information specifically addressed to each member in the home and their relationships to each other. Biblical laws concerning the home are not intended to restrict us unduly or rob us of joy and happiness. Quite the contrary, their purpose is to preserve and perpetuate the sanctity of the home as God designed it and to provide maximum joy and happiness in our familial relationships.

Since the perpetuation of the “nuclear home” (i.e., a husband and wife and any children born of their union) is ordained by God and is the basic building block of civilized society, it should come as no surprise that it is a favorite and constant target of Satan and his minions. The last forty years have brought unprecedented assaults against the home. These attacks have included the sexual revolution of the 1960s, “no-fault” divorce legislation, the Women’s Liberation movement, legalization of abortion, the entertainment industry, and the homosexual activists and sympathizers. Underlying it all is the philosophy of Secular Humanism that has done (and is doing) its best to destroy everything remotely connected with the Bible and belief in God (including Biblical morals, of course). The home has suffered mightily from this manifold attack. The social and cultural climate the youngsters now face – and will face after some of us older folk are gone – strikes apprehension into the heart of every sober-thinking child of God.

All of the above factors should impress upon us how vital it is for us to hold to the Biblical concept of the home and to raise our voices in every way we can to instruct others. We are certainly correct to observe that the church can be no stronger spiritually or morally than the homes that compose it. Stronger homes make stronger congregations, and vice versa.

What does the Bible teach us about the kind of homes that will build up the church? The best summary of this doctrine in a single passage is in Ephesians 5:22–6:4. This passage embraces the two major relationships in every normal and complete home: (1) the husband-wife relationship and (2) the parent-child relationship.

Husbands and Wives

Every home, as defined by the Bible, begins when a man and a woman decide they do not wish to live apart from each other. They decide to leave their respective parents and begin their own home by pledging their mutual love for and faithfulness to each other for life in a marriage ceremony. The Scriptures are explicit in detailing the way in which they are to relate to each other as husband and wife in this new union.

The Holy Spirit instructs wives to be subject to their husbands, as they are unto Christ (Eph. 5:22-24; cf. Col. 3:18; Tit. 2:5; 1 Pet. 3:1, 5-6). The wife is to fear and love her husband (Eph. 5:33b; Tit. 2:4). God has made the husband the leader in the home: “The husband is the head of the wife” (Eph. 5:23). Leadership implies not only authority, but also great responsibility, for which husbands will be called to account. They must behave lovingly and sacrificially toward their wives, as Christ did toward the church (v. 25; cf. Col. 3:19). If husbands would “give themselves up” for their wives as Christ did for the church, it would immediately destroy half of the divorce plague. If wives would then do the same for their husbands, it would destroy the remaining half.

Husbands are to nourish and cherish their wives as they do themselves, and as Christ did His spiritual bride, the church (vv. 28-29). The very same love that causes a man to leave his father and mother in favor of the woman who becomes his wife is the love that he is to continue toward her (v. 31). As one who is physically stronger than she, he is to honor his wife by protecting her (1 Pet. 3:7).

These respective elements of the husband-wife relationship are largely ignored, yea despised, by those in the world and by some in the church. Women who have grown up under the “Women’s Lib” influence ridicule, detest, and rebel against the explicit passages above that instruct wives to submit to their husbands. They somehow find this demeaning and infer that these passages imply some sort of inferiority in the female sex, which, of course, is not true. I know some Christian wives who are spiritually and/or intellectually superior to their husbands. (In fact, I suspect one of them lives where I live.) Submitting to one’s husband does not make a wife inferior in any way. In providing His spiritual blessings, God recognizes no male-female distinctions (Gal. 3:28b). However, in the home (as in the church), God demands the distinctions we have reviewed in male-female relationships.

The submission of a wife to her husband does not obligate her to suffer continual abuse, perhaps even at the risk of her life, at the hands of one who is a mean, cruel, and inhuman beast. The authority of a husband over his wife can never justify despotic and tyrannical – not to mention cruel and abusive – treatment of his wife. While the husband’s headship implies that “the buck stops” with him eventually, he is neither loving nor cherishing (nor wise) if he fails to consult his wife concerning matters that affect her life as well as his (e.g., major purchases, relocations, child rearing, recreation, et al.).

As in the church, so in the home – God’s way is the right way and is the way for our ultimate happiness. When men and women throw out God’s pattern for marriage, divorce, remarriage, and the home in general, they bring multiplied misery upon themselves and upon millions of innocent children they have brought into the world.

Parents and Children

Most husbands and wives become fathers and mothers, which result is also part of God’s plan (Gen. 1:28). Accordingly, Paul follows his discussion of husbands and wives with instructions to parents and their children. Children (one or more included) are to obey their parents (both mother and father) “for this is right” (Eph. 6:1b) and “this is well pleasing unto the Lord” (Col. 3:20b). Not only so, but children are to honor their parents, at which point Paul quoted the fifth commandment of the Decalogue (Exo. 20:12) and applied it to the Christian age (Eph. 6:2–3).

The order for children to obey their parents implies that parents must demand such obedience when their children are still very young. Most children are smart enough, even at an early age to test their boundaries and limits to see how far they can push them. Limits set by parents are meaningless apart from discipline and punishment for trespasses. Parents make a tragic mistake when one wants to discipline the child, but the other seeks to prevent it. A child will soon learn exactly how to pit one against the other to his own greatest advantage. To millions of parents, boundaries, limits, and discipline are strange terms and even stranger concepts. Dr. Benjamin Spock, through his book on child-rearing and his contemporary generation of silly psychologists, convinced parents two generations ago that they would “inhibit” their children if they restrained them. So, instead of warping Suzie or Johnny’s little posteriors as the Bible teaches parents to do (Pro. 13:24; 22:15; 23:13–14; 29:15), parents warped their personalities by letting them kick them in the shins and holler “no” to parental commands.

The result was a generation that was undisciplined which, in turn, has produced a generation that is even less disciplined. In spite of the obvious, social planners still cannot figure out why public schools are plagued with children who spout obscenities, defy authority, attack teachers, and even commit murder and rape. Although Spock recanted his disastrous child-rearing advice in his latter years, as King Manasseh of old who repented of his evil earlier years, the damage he had wrought could not be undone.

The jury is still out on who was the more irrational—Spock with his no-restraint elixir or the parents who eagerly gulped it down. Before we blame Spock too harshly, we should perhaps remember that no one forced parents to accept his no-discipline idiocy. They apparently thought his was the “easy” way—just let the little darlings grow up on their own, doing what they want to. However, that “easy” way has produced incalculable tragedy, heartache, and suffering for these recalcitrant and incorrigible children, the victims of their crimes, and their parents. In fact, the entire nation has paid (and is paying) an awful price for this unnatural and foolish approach to parenthood.

Paul also treats in this context the opposite extreme—unnecessarily harsh discipline: “And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but nurture them in the chastening and admonition of the Lord” (Eph. 6:4; Col. 3:21). While both parents have discipline responsibilities, we note again that the primary leadership responsibility is still squarely on the shoulders of the husband/father. Harsh and unfair discipline and limits provoke unnecessary anger and discouragement, and can be as counterproductive as no discipline at all. Wise parents will seek to exercise discipline and set limits for their children that are:

- In harmony with Biblical guidelines (e.g., purity, influence, associates, habits, etc.)
- Consistent (should not punish harshly today what one ignored yesterday)
- United (Mother and Dad should never argue about discipline in front of the child)
- Realistic (e.g., not demanding that a 3-year-old run 3 miles for not picking up his toys)
- Painful (when not respected)

If children do not learn to respect authority and to obey authority figures in the home (Dad and Mom), they often never learn it. Children get their first concepts of God from their parents, especially their fathers. Fathers therefore have an enormous responsibility to get this right. If they see permissiveness, no backbone, and no discipline in dear old Dad, they may easily extrapolate these characteristics to God. Could this explain why many conceive of God as a heavenly “Santa Claus” who will bring everybody presents, regardless of whether they are

naughty or nice? I think so. Contrariwise, if children have a mean, merciless Dad who just hopes to catch them in some infraction, they may well view God in that light.

It is so sad to observe that many Christian parents were among those who chose Spock's book rather than the Spirit's Book – the Bible – as their child-rearing resource. My judgment is that their grievous mistake explains to a great degree a generation of rebellious, confused, and liberal-minded offspring who have in recent years become Change-Agent elders and preachers in the church and administrators and professors in the schools.

Conclusion

Do Scripturally dysfunctional homes affect congregations? Do geese fly? Do dogs bark? Women who seek forbidden leadership roles in the church (1 Cor. 11:1-3; 14:34; 1 Tim. 2:8-13) very likely have first failed to submit to the authority of their husbands at home. Likewise, children who are not given limits at home will likely see little need to observe God's limits in the church. On the other hand, children of overly-oppressive, cruel parents who are Christians may cause them to be disillusioned with God and the church.

The other side of the coin is generally true, also. Children who grow up with reasonable limits and lovingly administered consistent discipline from Christian parents are blessed beyond description. They have the very best opportunity for being strong, faithful, zealous children of God. The Lord cannot have too many of those in His congregations! Such strong Christian homes are the greatest source of strength in any spiritual body.

[**Note:** I wrote this MS for and presented a digest of it orally at the Lectureship hosted by the Northeast Church of Christ, Hurst, Texas, April 3, 2005.]

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