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Dear friends in Christ,

I'm a little worried about my sermon title being out there on the internet. "Building a stable nuclear..." may draw the attention of the authorities. But then maybe a CIA family somewhere will receive a needed message from God.

Nuclear family: Is a term that really refers to immediate family. Typically it means a husband, a wife and their kids... that's the nuclear family.

But why "nuclear." The nuclear force is the strongest force in nature. Subatomic particles joined nuclear force are extremely difficult to separate. They are tightly and closely bonded. In fact, when that bond is broken, a tremendous amount of energy is released... a chain reaction of such energy being released is a nuclear explosion... the most violent man has dreamed up yet.

Dividing the nuclear family typically has the same devastating results. Those of you who have been through a divorce (as spouse or child), or know someone who has, know how your life blows up. When those tight, close bonds are broken, the pain and devastation are enormous. Lots of damage is done.

In the second presidential debate, Mitt Romney was asked a question about his views on banning assault rifles. He said something that seemed like a tangent, or dodging the issue. And he didn't exactly answer the question clearly. But he did make a good point. He said that it was important to have solid families, and that ideally there would be a husband and wife together raising their kids. What do you do about assault rifles? You create strong families which produces stable people in society that don't kill people with assault rifles. I like that idea.

God has made marriage and the nuclear family the building block of a stable society. It's important that we get this right!

So we want to answer this question today: How do you construct an indivisible, stable nuclear family? I'd like everyone to listen carefully today because God, who is the designer of marriage and family gives us his instructions for having a stable nuclear family. If you're **married**, this obviously directly applies to you. Do you want to go home today with truth that will change your married life? Then listen! If you're **single** and on your own, you may be thinking this doesn't apply to you... know that it does. If you think you may some day get married, God wants you to know well the principles we will learn today **BEFORE** you get married. If you're **divorced**, you might be thinking this information is too late in coming. Not true. God's Word can lead you to repentance where there is sin, and peace, and you will know his guidance going forward. And even if you are in a situation in life where you're pretty sure you will **remain single**, by knowing these principles, you can encourage friends and relatives that are married. So let's listen to God's Word... we have lots to talk about here.

As we look at the reading before us today, we find that God give specific instructions: first to wives, then to husbands, then to children. We want to look at each of those in turn. But before we do there is another relationship we must understand first. In order to illustrate the husband – wife relationship, Paul in both cases compares it to the **relationship of Christ to the church**. If we don't properly understand the relationship of Christ and the church, then we won't understand properly anything else that God is teaching us here.

In this place as well as in others in Scripture, Christ is described as groom and the church as his bride. The love of Christ for his church is truly amazing. What makes it amazing is that there is nothing in us that makes us lovely or loveable. God has laid out the kind of morality that he finds attractive. He describes in detail in Scripture that attitudes that he loves, the words we can say that make him smile, the things we can do that show we respect him and trust him above all things. And we fail again and again. We are not lovely or loveable to God in any way.

But here's what is amazing: Christ loves us anyway. In fact, **his love for us is so great that he takes responsibility for our disobedience, for our failures, for our faults.** That's what it means to be the head over someone. It doesn't mean lording it over them, it means taking responsibility for that person. Because Christ takes total responsibility for his church, he takes care of the sin problem. He does it at great personal pain and effort. As the loving head over the church, Jesus took every measure necessary to remove our burden and make it his own. He came into this sinful world. He lived under the law. He took our guilt. He suffered. He died for our sin. And rose on the third day. Jesus, our loving head, took full responsibility for us, and that's what ultimately led him to the cross.

Now, how do we, the church, respond? First of all, understand that in addition to calling the church the bride of Christ, it also calls the church the body of Christ. He is the head, we are the body. As Christ's body, we now yield to him. Knowing that he took responsibility for us and took care of our biggest problems, we live for him. We love him. We submit to him. We don't try to call the shots when it comes to pleasing God... we listen to Jesus and follow his will, for he is the head who gave his life for us. We don't chafe under Christ, we rejoice under him.

Okay, with that picture in mind, we are ready to look at God's instructions for marriage and family. First, we'll focus in on the women, because it's first in our text:

Ephesians 5:22-6:4

22 Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. 23 For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. 24 Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.

This teaching is not popular today. I get pushback on this almost every time I teach this to couples in pre-marital counseling. What is God instructing wives to do here?

Let's answer the obvious question: what is submission? I think you all know that what we are reading in this text is a translation from the Greek language. So what we need to ask is: What does the Greek word mean that is here translated: "Submit"? In all honesty, we don't have a perfect word in English that conveys what the Greek word conveys. The word "submit" carries a negative connotation in English. I don't want to submit. Do you want to submit?

When we think of submission we usually equate that with being inferior, with being unequal, or with being stifled or oppressed or weak. But that's not what the word means.

But here's what it means: "To yield or surrender (oneself) to the will or authority of another." Part of the problem is that we live in a culture that considers yielding to another weakness, not love. That's just not true. Yielding to another can be a very good and godly thing. When we yield to the police officer and don't fight him, or a judge, or your boss... it is a good thing, right? It doesn't mean they are more valuable. It doesn't mean that you are stupid and they are smart. It doesn't mean they oppress and you put up with it. Those are all connotations we have tacked on to the word. When God says "Wives submit to your husbands" these things are not a part of his command.

Or consider this: Jesus submitted to the will of the Father. At the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus yielded his will to the Father's when he said, "Take this cup (of suffering) from me. But not my will, but yours be done." His willingness to yield to the Father meant that we were saved from our sins.

Submission Does Not Mean:

- A wife is inferior to her husband.
- A wife does not have independent thoughts.
- A wife does not seek to influence her husband.
- A wife must obey her husband's command to sin.
- A wife is less intelligent or competent than her husband.

Submission does mean acknowledging that God has placed the husband as the head of the family. Because this order was established by God, she will

- A husband and wife are equal with complementary roles.
- Wives are to submit like Jesus (Luke 22:42). She will acknowledge the position God has given her husband as head of the household and treat him accordingly.

"God gave the wife unto the husband to be, not his servant, but his helper, counselor, and comforter." Puritan John Downname

- Husbands are to lovingly lead like Jesus loves the Church.

22 Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. 23 For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. 24 Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.

Now let's address the husbands. Before I do, let me remind you, men, that what I was just saying to the women was addressed to them, not to you. God said, "wives, submit..." he did not say, "Husbands, your wives should submit." Or "tell them to submit." Or worse, "Make them submit." The word was spoken to them, not to you.

But here is what you can take from what God said to the wives: *you* are in a position of responsibility in the marriage. You are indeed the head of the house. Head of the house, though, does not mean everyone serves you and you are entitled to privileged treatment, you get to do what you want, you get to bark the orders.

No, being the head of the house means that you are ultimately accountable to God for your marriage and for your family. You carry the burden of responsibility. Just as Christ carried the burden for the church and went to the cross to save her, husbands, you carry the burden for your wife and for your kids. You answer to God for them.

That means you are the one finally accountable before God for making sure your family is adequately provided for.... For the spiritual instruction and example for your family... for any emergencies or problems that come to your family.

Someone described it like this: Husbands God designed you like heavy duty pickup trucks. Empty, you bounce down the road and handle poorly. But married with a family, you bear lots of responsibility. God designed you for that. With that load you carry, you ride smooth, like a loaded pick up. You take responsibility for your wife, your kids, your household... and your wife ought to see clearly that you are bearing that burden... you are taking seriously the responsibility God has given you as head.

Now listen:

25 Husbands, love your wives [well what does that mean? What kind of love? Men don't understand the whole love thing clearly, so Paul explains in detail.], **just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her** **26 to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word,** **27 and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.**

This is why we talked about this earlier. What does it mean to love your wife? It means to carry all her burdens. It means to place her needs ahead of your own. It means to find out what she needs and provide it. It means to give yourself fully to her, sacrificially to her, serving her, and adoring her. And what if she is not acting in a lovely or loveable way? You do what Christ did, and you love her just like he loved the church. That's the love God wants you to show.

Paul knows we still probably don't get it so he gives a second illustration:

28 In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. 29 After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church— 30 for we are members of his body.

This makes it more concrete. How do you take care of yourself and your needs? Love your wife to the same degree. I don't think we remember that: the two are one flesh. We are united. So when you treat your wife without love, you are treating self without love! If you are in an argument and you shout or argue until you win. Guess what, you lost! It's like the right side of your body fighting with the left and leaving it bloody and bruised and then declaring, "I have one!" No... you've only mangled yourself. So also, to the degree you love your wife with a Christ like love, you are really loving yourself... your own body.

31 "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh." 32 This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church. 33 However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband. So Paul sums it all up. Husband and wife are one. They are united. Husband, listen up: Love your wife as you love yourself. Wives, listen up: respect your husband. If you both do these two things, you have will build a strong nuclear family.

Real briefly, what is God's word to children?

6 Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. 2 "Honor your father and mother"—which is the first commandment with a promise— 3 "that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth."

4 Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.

Children, obey. Your parents are God's authority over you. Listen to what they tell you to do and obey, without griping and complaining, without talking back, without complaining about it not being fair. Obey.

And parents, don't frustrate your children. Bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.

Okay, we're out of time, but here's what I want you to do this week.

- 1) Honestly evaluate: Wives, how are you doing with the submission respect thing? Husbands, how are you doing with loving your wife as Christ loved the church? Kids: are you obeying your parents? These things cannot continue! God is offended. You are destroying God's plan for a stable, strong family. So this week, will you bring your failures to God and ask him for forgiveness? Your sin is not only hurting your family, more importantly, it is damaging your relationship with God.

- 2) When you repent, know that God assures you that in Christ Jesus, your sin is atoned for. He loved you enough to take the responsibility and remove your guilt through his life and death.
- 3) Make changes this week. Morning, noon and night remember God's word from today and pray about how you can put into practice. Husbands, how will you love? Wives, how will you lovingly yield and respect? Kids, how will you obey? Make specific plans on what you will do differently starting today. Do this daily for one week. Then do this for me... next weekend contact me, and tell me if it didn't help. "Pastor, I did what God wanted me to do, and my marriage is just as bad... my family is no closer." Seriously, I want to know if you intentionally put this into practice and it made no difference. Because I know that it will.

May God strengthen our nuclear families for our good but ultimately for his glory! Amen.