

*Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.*<sup>22</sup> *Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord.*<sup>23</sup> *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.*<sup>24</sup> *Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.*<sup>25</sup> *Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her*<sup>26</sup> *to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word,*<sup>27</sup> *and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.*<sup>28</sup> *In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself.*<sup>29</sup> *After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church—*<sup>30</sup> *for we are members of his body.*<sup>31</sup> *“For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.”*<sup>32</sup> *This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church.*<sup>33</sup> *However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.*<sup>6:1</sup> *Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.*<sup>2</sup> *“Honor your father and mother”—which is the first commandment with a promise—*<sup>3</sup> *“that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth.”*<sup>4</sup> *Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord. (Ephesians 5:21-6:4)*

### What does a Christian Family Look Like?

What is a family supposed to look like? I grew up with the image of a father and mother and kids, who all had the same parents. We sometimes call that the traditional nuclear family. But before 1900, the predominant kind of family everywhere in the world was an extended family all living under one roof. Today we have blended families – a husband or wife or both bring children into a marriage and maybe more children are born. That happened in the past, too, although usually because the spouses had died. Today it usually happens because of divorce. Without in any way endorsing unscriptural divorces, whatever models of family we see in our church today, God still speaks of how that family is supposed to work. What does he tell us? In America in 2012, **what does a Christian family look like?**

#### I.

St. Paul focuses on the relationships that should exist in every Christian family. In fact, limiting what he says here to Christian families is a mistake. Paul is talking about God’s will for all families. But we will speak of the Christian today family because only by faith can we even begin to live the way God calls us to. **What does a Christian family look like?** To answer that question, we have to answer another question: **What does a Christian marriage look like?**

It should look like Christ and the Church. Paul says, **“Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy ...”** You can’t talk about marriage without using the word “love,” right? But what do we mean by love? St. Paul says nothing here that relates to the love songs that have been a staple of popular music for generations. Neither teenagers nor us older folks are going to learn what he means from the play list on our I-pods. Romantic love and even physical love should be a part of our love for our wives, but here, God commands husbands to love their wives as Christ loved the Church.

How did Christ love the Church? He loved the Church when all its members were sinners and unbelievers and we deserved death and hell forever. He loved us when he should have hated us and condemned us. And then he gave himself up for us. He died for us. It wasn’t a split second decision like when a husband dives in front of a bullet heading towards his wife. Jesus knew for centuries that he was going to die the most horrible death imaginable. He came into this world and controlled all things so that death happened. That was the only way to keep his bride, the Church, from spending eternity in hell. And it was anything but quick. Jesus suffered the agony of hanging from a cross while his enemies mocked him and his body endured unbelievable pain. On that cross, his Father abandoned him to hell itself. Jesus suffered everything that our sins deserved. He knew what that would feel like before he ever began and still he sacrificed himself for us.

That is the model of a husband’s love: self-sacrifice. Gentlemen, your wife always comes first. If she doesn’t, you’re sinning. Every decision you make must be made for her best interest. If that means that you have to sacrifice what you wanted, or that you never get to do certain things or own certain toys, that’s what you signed up for when you said “I do.” You’re not the master of your house. You are a servant, called by God, to

administer your house and to love your wife and make every decision for her benefit. That means you need to listen to her concerns and make the decision that is best for her. Most of the time, that probably means you're going to do what she asks. But even when you make a different decision, the only valid reason for doing something other than what she hoped for, is an absolute conviction that this decision is what is best for her.

What is best for her? It isn't the highest standard of living. We aren't talking about having the nicest clothes or the most expensive furniture. Christ gave himself up to make the Church holy. What is job one for every Christian husband? The *spiritual* good of his wife. Every decision we make should reflect how best to strengthen her faith. When you buy a house, do you ask yourself how close it is to church? If you live there, will you gradually become less and less involved in hearing the word because it's too far away? That question is more important than how nice the kitchen is. When you move to a different work schedule, do you think about the impact on your church attendance? Your number one responsibility as a husband is the faith of your wife. Do you think about that responsibility? God expects you to.

But St. Paul doesn't just speak to husbands. He says, **“Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. 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.”** That word “submit” is a hard word to translate into English because almost any word we would use could be understood in a negative way. The word means to be subordinate to someone. We tend to think that automatically means somehow being less valuable. But don't we have to do that all the time? Do you have a boss at work? Don't you have to be subordinate to that boss? He or she tells you what schedule you'll work. He or she decides who's going to do what. That doesn't mean that God loves your boss more than you. It means simply that someone has to be in charge. In the family, God has placed that responsibility on the husband.

The husband is the head of the wife as Christ is head of the Church. Jesus commands and we obey. He sends us out to the ends of the earth to share his word and he commands us to let our light shine, and we do. Just as the Church shows its love to Jesus by living and working as he commands, so wives love their husbands by supporting them in their call to be the head of the family. Not masters of slaves, but heads put there by Christ for the family's good. Love means resisting your own sinful pride. It means avoiding nagging and manipulation. It means accepting decisions that are different from what you wanted because you trust the husband God has given you. It does even mean obeying, when that's the case.

Obviously, it's easier for a wife to submit to a husband who clearly puts her needs first. It's easier for a husband to put his wife's needs first when he knows she supports him and accepts his decisions. But in real life, it's hard to do those things consistently. It's easy to let pride and sin interfere. When your husband is selfish, does that let you wives off the hook for obedience? Not at all. Even if he's an arrogant Neanderthal, you are still to submit to him. That's the hard part here, isn't it? That's why young women need to be very careful about who they marry. The key question has to be, can you submit to this man as the Church submits to Christ? If not, you should not marry him no matter how much the earth moves when he kisses you. Husbands, if your wife is nagging and difficult and thinks she's in charge, does God call you to break her? No. He calls you to love her. So he does call you to teach her the truth, but not to physically force her. Even if she's impossible, he still calls you to put her first in everything. So young men need to think very carefully about the woman they will marry. Will she submit and encourage him to be the husband God calls him to be? Or will she be full of pride and make his life miserable?

Can any of us claim to live in our marriages as God calls us to? I can't. You husbands and you wives know how many times you've failed to live as Christ calls you to. You young people know how hard it is to want this model of marriage and how easy it is to want something that you see on TV or hear about on your I-pod. We all sin and we deserve God's punishment in hell. But Christ loved the Church. He loved us and gave himself up for us so that we are forgiven for all that sin. All our failures as husbands and wives are gone forever. Now Christ calls us husbands to love our wives as he loved us. To sacrifice ourselves for their spiritual wellbeing. He calls you wives to love your husbands and submit to them as the Church submits to Christ, trusting that God will do what is best for you through them. Live that life of faith.

## II.

Paul moves naturally from marriage to family. **What does a Christian family look like?** To answer that you have to answer another question: **What does a Christian parent-child relationship look like?** Paul begins where we would expect: **“Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.”** Parent love

this passage. But let's make sure we understand exactly what God is saying. Children, obey your parents in the Lord. That means that you should do it out of faith. If you love Jesus, you will obey your parents, even when you don't like the decisions they make. You shouldn't make them force you. God says that this is right. Your parents are God's representatives in your home. Even when they're stupid and out of touch, even when they just don't get it, God still expects you to show them the love and respect that you show him.

Now, does that mean your parents are perfect? No. We parents are sinners, too, and most of us agonize over being the bad guy and all the hard things that God calls us to do. And smart parents know that they're wrong sometimes. But even when we're wrong, God calls you to obey your parents in the Lord for this is right. And he promises you that he is working for your spiritual good through them. He called them to bring you up in the faith. He called them to teach you right from wrong and he promises to bless you in this world and in the world to come when you listen to those parents. Trust in God and obey them.

And parents, don't miss the last verse here: **“Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.”** You are not masters of slaves. You do need to be in charge in your home. You do need to practice discipline. You do need to be the bad guy sometimes. But don't exasperate your children. Don't make them feel that they can never do right. Don't make them feel that they are only sinners. That means that your discipline can never be about how angry you are. Now, I've been a parent for almost 18 years. I've had little kids, I've had middle sized kids and I have teenagers now. So I know that sometimes it's really hard to control your anger. But true Christian discipline is not about venting your anger. It's not about revenge on your children. It's not really about you at all. It's about them. If you love them, you will discipline them to teach them good from evil. And you will bring them to Christ for forgiveness and strength. It's not enough just to tell them that you love them. They need to actually hear that you forgive them and that Jesus forgives them. Their consciences are so sensitive. Sometimes, they don't need to be punished anymore. They've done it all themselves. They need to be forgiven and built up and encouraged.

Do we do all that? Children, do you obey your parents all the time because that's right? Or do you get mad when they say “no”? Do you throw temper tantrums and disobey them and lie to avoid getting in trouble? Parents, do you do all things in love for you children? Do you constantly think of growing their faith? Or has your discipline often been about how angry you are? Do you remember to forgive them? Or have the words, “I forgive you” never come out of your mouth? We all sin in this area, too. But we have a Savior here also. Jesus died because not one of us was a perfect child. He died for all the times we dishonored and disobeyed our parents. And he died for all the times we parents failed to discipline in love and for all the times we exasperated our children. He took all that sin away. Now he calls us all to live in love. Children, love your parents and obey them because you trust in God. Parents, love your children and discipline them in love. Don't exasperate them. Bring them up as children of Christ.

Isn't amazing how this all comes down to love? Not feelings, but doings. Husbands, do all things for your wives. Wives submit to your husbands. Children love your parents by obeying them. Parents, love your children by bringing them up in the instruction of the Lord. Real love is what we do for each other. It all comes from what Christ has done for us. Love one another. Amen.