

We live in an era of enormous societal change, especially in the area of family and marriage, and what we consider normal and acceptable for today. And it's actually hard to define what **is** "normal" and "acceptable", because today, society would want to remove **both** these words from our vocabulary. To say that something is "normal", infers that anything else is "abnormal". To say that something is "acceptable", infers that other options are "unacceptable". And if there's one thing that people hate, it's to be told that their chosen life-style is abnormal, or that what they are doing, is unacceptable.

And so today, there is a concerted push, to re-define family and marriage, and the rights and the responsibilities of those within them.

As I prepared for this message today, I began to realise just how much **our** thoughts on family and marriage, and relationships within marriages, are actually coloured by **our** culture, and of course by the family unit, that we grew up in.

And so, in the Middle Ages, in Western Europe, a single nuclear family (Mum, Dad & the kids), is what defined a family. But at that same time in Eastern Europe multiple generations of the same family lived together in the same household...ⁱ So you probably also had Grandma & Grandpa, and Great-granny and her incontinent cat living with you. It was the same time, different places, different cultures.

Here's another example: It was really only the late 18th Century, that our more modern families began to marry for love. Before then, it was often a family choice, or a political choice, or a business choice... Where as today, we wouldn't consider having it any other way, would we??? We marry,

because we love someone. (unless we lived in another culture of course)

And in my Dad's day – in the '50s and '60s – if the wife went off to work, the husband was considered a failure in providing for his family. In fact, it was illegal for married women to work in Government jobs.... And so I thought that's the way it's always been (single income families, and mum stays home, while Dad works). But history tells us a very different story. Single income families were really only a luxury that existed for a few short decades of enormous prosperity and wealth... Apart from these few decades (from the end of WWII, through to the early '80s), it was very much, only a luxury, that could ever be afforded by the upper classes of society.... And yet I grew up, thinking it was normal... Well, it was normal, but only for about 30 or 40 years...

Sociologically, Marriage, family, and family relationships, have been constantly evolving, around economic, social and political patterns within the world. So, if the family is constantly evolving – if what makes up the family unit, and if relationships between husbands and wives, and children and grandparents, are constantly changing – on what basis – on what model,,,,, should I build my family????

What I'm asking, is "Is there some kind of benchmark – Is there a fixed point of reference that does not change – on which we can model our families?"

And the answer is a most definite, "Yes". There is a fixed point. There is an unchangeable rock. And that reference point is the Lord Jesus Christ, and His relationship to the church.

As I read today's reading, I found myself wondering, "Is Paul teaching us about Marriage & Family, or is he teaching us about Christ and His Church?" Because sometimes he seems to be teaching on family and marriage, and at other times he seems to be teaching about Christ and the church. Is he using the simile of husbands and wives, to help us to understand Christ and the church, or is he using the simile of Christ and the church, to help us to understand marriage relationships????

And I think the answer is "Both". You will not fully understand Christ's relationship with the church, unless you can also understand how husbands and wives should be relating to one another, and you will not fully understand marriage relationships, until you understand how Christ loves the church...

And so, right here – right here in Ephesians 5, is our fixed point of reference.

Last week's message was on "sacrificial love and sacrificial living". And we discovered that the two go together – sacrificial love and sacrificial living, are so tightly bound that they cannot be separated. And last week's reading – I actually included the tail end of it in this week's reading – concluded by saying:

¹⁵ Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, ¹⁶ making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. ¹⁷ Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.

**¹⁸ And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but 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.**

As disciples of Jesus Christ, we are called to a life of sacrificial love and sacrificial living, and this includes living a life of worship – worship is **not** just something you do on a Sunday – if the only time you sing a song of praise to God is on a Sunday between 10 and 11, then your praise is most deficient – God deserves our praises morning, noon and night, every day of the week... When we get up in the morning, and we see the day has dawned, worship should be the first thing on our minds.

And part of this sacrificial love and sacrificial living, is **submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ**. Reverence, is actually an expression of worship.

What is reverence? I suspect very few of us ever really grasp what it means to revere Christ. The Greek word Paul uses, is φόβω (Phobo), from which we get our word “phobia” “fear”. To revere Christ, is to fear Him. To have a healthy respect for Christ... Jesus is not your buddy buddy chum pal mate ... Jesus Christ is your saviour. He is your redeemer. He is your Lord. Jesus Christ is the Lord your God, and your Judge. We have good reason to fear God...

To fear God, does not mean that we're scared of Him and that we cower away from His presence – it means we have a healthy, awe-filled respect of Him.

When I was going to school, the school principle was feared – not only by the students, but also by teachers. He was looked up to. He was respected. He was honoured. When we spoke to him, it was in the utmost of respect. I wasn't scared of him (Oh, naughty kids going up for the cuts were scared of him) – I wasn't scared of him, but I did fear him... Do you get the difference? I don't think kids today, fear the principal like we used to... Maybe I should've prefaced it with "back in the old days" ...

But that's the sort of fear – that's the sort of reverence (times 10) that we should have for Christ.

And it's because of this reverence we have for Christ, that we submit to one-another. Sacrificial love and sacrificial living, find their expression in a thing called, submission.

OOOHHHHH, submission. Ohhhh ... What a terrible word we think that is... The so-called rights of the individual; personal empowerment; self determination; equality among the sexes – these things are held as an ideal to aspire to, and submission is seen as an absolute negative....

Now, you might think that what I'm about to do, is a bit of a diversion, but I think it's important.... What is God's intended model for government????

We live in a democracy, and as such, we tend to think of a democracy as the only right form of government – where it's our right to control the government. Since federation in 1901, Australia has been a democratic country, and I'm fine with that, because that's the country in which we live. But as I read the bible, I do not find democracy modeled anywhere in the Bible. God's plan for governing, is not a dictatorship, nor is it a democracy. God's plan for government, is for some to be appointed as leaders, and for others to accept that leadership – that's what we call "Loyalty".

OK, so God's design of government, is not dictatorship. It is not democracy – it is leadership and loyalty. And you can see this, in all forms of government. National government. Local government. Governance of the church. Right down to the simplest form of government – the family unit. And one day, Jesus is going to return, and He will be our King. He will be in leadership, and we will be in submission to Him...

But the word "submission" today, has become concept to despise and reject... - especially when it comes to marriage.

Contrary to this, I'm going to tell you today, "Without sacrificial love – without sacrificial living – without sacrificial leadership and sacrificial loyalty – without submission – no marriage can be successful". If marriage was a democracy, the toughest – the strongest – or the most manipulative, would rule the marriage, and none of us would want that, would we???

Is it any wonder, that as we've become more self-centred – more fixated on ourselves and our rights – and less willing to sacrificially submit to the other, the divorce rate has continued

to climb higher and higher and higher. If there is no submission in the marriage, that marriage is doomed to failure. If the husband is self-seeking, or if the wife is self-seeking, then they have not understood marriage.

Verses 22-24 – dangerous ground – guaranteed to get the hackles up on any feminist, and to bring their blood to the boil, faster than any heavy-duty microwave... But before the lynch mob come to get me, I want you to listen to the whole message.

V22-24 says: ²² 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 Saviour. ²⁴ Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands.

Without sacrificial love, and without sacrificial living, you're going to hate that – you're going to hate this submission thing....

The feminist, or women's liberation movement, have had a huge impact on our society. And the whole concept of wives submitting to husbands, has been demonised, so much so, that even Christian women, who in practice **may** be submitting to their husbands – they may be loyal to their husband, and enjoying his sacrificial leadership, and yet shudder at the thought of the word “submission” – they're embarrassed to even talk about it..., preachers are scared away from even

preaching on this topic.... And I've got to tell ya, it's not without some fear and trepidation that I approach it today.

And I want to begin by saying this, it's not only wives who submit. All disciples of Jesus Christ, are required to submit. We don't submit because we are weak, but because we are strong. We don't submit because we are second-class citizens, but because we are citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven. We don't submit because we're dumb, but because we know the secrets of the mysteries of God.... We submit out of reverence for Christ. We submit, because submission is an expression of sacrificial living – and sacrificial living is what we do...

When Paul wrote this letter to a bunch of Christians in Ephesus, he didn't say to the scribe who was writing it down, "Righto, that's enough of verse 21. Now break the paragraph. Right Verse 22, and I want you to add another little heading – let's entitle this next little section "Wives and Husbands"".....

He didn't do that. Paul dictated a letter that was written down. And when you write a letter to someone, you don't divide it up into headings do you????

Unfortunately, that's something that we've done. We've added chapter and verse numbers to help navigate our way around the Bible. We've added little headings to chop it up even further.... Verse 22 was never meant to be divorced from Verse 21. They **must** be read together. In fact, in the best and most reliable of the original Greek manuscripts, V22 doesn't even have the word "submit" in it, and in the Greek, it doesn't make any sense at all, without V21.

Let me give you a direct translation:

V21: Submitting to one another in the fear of Christ

V22: The wives to your own husbands, as to the Lord

V23: Because a man (and the word used here for man *ανήρ* is actually an interesting word – and it's got all sorts of connotations of manliness and chivalry (husband; bridegroom; warrior; manliness; gentleman; hero – alright, Men, it's OK to be a man – to be a real man – a sacrificial man – never apologise for true manliness {sacrificial manliness}))

V23: Because a man is head of the woman as also Christ is head of the church, himself Saviour of the body.

V24: But as the church is subject to Christ, so also the wives to their husbands in everything.

The reason I did that literal translation, is because I want you to understand that V21 is not divorced from the rest of the passage. V21 and V22, must go together. And what does V21 tell us? ... We all submit. It's not only the wives who submit. We all submit to one-another.

Having said this, in the family unit – God's design for for decision making, is sacrificial leadership, and sacrificial loyalty, and thus, wives submit to their husbands. And this is all part of sacrificial living and sacrificial loving.

If a wife does not sacrificially love her husband, she's going to have a lot of trouble submitting to him, and likewise, if a husband is not sacrificially loving his wife, there's going to be trouble.

Now, it just glares at me here, just how very important it is, for women to choose to marry, someone who they can look up to. And that's why it's just so important for you to marry a Christian.

Husbands also express sacrificial living and sacrificial loving, within the marriage relationship – they just do it in different ways (and we'll be getting into that more next week)...

It might come as a bit of a surprise to you, but: Men and women are different... I know that might shock you, but it's actually something that I've found to be true. And in a marriage, men and women do have different responsibilities and obligations. We're not just different physiologically – we're different.

And I cannot get around the fact, and I will not be embarrassed about it, nor will I shy away from it – that the man in the marriage – the manly one – the husband – the warrior – the bridegroom – the manly hero... has a responsibility that the wife does not have. And that is, to be a sacrificial leader.

Peter Obrien says:

Those in authority have different roles with greater responsibility, but they are not better roles. The value, dignity, or worth of the members of the Christian household in a subordinate position is no less than that of those in authorityⁱⁱ.

And I believe that if we men, were keeping our responsibilities – a responsibility of loving sacrificially – a responsibility of living sacrificially – a responsibility of leading, sacrificially.... If everything we did, was to serve, protect, love, and to seek the best interests of our wives – if nothing about us was self-seeking.... I don't think any of our wives would argue with the wisdom of leadership and

submission. The submission of the wife, does not mean that we treat our wives like a door-mat. Sacrificial leadership, always seeks the best interests of the other....

What gives submission a bad name, is its abuse by those who are self-serving – and that is **not** the way of Christian marriage.

How do we guard against self-seeking behaviour within the marriage?

Sacrificial love and sacrificial living – this submission we have – one to another – the leadership of the husband and the loyalty the wife – is all grounded firmly in a life of worship...

There have been times – rare times – I want you to know that this is rare... Where on a Sunday Morning, Robyn and I, have had a bit of an argument about something... and it usually ends with me saying something quite spiteful, and then we're running out of time, we jump in the car and go to church...

Now, I've got to tell ya, it feels wrong – walking in to church, with all those words that we've said, still hanging in the air.... And then we try to worship God.... It's not a good place to be....

Has that ever happened to anybody else????

I try really really hard, now that I'm a minister, not for it to happen, because can you imagine the hypocrisy of leading worship, with the remnants of a self-seeking tirade still fresh in your mind????

It's hard to worship, when you're self-seeking... Just as it is hard to be self-seeking when you worship. *There's a saying "A family that prays together, stays together"*. And I reckon there's probably a fair bit of truth in that.

When a husband and wife, live a life of worship. When they have a sacrificial love for one another – there's no problem with submission. There's no problem with headship...

The problem comes, if we try to have a marriage without sacrificial love...

And it's sacrificial love all-round. It's not only the wives who have sacrificial love - the husbands too.

And next week, husbands, you'd better not stay away. And wives, if your husband isn't here today, you'd better make sure he is here next week, because there's a fair bit more instruction for us husbands, then what there is for the wives.

But as we go home today, let's commit to sacrificial love and what that means in a Christian family.

Amen.

ⁱ *The structures, or forms, of the family vary as much as the definition itself. There is no single "true" family form. In Western Europe the nuclear family (a single set of biological parents residing together with their children) was prevalent in the Middle Ages, but at that same time in Eastern Europe multiple generations of the same family lived together in the same household (Coltrane and Collins, 2001). Indeed, the United States has also seen many types of family forms throughout its short history. Stephanie Coontz's (2005) research on the history of marriage reveals that the family forms we see today in the U.S. are actually the result of an evolution of the family that began with an important shift in the culture of marriage in the mid-18th Century.*

Coontz (2005) found that only in the mid- to late-18th Century in Western Europe and North America "did the notion of free choice and marriage for love triumph as a cultural ideal...[opening] the way for it to become an optional and fragile [institution]" thus influencing the structure of the family at that time and into the future (p. 7). Earlier in history, during the Stone and Middle Ages, marriage was not based on love and men and women had very little choice about whom they married. In the Stone Age men and women married in order to improve the economic situation of their respective clans, then in the Middle Ages and into the 18th Century marriage served the economic and political needs of a particular extended family group (Coontz, 2005).

As marriage evolved in the mid- to late-18th Century into a union based on love, other economic, cultural, and political shifts in the U.S. and in other nations were happening that would further influence the structure of the family. In the 19th Century an ideal of the husband as

breadwinner and the wife as homemaker became popular, but the majority of families could not achieve this ideal, as few jobs paid wages high enough to support a single-earner family. This changed as World War II ended and the U.S. experienced a time of dramatic economic growth. The economic prosperity of the time combined with the popular cultural ideal gave rise to family trends in the 1950s and early 1960s that had never been seen before. "Ozzie and Harriet" families that married young, remained married, and had many children were the major family form at this time (McLanahan and Casper, 2001). The realization of the Ozzie and Harriet ideal did not last long, however. In the late 1960s and 1970s divorce rates rose, births to unmarried women increased, and the average age of first marriage also rose. The reasons for these changes in the '60s and '70s were many: real wages for women rose while those for men fell, the economy weakened, wives joined the workforce due to the downturn in the economy, and women gained access to legal rights, education, birth control, and paid work (McLanahan and Casper, 2001; Coltrane and Collins, 2001). This historical examination of the evolution of the family and marriage shows that the family has constantly been under pressure to evolve and shift with changes in the economy, our values, and even politics.

<http://oregonexplorer.info/rural/RuralIssues/FamilyStructure>

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ⁱⁱ O'Brien PT. *The Pillar New Testament Commentary – The Letter to the Ephesians*. Eerdmans – Grand Rapids. 1999.