

Family Members: Reflect the Family of God!
Sermons on Ephesians 5:22-27 & 6:1-4
Saint Mark's Watertown
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Introduction: Modern-Day Americans Mess Up Marriage

God makes marriage picturesque of our relationship to Jesus—when the Apostle John writes in Revelation: *The wedding of the Lamb has come! And his bride – his Church! – has made herself ready.... Amen.*

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ—who value our Heavenly Father’s institution of Holy Matrimony:

Did you know that the English language is a very unusual language?

Actually, that’s true for a number of reasons. But let me mention to you just one of them. English is largely a gender-less language. Let me explain.

In every other language I’ve ever studied –probably in any other language you have ever studied – everything has a gender. It’s true of German. *Der Grund* – the ground – “*He* is frozen,” we would say in the winter. *Die Straße* – the street – “*She* is long,” we would say. Everything has a gender like that. The same is true in Spanish. *El altar* – the altar – that’s a *he*. *La iglesia* – the church – that’s a *she*. And it’s the same way in Latin, Greek, and Hebrew.

But not in English. English is pretty much a gender-less language. Granted, you women are “*she*”, and we men are “*he*”—usually, anyway! But otherwise, there is no distinction in gender.

And our language is reflective of our society. There’s no distinction of gender in our society either, is there? And hey, some of that is good. “Equal pay for equal work” – man or woman – it makes sense to me. “Equal protection under the law” – for men or women – that’s really very good.

Having said that, the gender-less-ness of our society has an awful lot of drawbacks. As a consequence, our attitude is: men ought to be more like women; women ought to be more like men. But think of the guilt we’ve foisted upon ourselves when we notice we’re really not built that way. Similarly, our attitude is: men really don’t need women, and women really don’t need men. But think of the damage that’s done to marriage!

If men and women think they don’t need each other, then why get married at all? and why struggle to make a challenging marriage work? and why even figure that you need a man and a woman for marriage? And so, we suffer so much sinful living together, and so many fractured marriages, and our northeastern states are even coming up with a perverted form of marriage that doesn’t require a man and a women.

Well, a part of the reason we study God’s Word is to get our hearts and minds corrected when Satan uses society to lead us astray in this way. And the main reason we study God’s Word is to cause us to treasure all the more our relationship to Jesus Christ.

God’s Word to us today meets both of those goals. The section of Scripture before us on this week of Mothers Day – when we at Saint Mark’s traditionally observe what we call Family Sunday – God’s Word to us begins with Ephesians chapter five, verses twenty-two through twenty-seven....

Part One: Wives, Follow Your Husband’s Lead

First of all, this section of Scripture addresses wives. And even if you’re not a wife, you’ll want to listen. If you’re a prospective wife, this is what you’ll aim to be, as a Christian. If you’re a husband, this is what you’ll treasure about your wife. If you’re a prospective husband,

this is what you'll search for in a wife. And if you're none of the above – that's okay! – but you'll still rejoice in what God says here about wives—for the sake of society as a whole.

God, who established Holy Matrimony, says: **Wives** – literally, simply “women”, so there are some overtones here for all of you of the fairer gender, but the context makes it clear that the Lord is addressing specifically wives – *Wives, submit to your husbands* – to your “men”, but in this context, again, those are husbands – *Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord*.

Yeah, I know, that word *submit* can be a stumbling block—as can the word “obey”, which God uses elsewhere in Scripture. Probably it would help for me to tell you that the word used in the original Greek could be better translated. It's really, very literally: *Wives, place yourselves underneath* – under the lead of – *your husbands*. And isn't that better?

Wives, “place yourselves under the lead of” your husbands. Now, why? **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**. We Christians have no trouble following the lead of Jesus. He's our Savior! He himself led us into this world. He led our souls to the waters of Holy Baptism, and he scrubbed us clean. He led us into his Word—which has comforted us in every sorrow, which has given us reason to get up every morning. He has fed our souls with his own body and blood – wining and dining us! – in Lord's Supper. We Christians have no trouble following the lead of Jesus.

So now, as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands – with what exceptions? – **in everything**. So, unless your husband asks you or directs you to sin, you will follow his lead. But if he does direct you to sin, defy him—and guys, you'll deserve that defiance.

Anyway, ladies, do you see your noble task? When you wives cheerfully and carefully follow the lead of your husbands, you are reflecting the Church's happiness in following our Savior. Wow! When your husband leads you to blessings, who wouldn't want to follow?! And when your husband – unfortunately – leads you to suffering, well, just the way we Christians are willing to suffer after Christ, you also are willing to follow your husband. And in the end, through faith in Jesus, Christ will lead you home.

Part Two: Husbands, Love Your Wives to Death

Now, women, believe it or not, I think it could be argued that I've just described the easy part of marriage. I mean: Listen to what the Lord says to men. And before we get to that, let me say: If you're a wife, this is what you're going to value in your husband. If you're a prospective wife, this is what you're going to seek in a husband, before you give yourself to him. If you're a prospective husband, this is what you'll seek to be. If you're a husband already, this is what you're going to do. And if you are none of the above – that's okay! – but you're still going to pray for God to make men like this.

So now, God says: **Husbands** – again, literally “men”, but in context: husbands specifically – *Husbands, love your wives* – your “women” – **just as Christ loved the church**. Whoa!!! *Husbands, love your wives just as Christ loved the church?!?* And how much did Christ love you and me?

Well, *Christ loved the church* so much that before he made the world – eternally ago – he knew your name, and your sin, and he still developed a plan for you to dwell with him eternally! *Christ loved the church* so much that he left his throne on high, where he had been perfectly blissfully content for all of eternity, and he entered into this dark and miserable world as a poor little infant for you! *Christ loved the church* so much that he spent thirty-three years surrounded by sin, tempted to sin, but not sinning – instead loving and helping and forgiving – for you! *Christ loved the church* so much that, finally, he accepted your guilt, suffered your penalty, went through the crushing damnation of eternal hell and died – God died! – for you!!!

Husbands, love your wives – like that! – **as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word** – Holy

Baptism! – *and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.*

See, to Christ Jesus we are his radiant, perfect-in-beauty, completely pure Bride. Husbands—husbands, that’s the way your wife looks to you: so fully do you forgive her, so entirely do you accept her, so completely do you love her. And your chief motivation in so doing is to reflect our glorious relationship to our Heavenly Husband, Jesus Christ.

Pretty good stuff, eh?! And there’s more: for children and parents—which is something that often results when husbands and wives get together (!). But before we look at all that, let’s hit the “reset” button on our minds, if not our hearts, and sing the next hymn....

Introduction: Modern-Day Americans Mess Up Parenting

Jesus makes the family picturesque of our relationship to God—when the Apostle John writes in his First Epistle: *How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God. And that is what we are!* Amen.

Dear fellow children of God—who value our Savior’s institution of parenthood:

When we talked about husbands and wives moments ago, I introduced the subject by saying we modern-day Americans are very confused on gender issues. It’s reflected in the English language itself. And that confusion is corrected only when we take to heart the Bible’s message.

I guess you might say the same in regard to the relationship between parents and children. Again, English reflects no difference between the two. In Spanish, for example, when children address a parent, they use the word *Usted*: *you*—but it’s a lofty sort of *you*, and it’s capitalized. In contrast, when parents address a child, they use a different word, *tu*: *you*—an endearing sort of *you*, and it’s not capitalized. And a whole different verb form is used to go with the two different sorts of “you”.

But not in English. The English language pretty much lacks what you would call “rank”. There is no distinction between parents and children.

And again, it’s reflective of our society. There’s little distinction between parents and children in our society, right? And again, some of that is good. Each parent and each child is a valuable life. Each parent and each child ought to be protected by law.

But again, the lack of parent-child distinction in our society has an awful lot of drawbacks. A child’s attitude in our society is, “I have equal say with my parent, I know as much as my parent does, and my happiness is paramount.” And a parent’s attitude in our society is, “I’ll let my child choose – how can I think that I know better? – anything to keep him happy.”

But think of the damage that’s done to society! Children grow up thinking they should always get their way, and their feelings are always right, and their happiness becomes their god. And we wonder why some young adults haven’t learned to earn their keep, others have become addicts, and still others criminals. It’s actually a marvel so many of you turn out so well!

Well, let’s get our hearts and minds corrected, and let’s learn to treasure Jesus as we consider Ephesians chapter six, verses one through four....

Part Three: Children, Listen Underneath Your Parents

First of all, this section of Scripture addresses children. Our Heavenly Father says: *Children* – and God uses a word here that encompasses sons and daughters alike – *Children, obey your parents* –mother and / or father – *in the Lord, for this is right*. That word for *obey*? It’s literally: *listen underneath*. Children, listen underneath your parents—genuinely listen to what they say, and genuinely follow what they say. And do it *in the Lord, for this is right*.

Do you see, then, the noble task you have if you are a child? By listening underneath your parents and following what they say, you are giving an example to the entire world of the

way people ought to listen underneath their Heavenly Father and follow what their Heavenly Father says. And if others do that, if they follow your lead, they'll have eternal life through faith in Jesus Christ!

Going on, we read: "**Honor your father and mother**"-- *which is the first commandment with a promise*—"that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth."

Ah, that does a nice job of broadening out the subject, doesn't it? It's mostly minor children that need to listen underneath a parent and follow what they say. Our goal as parents is that, when our children reach majority age, they will be genuine adults—fit to serve the Savior on their own. But all of us, whose father and mother are still alive, still need to *honor* them—as the fourth commandment says here. And as we do, it's true: *it will go well with us*, and generally speaking, *we will enjoy long life on the earth*.

So, be sure to speak to your Mom today—and to your Dad, too. And thank them for what they've done for you. Thank them, especially, if they're the ones that made sure you got baptized, and learned the Scriptures, and got prepared to receive the Lord's Supper. *Honor* them today!

Part Four: Parents, Nourish Your Children in the Lord

And finally, what's the role of your parents? Our Heavenly Father says: **Fathers** – and I can't say that excludes you moms, but it does explicitly focus on fathers here – **Fathers, do not exasperate your children** – literally, simply, *don't provoke them to anger* – **instead, bring them up** – *nourish them!* – **in the training and instruction of the Lord**—even warning them from him.

Now, what to make of that? Well, let's take it in the two parts that the Lord gives us here.

Fathers, and mothers, *don't provoke your children to anger*. How would you provoke your children to anger? Well, let me tell you. Don't listen to them. Act like your way is the only way. Don't accept your for the way God did and did not make them. Don't give them the impression that you really do love them. And above all things – above all things – make sure that you don't read your children the Word of God, make sure you never ask them about it, try to discourage your children from getting to church, but if they do get to church, make sure you don't set them a godly example by going to church regularly yourself.

That should just about do it. Whether your children are young or old, this should be enough to provoke them to anger. If you do it well enough, you will land in hell, because you won't be listening to your Savior and trusting him. And your example will lead your children to hell—but believe me: there are others of us who will fight you on that one.

Fortunately, I know better for all of you. You are my dear brothers and sisters in Christ! You are following the Lord's command to: *nourish your children in the training and instruction of the Lord*. Whether your children are young or old, you are doing for them the three main things a Christian parent needs to do for his children. First and foremost, you're getting them to trust Jesus through abundant exposure to his Word. Secondly, and very importantly, you're loving them with no strings attached at all. And thirdly, yes, you're leading them to see the natural consequences of their actions; we call that discipline.

So, moms (and dads), when your kids wish you a Happy Mother's Day (or Father's Day): tell them how much you love them, tell them that our dear Savior Jesus loves them even more, and fearlessly give them whatever advice they need. The payoff is that, when your children follow your lead, you will dwell together in the house of your Heavenly Father forever—through confidence in Jesus Christ. Amen.