

“The Secret to a Happy Life, Part 2”

Ephesians 5:21-6:9

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Last week, as we looked at this important passage from Ephesians, we began talking about the secret to a happy life. As I mentioned, the top three areas in our lives that can either be joy-givers or joy-stealers are marriage, parenting, and work, and that’s exactly what Paul is talking about here. If you were here last week you remember that I decided to discuss these three in reverse order. One of the reasons I decided to do that is because many people struggle with verse 22, “wives submit to your own husbands.” That verse has been misunderstood and misused so often that many people never hear the real message. The other reason for working through this passage backward is that we can discuss these three critical areas of our lives in order of increasing importance and intimacy.

The first area of our lives that we talked about last week is our work. Paul says, “slaves obey your earthly masters.” A perfectly acceptable modern way to translate that verse would be, “employees, obey your earthly employers.” God cares about how we go about our work. He cares about our *attitude* about our work. Paul tells us that in whatever we do we are to work as if we’re working directly for God, and we are to do it respectfully, sincerely, and cheerfully. Likewise, superiors are commanded to treat those under them respectfully, sincerely, and cheerfully.

The second area we discussed was the relationship between children and parents. “Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right,” and parents, “do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.” Parents are not to cause deep, long-term resentment and bitterness in their children by being unreasonable or unfair or simply uncaring. Instead we are to nourish them, teaching and correcting in a gentle, loving way. Each is to treat the other in a loving, respectful way.

That brings us to the third area of life that Paul says can provide the secret to a happy life – marriage. Perhaps you saw the article recently that Scotland’s oldest woman, Jessie Gallan, passed away at 109 years old. In an interview before her death she revealed the secret to a long and happy life – eat porridge for breakfast every day and stay away from men. She said, “they’re just more trouble than they’re worth.” Now she tells you, right? But that’s not God’s secret to a happy life. God created marriage and He intends for it to be the closest of all earthly relationships. And marriage is the highest value relationship because as he says in verse 32, one of the purposes of marriage is to show the world how much Jesus loves the church. However, marriage is where we are the most vulnerable and so it’s also the relationship that is most prone to conflict and misunderstanding.

Since we’re working our way through this passage backwards, this morning we’ll look at God’s instructions to husbands first. “Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body. “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.”

Notice that this is the longest section in the entire passage, which means it’s probably the most important. It was also the most radical concept in those days. Husbands are instructed

to love their wives, which seems obvious. But then Paul tells us what love really means. Our culture tends to equate love with romantic feelings, although that's certainly part of it. The problem with thinking of love as romantic feelings is that feelings change. People talk about "falling out of love." But that's not love. Paul gives us two ways to understand real love. First, husbands are to love their wives like they love their own body. At first this seems kind of weird, like the body builder who stands admiring himself in the mirror. That's not what Paul means. You love your body by feeding it properly and protecting it from harm. Paul says that since the two have become one flesh that husbands are to care for and protect their wives just as they would themselves.

Paul also says that husbands are to love their wives like Christ loves the church. How much does Jesus love his church? Enough to die on the cross and suffer the punishment for our sins in our place. Jesus loves his church so much he was willing to die for her. The point of this passage is that love is not a feeling. Love is a commitment and a sacrifice. Love means dying for my wife. Most men will never have the opportunity to actually die to protect their wives. But there is a deeper meaning to the idea of dying for your wife. A woman once told her husband, "I know you are willing to die for me. But while you're waiting to die do you think you could help me put the dishes away?" Love means willingly dying to self, to my own personal feelings and wants in order to serve and protect my wife and meet her needs.

What about the wife's responsibility? I've tried to avoid it as long as possible but we have to go there. "Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands."

So what exactly does Paul mean by "submit?" Before we get to that let's talk briefly about what it *doesn't* mean. It's important to

notice that Paul intentionally uses a different word here than he did for children or slaves. In both of those cases he says *obey*. Whatever he means by *submit*, it's not the same as *obey*. Second, submit does not indicate some kind of hierarchy where the husband dominates the wife. In the section on children Paul refers to parents, indicating an equality. Third, when he says "submit in everything," Paul does not mean submitting to anything that goes against God's Word. Wrong is still wrong.

The Greek word for "submit" is *hupotasso*, which literally means to arrange or put under. It means to willingly give of oneself. If you're going to willingly do something you must have the ability and authority to do it. If you are going to submit, that means you are going to make a choice. One way to think about it is like submitting a paper in school or submitting an article for publication. So what does submitting look like? Seems to me that it looks a lot like the husband's loving. It looks like self-sacrifice, a giving of yourself willingly, giving up your own personal feelings and wants in order to meet the needs of your husband.

A lot of research has been done in this area over the last 20 years. You've heard of the books like *Men Are From Mars, Women Are From Venus*, and *Love and Respect*, which comes right out of today's passage. What the research overwhelmingly shows is that deep down most men and women have distinct needs that are summed up in a question. Not all but most women, according to the research, have this nagging question "am I lovable?" You may not even be conscious of the question but it drives your thinking and relationships and decisions. The question that lies at the root of most men's identity is "am I good enough?"

In the area of marriage, the secret to a happy life is speaking and acting in a way that answers that innermost question with a resounding YES! Husbands, your number one job is to make sure that your wife knows without a doubt that not only is she lovable but that she is loved. You can do that by being close to your wife. In *Love and Respect*, Dr. Emerson

Eggerichs points out that most women need “face-to-face” time. They need you to listen attentively. That means putting away the cell phone. And they need you to listen without trying to “fix” everything. Loving your wife this way means letting her know you treasure her. One author suggests that instead of just saying, “I love you,” you can convey this idea of being treasured by saying, “I’m so glad I married you.”

Wives, your number one job is to make sure that your husband knows without a doubt that not only is he good enough but that he is appreciated and valued and desired. Dr. Eggerichs notes that men need “shoulder-to-shoulder” companionship. Submitting means taking an interest in your husband’s interests. You may not have a natural interest in fishing or hunting or working on the car or whatever your husband likes to do, but it’s important to show him that his interests are important to you because he’s important to you. Next, find ways to show him that you appreciate what he does. This can be a difficult one if there’s more frustration than appreciation. Criticism can be like a knife to his soul, but working to find

those areas where you can show genuine appreciation can make a world of difference. Finally, the deepest, most powerful way you answer your husband’s question “am I good enough?” is your desire for him. Submitting to your husband means meeting his emotional need for physical intimacy with you.

So what is the secret to a happy life? For more than 80 years now Harvard University has been studying what leads to a happy life. In 1938 they began studying 268 sophomores at the university. They have kept up with them through all of life, studying what made them happy. The result? More than anything else happiness depended on the quality of their relationships. As we’ve here in Ephesians, the quality of our relationships depends on our willingness to die to self and put others’ needs ahead of our own – our spouse, our children, our boss, and our employees. You could say the secret is treating others the way you want to be treated...by Jesus.

Amen.