

Ephesians 5:21-6:9
“We’re All Family”
June 14, 2020
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We continue our sermon series through the New Testament book of Ephesians.
Today we’re looking at Ephesians 5.21 – 6.9, listen now to God’s word for us this day...

[Read Ephesians 5.21 – 6.9]

Let us Pray:

Come, O Holy Spirit, come.
Come as the fire and burn,
Come as the wind and cleanse,
Come as the light and reveal,
Convict us, Convert us, Consecrate us...until we are wholly thine.

And now, Lord, my prayer is simply this:
That the words of my mouth
And the words of all our hearts will be found pleasing and acceptable to you,
for you are our rock and our redeemer...Amen.

Sermon

As someone who will be celebrating a 24th Wedding Anniversary tomorrow – I appreciate this text because it captures for us as faithful people the true nature of our relationships.

Straight to the point – it’s not about hierarchy in relationships – it’s about God in Christ revealing the depth of love and mutuality that is to be the basis for ALL our relationships.

We’re all Family and deserve to be treated with the utmost of care.

Ephesians 5:21-6:9, is a good example of what New Testament scholarship calls “household code” – consisting of a set of principles – depending on how legalistically one construes them – that define – as we have just read – domestic relationships among:
Husbands & wives (5:22-23)
Children & Parents (6:1-4)
Slaves & Masters (6:5-9)

Structurally, these household codes, move from the responsibility of those considered to be socially subordinate to what is required of those holding relative dominant positions within the culture – at the time this letter was written by Paul to the Ephesian community.

While this hierarchy of relationship may have been true in terms of the broader culture, it is precisely opposite to the attitudes Paul expounds upon in this letter to the Ephesian church.

This “code” opens with a statement which encompasses all – ALL – the groups that will be addressed – it carries with it an imperative force which commands that they all – ALL – are to “subject” themselves to “one another” ... out of reverence for Christ.

That is not to say there is not a hierarchy of relationship at play here – it is to say that it might not be the hierarchy we first think of – if we’re honest, our first thought is often about what’s best for me/I rather than what’s best for we/you.

So, what do I mean by that?

Well, simply put, we tend to forget the opening line & specifically what – or who – holds and molds this text, “Be subject to one another ***out of reverence for Christ.***”

This wording points to a mutual subordination which is a far more egalitarian model of social relationships, these household codes are held together via a hierarchical ordering of household relationships founded upon our ***reverence for Christ*** – who is ***head of the church, the body of which he is Savior*** (5.21, 23).

This – in turn – directs us to the true hierarchy at play within the whole of faithful living – for it is probably not going too far as to suggest that the hierarchy at work in our lives - & our relationships – is essentially flattened to only two levels:

- The dominant position being reserved for God & Christ.
- The subordinate position including all others relative to the divine & in turn mutually subordinate among themselves.

This is to say, rather than a “chain of command” which flows from God to Christ to husbands to wives to children to slaves – or as is at times literally translated from this passage – husbands/fathers/ masters are superior to wives/children/slaves in respectively analogous subordinate positions.

Rather than this type of hierarchy – the real hierarchy is two-tiered – *The Divine & the Human.*

When relationships are formed by our ***reverence for Christ*** there is a fullness of life which springs forth.

- The one we revere teaches us how to relate to one another.
- The one we revere is the one we seek to emulate in our relationships.

That one is Jesus the Christ – the one who ***loved*** and ***gave himself up*** for the church ***in order to make her holy...and without blemish*** (5.25-27).

We are to love and care for one another as Christ loves the church.

We know from the Easter narrative that Christ willingly sacrificed for the church.

In his Anchor Bible commentary on Ephesians, Markus Barth reminds us that our discussions of the ethical requirements of the Christian life “were a means to remember and proclaim Christ rather than an occasion to return to legalism.”

The same can be said of how we relate to one another.

As faithful people, our Christ-like – our Christian love – is revealed through loving, mutually subordinating relationships between one another – which is a proclamation to the watching world of Christ’s loving, self-giving for all – ALL – people.

The way we treat one another says a lot about the God we believe in – the God who took on human skin and walked among us in Jesus the Christ – in order to show us what abundant, full life looks like.

Perhaps you like the adage, “Christianity is more caught than it is taught”
Or, as another adage puts it, “Who you are speaks so loudly, I can’t hear what you’re saying”

People understand who we are & what we believe by seeing how we treat each other.

Maybe the following will help:

When you thought I wasn’t looking, I saw you hang my first painting on the refrigerator, and I immediately wanted to paint another one.

When you thought I wasn’t looking, I saw you feed a stray cat, and I learned that it was good to be kind to animals.

When you thought I wasn’t looking, I saw you make my favorite cake for me, and I learned that the little things can be the special things in life.

When you thought I wasn’t looking, I heard you say a prayer, and I knew there is a God I could always talk to and I learned to trust in God.

When you thought I wasn’t looking, I saw you make a meal and take it to a friend in need, and I learned that we all have to help take care of each other.

When you thought I wasn’t looking, I saw you give your time and money to help people who had nothing, and I learned that those who have something should give to those who don’t.

When you thought I wasn’t looking, I saw you take care of our house and everyone in it and I learned we have to take care of what we are given.

When you thought I wasn't looking, I saw how you handled your responsibilities, even when you didn't feel good, and I learned that I would have to be responsible when I grow up.

When you thought I wasn't looking, I saw tears come from your eyes, and I learned that sometimes things hurt, but it's all right to cry.

When you thought I wasn't looking, I saw that you cared, and I wanted to be everything that I could be.

When you thought I wasn't looking, I learned most of life's lessons that I need to know to be a good and productive person when I grow up.

When you thought I wasn't looking, I looked at you and wanted to say, "Thanks for all the things I saw when you thought I wasn't looking."

Children – and other people – are watching us – doing as we do, not as we say.

To God be the glory, now and forevermore!

Alleluia & Amen.