

What Does a Christian Family Look Like Again?

“We are not in Kansas anymore,” were the words Dorothy spoke when she woke up in the strange land of Oz. Ever feel like you woke up from a nap into a world that is completely upside down? I do. I grew up being told that we had nine planets in our solar system. Now they say Pluto is no longer a planet. I guess we have only eight. Things are not what they use to be. Let’s see the confusion about something closer to home, our families. There are arguments over how many genders there are. People can’t define what a woman is. What is marriage? Why get married? What does a family look like?

I wish I could hold up before you today the perfect model of the family unit. I can’t find one. Even the nuclear family we imagined from the 1950’s is still flawed. If we lived that way my wife would never work and I would never cook. I can’t even find a perfect model in the Bible. Adam didn’t love his wife when he blamed her for his sin. Their children grew up hating each other to the point of murder. Was it right for Jacob to have two wives and two mistresses? Look at the dysfunctional family that came out of that.

When I made homemade pancakes last weekend, I couldn’t remember if I should add ¾ cup of milk or a full cup. The recipe called for ¾ cup so that is what I used and they turned out great. When I am confused, I go back to the instructions. Let’s ask the one who created us male and female and invented marriage to tell what a Christian family looks like again.

I. It starts with Christ.

“¹⁸ **Instead, be filled with the Spirit ... ²¹ ... by submitting to one another in reverence for Christ.**” We are talking about a Christian family. Certainly, society would be better if everyone, Christian or non-Christian, adopted God’s model for the family. But they have no reason to. We do. This is for those who are “filled with the Spirit,” who believe and say Jesus is Lord by the Holy Spirit. This explains why a Christian does anything the Lord asks him or her to do. It is like the electrician. All day he does wiring and gets paid for it. But at night he goes to his mother’s house and fixes her wiring for free. That’s the difference. We do what the Lord says because we want to, not because we have to.

So the Christian family begins with Jesus Christ, “**in reverence to Christ.**” That electrician gladly does his mother’s wiring because she is his mother. We want to do what Jesus says because he is Jesus. So we Christians submit to everyone else, even unbelievers, out of reverence to Christ. Now let’s see that in the family.

II. A husband loves his wife as Christ loves the Church.

Chronologically, the next thing to quote from our reading today is what God expects of Christian wives. But I am going to skip them for a moment. I admit it, this section of the Bible scares me. Once you say, “wives, submit to your husbands,” it seems as though riots break out. Well, not riots, but people get upset. So let’s look at husbands first because that might help us understand the wives role later.

“²⁵ **Husbands, love your wives, in the same way as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her ²⁶ to make her holy, by cleansing her with the washing of water in connection with the Word. ²⁷ He did this so that he could present her to himself as a glorious church, having no stain or wrinkle or any such thing, but so that she would be holy and blameless.** Husbands, do you see what your Lord is doing here? He wants you to submit to your wives and children as Christ submits to the Church by loving her. You know how much he loves the Church. Even when we gave him every reason to abandon us, even when we became downright nasty to him, even when we were still sinners, Christ died for us. He is the only reason God forgives us and gives us a place in his heaven. And that Jesus is still submitting to our needs as he is the Good Shepherd who is leading us through a dangerous world to that heaven. We want Jesus as the head. We have no problem being the body.

God has made you the head of your family. This means you are the head as Christ is the head of the Church. God wants your family to see you as God’s representative in your family. As the head, show them God’s kindness and patience. When you discipline, discipline as the Lord, firm but with love. Let them see God as you open up the Bible to them, when you pray with and for them.

Husbands, your wife and family are more important than your job, your hunting, your softball, your friends. That doesn’t mean you can’t go to work or hunt or hang out with your friends. But all of your decisions will revolve around what is best for them.

If it helps, picture it like this. Imagine I asked you to take care of a 1965 all original, mint condition Corvette convertible. You have a choice. You can take it out for joy rides, seeing how far off you can come off the road as you zoom 120 mph over that little bump in the road. Or you can treat it as the treasure it is. You can still drive it, but you are careful with it so it remains in mint condition. Husbands, love your wives and families as Christ loves the Church and gave himself up for her. They are your treasure. Like Christ, die for them if necessary.

III. Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord.

Maybe that will help us make sense out of God’s role for wives. “²² **Wives, submit to your own husbands as to the Lord. ²³ For the husband is the head of the wife, just as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he himself is the Savior. ²⁴ Moreover, as the church submits to Christ, so also wives are to submit to their husbands in everything.**” Wives submit by submitting to their husbands as the Church submits to Christ. This means your husband is the head of the family. Why? Is he is better suited for that role? No. Is it because you are inferior? No. So why? God placed him there. God does that. He tells us

to submit to the governing authorities as his representatives. He places pastors and teachers in churches. And he does the same in the family.

Now, submitting is a voluntary action. Wives are wives because they voluntarily said, "yes." In fact, we men have to beg them to marry us, don't we? By getting married, you are placing yourself into the care of your husband. You are saying, "I am going to put myself under your care. I will let you hold me. It is a bit scary because I will depend on you to do the right thing, but I trust you." It is as if you are the owner of that mint 1965 Corvette and you are telling your husbands, "Please handle with care."

²⁸**In the same way, husbands have an obligation to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself.** ²⁹**To be sure, no one has ever hated his own body, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church,** ³⁰**because we are members of his body, of his flesh and of his bones.** ³¹**“For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two will be one flesh.** ³²**This is a great mystery, but I am talking about Christ and the church.** ³³**In any case, each one of you also is to love his wife as himself, and each wife is to respect her husband.”** Do you see what the Lord is doing here? He is making a unit. Two are becoming one. Yes, there is a head, but the head loves and serves for the sake of the others. And the other places herself under that head. She does out of respect, not because he earned it, but because God put him there. I like how one old pastor once put it: The wife is willing to live for her husband, and the husband is willing to die for his wife.

IV. Now throw in kids.

Now for the rest of the family. **“6 Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.** ²**“Honor your father and mother,” which is the first commandment with a promise:** ³**“that it may go well with you and that you may live a long life on the earth.”** ⁴**Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.”** This Fourth Commandment is meant for the good of children. It is there to help them grow up and be wise and successful and God-fearing.

We don't need a reason why we should obey this Commandment or any of the others. It is God speaking, it is right to obey, period. But God gives kids a reason. If you do, you will do well and you will live a long life on the earth. I know. In this sinful world people including kids may have to suffer, even die early. But generally, kids will do well and live longer when they listen to their parents. That is why they tell kids not to run into the street for that stray ball, or put their hand on that hot burner or into that blender, or ride their bikes down the middle of the road at night. They are there to tell you what to watch or not watch, how to become responsible by cleaning your room or to tell the truth. You will live longer and better if you listen.

And they are there to protect you spiritually. ⁴**Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.”** Moms are just involved, but remember, the Father is the head of the family and the buck stops there. What do you prefer, a father who teaches about Jesus by word and example, or do you want a father who says, "Go ask your mother?" Yes, teach kids how to tie shoes, be honest and have a good work ethic, but teach them about Christ. All parents discipline, but Christian parents do it in such a way as Christ would, to show sin in order to show a Savior, to learn and not to punish. If you don't teach them about Jesus, they will grow up confused and will be tossed back and forth by the waves of the world. They may grow up angry if you are harsh and bitter if they don't get forgiveness.

You see what God is doing here. He is making parents the chief guardians and teachers of kids, especially about God and Christ. I learned what prayer is from Catechism, but I learned how to pray from my parents.

I know. There are folks here who are not married. There are folks here who may have a bad taste in their mouths because they had dysfunctional families. I know I have families here who are broken, or where one spouse died. And remember, this is Law. It shows our sin. When I stand before this text, I see all the things I didn't do, and I am shamed by all the selfish, bad things I did to my family. That is why the Christian family begins with Christ. It also must end with Christ and have Christ in between.

²⁵**Husbands, love your wives, in the same way as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her** ²⁶**to make her holy, by cleansing her with the washing of water in connection with the Word.** ²⁷**He did this so that he could present her to himself as a glorious church, having no stain or wrinkle or any such thing, but so that she would be holy and blameless.”** Jesus didn't just marry us as his bride. He first had to turn the ugliest bride you can imagine into a beautiful and radiant bride, just as holy as he is. He did this by laying down his life for his bride, cleansing her with Baptism and the Word. We sin, but before God we are holy and blameless. If that doesn't move you to submit out of reverence to Christ, nothing will.

So, don't be confused by the confusion of the world. We know and see what a Christian family looks like. It begins with Christ as we do so out of reverence to him. It loves and serves each other as Christ loves and serves us. And it ends with Christ, too, as we cling to him to forgive the sins we still commit. We know what the family looks like. May your neighbors see it, too. Amen.