

**Living the Easter Life:
FAMILIES**

Ephesians 5:21-6:4

*Jesus is Lord over our
most important relationships.*

A sermon preached by
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Happy Mother's Day! If your mother is still alive, I hope you have done appropriate things to honor her on this day—gifts, cards, dinner, and so forth. In case this has caught you by surprise, and you are now planning on running out after church to see what you can get, let me share with you some Mother's Day cards that you do NOT want to buy. I don't have the artwork, but here is the text from several actual Mother's Day cards:

“Mom, thanks for always checking up on me,” with a picture of a cell phone with 24 unanswered calls from "Mom."

“Well, I guess this Mother's Day card is late. Looks like someone wasn't raised properly.”

“I'm awesome. You're welcome. To the luckiest Mom ever.”

“Mom, I love you loads.” (A picture of a laundry basket overflowing with clothes.) “Speaking of loads ... can you do my laundry?”¹

This is not how you want to celebrate Mother's Day. The day (which was invented by Anna Jarvis, a Methodist lady from West Virginia) does turn our thoughts to our moms and to our families. Next to God, our families are generally the most important piece of our lives. So as we consider “Living the Easter Life,” we should think about what that means for our family relationships. How does the power of the risen Christ impact our role as mother, father, sister, brother, spouse, child, or grandparent? How can Jesus be the Lord over our families?

To think about these relationships today, I want to look at one of the real hot-button texts in the Bible. Diane, my assistant, told me that when the office ladies proofed the bulletins this week, they couldn't believe I was preaching on this text this Sunday!

I saw a cartoon one time that had a pulpit surrounded by sandbags like a bomb shelter. The preacher was peeking out of a tiny slot in the sandbags, saying, “Today I will be preaching on the text, ‘Wives, be submissive to your husbands...’” So before anybody explodes, let me explain.

This Ephesians text is part of what scholars call a “household code,” a section of advice on how to live in everyday relationships. There are also household code sections in the letters to the Colossians, to Titus, and I Peter.² They all assume that slavery is normal and that women and children should be submissive to men. They were all written in the first century A.D. Given their historical context, which was brutal in its treatment of women, children, and slaves, these passages are actually quite gracious and egalitarian. Nevertheless, our tendency is to ignore these words as relics from a primitive time.

I think we have to look at these texts in light of their historical context, but I don’t think we should discount them totally. I believe God has truth in them for us today, if we can open our minds to understand. “*All Scripture is inspired by God,*”³ Paul says; sometimes you just have to dig a little to get to the inspiring part.

The great principle in our Scripture text today is the idea of **MUTUAL SUBMISSION**: “*Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ.*”⁴ It’s actually a two-way street; one-sided submission is abusive. That’s not what we’re talking about. Mutual submission means husbands and wives should be submissive to one another.

That still grates on our nerves, though, doesn’t it? We don’t want to be subject to anybody, do we? We live in an age where people are supposed to be liberated, independent, self-assertive, self-actualized. I am my own person! Never mind that Scripture says, “*You are not your own. You were bought with a price.*”⁵

But there it is: “*Wives, be subject to your husbands as you are to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife just as Christ is the head of the church, the body of which he is the Savior. Just as the church is subject to Christ, so also wives ought to be, in everything, to their husbands.*”⁶ But don’t stop reading there: “*Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her*”—died for her, right? “*In the same way, husbands should love their wives as they do their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves*

himself.”⁷ I couldn’t help but notice that the writer only takes three verses to explain it to the women, and it takes seven for the men. Then just to be sure, he repeats the principle: “*Each of you, however, should love his wife as himself, and a wife should respect her husband.*”⁸ That’s both being subject to one another.

The prime example of this principle of submission is Jesus. He was Lord of the universe from before all time. But he subjected himself in love to become human like us. Philippians says he took the form of a servant and humbled himself to the point of death on a cross.⁹ That’s how much he loves us. When he was giving his final instructions to his disciples, he gave them this new commandment: “*that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.*”¹⁰ So our calling, our commandment, is to love our spouse, if we have one, and our family with the kind of self-sacrificing love that we see in Jesus.

And that’s a stretch for us self-centered humans. When I meet with couples before they get married, I give them a basic principle. I call it the 80-20 rule. Everyone knows that marriage should be a 50-50 proposition—equal sharing, equal rights, equal submission to each other. But human beings are basically self-centered. We tend to maximize our own contributions and minimize the contributions of others. So in order to achieve a balance in your marriage, or in your relationship with other family members, you have to decide that it is going to take 80% of the effort on your part to make the relationship work. If both parties in the relationship try to give 80%, adjusting for the factor of self-centeredness, things will work out about even. That’s just another way of saying, don’t keep score. Be subject to one another.

Andy Stanley is the senior pastor of North Point Church in the Atlanta area and several satellite campuses. When he was a young preacher, he flew to Washington, D.C., to be a groomsman in a friend’s wedding. After the reception, the wedding party of twelve or so headed to an upscale bar in Georgetown. Being part of the wedding

party, Andy tagged along. A preacher walks into a bar, right? Often interesting conversations ensue. Sure enough, he got into a conversation with two of the women in the wedding party. One of them said, "Andy, I heard a preacher say that the man had to be the head of the home because a two-headed home is like a two-headed monster. Is that what you believe? That the man is the head?"

Andy replied to the woman, "Before I answer your question, imagine you're married to a man who genuinely believes you are the most fantastic person on the planet. He's crazy about you. You have no doubt that your happiness is his top priority. He listens when you talk. He honors you in public. To use an old fashioned term, he 'cherishes' you. He's not afraid to make a decision. He values your opinions. He leads, but he listens. He's responsible. He's not argumentative. You have no doubt that he would give his life for you if the need arose. You never worry about him being unfaithful. In fact, to quote an old love song, 'he only has eyes for you.'"

As Andy was prefacing his answer, the other members of the wedding party around the table tuned in and began to listen. The longer he talked, the more he sensed their resistance ebbing. Finally he paused and asked the two women, "Would either of you have trouble following a man like that?" One of the women blurted out, "Well, heck, no (except she didn't say "heck.")! I want to meet that guy." Everybody laughed.

Telling this story, Andy Stanley said, "Without realizing it, she made my point. It's easy, perhaps natural, to submit to someone who genuinely has your best interest in mind. There's no fear. No reason to resist. Conversely, anyone who has your best interest in mind has in effect submitted to you. That person has chosen to leverage him- or herself for your benefit, basically saying, 'You first.'"¹¹

This is being subject to one another. This is what E. Stanley Jones called "self-surrender." Jones often said that self-surrender is the "central necessity of life." In fact, self-surrender is the essence of our relationship with God. Jones said, "The Christian faith in its New

Testament form asks nothing less and nothing more than self-surrender to God.”¹²

So this whole issue of mutual submission is more than just how to get along with your wife or your husband or your children or your parents. It goes to the very heart of our faith. That’s why the writer of Ephesians says, “*This is a great mystery, and I am applying it to Christ and the church.*”¹³ The principle of mutual submission is essential to the Easter Life. It is crucial to having Christ-like marriages and families. This is how we make Jesus the Lord over our families.

So let me play with a household code this morning. Let this be a household code for the 21st century. Here are some rules for marriages and families.

Talk together. Problems and conflicts are going to come up. Talk through them. Talk about your feelings, your hurts, your dreams and your desires. Sometimes this is hard, but it’s not complicated. Just do it. It takes trust to share, but if you don’t have trust at home, you won’t have it anywhere.

Pray together. When all else fails, you can take it to God. But even before all else fails, if you have established spiritual time with your loved ones, it will be a source of strength and blessing for you. Home is still the primary place for Christian education; you spend much more time there than at church.

Play together. Spend time having fun together. I’m not talking about everyone playing video games on your phone in the same room. Play a game where you have to talk. Do something outside. Watch each other laugh.

Forgive one another. There will be mistakes and hurt feelings along the way. Jesus died on the cross to forgive your sins—because he loves you. You can forgive someone you love when they hurt you.

Encourage one another. Let your words build up your spouse or family members. Celebrate when they accomplish something. Say words of encouragement when he or she is struggling. Don’t be

critical; if you have to, hold each other accountable, but do it with grace and love.

Finally, if you are parents, the best thing you can give your kids is a strong marriage. Having a strong marriage teaches by example. It provides a place of safety at home. It wraps your kids in a blanket of security. This is more valuable than any thing you can ever buy them.

There you go—a household code for today. If you have a family relationship like that, you might make something of yourself.

Fred Rogers achieved success and fame as the creator and host of "Mister Rogers' Neighborhood," a children's television show that began airing in 1968 and ran until 2000. He made 895 episodes of the show. In 1997, Mr. Rogers was given an Emmy lifetime achievement award. You can watch his acceptance speech on Youtube; it was an unforgettable moment. He said, "So many people have helped me to come to this night. Some of you are here. Some are far away. Some are even in heaven. All of us have special ones who have loved us into being. Would you just take, along with me, 10 seconds to think of the people who have helped you become who you are? Those who have cared about you and wanted what was best for you in life. 10 seconds of silence. I'll watch the time."

As Mr. Rogers looked at his watch, the camera showed TV stars and celebrities with heads bowed, tears welling in their eyes. Then Fred said, "Whomever you've been thinking about, how pleased they must be to know the difference you feel they've made."¹⁴

All of us have special ones who have loved us into being children of God. Some are here. Some are far away. Some are even in heaven. Maybe a mother, a father, a sister, a brother, a family member, a friend, a child. I'd like to give you 10 seconds of silence to think in your heart about who those people would be for you. I'll watch the time. ...

How pleased they must be to know the difference you feel they have made in your life. But I would like to add to Mr. Rogers today.

I'd like to encourage you, if whoever came to mind is still alive, that you tell them about this moment of reflection that included them. Then I would like to challenge you to live so that when someone you love reflects in this way, your name will occur to them. Be one of those people.

Wherever your family is right now—and maybe it's in a pretty good place—it can get better. Even the worst family situations can experience resurrection. Surrender yourself to God. Practice mutual submission with your spouse or your loved ones. That's how you make Jesus Lord over your family. That's how you live the Easter life.

¹ Matt Woodley, editor, PreachingToday.com. *The Telegraph*, "20 awful Mother's Day cards that you absolutely should not buy," (3-16-17)

² Colossians 3:18-4:1, Titus 2:1-10, and I Peter 2:13-3:7.

³ II Timothy 3:14.

⁴ Ephesians 5:21.

⁵ I Corinthians 6:19-20.

⁶ Ephesians 5:22-24.

⁷ Ephesians 5:25, 28.

⁸ Ephesians 5:33.

⁹ Philippians 2:6-8.

¹⁰ John 13:34.

¹¹ Adapted from Andy Stanley, *The New Rules of Love, Sex, and Dating* (Zondervan, 2015), 41-42.

¹² James K. Mathews and Eunice Jones Mathews, eds., *Selections From E. Stanley Jones* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1972), 252.

¹³ Ephesians 5:32.

¹⁴ "Fred Rogers' unforgettable Emmy Award speech—1997," YouTube (6-7-14).