

Good morning. Good to see a good group here on this first Monday of the last week. We are, as Dean Gordon said, praying for you and trust the Lord will give you all that you need to finish and to finish well. I'm pleased to wrap up this semester series this morning, this final installment on biblical perspectives on the family, Family Matters, and why the family matters and some issues pertaining to the family. A number of sessions, and I want to culminate this morning talking about from Ephesians 5, the family as a priority and the picture of the church.

And this passage sums it up very, very well for us. And so, I'm looking forward to concluding all of this. We began this semester talking about the family, the importance of the family as viewing it as foundational to creation, that God created the family at the very beginning when He created humankind in His image and likeness, male and female. He created them for one another. He created them with a mandate to be fruitful and multiply, to actually carry out the work of the family in God's creation in this world for His good and for our good and for His glory.

It is very important, as I've been arguing all semester, that we actually think clearly and biblically about the family, particularly in our day as the family is under assault and there are attempts ideologically and more subtly to undermine the nature and value and importance of the family. It's critical for us as biblical Christians to think biblically about this most important institution. You should be thinking about why it matters, not just to you, but why it matters in this world, the good that can be accomplished in and through the family, for that is God's design. We looked at it as God's design there at the very beginning, the family as foundational, the family as being the expression of God's image and likeness that we are created in, that the family is an expression of that in this world. We looked at the creation of men and women, male and female, in the image and likeness of God, and the implications of that for their relationships with one another.

We also talked about the fall, the reach and impact of sin and the fall on the entire world, and specifically the way in which it has marred and damaged the family. But then we last time looked at the family as a blessing and an instrument for good, because it is both of those things. It is a blessing to us and to this world and an instrument for good by God's design. And all along, what I've been challenging you to think about— and now as we wrap this up, even more so— now is the time for you to be thinking about what you believe to be true about the family, having your sensibilities about family, about marriage, about children, about parenting, about relating to your parents. Now is the time for you to be thinking about that biblically.

Don't allow it to happen in the rush of the moment or by accident where you might be shaped by the thinking and sensibilities of the context in which you find yourself. Rather, don't allow your sensibilities to be pushed in that direction, but have them shaped and formed by your understanding of God's word. We don't want to find ourselves ever in danger of the kind of circular reasoning that's based upon feelings. I had a good experience with the family, so therefore I think positively about the family. I had a bad experience with family, and therefore I think negatively about the family.

That is not the way for us to draw conclusions in this world. Not based upon our own circumstances or experiences or the sensibilities of the world around us that would actually challenge the nature and value of the family because it actually undergirds and supports the idea of God's authority as Creator and sustainer of all that is. Rather, we should be intentional in forming our views about the— and those views should inform not just the way we think about it, but the way we carry it out. And this morning in Ephesians 5, that's exactly what we see. We see the exhortation to actually practice family well, to do it in a way that honors the Lord, is reflective of his intentions and designs for marriage and the family.

In this passage in Ephesians, we don't just see an outline instructing members of the family, husbands and wives, fathers and mothers and children, but rather we see a picture of how the family should be a priority and should be practiced. It should be practiced well. It should be given its rightful place. It should be seen as a priority. And that's spelled out for us here in this letter to the Ephesians.

I have always found it very curious when reading this letter to the New Testament church. That the Apostle Paul, who begins this letter with such deep and profound theology outlining what is

accomplished for us in and through Jesus Christ, all of the great passages in this letter that we have memorized, for by grace you have been saved through faith, and this not of yourselves and your own doing, it's the gift of God. Not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them. In this passage, we see the Apostle Paul outlining that we were dead in our sins, not dying in our sins, dead in our sins, but God being rich in mercy made us alive in Christ Jesus.

All of this great theological truth in the first few chapters gives way to exhortations about the way in which we should walk in a manner worthy of the gospel, worthy of our calling, in love, as imitators of God, not as unwise, but as wise. I've always found it interesting that the— at the conclusion of that section of the theology and the exhortations to walk in a particular way, Paul draws attention to the family. And I think it's very tempting to think, well, this is sort of Paul sort of trying to land the plane. He's been telling these Christians about how to think and what to believe and how to live. And now here's some practical suggestions about family to give a little thing at the end to say, and remember, the way you, you, you live with one another should be done accordingly.

They're all tied together. They're all tied together. I think the beauty of ending this particular letter in this particular way, and just prior to outlining the importance of the armor of God, Paul's tying all of theology and faith and belief and our conduct and the way we live out our faith with our relationships with one another and ultimately the significance of that to spiritual warfare in this world. The way in which we live out and prioritize the family is a manifestation of our theological commitments, a manifestation of our commitment to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord according to His Word. If we believe what is said in the first 3 chapters to be true and we're committed to living life as the following chapters outline, it should show up in our everyday relationships.

And I think that's why this book ends that way.

In Ephesians chapter 5, it's a very clear exhortation to practice family well, but not disconnected from your theological beliefs, your convictions, your understanding of all that has been accomplished for you and for me in and through the person and work of Jesus Christ. It is to be carried out as our worthy walk, not as just something that we do in this world, but as an outward expression of the Christian walk. And so he begins, as Dean Gordon read for us, immediately following, look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise, but as wise, making the best use of time because the days are evil. How do you do that? 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 his 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.

Look carefully how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. 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. This exhortation, this teaching about the way in which husbands and wives relate to one another is a direct manifestation of walking properly in this world.

According to your Christian convictions.

You can't see it in any other way. And there's no way to step around this one. The family here is used as a picture of the church, and the church is actually what Paul is driving at here. He's, he's putting these two things together. He's saying that, that the husband— the wives should submit to their husbands as we submit to Christ, who is the head of the church.

And husbands should love their wives as Christ loved the church. There's this picture here that's very important. You have to understand it to understand the beauty of what the Bible is saying about

marriage and about family. Christ is the head of the church. He has given himself up for her, sacrificed his blood shed for the church.

That's how much Christ loves the church, but he is her head. He has given himself to her as her head. Jesus came to be the lamb, the sacrificial lamb. He is our Savior. This is not headship without sacrifice.

This isn't headship solely of privilege. This is headship tied to giving of himself completely to the church. And what's the church's response? To give up its will. To yield itself to the head, to understand that Jesus gave himself to the church and the church gives herself to Jesus.

In the same way, wives, give yourself to the husband, and husbands, give yourselves to the wives. There is no point in understanding what the Bible teaches about family where there's any justification for a selfish approach to being a husband or a wife. In fact, All of that selfishness, all of that drive to satisfy your own desires, all of the issues to lord authority over or to undermine the authority of, all of that is rooted in sin and the fall. The beautiful picture of marriage outlined here in Ephesians 4, Ephesians 5 is that we would do as Christ's relationship to the church, that we would so give ourselves up to one another that it would reflect the truths that we see related to the church. Christ is the head of the church, gave himself up for her.

Wives, submit to your husbands as your head. Husbands, love your wives as your own body. It's a beautiful picture. We should, as biblical Christians, not apologize for it, not shrink back from it, not hesitate about it, not wonder if it's true, not wonder how to contextualize it in the contemporary culture. Rather, we should celebrate it, proclaim it, see it for the good and beautiful thing that it is.

Because if you look sideways at marriage and family the way it is outlined in the Scripture, you might as well— the Apostle Paul is saying here— look sideways at the church.

They are tied together here in this passage. And if you start to allow the contemporary thinking around you to influence the way you see what it means to be a wife and what it means to be a husband, what it means to be united as one flesh, if you let the contemporary thinking around you cause you to doubt the priority, the significance, the importance of that, the call to do it well, if you allow the thinking around you to begin to doubt that, you might as well let it influence your thinking of the church.

And sadly, that might be exactly where we find ourselves. That our view of the church, its priority, its importance, its value, its role, the importance of practicing it well, all of that has been diminished in the same way the family has been diminished in the world around us. But we as Christians, as members of the body, as the church of Jesus Christ, should not allow that to happen in our own thinking, in our own midst, in our own practice. We should embrace this idea of family not as a burden, but as a gift in the same way we look at salvation that is ours through Christ Jesus and our being placed in his body as members of the church. Wives and husbands have a clear relationship to one another of submission and love, of respect, of sacrificial giving to one another.

It isn't just that we hold it in high view, it's that it should be practiced well. It should be practiced with all piety, with all submission, with all faith, with a clear understanding of all that has been accomplished for us in and through Jesus Christ. That should permeate the way we care for one another. Why? Because it should permeate the way we care for one another as brothers and sisters in the Lord.

Fascinating to me, not that difficult to understand, that just before this passage that begins, wives submit to your own husbands, there's instruction for the church that we should be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ. The picture of the body life for Christians is that we're deferential to one another out of reverence for Jesus Christ. We treat one another with respect because we see one another as fellow blood-bought ones. We're not doing it

because it makes us feel better or because it makes them feel better or it makes us look better or it makes things go better. We're to submit to one another and defer to one another and love one another in this way out of respect for what Christ has done for us.

That when we see one another as brothers and sisters in the Lord, we see blood-bought ones just like us, and they should be treated with that kind of respect and that kind of deference. So too then, this should pour over and pour out in our marriage relationships. The cultural resistance and animosity directed towards this exhortation that wives should submit to their husbands is in its essence spiritual rebellion. It is to say that I will not behave out of reverence for Christ. Because what Paul is saying here is not culturally, it's not specific to that particular point in time in history in that particular culture.

This is the way we should be treating one another. And the burden put on wives to submit to their husbands as the church submits to its head, Jesus Christ, should always be read in the context of what follows, which is husbands must love their wives. They are not your servants. They're not your indentured servants. They're not, they're not your property.

They are, as the church is to Jesus, the one that he loves enough to die for.

If we actually viewed our relationships to one another in marriage that way, all the stuff that has come into this dynamic relationship as a result of sin in the fall falls away, that we don't actually desire to control or to undermine one another. Rather, we desire to be given over to one another in the beautiful way that God intended. And this actually spills not just for the— it spills over into our relationship as parents and as children to our parents. It isn't just for husbands and wives. Paul then in chapter 6 talks about this.

Obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. Honor your father and mother. This isn't just a tack-on. We are the sons and daughters of God. We are to honor God, so we are to honor our earthly parents.

Our relationship to one another as brothers and sisters and our relationship to God the Father and his Son Jesus should be marked by doing what is right, honoring, obeying. And that should be, that should be manifest in the way in which our children relate to parents and the way that parents relate to children. Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but instead bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. This exhortation to fathers is not don't discipline your children. It's don't provoke them to anger.

In other words, Do not experience, do not live out these familial relationships according to your flesh, but rather according to the Spirit and according to the teaching of the Word. If we are not serious in attending to our own faith, we have little chance of being a suitable husband, a suitable wife, a suitable son or daughter, a suitable father or mother. This is required because sin and the pull of the world is so strong.

One of the hardest pieces of advice I was ever given about fatherhood was be careful not to punish in anger. You know how hard that is? You experience it. You get frustrated. You want to lash out.

You want a correction. Not provoking your children to anger means being self-controlled. Wives submitting to their husbands, that means exercising self-control. Husbands loving your wives at every turn. No matter what, that requires self-control.

Children, honoring your parents requires self-control. The fruit of the Spirit is required to live out these relations. The family is lived out as an expression of our Christian faith and maturity. And so I ask you, how do you want to practice this? If you want to practice it in a Christian way, then you must take your personal Christian faith and walk seriously.

That's the key to managing these relationships, to understand and believe all that Paul says in the first few chapters, to commit yourself to living the Christian life in a particular way as those walking exhortations. Then it should bear out in your relationships. You must want to be a mature, faith-filled,

biblically-minded follower of Jesus Christ. And in so doing, that should spill into your relationships with one another. In the family, in marriage, in your relationship to others outside of the family, this is the way this works.

If we're serious Christians, it should have a serious impact on the way we live with one another. And so I would say, in thinking about this series, that it is important for us to think about the family rightly. And to commit ourselves to practicing it well. Just a few practical success— suggestions.

If you're struggling with your own experiences in family, either in your own experiences with your parents, with your siblings, if you're married, with your spouse, if you had bad examples around you or seen so much tragedy and harm and abuse in family, I would say to you, lay it at the feet of Jesus. Having those experiences or having observed those things does not mean that you are destined to a life of familial dysfunction. We are the children of new beginnings.

We who were dead have been made alive. Amen. How much more can we who were damaged be made whole? How much more can we who have grown discouraged and despairing about marriage and family be restored to have a high view of it? If we could be moved from death to life, then certainly our attitudes and judgments can be moved from negative to positive.

Because when we understand this institution according to God's design and the way the Word teaches us, we have to set aside our experiences and our observations to seek what is good and best regarding family. So I would encourage you, if you've been discouraged or you've been despairing or you've been disillusioned or jaded about the family through your own experience or observations, practice your Christian faith and start fresh. Be gracious with those who have had it hard in this particular area of life. Be gracious with one another, but look for new beginnings and start fresh.

Just because you have seen this go badly or experienced it badly is no reason to view it negatively. Rather, the answer is to see the beauty and the perfect intention that God placed upon the family. I would also say this: over the course of your lives, you should commit yourselves as a result of reading passages of Scripture like this and others, that you would work on the family, not just work in the family. That you would actually take the time as you contemplate marriage to think about it. You find yourself in a marriage relationship, you don't— just become a slave to the tyranny of the urgent, just getting through life.

You stop and talk about your relationship and work on it. You should never attempt to raise your own kids without being intentional about the way you will handle discipline or time or faith or instruction. You should work on the family, not just work in the family. I think that that's a very clear exhortation that comes from Scripture, to be attentive to our lives and to be intentional in everything that we do. I think I would also encourage you to hold the family with high regard, hold it highly.

How do you do that? It isn't just thinking it in your head. I would encourage you to use language that esteems the family. Use language that actually communicates it as a priority. Preach this truth to yourselves when you begin to doubt the blessing the family is, the instrument for good that the family is.

Use language that communicates it as a high priority. Talk about it as a beautiful thing, a good thing, a foundational thing, a blessing. We should be using that language, particularly in a world that actually has grown cynical and skeptical about the institution of family. We should be people who defend it by using language that is worthy of it.

I think that you can talk it up in a way that is extremely important. But I also think it's important not to concede not one inch of ground to the culture that would erode the institution of family. Don't give that kind of thinking an inch in your mind. Don't allow it to erode any of your convictions or understandings. Don't just fight against the thinking of the world and its language.

Don't concede. Don't surrender not one inch. Don't stop using the terms husband and wife. You can't, because the Bible uses those terms. Don't stop using the word man and woman, mother and father,

son, daughter, parent, child.

If we concede that ground to replace the word mother with words like birthing person, the word husband and wife with words like partner, We give a foothold for the undermining of our conviction that family is instituted by God, set in place for his glory, for our good and the good of the world. So be firm in your understanding. See it for what it is, the beauty and intention and blessing that the family possesses and hold firm in your language, in your actions. Hold family as a priority, commit yourself to practicing it well, and let the Scripture be your guide because you'll have a hard time reading any part of it that doesn't carry implications for the way you treat one another as husbands and wives, mothers and fathers of sons and daughters, sons and daughters of mothers and fathers. The Scripture is full of this.

In the church, we are brothers and sisters, sons and daughters. And the way in which we approach the family should be the way in which we live out our lives with one another in the body of Christ. My hope and prayer is that, that you will give this serious thought because it is dangerous not to.

Let's pray. Father in heaven, we do thank you for your goodness and grace. We marvel at the works of your creation, the mountains, the skies, rivers and streams, the seas, all the creatures and plants that inhabit this world.

Father, keep us from the sin of indifference and apathy when it comes to that aspect of creation which you formed by your own hands, according to your own image and likeness. Keep us from the sin of apathy and indifference towards the truth that you created us male and female, that you created men and women for one another, that you charged us to be fruitful and multiply, that the family is foundational to all of creation.

Father, keep us from the sin of believing that the problems in this world are somehow related to the institutions you have set in place. Rather, Father, give us clarity of thought to see the impact of sin in the fall, to be honest about it, and to see the path forward is only through your righteousness and the shed blood of your Son, Jesus. Grant us in this world in which we live the wisdom and clarity to think rightly about these things. I pray for Christians everywhere and for those of us assembled in this room that you would give us the grace and strength and faith and wisdom to maintain the institution of family as a priority, to give us not just the desire, but the capability to practice it well in a way that brings you glory. For this was your intention from the beginning. And we pray this in the strong name of Jesus. Amen.