

“Basic Christianity – The Family”
Deuteronomy 6/Ephesians 5
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The relationship of husband and wife is the most basic human relationship.

Both the Apostle Paul and Jesus himself corroborated this truth by referring to the creation account of the husband/wife relationship.

Genesis 2:18-24

“The LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him."

GE 2:19 Now the LORD God had formed out of the ground all the beasts of the field and all the birds of the air. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name. ²⁰ So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds of the air and all the beasts of the field.

But for Adam no suitable helper was found. ²¹ So the LORD God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and closed up the place with flesh. ²² Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man.

GE 2:23 The man said,
"This is now bone of my bones
and flesh of my flesh;
she shall be called `woman,'
for she was taken out of man."

GE 2:24 For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.”

As far as we know there has never been a civilization that has not aspired to, honored and protected this relationship of marriage.

In the 2003 article entitled, “The State of Our Unions”, the authors stated, “Marriage is a fundamental social institution. It is central to the nurture and raising of children. It is the ‘social glue’ that reliably attaches fathers to children. It contributes to the physical, emotional, and economic health of men, women and children, and thus to the

nation as a whole. It is also one of the most highly prized of all human relationships and a central life goal of most Americans.” (The Family Portrait, from the Family Research Council, 2004. pg 1)

The Mosaic Law protected marriage.

And also some of God’s harshest judgments on Israel were for their failure to keep their covenants of marriage.

Malachi 2:13-16

“You flood the LORD's altar with tears. You weep and wail because he no longer pays attention to your offerings or accepts them with pleasure from your hands. ¹⁴ You ask, "Why?" It is because the LORD is acting as the witness between you and the wife of your youth, because you have broken faith with her, though she is your partner, the wife of your marriage covenant.

^{MAL 2:15} Has not the LORD made them one? In flesh and spirit they are his. And why one? Because he was seeking godly offspring. So guard yourself in your spirit, and do not break faith with the wife of your youth.

^{MAL 2:16} "I hate divorce," says the LORD God of Israel..."

And it is quite clear from both the Older and Newer Testaments that God equally hates the sin and selfishness that lead to divorce.

Why is God so pro-marriage and so strong in its defense?

Because, as I already said, the husband-wife relationship is the fundamental human relationship upon which all other human relationships are to be built.

- Societies are built on communities of people.
- Communities of people are built on families.
- Families are built on marriages.

Certainly human beings can exist without marriages, families, communities and societies, but not in the joy and purpose that God meant for humans to have.

So fundamental to being fully human are these relationships of husbands and wives and families that both the greatest joys and the deepest wounds of life are found in those relationships

No other relationships, when healthy, give greater joy and no other relationships, when wounded or failing, bring greater pain.

Why is God so pro-marriage and so strong in its defense?

Because our own joy and well-being depend on it.

And because marriage and parenting play a significant role in the expansion of the kingdom of God.

That's why, in the title of this message, I refer to the family as "basic Christianity!"

In that regard I want to focus for a moment more, specifically on the marriage relationship.

It is apparent in the Bible that God sees marriage as essential in the propagation and well-being of the human race for reasons that become obvious when we look a little later at family and parenting.

A stable marriage is the bedrock of a family.

But God also makes it clear that godly marriages play a significant role in the furthering of the Kingdom of God.

I refer specifically to the passage in Ephesians 5 wherein Paul spells out clearly that marriage is the best representation on earth of the relationship of Christ and the church.

Ephesians 5:25-33

"Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her ²⁶ to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, ²⁷ and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. ²⁸ In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. ²⁹ After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church-- ³⁰ for we are members of his body. ³¹ "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh." ³² This is a profound mystery--but I am talking about Christ and the church. ³³

However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.”

I think there are at least two implications here.

Jesus said, John 13:35 “By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if **you** love one another.”

If the world’s perception of the credibility of the gospel depends on our relationships with each other, how much more true must that be of the most intimate of human relationships – of our marriages?

If the gospel can’t work in the husband/wife relationship why should anyone believe it has power to change lives otherwise?

When the divorce rate among Christians approaches (and some say surpasses) the divorce rate in the general population, we are not only saying something about marriage, we are making a huge statement about our God and his gospel.

The second implication is that the husband/wife relationship is the very best context for spiritual formation.

God’s goal for us is that we become like Christ in our attitudes and actions.

No other relationship provides the crucible for transformation that marriage does.

A crucible is a “place or situation in which concentrated forces interact to cause or influence change or development.” (Merriam-Webster Dictionary)

God will use marriage like he uses no other relationship to put us in the place of greatest personal and spiritual growth.

And this is not a threat, it is a promise because spiritual maturity is his goal for us and marriage is one of the best places to accomplish it.

That is why God is so clear about the importance of marriage and his defense of it.

But we have **reason to be concerned** in our culture and in our church.

The marriage rate in our country is falling.

- The marriage rate is the number of marriages in any given year out of every 1000 unmarried adult women.
- It is half of what it was in the 1950s.
- Then it was over 90 marriages for every 1000 unmarried adult women.
- In 2001 (the latest for which I could find statistics) it was just over 45.

The marriage rate is falling while the divorce rate is rising.

The divorce rate is nearly double what it was in the 1960s.

And the percentage of couples that are living together without marriage is rising.

But cohabitation is not only dangerous for women and children but even when it eventually results in marriage it increases the chances of both divorce and abuse for women and children.

In other words it is the least likely place that the real joys and purposes of marriage and family can be realized.

Something has to change!

For that reason, among others, we at Southern Gables wish to take more deliberate measures to address this great need to prepare for and strengthen marriages.

In this the 5th message in the series of sermons entitled, "Gables, the Kingdom, and 2005" we are thinking about marriage and parenting.

Our ministry objective is:

By the end of 2005 we will have and be working a plan to intentionally and specifically nurture the marriage relationships of the people of Southern Gables

Our vision for that plan includes at least the following:

- Teaching young adults about biblical dating, courtship and marriage. (I've been troubled for over 15 years about the dating and courtship practices of our American culture. I find that I am not alone. A growing number of parents are finding ways to be effectively counter-cultural in this important regard.)
- Preparing and assisting newly weds during the first two years of their marriage. (Pre-marital assistance is not enough.)
- Recruiting and equipping mentoring couples to come alongside other couples that want help to strengthen their marriages.
- Offering retreats or conference style teaching and interaction at least twice each year on the subject of Christian marriage.
- Providing assistance for marriages in crisis.
- And offering grace and hope when marriages fail.

Marriage is fundamental to our lives and the advancement of the kingdom of God; we must give even more attention to it.

But I turn your attention now to the family.

As I have already said, we have this great interest in marriage partly because we see marriage as the bedrock of family.

And in both the older and newer Testaments it is clear that God sees the family as hugely significant in the expansion of the Kingdom of God.

It is true in one sense that God has no grandchildren, but it is equally true that God has given to parents the greatest of all responsibilities:

Ephesians 6:4 to "bring (their children) up in the training and instruction of the Lord."

I want to read to you a long passage from the Bible.

This instruction is 3500 years old and it is as relevant as the day it was written.

Moses was speaking to the people of God, as they were about to enter the Promised Land.

Please stand as God's Word is read:

Deuteronomy 6:1-25

“These are the commands, decrees and laws the LORD your God directed me to teach you to observe in the land that you are crossing the Jordan to possess, ² so that you, your children and their children after them may fear the LORD your God as long as you live by keeping all his decrees and commands that I give you, and so that you may enjoy long life. ³ Hear, O Israel, and be careful to obey so that it may go well with you and that you may increase greatly in a land flowing with milk and honey, just as the LORD, the God of your fathers, promised you.

^{DT 6:4} Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. ⁵ Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. ⁶ These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. ⁷ Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. ⁸ Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. ⁹ Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.

^{DT 6:10} When the LORD your God brings you into the land he swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, to give you--a land with large, flourishing cities you did not build, ¹¹ houses filled with all kinds of good things you did not provide, wells you did not dig, and vineyards and olive groves you did not plant--then when you eat and are satisfied, ¹² be careful that you do not forget the LORD, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.

^{DT 6:13} Fear the LORD your God, serve him only and take your oaths in his name. ¹⁴ Do not follow other gods, the gods of the peoples around you; ¹⁵ for the LORD your God, who is among you, is a jealous God and his anger will burn against you, and he will destroy you from the face of the land. ¹⁶ Do not test the LORD your God as you did at Massah. ¹⁷ Be sure to keep the commands of the LORD your God and the stipulations and decrees he has given you. ¹⁸ Do what is right and good in the LORD's sight, so that it may go well with you and you may go in and take over the good land that the LORD promised on oath to your forefathers, ¹⁹ thrusting out all your enemies before you, as the LORD said.

^{DT 6:20} **In the future, when your son asks you,** "What is the meaning of the stipulations, decrees and laws the LORD our God has commanded you?" ²¹ tell him: "We were slaves of Pharaoh in Egypt,

but the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand.²² Before our eyes the LORD sent miraculous signs and wonders--great and terrible--upon Egypt and Pharaoh and his whole household.²³ But he brought us out from there to bring us in and give us the land that he promised on oath to our forefathers.²⁴ The LORD commanded us to obey all these decrees and to fear the LORD our God, so that we might always prosper and be kept alive, as is the case today.²⁵ And if we are careful to obey all this law before the LORD our God, as he has commanded us, that will be our righteousness."

Adlai Stevenson, one-time presidential contender, wrote:

"It has been said that fatherhood is a career imposed on you one fine morning (or I might add, in the middle of the night) without any inquiry as to your fitness for it.

That is why there are so many fathers who have children but so few children who have fathers."

I'm afraid there are many mothers and fathers today who know how they became parents but they don't know why.

It's no wonder people are frustrated in rearing, children - they don't know what they're trying to accomplish.

No, it's not enough to just keep them from killing each other until they move out.

We must be clear about the purpose.

The fundamental purpose for having children is to rear the next generation of image-bearers who will carry genuine Christianity to its peers.

Adam and Eve were created to bear the image of God.

The created heavens could declare the glory of God.

The earth and its plant and animal life could reflect the power and beauty of our God.

But to human beings alone was given the privilege of reflecting the character of God's conscious, intentional, self-sacrificing love.

Though sin has complicated the task, it is still the parents' responsibility to raise their children to reflect the image of God.

The Apostle Paul said that parents are to nurture their children in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

Parents are the pastor/shepherds of their children.

Paul said that his goal in life was to teach with all wisdom so that he might present everyone perfect in Christ.

Elsewhere he talked of bringing people to maturity - to Christ-likeness.

That is the goal of parenting.

One author put it this way:

"True followers of Jesus Christ don't have children merely for the fellowship factor. Or so they can pass on property and the family name or to avoid loneliness in their later years. They view parenting as the opportunity to invest themselves fully in the life of a child who will someday become **an irresistible manifestation of God's grace** and make a difference by exercising his or her unique (God-given) talents and gifts." (source unknown)

That is our mission.

The challenge is to shape a life.

To take a runny-nosed little rebel and shape them into a God-reflecting difference-maker.

There could not possibly be anything more challenging and more rewarding than to shape the future by shaping your own child.

Yes, life will still be filled with diapers, dishes, day-timers, deadlines, dirt and discipline but it will be worth it if we stay clear about the mission- we are in the business of raising image bearers!

In the Deuteronomy passage we read, Moses uses the metaphor of an artisan to make his point.

He says, "impress them on your children."

Impress God's commandments and purposes on them.

The word picture is of an engraver taking painstaking care to be precise in imprinting a design on stone or metal.

The home is the artist's workshop wherein the life of a child is shaped.

Some have said it this way: "Home is where life makes up its mind."

Moses makes it clear that this impression on our children is made not just by saying words but by using every experience of every day to demonstrate the role of God in our lives and theirs.

Deuteronomy 6:7-9 "Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. ⁸ Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. ⁹ Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.

Helping our children become Christ-followers is what parenting is primarily about.

As a parent, our highest calling isn't to build a business or even to raise a capable productive citizen, but to build godly character, godly values and godly eternal-vision into our children.

I am greatly impressed with the investment I see many parents making in their children today.

But I cringe when I see the **kinds** of investments they are making.

- They want their children to have the best schools, the best athletic and cultural opportunities, the best healthcare, and so forth.
- They scrimp and save to get them into the best colleges possible.
- They worry much about their child's financial future, getting a job and keeping it.

But their children's spiritual development is given very little thought.

That is not what God has called us to.

Yes, we must pay attention to many of those other things in the rearing of our children, but what is most important?

Here's what God says in Deuteronomy 32:46-47 "Take to heart all the words I have solemnly declared to you this day, so that you may command your children to obey carefully all the words of this law. ⁴⁷ They are not just idle words for you--**they are your life.**

Mom and dad, do you know for as certain as you can that your child has or has not come to a saving faith in Jesus Christ?

- Do you know what biblical values are parts of their spiritual DNA?
- Are you planning for and seeing progress made in their spiritual understanding and their relationship with God?
- Do you see a growing commitment to the kingdom of God in their lives?

Late night television public service ads used to ask, "Parents, do you know where your children are?"

We might ask a similar question, "Do we know where our child is in his or her relationship with Jesus?"

Though I don't have time to develop it, I want you to see, in this Deuteronomy text, an important part of God's instruction to parents about godly parenting:

Deuteronomy 6:20-23

"In the future, when your son asks you, "What is the meaning of the stipulations, decrees and laws the LORD our God has commanded you?" ²¹ tell him: "We were slaves of Pharaoh in Egypt, but the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand. ²² Before our eyes the LORD sent miraculous signs and wonders--great and terrible--upon Egypt and Pharaoh and his whole household. ²³ But he brought us out from there to bring us in and give us the land that he promised on oath to our forefathers."

Yes we are to impress the commands of God on our children, but those commands must be understood and lived out in the context of the grace of God.

Deuteronomy 6:22-23 "Before our eyes the LORD sent miraculous signs and wonders--great and terrible--upon Egypt and Pharaoh and his whole household. ²³ But he brought us out

from there to bring us in and give us the land that he promised...”

Why do we do what we do as Christians?

Because God has set us free!

Paul said it this way in Colossians 1:13-14, “For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, ¹⁴ in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.”

What is to be impressed on our children? The acts of God!

“We are not called to **define** our faith so much as to **bear witness to what God has done.**” (Christianson, Word Biblical Commentary, Deuteronomy, p81)

We don’t want our children just to learn Bible verses and go to church.

We want them to hear **from us** the powerful and gracious work of God in the history of his people through the centuries and in our personal histories.

Our children must hear and see the effects of God’s work in us.

Fathers and mothers, are **we** minding the spiritual lives of our children?

The lives of our children and the expansion of the kingdom of God ride on the answer.

That is why we, as a church, are making the answer to that question a priority in these next months.

I showed you earlier our objective as it relates to marriage, now I show you our objective as it relates to parenting.

Ministry Objective:

By the end of 2005 we will have and be working a plan to intentionally and specifically nurture the marriage relationships of the people of Southern Gables **AND to intentionally and specifically equip and encourage godly parenting of our children.**

Our vision for that plan includes at least the following:

Helping parents lead a “Christian” family.

Resourcing and supporting men to be able to “father” Christianly.

Helping fathers and mothers intentionally direct the spiritual lives of their children.

Encouraging and providing opportunities for whole-family activities.

Missions and compassion projects, family camp, retreats, etc
Making SGC truly “family friendly.”

“Deuteronomy 32:46-47 "Take to heart all the words I have solemnly declared to you this day, so that you may command your children to obey carefully all the words of this law. ⁴⁷ They are not just idle words for you--**they are your life.**