



Family Matters — Reverence and Obedience to Christ

TEXT
Ephesians 5:21–6:4

August 13, 2017 — Sermon by Dr. Rodger Y. Nishioka

On this August weekend, especially as we embark on a new school year, it seems right and good for us to hear from the letter to the churches in and around Ephesus about family matters.

It is true. Families do matter. Our families have the incredible ability to dramatically shape us in wonderful ways and also sadly in hurtful ways. Whether it is wives and husbands or brothers and sisters or parents or stepparents or grandparents and children and grandchildren, there can be no doubt that our families have a tremendous impact on us because they shape our identity.

It was when I was 16, growing up at the Japanese Presbyterian church in Seattle, that our congregation held its annual Youth Sunday. This is the one Sunday a year when the youth get to take over the service and congregation holds its collective breath. Our own Youth Sunday will happen here in two weeks.

Probably because my father was the pastor of our church, the youth group, my peers, chose me to give the sermon. Now while this was going to be my first sermon, by then I had heard Dad preach many times, and I

remember thinking to myself, “Well, how hard can it be? I mean Dad does it.”

Dad kindly offered to read my sermon ahead of time, but I told him it would be okay. I do not remember what I preached and likely neither does anyone else, including God, but I do remember thinking about what I would say after the sermon. I thought that no doubt people would be appreciative and thank me and compliment me, and I remember thinking that it would not be right to say, “I know.”

And sure enough, when the service was over, the whole youth group lined up outside the sanctuary doors, and the adults came by to thank us. And when the first person, a kind older gentleman, came to me and said, “Thank you. That was a good sermon,” I remember saying something like, “No. It wasn’t me. It was the Lord.” And it worked. He smiled and said, “Oh yes.” I thought, “This is so great. I get to be falsely humble and truly arrogant all at the same time!”

Now the last person to greet me that morning was my mother. She hugged me and said, “Thank you, Rodger. That was good.” And I said to her, “No, Mom, no. It wasn’t me. It was the Lord.” Mom had passed me by

then, but my words caught her and she stopped. Then she came back to me and looked up at me and said, “Oh, Rodger. It wasn’t that good!”

She was right, of course. There is something about our families ... our parents ... our children ... our siblings ... our spouses. They know us and see us at our best and our worst.

Through my growing up years, Mom had several phrases that she sought to embed in us. One of them had to do with how we treated each other. I was one of four sons. No sisters. Thank you, Jesus. When I was being mean to one of my brothers or fighting with them, Mom would pull me aside and say: “You know, Rodger, I hear all the time from people about how nice you are outside the house, and that is important. But if you cannot be loving to your brothers, it’s a problem. If it doesn’t work at home, it doesn’t work.” What she taught me was that you can put on a nice appearance to everyone else, but if you do not treat your family with kindness and respect, then it is all a show. According to the writer of the letter to the churches in and around Ephesus, Mom had it right.

This passage talks directly about the family and how we

relate to and care for one another. The key is in Chapter 5, Verse 21. “Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ.” The rest of the instructions all are shaped by this one verse.

Wives, be subject to your husbands out of reverence for Christ. Husbands, be subject to your wives out of reverence for Christ. Children, be subject to your parents out of reverence for Christ. Parents, be subject to your children out of reverence for Christ.

Some of this may sound harsh and even sexist to our 21st century American ears, but think about it. This teaching alone was a surprise in a society that valued men much more than women and parents above children.

It is not lost on me that there are only three verses of instruction to wives but eight verses of instruction to husbands. And while the Bible says that the husband is the head of the wife, the comparison here is “just as Christ is the head of the church.” The analogy here is that husbands are to treat their wives as Jesus Christ treats the church and remember this: Jesus sacrificed his life for the church.

Again, all of it is summarized in the first verse in this section. “Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ.” That is the rule.

Subjecting yourself to your wife, to your husband, to your child, to your parent, to your sister, to your brother means you put them first and yourself second. It means you are not the center of the universe. It also means they are not the center

of the universe. The verse says, “Be subject to one another ...” What? “Out of reverence for Christ.”

That’s it. When Jesus Christ is at the center of our families, it sets our relationships correctly. The great challenge is living with our families with Christ at the center. The great challenge is being subject to one another out of reverence for Christ.

Like you, I was stunned by the scenes that emerged from Friday night and yesterday in Charlottesville. I corresponded yesterday with my friend, the Rev. Dr. David Forney, who is the senior pastor of the First Presbyterian Church there. He told me that he and his family and members of the church were marching in the counterprotest. He said, “Rodger, I have never before sensed such a tangible presence of evil. The hatred was so horrible — and the awful things these white supremacists and neo-Nazis and KKK members were chanting and screaming about African Americans, and Jews and Muslims and women and Latinos. David and his wife Liz have a son Sam, whom they adopted from Korea, and he was with them, and one of the protestors screamed at Sam telling him to go back to China.

Make no mistake. This notion of white supremacy is evil, and it stands in direct opposition to the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

My friend David said he is shaken by what he experienced — by the open hatred and anger. And he has been left wondering, how did these people learn so much hate?

Yesterday former President Obama tweeted in response to the horror of the scenes in Charlottesville a quote from the late Nelson Mandela’s autobiography, *Long Walk to Freedom*. Mandela wrote: “No one is born hating another person because of the color of their skin, or his background, or his religion. People must learn to hate.” Then Mandela continued. “And remember, if they can learn to hate, then they can also learn to love, for love comes more naturally to the human heart.”

Families matter because they can teach to hate. But they can also teach us to love.

Sadly, it often takes a crisis for us to remember what is most important to us.

It will be nearly 16 years ago next month when, on September 11, 2001, four planes were hijacked out of New York and Newark. Two aircraft struck and destroyed the World Trade Towers in New York City. One struck the Pentagon in Washington. The fourth, United Flight 93, was hijacked on its way to Washington, where it was supposed to crash into the United States Capitol building and kill hundreds, perhaps thousands, more.

But as the plane was turning around to head to Washington, passengers and crew members on the flight found out what had happened to the other three flights, and they realized the hijackers’ plan. Huddled at the back of the airplane, they decided to not let that happen and to try to retake the plane — even at risk of their lives. Before launching their plan,

they passed around cell phones so people could alert their loved ones. Three years later, in the final report of the special commission on 9/11 that told all that had happened on that terrible day, one of the sections included transcripts of ten of those calls. The passengers and crew had only moments to talk.

Mark Bingham called his mother and told her he loved her so much. He asked her to give his love to his Dad from whom he was estranged and with whom he had not spoken in seven years. He said, “Mom, please tell Dad that I have never stopped loving him, and that I am so proud to be his son.”

Jeremy Glick called his wife and left a message. He said, “I know that we have not had the perfect marriage, but I wanted you to know that you have made me a better person and in these last moments of my life, I am thanking God for you and thinking only about you.”

Todd Beamer left a message for his wife and then called his son and daughter. He said to his wife, “I want you to know that you are the best thing that has ever happened to me and I knew every day that I did not deserve you, and I love you more today than the day we first met.” He left messages for his children and told them, “I know that I have been hard on you. Your Mom has always told me I was too hard on both of you, and she is right. I know I have not told you enough how much I love you, but I want you to know that now. And I want you to know that I am so proud of you both and no Dad could have

ever asked for a better son or a better daughter.”

Flight attendant CeeCee Lyles reached her husband and she said to him, “Sweetheart, I know the plan was that we were going to grow old together and then travel. I was going to take you to all the wonderful places I have been, and I was going to get to see the world through your beautiful eyes. But I guess that is not going to happen, and I am sorry. But please promise me that you will still go see all those places and then when I see you in heaven, we will talk about them. I love you so much.”

You know what they did not say? No one said there was an important file on their desk. No one asked anyone to let co-workers know they would not make a meeting. No one asked about grades or homework. I am not saying those things are not important. But I am saying that when it comes down to it, how we love each other — being subject to one another out of reverence for Christ — that is the most important thing. Please do not wait for a moment of crisis to speak what is true to your loved ones.

United Flight 93 crashed into a field in Stonycreek Township in Western Pennsylvania. All 44 persons, including the four hijackers, died.

Families matter. Be subject to one another out of reverence to Christ. Love is learned. If it doesn't work at home, it doesn't work.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

This sermon was delivered at Village Presbyterian Church, 6641 Mission Road, Prairie Village, KS 66208.

The sermon can be read, heard or seen on the church's website: <http://www.villagepres.org/current-sermonsermon-archives.html>.