

Sermon for Sunday, July 22, 1979, by Andrew A. Jumper, D.D., Pastor
Central Presbyterian Church, St. Louis, Missouri 63105

"GOD'S GLUE FOR FRACTURED FAMILIES"

Ephesians 5:21 - 6:4

Text: "Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ."

Ephesians 5:21

The other day I had the opportunity to be on a local radio program that featured a religious panel composed of a Rabbi, a Priest, and I served as the Protestant minister. One of the questions that came up had to do with God's order for the home. Who is the head of the house and who runs things in the home? One caller quoted Ephesians 5:21 - 6:4 as the basis for Biblical authority for the husband and father to be head of the house. I replied to that caller by indicating that there is more involved in that passage than simply authority and that if one takes the authority out of the context of the entire passage, one misses the entire point

Nevertheless, I was deeply frustrated. I was frustrated because no one thought could be developed very adequately because we kept being interrupted by commercials. Now, I realize very well the commercials pay the cost of the radio station and the program would not be possible without those commercials. Still, it was frustrating nonetheless. The other frustration was that three of us were participating in the panel and it was obvious to me that I did not hold the same view as one other, including the fourth person, our announcer.

It has bothered me since then that those in the St. Louis area who heard that program--and particularly members of my own congregation--might have gotten a wrong impression of what the Bible teaches or of what their pastor might believe. It is out of that context that I wish to address myself to the passage of scripture called to the attention of the religious panel by the anonymous caller.

Obviously today--in one sermon--I will not be able to deal with everything I would like in this important passage, and in future Sundays I will come back to specific details of the family relationship as I begin today a series on the Christian family. But this morning I want to talk about several basic elements that God gives us in the Bible for our families, elements that I am calling "God's Glue for Fractured Families".

However, before I start, I want to raise one question and answer it before we begin. That question has to do with the authority of the Bible for today. Recently I had a person say that Paul was a woman-hater, that he was a male chauvinist, and that his writings reflected the sociological and cultural conditions of his day. Now, if that is true, then that part of the Bible written by Paul (which, incidentally, constitutes a considerable portion of the New Testament) cannot be looked upon as the Word of God nor does it carry the authority of God. Frankly, I can't accept that. If I make that judgment about Paul and his scriptural authority and say it isn't true because I don't agree with it or understand it properly, on what basis can I say any part of the Bible really is true? Suppose a homosexual says that what the Bible says about homosexuality only reflects the social and cultural conditions of the day of the person who wrote against homosexuality? Suppose a thief--or an adulterer--or a murderer say the same thing? That means the Bible has only the authority we want it to have for the parts we want it to have. Well, I can't accept that. I believe the Bible is the Word of God. I believe it has God's authority behind it. And I believe the truth of the Bible is truth for every generation and for every age and for every person. Without that conviction the Bible becomes meaningless. It is true that when any particular part of the Bible was written, it was written in the context of some sociological or cultural situation of that time. But I do not believe it is simply a reflection of that time and that situation. No, I believe it was written as God's truth for all ages and it applies to men and woman today as it did yesterday and as it will tomorrow.

Let me just add this one illustration. In the days of St. Paul the lot of women was difficult. They were definitely regarded as inferior. They were regarded as the mere property of men. They had few rights and were very limited in their privileges and the things they could do. They could be easily divorced and left without any recourse. Even today in certain parts of the Mid East, in order to divorce his wife, a man has only to say "I divorce you, I divorce you, I divorce you" three times before witness and she is no longer his wife. She has no alimony, no property settlement, no right to the children, or any other privileges for support and maintenance. That can be very tragic and disastrous for a woman. Now, as a matter of fact, what St. Paul taught about the family, about human relationships between husband and wife and the duty each had to the other elevated women to a status they had never before experienced or attained. When you stop to think about it, the highest status of woman anywhere in the world today is in those countries whose cultures arose out of the Christian faith. While many so-called feminists may not be aware of it, the whole women's liberation movement had its roots in the theology of St. Paul. Without the New Testament there very well might be no women's movement today.

Now, it is true there are some sections in the New Testament that give us an idea of how women were treated in New Testament times. But they are given only to contrast how a Christian family is to relate. So, I just want to make clear that God's glue for fractured families is given in the Bible. That Bible is God's authoritative word for the family and when a family or a member of the family ignores it, defies it, or rejects it, that family is very likely to fragment and fly apart.

There is a second thing I must mention before I go on to talk about God's glue for the fractured family, and it is this: Paul is using an analogy to describe the family. He says that the husband and wife have a relationship such as Jesus has as head of the church. So Paul compares the relationship of husband and wife to that of Jesus and church. But analogies have a problem. Analogies tend to break down and certainly this one does. The subjection of the church to its Lord is unconditional because he is a perfect Lord. The subjection of an individual to the Lordship of Jesus is unconditional--or should be--because he is a perfect Lord. Now, that is the point where the analogy breaks down. The husband is sinful and fallible, a fallen human being just as is the wife. Therefore, the subjection of the wife to the husband cannot have the same completeness, the same blind obedience, the same unquestioned, unconditioned, unqualified loyalty that she gives to Christ. Now, as we proceed in a moment, we need to hold this reality in tension in the back of our minds. Let me give an illustration of what I mean. A woman's first loyalty is to Jesus--just as the man's first loyalty ought to be to Jesus. Suppose the man demands that the wife--or for that matter, the children--do something that is un-Christian or contrary to the clear will of God. What does a woman do? Since her husband is not her saviour in the same sense that Jesus is the saviour of the church, and since her first loyalty and commitment is to the Lord, what will she do? Now, actually, later on I'm coming back to this problem, but I simply wanted to make those two points as we begin our discussion of the Christian Family: First, I believe what the Bible says about family relationships is the authoritative word of God, that it is valid for all times and does not reflect the cultural conditions of a particular area or era that makes it invalid for today. God's truth yesterday is God's truth today and it will still be God's truth tomorrow. Like Jesus said, it is God's truth that sets us free and that is especially true for the family. Second, I wanted to point out that Paul's analogy of the relationship does break down and as we shall see, he himself recognizes this. I think the point he is making that has eternal validity has to do with how Christ related to the church and that is how the husband must relate to the wife. That's the point of his analogy he is really making and it is eternally true, the authoritative word of God.

Now, perhaps there is a third comment I ought to make. In a moment I am going to mention the three basic parts of God's glue that holds families together. The point that I want to make about them is this: they must be taken as a whole. You can't separate them and pick one of them and say, "That's God's rule for the family". That won't work. It is like getting a wheel out of round to do that. There are indeed three basic parts that make up the ingredients of God's glue, but the three parts make one whole. And the person who takes one of those parts without the other doesn't have God's glue. As a matter of fact, separating those three parts may create some "unglue". I have seen a lot of families destroyed because one member of the family is taking one part of God's glue to the exculsion of the other parts and trying to emphasize it apart from the others. That turns out to be more destructive than anything I know.

Now, the three parts of God's glue that holds fractured and broken families together are these: Rule, Relationship and Role. Today I am going to talk about the rule in the Christian home--that is, God's order for the home, the authority structure and the domination relation that God intends. In a way, I am sorry we have to start here. I'm sorry because a lot of you men are going home saying, "Dr. Jumper said that the husband is head of the house. He is the ruler, the authority of the home and the wife and children must be in subjection to him." Well, in one sense I am going to say that. But to say that in isolation is wrong. And ladies, if your husband says that to you, you have my personal permission to say to him, "But, dear, Dr. Jumper said you had to take the whole Bible." And then hit him with the whole Bible!

Seriously, our series that I am beginning today must be taken as a whole. Any person who fails to take into account all three parts of God's glue for fractured families is abusing scripture and, as St. Paul might say, is worse than a pagan and an infidel.

But the first part of God's glue for fractured families has to do with rule--with the pattern for authority. The Bible says that in the pattern of authority the husband is the head of the house as Christ is head of the church. He is the primary authority in the home. The wife is to be subject to the husband and in the passage we read this morning dealing with the children, the Bible makes it clear that in relationship to the children, the father is the primary source of authority.

Now, before some of you ladies get too upset, let me admit quickly that this raises some questions. What if the husband isn't a Christian? What if the husband refuses to exercise his Christian duty as the head of the family? What if the husband gives leadership that is out of accord with God's laws or God's words. Well, let me assure you in Sundays to come that I intend to deal fully with those questions. The point this morning is this: the first part of God's glue that holds families together is that God has an ideal order, a pattern of authority, for the Christian family. And the family that is being obedient to God's order for the family--the family that is following God's plan for rule in the home, is a family that is going to work well. It is going to stick together. God's order, properly followed, holds a family together. As we go on in this series you will discover that this does not in any way "put down" the woman, or her rights, or her gifts or her talents or her abilities. As a matter of fact, as I said earlier, it is out of God's order for the home that has leadwomen to where they are today and God's order is going to continue to help them fulfill who and what they can be as human beings and persons of worth. I doubt if many of you ladies would like to live in a non-Christian country like Iran with its Moslem customs where some mighty curious things are going on!

But the fact is, every situation must have order--it must have a pattern of authority. Now, the first point I want to make about God's plan for rule is that it is essential. There is abroad today in the world a concept of what I call secular democracy and the concept of submission is not very popular today. We have had all sorts of rebellion and revolts in South America, Rhodesia, and now Nicaragua to demonstrate this.

But, as a matter of fact, the Christian concept of human equality is much deeper than any other such concept in the world. A few verses after our Scripture this morning, St. Paul goes on to add in Ephesian 6:9 that "God is no respecter of persons". In the Christian fellowship and the Christian family there is no "high" and there is no "low" as those words are ordinarily used today to talk about position. There are no second-class citizens in God's family. Now, in the Christian Fellowship and in the Christian home, there is equality of all. However, there must be an order. There must be a pattern of authority, and God has said what that rule is--the husband is to be the head of the home.

Now, let me make an unequivocal statement and I'm going to use a big word to do it. There is no such thing as a workable democratic equalitarianism! For example, in the Middle Ages, we had a cast system. But if you abolish the cast system, you may end up with inequality of wealth as a substitute. Then, if you attempt to abolish inequality of wealth, as the communists have done and as some of our American liberal religious leaders seem to want to do, you may end up with the inequality of power. Certainly that has happened in Russia and needs no documentation. Now, this doesn't mean that overthrowing an oppressive form of government or rule is bad, but the Christian recognizes you may be swapping one form of evil for another and the fact that you throw out one bad form doesn't mean God's kingdom has come. This has been amply demonstrated in such places as Vietnam, Cambodia, and Iran.

You see, no matter how hard you work for human justice there is going to be inequalities. There will be inequalities of talent, of social order, of power, of wealth. Do you remember how Shakespeare put it in his play "Much Ado About Nothing"? He said if "two men ride on the same horse one of them has to ride behind." (Act III, Scene 5)

Here is the whole point: freedom--true freedom--requires discipline and needs the restraint of order. Isn't this what happened to the prodigal son? He wanted to be free--free of father, free of order, free of discipline, free of restraint. But without order or discipline, his freedom landed him in the pigpen. In his search for pure freedom, he lost his freedom. He came home a much wiser young man. "Make me as one of your hired servants," he said to his father. He had discovered that true freedom lay in discipline and order and restraint. Freedom without order becomes either anarchy or libertarianism--or both! As one writer has said, you can't have an army that can fight effectively unless you have generals and captains and sergeants as well as privates. The fact is, liberty without control turns into chaos.

So with the Christian family. Without discipline, restraint and order or control, family life turns into chaos and confusion. One way or another all live under power or order or authority. Society--life--doesn't work without it. The fact is, we all live under one master or another. God's order for the home--God's pattern of authority for the family--God's rule for husband, wife and children--is that the husband be head of the house.

In closing, let me say this: it is true that in submission our first submission is to God. As St. Luke put it in Acts 5:29, when Peter refused to obey the command of the Jewish officials not to preach about Jesus, "We ought to obey God rather than men." Yet, the fact remains, the first part of God's glue that holds fractured families together is Rule--God's pattern for authority for the home, that the man be head of the house.

In weeks to come we will talk about other elements in God's glue that holds families together and we will talk about some of the problems we have because of human failure. But the first part of God's glue is his pattern for authority where the husband is head of the home.