

Sermon for Sunday, August 26, 1979, by Andrew A. Jumper, D.D., Pastor
Central Presbyterian Church, St. Louis, Missouri 63105

"GOD'S GLUE FOR FRACTURED FAMILIES - VI"

Ephesians 5:21-6:4

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

Ephesians 5:21

This morning I want to continue our series on the Christian family. In the past weeks, we have been talking about the three basic elements that serve as the foundation for God's plan for the family. First, we talked about rule--God's structure for the home; second, we talked about relationships--how the husband relates to wife, how the wife relates to husband; and how parents and children relate to one another. Today we move to discussion of the third element, which is roles. What roles do husband and wife play in the home? What is the role of children in the home? God has given us a model for what the home should be like and he has laid down in the Bible some basic roles that each person in the Christian home should fulfill.

Let's begin by talking about the role of the husband. There are about six basic roles for the husband and today we will look at two of these. When we discussed the rule of the home, God's structure for the family, we discovered that the Bible teaches clearly and unequivocally that the husband is to be the head of the home. That's God's order for the family. And when the husband does not assume his role, or when a woman takes that position for herself, the family does not work very well. It doesn't work well because that is out of God's order and when you violate God's order, you get your family out of the perfect will of God. Now, there are a lot of able, capable women in the world, and some of them may not like that. They may feel they are able to rule the home better than the husband. And, as a matter of fact, they may indeed be much more capable. Unfortunately, that's not God's plan for the family. Besides, how does one decide who is the more capable in running the family? Do you do it by cutting cards, or verbal fights (or even maybe a fist fight!), or just how do you decide? You certainly cannot run it equally, for there is no such thing as democratic equalitarianism. Ultimately someone has to make decisions and someone has to take final authority. Well, the Bible says that is the role of the man. If we accept God's way, we avoid the power struggle that otherwise would result and which always brings tension to the home.

Some of us may ask, but what if the husband doesn't fulfill his duties? Or, what if the wife is clearly more superior in ability? I suspect there are a lot of families in that situation today. As I understand the Bible, the response would be two-fold. First, if the man does not fulfill his role, certain duties fall back on the wife because certain roles are shared mutually, for there are--as we shall see--many duties they share in common. But second, I suspect that in many, many cases, the reason the man does not fulfill his role as head of the house is because his wife has already assumed that role. If there are some serious tensions in your marriage, I hope you men and you ladies will examine your role you are playing in your family to determine if you are fulfilling your role. I realize it may be difficult to change, or to drop the responsible role as a woman if your husband is reluctant to assume it. It may mean a lot of things will go undone for a while. Bills may not get paid. It may mean a lot of things are left untended. But as you practice submission and leave the duty where it belongs, hopefully your husband will begin to assume his proper role. You see, sometimes the man does not fulfill his duty because either the wife has assumed it or else she does for him so that the responsibilities no longer rest on him.

In either case, it creates problems because that is not God's perfect will for the home. Indeed, if a member of the family is not assuming his or her role properly and if you put your home in God's order, I promise you things will get better. You see, ultimately your home works better and your relationships are better if they follow God's plan. If you are not going to follow God's plan, whose plan or what plan will you follow?

The first role of the husband--and the keystone to his entire role--is to be the servant-leader. As Jesus is the head of the church, the husband is the head of the family. And Jesus did not come to be ministered unto, but to minister. Any idea of the man as "king of the hill" or "master of the castle" is not biblical. He is the servant-leader. He leads the family in the same spirit and in the same loving way that Jesus leads the Church. He is to meet the emotional and spiritual and physical and material needs of his family. A lot of men use their families as an emotional foil to meet their own needs, but the Bible says it is the duty of the man to meet the needs of his family as its servant-leader.

Now, I want to say two things about the servant-leader. First, what is the "style" of his leadership? That is, in what spirit does he exercise his leadership role? The Bible is very clear about that. It is not to be done in a spirit of harshness. Colossians 3:19 says that husbands are to love their wives and not be harsh with them. And in I Peter 5:3 the Bible says that a leader should be one who is not domineering over those in his charge. And particularly in relationship to the children, his authority should not be exercised in such a way that he provokes them or breaks their spirit or causes them to be discouraged. (Colossians 3:21 and Ephesians 6:4)

Now, that is the "style" of leadership spelled out in the Bible. It is loving and considerate and thoughtful. It is a style that treats others as persons of worth. Do you remember how Jesus spelled that out after he finished the last supper? He said to his disciples, "The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and those in authority over them are called benefactors. But not so with you; rather let the greatest among you become as the youngest, and the leader as one who serves. For which is the greater, one who sits at the table, or one who serves? Is it not the one who sits at the table? But I am among you as one who serves." (Luke 22:25-27) So, that is the style of leadership that Jesus gives us and if the husband has Jesus as his model, that is the kind of leadership he will give.

As a servant-leader in my own home I have been guilty of harshness, of dominating, of provoking my children and family. But I am always wrong when I do that. That is also true for every husband and father here this morning. We are not Lords and Masters. No, our role is to be the servant-leader of our homes, done in the style and in the spirit of Jesus who came among us as one who serves. Your family is not your servants to be at your beck and call, to meet your every whim and need. Indeed, the reverse is true! We are to be the servant-leader in the spirit of Jesus who came to minister and not to be ministered to.

Now there is a second way in which the man is to be servant-leader who is head of the home in the way that Jesus is head of the church. He is to encourage the exercise of the gifts that God gives various members of the family. Our model for this is found in I Corinthians, chapter 12. There we are told how the Spirit of Jesus gives various gifts to different members of the body and those gifts are to be exercised for the common good. Now, it is the desire of Jesus that every member of the church exercise the gifts that God gives him. As the Bible puts it, the eye can't say it has no need of the hand, nor the head that it has no need of the feet.

Now, Jesus as the head of the church is the model for the man who is the head of the family. As Jesus desires that every part of the body exercise his or her gifts for the common good, so the man should desire that every member of the family exercise whatever gifts he or she has for the common good of the family. It is not true that the Bible puts down women. As a matter of fact, the women's liberation movement has its roots in the teaching and writing of the New Testament where they are insisting that an individual has the right to be the person God calls them to be.

Let me suggest what that may mean. Suppose the wife has a gift for mathematics or figures. It could mean that the husband lets her exercise her gift by managing the finances of the home as long as she does it under his authority as head of the home. Or suppose a woman has other gifts--maybe an artist or managerial skills or other business abilities. I believe it is the duty of the husband to provide an opportunity for those skills and gifts to be exercised. Now, the woman as wife and mother has certain duties, she has a certain role that she must fulfill. Later on, when we come to talk about her role in the family, we will discuss those duties. However, I do not believe that a case can be made from the New Testament that a woman must suppress her gifts, her unique and God-given talents. As a matter of fact, I think that would be terrible. It would be wrong for a woman who is given unique gifts and talents to have to repress them, simply because she is a wife or a mother. I know women in this congregation who have great talent and skills and gifts and I believe it's their responsibility as children of God to utilize those gifts in the community in order to minister and help other people. Now, it is true that if a working wife or mother does not fulfill her role in the family, the family will suffer. But a working mother can fulfill that role while a mother who stays at home all day might not. To put it another way, you can be away from the home all day and still be a good mother, and you can stay at home all day and be a rotten mother. What makes a good wife and mother is whether or not a woman fulfills her role that God assigns her. God may call a particular woman to be a homemaker. That may be the gifts he gives her, but God doesn't give the same gifts to everybody. God may give other gifts to another woman and the fact that a woman stays at home doesn't mean she is any better than a wife who doesn't and the wife who doesn't stay at home isn't any better than the wife who does. Each is to exercise them according to the gifts of God. God gives different gifts to different people.

There are people who say that a women's place is in the home. They are opposed to working wives and mothers. And it may very well be that there are times when it is more appropriate for the mother to be at home. But can it be that when a woman is forced by economic necessity to work that she is out of God's will? Can it be that a mother who through divorce or death is alone and is forced to work is out of God's will? Or can it be that a woman who has certain business skills and chooses to exercise them is out of God's will. No--I cannot believe that and I cannot find justification in the Bible for it. As a matter of fact, the first convert that we know of on the European mainland was a woman named Lydia who was a successful business woman. We will have more to say about this subject when we come to discuss the role of the wife and mother. There are those who say that the breakdown in the American family can be traced to working wives and mothers. I don't believe that either. The breakdown comes when a mother fails to fulfill her God-given role in the home. The American tragedy of the home today is not because women are working, but because women--and men, too; for that matter--are not following God's order for the home. The real question is not do you work but why are you working? If a family is working to accumulate the material goods of the world they are already out of God's will. It does not matter whether the wife works or not, their motivation for involving themselves in the business world, if it's just to accumulate worldly things, is already out of God's will. That's why the home is breaking down. It is simplistic to say that if a woman

at home all would be well. It will never be well until mothers--whether they work or not--are fulfilling their duty to the home. It will never be well until fathers and husbands are fulfilling their duties to the home. What we really need today are men and women, husbands and wives, fathers and mothers, who are God's people, doing God's will, living together according to God's plan. When that happens American homes will be strong--they will be right.

The second role of the husband as head of the home is to be its religious or spiritual leader. Do you have family prayers, prayers at meals, devotional time together as a family? If not, let me ask you husbands and fathers, why not? That's your responsibility. Is your family regular and systematic in its attendance at Sunday School and Church? If you are not, then the man as head of the house is failing in his job. Are you children being taught the Christian faith at home? If not, that is a failure of the husband and father. There are so many men who have abdicated their responsibility to be the spiritual leader of their homes. A mother, no matter how hard she tries, cannot be the primary spiritual leader in the home. Children--particularly boys--admire their fathers and tend to follow their example. If the father thinks spiritual things and the church are important, in all likelihood, the children will feel that way, too. But if the father ignores spiritual matters, if he abdicates his duty as spiritual leader, if he fails to be the teacher of religion in the home, it is likely the children will be what he is. I praise God for Godly women who are trying their best to make theirs a spiritual home and who emphasize the things of God. But, oh, how homes today need fathers who are spiritual leaders, who are training up children in the way that they should go. The Bible says that a man of God should have children who are believers, and that he should be able to give instruction in sound doctrine. (Titus 1:6,9) The Bible says a man should be apt to teach spiritual things (I Timothy 3:2 and II Timothy 2:24)

How about it fathers--how about it husbands? Are you providing the spiritual leadership for your family? Our children are an incredible gift from God. And how God loves our children. The Bible says, "their angels constantly behold the face of God." (Matthew 18:10) And Jesus said, "but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to stumble, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened round his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea." (Matthew 18:6)

The husband and father is the head of the family. That's God's rule for the home. And the husband and father is the spiritual leader in the home--that's God's role for him. As Jesus is the Great Shepherd, so the father is the shepherd of the family--the little flock. As a husband and as a father who is the shepherd of the little flock, I say to you, "It is not the will of our Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish." (Matthew 18:14) That's your job, father and husband.