

**Sermon preached by Dr. Neil Smith at Faith Evangelical Presbyterian Church,
Kingstowne, Virginia, on Sunday, September 6, 2020**

WHATEVER YOU DO (7)

Colossians 3:18-4:1

We began talking last Sunday about God’s design for the relationship between wives and their husbands in the covenant of marriage. I want to talk more about it today because marriage and the family are so central to God’s design for the ordering and flourishing of society, and because marriage gives us a picture – an imperfect picture, but a picture nonetheless – of the spiritual relationship between the Lord Jesus Christ and His church.

Marriage, as the Bible says, is a mystery (Ephesians 5:32). A “profound mystery.” It is a serious subject. But sometimes it is good to laugh about it.

One husband read a book called *Man of the House* on his daily commute. (Hopefully, he wasn’t driving while he read.) Inspired by the book, he stormed into the house one evening and said to his wife, pointing his finger in her face to let her know he was serious: “From now on,” he said, “I want you to know that I am the man of the house, and my word is law. Tonight you are going to prepare me a gourmet meal and a sumptuous dessert. Then, when I’m done eating, you’re going to draw me a bath so I can have a relaxing soak. And when I’m finished with my bath, guess who’s going to dress me and comb my hair?”

His wife responded: “My guess is the funeral director.”

He obviously misunderstood what it means, at least biblically, to be the “man of the house.”

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A dad and his young daughter were sitting on the couch together. The little girl said: “Daddy, you’re the boss of the house, right?”

The dad replied proudly: “Yes, I’m the boss of the house.”

His daughter burst his bubble, though, when she said: “Cause Mommy put you in charge, right, Daddy?”

A lot of husbands and dads may think they are the “boss of the house,” but their kids (and their wives) know otherwise.

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A seven-year-old girl wanted to learn to play the violin, so her mom took her to a music store to rent an instrument. Trying to impress on her the importance of practicing, the mom explained that violin lessons were expensive, so she would have to work hard. “There may be

times when you feel like giving up,” the mom said, “but I want you to hang in there and keep on trying.”

The little girl nodded and then, in her most serious seven-year-old voice, said: “It will be just like marriage, right, Mommy?”

Out of the mouths of children: It *is* just like marriage. There will be times when you feel like giving up. But you’ve just got to hang in there and keep on trying.

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Making marriage work can be hard work. And some people – lots of people – give up too soon. Marriages fail for all kinds of reasons. Sometimes it is due to unrealistic expectations, because of a fairy-tale view of marriage. Sometimes it is due to plain old self-centeredness on the part of one or both marriage partners. One man told his pastor he wasn’t sure he could marry the woman he had been dating for several years (!), because, as he said: “I don’t think she makes me happy.” His pastor asked him why not, which, according to the pastor, was a mistake, because the man went on and on explaining all the reasons she didn’t make him happy.

Finally the pastor interrupted and asked: “What kind of wife would make you happy?” The more he described what he was looking for in a wife, the more convinced the pastor became that what he really needed was a goldfish, or maybe a Golden Retriever. The last thing he needed was a wife, because he seemed to think that the whole world existed – and marriage in particular – to meet his needs.

A wife or husband will never meet all your needs. Neither will the church. Or a goldfish. Or a Golden Retriever. Only God can meet your deepest needs. (Adapted from sermon by Dr. Craig Barnes at National Presbyterian Church, Washington, DC; www.preachingtoday.com.)

It is the height of presumption to think your husband or wife exists to meet all your needs. A loving husband or wife will meet some of your needs – some very important needs. But not all of them. If you expect your spouse to meet all of your needs, you will be deeply disappointed. You will become disillusioned, because that’s what happens when you live under an illusion. And you will be tempted, like many wives, many husbands, many couples, to give up.

Ever hear of Glynn Wolfe? He went by “Scotty.” Scotty Wolfe holds the modern-day record for the most monogamous marriages. Before he died in 1997 at the age of 88, he had been married 29 times. He also had one marriage annulled. He was widowed four times. All the others ended in divorce (except his final marriage to wife #29, whom he married about a year before his death.) Scotty Wolfe was addicted to marriage, but never developed the virtues of self-sacrificing love, faithfulness, or staying power to go the distance. His shortest marriage lasted just 19 days. Several lasted less than a year. His longest marriage lasted 11 years (#28).

If you dream of making it into the Guinness Book of World Records, let me suggest that this is not the way to do it.

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In the Bible, there is no such thing as a perfect marriage. Every marriage in the Bible is imperfect in its own way. The only exception is the marriage between our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and His church, a marriage to be celebrated and consummated at the end of time when the kingdom of God comes in all its fullness and the Lord Jesus “presents (us) to Himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless” (Ephesians 5:27). This will be the perfect, eternal union of the Redeemer and His redeemed people, the Lamb of God and the people for whom He died. We live, and wait in hope and expectation – it should be an *eager expectation* – for the day of the marriage supper of the Lamb to come.

Adam and Eve did not have a perfect marriage. That is intuitively obvious, isn't it? Mr. and Mrs. Noah were married for hundreds of years, but theirs was not a perfect union. Do you know the name of Noah's wife? No, it was not Joan of Arc ☺. Noah's wife is not explicitly named in the Bible, although Jewish tradition says her name was Naamah, who is mentioned in Genesis 4:22.

Abraham and Sarah didn't have a perfect marriage. Nor did Isaac and Rebekah. Or Jacob and either of his wives, Leah and Rachel. Or Moses and Zipporah. David was a man after God's own heart (1 Samuel 13:14; Acts 13:22), and he didn't come close to having a perfect marriage. Not even Joseph and Mary had a perfect marriage. It is impossible to have a perfect marriage when it is the union of two flawed, sinful, imperfect people.

It is not God's fault that there are no perfect marriages. It is not a flaw in God's design for marriage. The fault is with us. The flaw is in us, in the sinfulness of our fallen human nature, in our disobedience to God, in our deviation from the blueprint God has laid out for marriage as a means of blessing and flourishing in the human community.

The biblical blueprint for marriage is not rocket science. It begins, as Paul says in Ephesians 5:21, with mutual submission. It begins with submission on the part of wives to their husbands, and submission on the part of husbands to their wives. It is not one-way submission. It is two-way submission. It is rooted in mutual submission to and reverence for Christ as Lord of the marriage relationship and Lord of all of life. Because we submit to the sovereign and gracious rule of Jesus in our lives, husbands and wives are to submit graciously to one another. So, submission is not a one-way street. It is not just a matter of the wife submitting to the desires and decisions of her husband. It is a two-way street.

What motivates the husband in his leadership of and submission to his wife is ... love: Love for his wife that is modeled after the love Jesus demonstrated for us in His life, ministry, suffering, and sacrificial death on the cross for us.

Husbands, if you love your wife the way Jesus loved (loves) the church, you will “not be harsh” with her (Colossians 3:19). You won't be mean to her. You won't treat her

disrespectfully or thoughtlessly. You won't always put your own interests ahead of hers. In fact, you will put her interests ahead of your own, because that is the nature of love.

In the biblical sense, submission by either the wife or the husband is not a pragmatic strategy designed to get what you want from the other person. It is a yieldedness of your heart based on trust in the other person, on love for your husband or wife, and your devotion to Jesus as Lord of your marriage. The decision to submit, like the decision to love, is one you have to make every day. Multiple times every day.

If you understand what love is, you understand that it is a decision. It is a verb. It is something you do, much more than just something you feel. Feelings come and go, but the kind of love we learn from Jesus endures. It is deeper and stronger than how you feel at any given moment.

At weddings I often read a few verses from Ecclesiastes 4. These verses are not specifically or primarily about marriage. But they have a definite application to God's design for marriage. Listen to these wise words:

Two are better than one
 (MSG: It's better to have a partner than go it alone)
 because they have a good return for their work.
 If one falls down,
 the other can help him or her up.
 But pity those who fall
 and have no one to help them up.
 Also, if two lie down together,
 they will keep warm.
 But how can one keep warm alone?
 Though one may be overpowered,
 two can defend themselves.
 A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.
 (Ecclesiastes 4:9-12)

In a marriage between a man and a woman who know and love and trust Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, this third strand is the Lord Jesus Himself. He is the glue that holds our marriages together. He is the One who can keep our marriages from falling apart. He is the One who helps us to submit to one another, out of reverence for Him. He is the One who gives wives the grace to submit to the loving leadership of their husbands, and who gives husbands the grace to love their wives as He loves His church.

Marriage *is* a lot like learning to play the violin (or any other instrument): There may be times when you feel like giving up. But you just have to hang in there and keep on trying. And let Jesus be Lord of your marriage.

Lord, let it be so in us. Amen.