

RELATIONSHIPS - THE "LIVED-OUT" GOSPEL

"Submit to one another..."



Relationships

Jesus summarized the commandments talking about relationships: *"Love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, soul and strength and love your neighbor as yourself."* Relationships are a polarizing topic these days - how do we relate to one another? It seems as though every facet of life enters into how we perceive and relate to each other as fellow human beings - race, creed, gender, ethnicity, gender identification, beliefs, opinions - and even vaccinated or unvaccinated. As we look at ourselves and our relationships in God's

scheme of things, we see that we are all indeed priceless treasures that Christ lived, died, and rose from the grave to save to be His Bride for eternity. God's Word calls for us to *"submit to one another out of reverence for Christ"* (Ephesians 5:21).

Unless you truly live in a bubble, every person is engaged in a relationship or two or even thousands. Therefore, "living-out" the Gospel has a "life-changing" effect in these relationships. The Holy Spirit is active as Christians proclaim to the world the beautiful Gospel truth that God has a model for His people as reflected in His grand design for marriage - His pattern for one man and one woman that are to mirror Christ Jesus and His love for His Church as they become one - submissive to each other out of reverence for God. The Apostle Paul's words in Ephesians 5:21 - 6:9 are a teaching tool for all our relationships and how we take care of each other - how we are mutually submissive to one another. God is concerned about relationships and so is your District Evangelization Team. **Read more** about how all your relationships are impacted by the Gospel.

Marriage is God's grand design for all relationships.

The topic of marriage is a volatile one, a topic that will soon be something you don't discuss in public along with religion and politics. Americans are living longer, marrying later, exiting marriage more quickly, and choosing to live together before marriage, after marriage, in-between marriages, and as an alternative to marriage. People now tend to speak more about "relationships" and "intimate partners" than they do about marriage. Marriage has been redefined by the Supreme Court and culture considers this definition the norm rather than Scripture.

Almost everyone knows at least one joke about marriage. We were even told this one at the seminary: "A pastor went to speak to a group of 4th graders on the topic of marriage, and he

asked the question: 'Does anyone of you know what God has to say about marriage?' Well, immediately one little boy threw his hand up and the pastor called on him and said, 'All right, what does God have to say about marriage?' The little boy said, 'Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.'" But whether you are single or married, still in school or been married for over 60 years, each and every one of us has skin in the game when it comes to the topic of marriage because, by the grace of God, we are the Bride of Christ.

God is concerned about relationships. God created the world in His own image and treasures each one of us as the crown of His creation. He gave man and woman to each other in relationship to be one as the Triune God is one. But sin severed our relationship with God and with one another. The Prophet Isaiah (Isaiah 29:11-19) proclaims something that has been true since the fall into sin - man hiding from God, thinking God doesn't know or see what we do in secret. Sinful man, like you, like me, has twisted and turned everything upside down to the point that we are like the clay that says to the potter, "You didn't make me. You don't understand me." In Mark 7:1-13, Jesus puts it quite simply: "*You honor Me with your lips but your heart is far from Me.*" And yet, the Apostle Paul speaks of the profound mystery of the relationship between Christ and His Church likening it to the Bridegroom and his Bride. The Prophet Jeremiah speaks of the new covenant that must be made because, "*My covenant they broke though I was their husband, declares the Lord.*"

The Gospel the apostles proclaimed and which the Church continues to speak is a life-changing Gospel, a "lived-out" Gospel. It changes us no matter what situation we are living in. As we look at ourselves and our relationships in God's scheme of things, we see that we are all indeed priceless treasures that Christ lived, died, and rose from the grave to save. In our selfishness, we are only concerned about ole' number one - ourselves - which makes any and all relationships challenging - at home, at work, in government, and even in a church family. All it takes is a misspoken word, a varying opinion, a sideways look, someone failing to live up to our expectations of them - and relationships are severed, walls are put up, grudges are formed, and a church family suffers. The world witnesses that even in the Church, getting along isn't a given, and they may mistakenly get the impression that the Cross isn't enough to heal broken relationships.

Relationships are held together by the invisible cord called commitment.

Commitment is an island of certainty in a sea of change and upheaval. We are not human butterflies fluttering through each day and through other people's lives stopping just long enough to get what we want and then flying off again. We are human beings created in God's image and re-created through the redeeming blood of our Savior so that we are capable of making one thing certain in an uncertain future. And that certainty in all our relationships is **love**. God is love. We love because God first loved us. Scripture clearly proclaims: God is committed to us. His heart is "all in" for us - revealed through His Son giving His life for us.

God wants our hearts to be “all in” for Him - and not simply “lip service.” Lip service, half-heartedness doesn’t work in any relationship. If you went home and said over dinner, “You know, dear, I’ve been acting as though I love you but my heart’s just not in it. My heart is still searching for something or someone else” – how do you think that would go? Or what if you told your boss, “I put my 40 hours in each week but I only work half-heartedly at it. But thanks for the paycheck.” What if your child comes home and says, “I’m glad I have a place to crash at night but if you think I’m going to listen to what you say - forget about it.” Why would people ever just give lip service to their relationships - husband and wife, child and parents, working with others, or even at church – it begins with the sinful heart that is only concerned with itself.

Our relationships are about the “other I”.

As you know, I like stories. Here is one I tell often: With God working on Jerry’s heart, Jerry finally understood that he had not been a very good husband or father. Wanting to start over, he took his wife on a two-week vacation to a secluded cottage. They walked on the beach holding hands. He complimented her on her clothes. They even went shopping, which was not Jerry’s thing, at all! Most importantly, he didn’t call the office once or even turn on ESPN. (What?) On the last night of their vacation, Jerry’s wife broke down crying. When Jerry asked her what was going on, she blurted out: “I just know why you’re doing all these nice things. The doctor told you something at your check-up that you haven’t told me. You’re dying, aren’t you? That’s the only explanation.” “No,” Jerry replied, “Treating you and the children the way God intended, I’m just now starting to live.”

The “other I” are those with whom we relate, with whom God calls us to love as we love ourselves. Paul writes, *“For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the Church because we are members of His Body.”* The welfare and happiness of the person who has become the “other I” - be that spouse, parent, child, co-worker - has an immediate effect on his or her own welfare and happiness. We need to ask ourselves, “Do they know that we love them?” If the answer is “no,” then we need to make some changes - “Create in me a clean heart, O God. Forgive my selfishness that puts myself before loving others.” But if the answer is “yes,” then we can rejoice that we are doing unto others as our Lord has revealed to us. *“Christ loved the Church and gave Himself for it.”* He laid down His life with sacrificial love, committed love, unconditional love to purchase a relationship with us and to replace a sinful, selfish heart with a forgiven, committed, sacrificial one that sees a desire for every relationship to reveal God.

Not even once in the book of Ephesians does Paul ever ask a woman to obey the man. Not once! It’s not what the Bible teaches. Paul knows how to use the word obey. Children are to obey their parents; slaves are to obey their masters, but not once does Paul ask wives to obey their husbands. Instead, he says they are to be mutually submissive, mutually servants, mutually loving and caring for each other. This was revolutionary and transforming to the culture of his day - and yes, even to our day still - because of sin!

Luther said, "Eve was created out of the rib of Adam. She was not created from a bone in his foot so that she would be under man. She was not created from a bone in Adam's head so she would be above man. But Eve was created from a bone in Adam's side, his rib bone, so that she would be at the side of man and be called a helpmate. And so it is that Adam and Eve stand side by side in a mutual partnership of love and serving." That's God's design for marriage - for relationships - out of reverence for Christ who first loved us this way - in submission to the Cross!

Being submissive out of reverence for Christ is counter to our culture; it's counter to our way of living. Men are taught to be absorbed by their work, absorbed by their success, absorbed by sports. Men are implicitly taught to marry wives who will be like their mothers and pick up after them in all their messes. And women? Our culture teaches you to be liberated, independent, to be able to do with your bodies and your lives as you please. So the message from Ephesians 5 is revolutionary, radical, transforming when God says to be servants of one another out of reverence for Christ, out of holy fear of God. Are you willing to lift up the topic of marriage, the Gospel, in all your relationships to go against the flow so that God's will can be made known? Why risk it, you say? Well, out of reverence for the Christ, who gives you, His partner, His Bride, the blessing to share this truth with the world He loves. Speaking this Gospel and "living-out" this Gospel in all your relationships is living the abundant life given to us by our Bridegroom, the Good Shepherd (John 10:10).

In all the examples of relationships, Paul has laid out for us how every relationship is influenced and transformed by the love of Christ.

God sent His one and only Son - in love - to restore all relationships broken by sin. Marriage involves each mate giving themselves totally to the other. Not because they have to and not because someone is going to make them, but rather, because of their reverence for Christ. As Christ gave Himself totally for us, we are to give ourselves totally to our spouse. Later Paul says to husbands, "*Love your wives, as Christ loved the Church and gave Himself up for Her.*" There's no hint of an autocratic "lord and master" here. Instead, it is to be a serving headship. As Christ gave Himself up even into suffering and death for the Church, the husband is to give himself up for his wife, giving her health and welfare and happiness priority in his concerns, and not his own. In this setting, a wife will not fight her husband for "headship" but will willingly encourage and support him in his headship of the family giving her heart fully to him out of reverence for Christ. Hers will be a willing "giving to" of submission and respect and love, and his will be a willing "giving for" of love and care and concern.

Another example is the relationship between children and their parents. "*Children, obey your parents in the Lord.*" "*Fathers, do not provoke your children.*" We know, of course, that the growing-up process produces some tensions and rubs in every family. Youth are eager to "get out from under" while parents want to "keep them under control." But in God's perspective, the

priority concern for families is that they see the home as a place where the love of Christ is nurtured through mutual reverence for Him as the center and heart of the home.

From the home Paul moved to the workplace in the verses following our text where the influencing and transforming love of Christ gave them an identity and self-worth as children of God - no matter what their place in life or social status. In all these examples, the relationship as Church, as husband and wife and family or work - God is committed to relationships - so much so He gives of Himself to influence and transform them. It is the perfect life of Christ that transforms us to forgive the imperfections of our brothers and sisters in Christ and instead look at them for who they truly are – fellow redeemed, forgiven, and loved children of God. It is the sacrificial death of Christ that transforms us to make sacrifices to help a brother or sister in need. And it is in the victorious resurrection of Jesus Christ that we share the joy of the promise of eternal life with our brothers and sisters in Christ.

The Gospel changes lives for eternity.

You may not be able to change the circumstances you're in now, but it can **change you** within those circumstances. Carry this image with you into the coming week: serve Christ as you respect and work with those who are over you, as you are friendly and helpful to co-workers, as you do the very best you can with your whole heart, and you'll probably find that your whole work situation will improve. Let your children and grandchildren see the love of Christ as you submit all your endeavors before Him with your whole heart - and they will find a home that functions by the discipline and instruction of the Lord. Love your spouse as yourself out of submission for Christ - and you'll start living out God's design as the Bride of Christ Himself - who loves you with a committed, sacrificial, and eternal love.

There is one illustration I used for every wedding I ever officiated. Beth would gaze out into the garage as her husband Rick would spend hours slaving over his precious MG. Every part, every nut and bolt just sparkled on his pride and joy. If he caught a glimpse of Beth watching him, he would always tell her, "You can drive this baby anytime you want." But Beth knew that if something ever happened to that car, their relationship would be strained and maybe be irrevocably severed. But one day, with her car in the shop, her husband at work, and their child getting sicker by the moment, Beth was forced to drive the MG to get medicine for the baby. She cautiously drove the car to the pharmacy and parked far away from any other vehicle. Beth was only blocks from home when out of the corner of her eye she saw a child riding his bike into the street. She swerved to miss him but in doing so, she ran right into the back of a parked car. She and the baby weren't hurt but Beth crumbled behind the wheel and sobbed. She just knew that not only the car was ruined but possibly her marriage. As the police officer stood over her, he asked for the car's registration and her license. She reached into the glove box and found a note attached to the registration. It read, "Beth, if you are reading this note, you have probably ruined my car. But please know this for sure: It's you that I love, not this car."

The tragedy of this story is that far too many of our relationships are missing that Gospel truth either spoken or lived out: We love because God first loved us. (1 John 4:19) God shared this truth of His love for all our relationships - we love out of submission to the Christ who gave Himself for us. The Cross bears witness from God to the world: "It's YOU that I love." This Gospel is life-changing. How blessed to share with your spouse, co-worker, dear friend or neighbor - It's you that I love! The things of this world are here today and gone tomorrow - but relationships founded upon us as the bride and Christ as the Bridegroom are for eternity.

Relationships are indeed a hot topic right now. Relationships are strained more than ever over politics, vaccinations, masks and a variety of other burdens. But the Gospel brings healing to broken relationships and God's Word reveals the image of His will for all relationships. Why not let others know that God's design for marriage is where you learned to submit out of reverence for Christ and what it means to be truly loved? The world around you needs God's love and grace. God's love and will introduced into all our relationships make a difference for eternity. Are there some relationships that need God's healing hand? Share them with your Evangelization Team at the email evangelizationteam@englishdistrict.org We would love to lift them up to God in prayer. As one body in Christ, may the Holy Spirit equip and empower us to speak the Gospel and live it out in all our relationships - to truly live, now and for eternity.

In Christ Alone,
Pastor John Diener
Galatians 2:20