

FAMILY LIFE IS MESSY: Who Wins The Arguments At Your House?

Ephesians 5:21—6:3

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WATCH/LISTEN: <https://www.fbcjc.org/sermon/family-life-is-messy-who-wins-the-arguments-at-your-house/>

DOYLE:

Grandpa was celebrating his 100th birthday and everyone was complimenting his great health. “I’ll tell you my secret,” he said. “My wife and I were married 75 years. On our wedding night, we made a promise that whenever we had a fight, the one who was wrong would go outside and take a long walk. I’ve lived in the open air for years!”

As entertaining as that story is, I hope the same person doesn’t win all the arguments at your house. Our text this morning says there is something more important than always winning. God’s Word has something powerful to say about every member of the household, including the children, being valued. Each opinion and viewpoint matters.

HANNAH:

We live in a Pinterest-perfect world. We each carry with us expectations about how things should look or function. Family is no exception.

But the truth is that our stories of faith, and our personal experiences, show us that there is not necessarily one “perfect way” to do family. God did not make robots. Each family is unique because each person is unique. Sometimes we do more damage trying to fit into a certain family mold than we would if we instead asked God “how have you uniquely created and called each person in our family? How are we gifted to love each other well?”

The church has a checkered past when it comes to marriage and family. We have not always acted Christ-like in our pursuit of Christ-likeness.

So, when we approach texts of tension, like Ephesians 5, we should ask: “Where is Christ in this passage?”

DOYLE:

Here is an important fact about the literary construction of this text. From a study of the Greek New Testament, we know that the unit of thought does not begin with v. 22, but with v. 21. Imagine the writer taking a big red Sharpie and saying, “Here is the big unit of thought.” And it doesn’t begin in verse 22 (“wives, be subject...”) but in v. 21 (“be subject to one another”).

Now if you’re a man and like to twist this text to support male dominance, these words about mutual submission may cause you to grow quiet. In fact, we might hear crickets. I once sat down to lunch with a dear pastor-friend of mine whom I’ve known for many years. He lives and serves on the other side of the globe, so we don’t see each other often. I was heartsick when I

heard that his marriage was so empty and at such a stalemate. With a great deal of pain showing on his face, he said about his wife, “For years I was leading her; I didn’t do so well serving her.”

There is a huge difference between enforced subjugation and voluntary yielding [John C. Howell, *Equality and Submission in Marriage*, by, p. 66].. The first is from the outside, like a military chain of command. The second is from within, like a spiritual battery pack, done with love and trust.

Paul is not teaching subjugation but mutuality [LeAnn Snow Flesher, *Review and Expositor*, Nov., 2018, Vol. 115, Issue 4, p. 257]. A voluntary yielding in love. Now stop and think. Where have we seen this voluntary yielding before? In Christ’s behavior! See v. 25: “...as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.” He chose yieldedness because of his love for us and for God

Mutuality is the opposite of having our own way, always having the last word, valuing my own opinions above others, insisting on my own rights. I’m a huge Beatles fan and I think of their song, “Hello Goodbye:” “You say Yes, I say No. You say stop and I say go, go, go. You say goodbye and I say hello. I don’t know why you say goodbye, I say hello. I say high, you say low. You say why and I say I don’t know. Oh no. You say goodbye and I say hello.” And on and on. Families get that way sometimes. Mutuality is a sweet reasonableness, a personal yielding of our claims to be right all the time, to have the last word. It gives us permission to drop it and not argue.

HANNAH:

It would be an understatement to say that this text has been used in ways that are hurtful to women, children and persons in bondage or servitude. When we interpret the Bible, it is helpful to ask:

- Am I using my interpretation to dominate, control, or manipulate others?
- Is my interpretation one that is life-giving and empowering to others?

Over the centuries, well-meaning people have prioritized the family hierarchy described in Ephesians 5 rather than prioritizing the imitation of Christ in family relationships.

But, the focus of the early church was not to preserve the hierarchical structure of the Greco-Roman household, but to empower the early believers to bring Christ into the existing structure in radically counter-cultural ways [Rachel Held Evans, “Four Interpretive Pitfalls Around the New Testament Household Codes”].

Ancient philosophers believed the household to be a microcosm of the society; the household hierarchy must reflect the hierarchy of the empire in order to preserve the empire. The husband, therefore, was to rule over slaves, children, and wife. This is not a Biblical idea, but a cultural idea into which the mothers and fathers of the faith sought to inject the spirit of Christ.

When thinking theologically and men's and women's roles in the family, we must remember, in the Gospels, men and women are depicted as model disciples. In the early church writings and letters, men and women were key leaders in the early church. Sometimes women were the first people in their respective cities to be baptized and plant churches. And we must filter our conclusions through the most radical, compelling, earth-shaking theology of the early church: There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. Gal. 3

The call of the Christ-follower is to imitate Christ, for our relationships to be infused with Christ-likeness, to find unity through Christ. Not to bicker and bash each other over the head about who's in charge, but to empower each other and to cultivate one another's well-being.

Doyle and I want to offer some handles, some practical takeaways from the text for today:

DOYLE:

Ask Christ for help. In your prayer time, invite Christ to work in areas which don't come naturally for you, areas of weakness. It might be a reluctance to say you're sorry; you have difficulty respecting other opinions, or you are guilty of getting loud or using abusive language. Remember—nothing about mutuality comes naturally, so Christ must reproduce his mutual submission in each of us, every day. Have weekly family meetings and ask how well you've done with mutuality. What could you do better? Keep a log of the common themes of your arguments and disagreements. See if you discover a pattern and address them from the standpoint of mutuality.

HANNAH:

Listen: Learning to truly listen requires extensive practice. Listening means hearing the words a person says, and also listening to the meaning behind those words. Can you remember what your partner or your child said to you after the conversation is over? Can you repeat back to your partner or child what he/she said? After the discussion, are you mulling over what you said or what the other person said? Truly listening is an art. If you're not in a place to truly listen, in the heat of a disagreement, it may be best to take a break until everyone is prepared to listen.

Be honest: Relationships are the most rich when we're honest with each other. It's not healthy to hide things from each other. It's not healthy to continually smooth things over, or just go with what the other person wants all the time. Are you aware of your feelings? Are you sharing your feelings? Are you teaching honesty in your family?

Say I'm Sorry: Ladies and Gentlemen: NEWSFLASH: Being family means that sometimes, you will need to say you are sorry, and you will need to mean it. Truly mean it. Truly have the humility to own, inside and outside, that you were in the wrong. This is such a basic skill, and we are so bad at it. Saying you're sorry is not weakness; it does not diminish your authority as a parent. In fact, it has the opposite effect, because you're building your relationship bond. Saying you're

sorry is part of loving another person, valuing your relationship enough verbalize humility with sincerity.

DOYLE:

When our children were small, I found that my relationship with them grew when I had the courage and humility to apologize for handling a situation poorly.

Richard Foster defines submission as laying down the terrible burden of always getting my way [Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, p. 111]. Perhaps there are some relationship burdens that could be laid down this morning. Try it. Take a breath and let go. Doesn't that feel good?