Pentecost 20 Ephesians 5:21-6:4
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Don't Be Surprised – Only Christians Can Understand…
I The Christian marriage.
II. The Christian family.

Dear Christian friends,

It would be so easy today to GET UP ON our **soapboxes** and bewail the MORAL MESS in our country. Is there really any hope for **marriage** and the **family** in America? IF ONLY people would follow GOD'S PLANS for marriage and the family!

But there's something here that's EASY TO OVERLOOK yet it's the key to understanding these verses. ***"In reverence for Christ – as to the Lord – just as Christ – in the Lord – of the Lord – a profound mystery."*** The world doesn't get this because it DOESN'T GET Jesus. As we look at **God's will** here DON'T BE SURPRISED. ONLY CHRISTIANS **can understand** 1)Christian marriage and 2)the **Christian** family.

I. The Christian marriage.

Do you know a marriage where you just WONDER WHAT she ever saw in him (**or vice-versa!**) that they got married? He/she is so obnoxious – annoying – **irritating**. You CAN'T STAND being around the person. Get the PICTURE?

Let's take that picture a **step farther**. The Bible often pictures Jesus as our ***"bridegroom"*** and the Church as Jesus' ***"bride."*** What did Jesus SEE IN US to make Him love us **so much** and have us spend **eternity with Him** in heaven? ONLY CHRISTIANS who have taken an honest look at their **own hearts** and **lives** IN THAT MIRROR of God's law can understand how ugly we really were in God's sight. Every sin we commit is A SLAP in God's face blatantly telling God, "I **really don't care** what You say – I'll do whatever I want, and if You don't like it **tough luck**!" Someone treats you like that DAY AFTER day countless times **every** day – would you WANT TO MARRY that person and spend the rest of your life with him/her? Wouldn't you rather say, "FINE! **I'm out** of here!"? IF EVER anyone had grounds for divorce it's **God divorcing** us.

Being honest about ourselves listen again to **Paul explain** JESUS' LOVE for us. ***"Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her to make her holy, by cleansing her with the washing of water and the Word. He did this so that He could present her to Himself as a glorious church, having no stain or wrinkle…, but so that she would be holy and blameless."***

WHAT GRACE! Jesus didn't GIVE UP on us but totally gave Himself TO us as our Savior. The eternal Son of God took on our human flesh and blood and took our place under God's law. Jesus lived for us that life of **perfect love** and obedience that we owed God but **never could** live. Jesus lived that life but He GIVES US all the credit for it. THEN Jesus willingly endured the punishment and **hell** we had coming. Jesus died the death that paid for all our sins **in full**. Jesus TOPPED it all off by rising triumphant from the dead on Easter morning. THEN in that ***"washing of water and the Word"*** Jesus made that salvation HIS GIFT to us. **There in Holy Baptism** Jesus washed away all our sins – He clothed us with His own perfect life – He made us children of God – promised us eternal life in heaven when we die. GOD HELP us to never lose our **awe** and **amazement** over that gospel! FROM stinking, sinful slobs **Jesus has made** us INTO His beautiful, spotless, radiant **bride**!

That truth shapes our **marriages** INTO CHRISTIAN marriages. AS CHRISTIANS we understand that marriage is **not just** a SOCIAL CUSTOM or some kind of a CONTRACT or **arrangement**. God established marriage. God defines and regulates marriage as the LIFELONG UNION of one man and one woman. Marriage is part of the ***"very good"*** of creation. EVEN NOW **after the fall** when there

are no perfect spouses or **marriages** ***"God joins together"*** husband and wife to be blessings to each other as they JOURNEY TOGETHER through life.

What makes Christian marriage DIFFERENT is that we're not just husband and wife but CHRISTIAN husband and wife. Paul explains, ***"Wives, submit to your own husbands AS to the Lord. AS the church submits to Christ, so also wives are to submit to their husbands." "Submit"*** literally means to LINE UP UNDER – it expresses an ORDERLY ARRANGEMENT. **In marriage** God arranges the wife UNDER her husband. DON'T BE SURPRISED that the world doesn't understand this – that the world sees this as DEGRADING and **humiliating**. The **world** doesn't understand Jesus or the **Christian**. The world doesn't understand that ***"AS the church submits to Christ."***

As Christians OUR JOY is living our lives UNDER Jesus **as our Lord** and Savior. Jesus loves us -is there for us – is taking care of us – working all things for our eternal good. **As Christians** OUR JOY is to serve our Jesus and do what makes Him HAPPY. Basking in **Jesus' love** we don't want to tell Jesus, "LEAVE me alone – quit bossing me around!"

Paul further explains the CHRISTIAN marriage. ***"For the husband is the head of the wife, JUST AS Christ is the head of the church, His body, of which He Himself is the Savior."*** God makes the husband ***"the head"*** NOT to lord it over his wife but to BE A BLESSING to his wife. Being ***"the head"*** is a position of authority AND RESPONSIBILITY. **God** holds husbands responsible for their **wives' well-being**.

"Husbands, love your wives, in the same way AS Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her." DON'T be surprised that the world doesn't get this either. The world doesn't understand Jesus' LOVE **for sinners**. Jesus shows us that REAL LOVE isn't just words but a TOTAL GIVING of yourself to another person – a SACRIFICING **of yourself** for the good of **someone else**. So Jesus ***"loves"*** us and ***"gave Himself"*** for us on the cross. SO ***"in the same way"*** CHRISTIAN husbands are to love their wives.

Did you notice what God is **telling** BOTH the CHRISTIAN husband and wife? Forget about yourself! Focus on your **spouse**. Build your marriage ON JESUS' LOVE for **the both** of you. Christian marriages HAVE PROBLEMS. **Christian** marriages need CONSTANT CARE and **attention**. We handle these needs AS CHRISTIANS. As we grow IN GOD'S LOVE **for us** we can better love each other. As we better see HOW PATIENT – **loving** – **forgiving** – faithful God is with us SO WE CAN BE with each other. A **Christian marriage** is the perfect place to practice CHRISTIAN LOVE!

Now Paul turns to the **family**. Again, DON'T BE SURPRISED. Only Christians can understand…

II. The Christian family.

Paul addresses these words DIRECTLY to ***"children."*** Paul expects children to be present when this **letter is read**. He **expects children** will understand what he says – **expects** that they will take this TO HEART and try to live what **God is telling** them.

How can **Paul have** such HIGH EXPECTATIONS? Because this again is ***"in the Lord."*** They are CHRISTIAN **children**. Oh, **Christian** children also have STUBBORN and **defiant sinful natures**. Remember parents, **your** children got their sinful natures FROM YOU, their **sinful parents**. Paul here addresses the CHRISTIAN FAMILY. In both **parents** and **children** God has worked **saving faith** – the faith that clings to Jesus **for forgiveness**, peace with God, eternal life in heaven. God wants **parents** and **children** to live together AS A CHRISTIAN FAMILY.

"Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right" – this is what your Savior wants. AH, but what does ***"obey"*** mean? To DO what you're told the FIRST TIME you're told. ***"Obey"*** doesn't mean that AFTER THREE times you should probably consider doing whatever – and AFTER SIX times you really better do it. What's ***"right"*** is to ***"obey"*** the very first time you're told.

But CHRISTIAN obedience is more than just the OUTWARD doing whatever. ***"Honor your father and mother"*** – show respect to your parents AS GOD'S REPRESENTATIVES over you. God put your parents **over you** TO BLESS you. Understand too that GOD GAVE YOU to be blessings to your parents. DON'T BE SURPRISED that the world doesn't get this. AS CHRISTIANS we understand, "**I'm** NOT THE CENTER of attention – Jesus is. The world doesn't revolve around me but God." JUST AS Jesus humbled Himself and ***"was obedient even unto death on a cross"*** SO Christian children will ***"honor"*** and ***"obey"*** their parents.

Now Paul addresses **parents**. He singles out **fathers** – not because moms **aren't important** – but because God made dads the ***"head"*** of the family. God holds dads PERSONALLY RESPONSIBLE for the physical and spiritual well-being of the **family**. **Moms** and **dads** work together AS A TEAM in raising the family. God says, "**Dads**, I'm ESPECIALLY COUNTING on you **as the head** to make sure your family is **brought up** as a CHRISTIAN FAMILY."

That means – 1)***"Don't exasperate - provoke your children to anger."*** Don't frustrate – don't drive your children nuts. Let LOVE NOT ANGER guide you in **raising** your family. AS CHRISTIAN FATHERS take God the Father as your **role model** in showing love and **discipline**.

2)***"Bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord."*** Having our children baptized is the START of this **Christian upbringing** but baptism must be followed up with FAITHFULLY bringing them **to church** – teaching them God's Word **at home** – giving your children the DAILY EXAMPLE of a Christian life lived UNDER and FOR and WITH Jesus. The church is here to **help parents** but the church can't replace parents.

Like any good parent we **want our children** to be healthy – **happy** – **safe** – get a good education – enjoy a productive and good life. But AS CHRISTIAN parents more than anything else we **want our children** to BE – to STAY - and **finally** to DIE **as Christians** and go to heaven. The last thing CHRISTIAN parents want is for their children to fall away from Jesus and **end up** in hell. DON'T BE SURPRISED that the world doesn't get this. The **world** has other ideas and goals for our children. That's why AS CHRISTIAN PARENTS it is SO VERY IMPORTANT for us to raise our children in a CHRISTIAN HOME and make sure they are ***"brought up in the training and instruction of the Lord."***

CHRISTIAN marriage. The **Christian** family. WOW! How important it is **for us** AS CHRISTIANS spouses – **as Christian** parents and children to KEEP OUR FOCUS exactly where Paul puts it here – on Jesus! HEARTS clinging to Jesus – LIVES focused on Jesus. The world doesn't get that but thank God - He's MADE US **Christians** and we do get it! Amen.

APOSTLES' CREED