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St. John's Lutheran Church of Burlington
6 October 2024

Sermon on Ephesians 5:21-6:4

Worship Theme:

FOLLOWERS OF CHRIST LOVE THEIR FAMILIES

In our families, it is not enough that there is love. We need to rightly love, to love in a way that leads to blessings for those we claim to love. In Jesus we see perfect, self-sacrificial love. Jesus loves us as we are. He also loved us too much to leave us as we are. So, in love he gave his life up so that we might be holy and blameless. His love for us shapes the way we love our spouse, our children, our parents. Today we see that followers of Christ know how to love their family.

Sermon Theme: “A Blessing for All”

Being a Christian family is an incomparable blessing, and we want everyone to clearly know and see how true this is. So what is it that makes a group of people a Christian family? And how does this blessing become **a blessing for all**?

As soon as any of us say we are a Christian family, different thoughts go through people's minds about what that means. It probably means these people go to church on the weekend and they probably read their Bibles and pray. It probably means they say generally nice things, learn how to share and give generously, to apologize and forgive. Maybe people even picture a rather stereotypical family where both parents are in the picture and there's a number of children running around the house, maybe even a big number if this is a “super-Christian family”.

But actually that's not it at all. Obviously those are all really great things and hopefully people have such positive thoughts about us and I'm sure many wonderful families are like that, but that doesn't make us Christian families. You see, that's a list of things WE do. Reading our Bibles, going to church, praying, forgiving, generously sharing, showing love – those don't make us Christian. A house where both a mommy and a daddy happily and contently live with their little pack of juniors isn't Christian just because all those pieces are present.

As wonderful and amazing as all those blessings are, it would be absolutely dreadful if we depended on them in order to be Christian families, because not a single one of us would have a Christian family anymore! In fact, we never would have been Christian families in the first place. Not a single one of our households was perfect this week. We all sinned and fell short of God's expectations for us. Even if your family is a family of one, you sinned this week, just like I did, just like all of us did. And sin never makes anything a blessing for anyone. It actually does the opposite. Sin takes what otherwise could have been (even should have been) a blessing and ruins it completely. God created a perfect world as a home for perfect people and told those perfect people to make more perfect people to live in perfect harmony with him and with each other. That was God's plan and design for families – to be as he created and live in perfect agreement with him and his will.

But as soon as the first man and woman disobeyed that perfect will and did their own thing instead, families would forever be less than what God intended, completely regardless of who is in them and what they look like. There is not a single family on earth that lives as God intended and designed, because his plan was for us to be sinless, and that's something we know we cannot be. Husbands and wives do not treat each other the way God wants. Parents do not bring up their children the way God wants. Children do not honor and obey their parents the way God wants. Absolutely no one on earth has a family the way God perfectly planned for families to be, and absolutely nothing we can do will change that. We can't try harder, we can't take classes, we can't grow up and mature, we can't love deeper, we can't follow instructions like Ephesians ch. 5-6 without any complaint or dissatisfaction – nothing we ever do will be enough or make us into specifically Christian families who perfectly live as God wants. Sin will always ruin it.

So what does make us Christian families? CHRIST! In Paul's letter to the Ephesian Christians, he never once points them to something THEY have done as the reason they wear the name "Christian." No, it's all about Christ. The focus is first and foremost always on Jesus and what HE has done, because then and only then do any of us have a life worth living, then and only then do we have any chance whatsoever of enjoying the **blessing** of a Christian family. Eph. 1 – *Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in Christ.* Eph. 2 – *You were dead in your transgressions and sins, but because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive in Christ – it is by grace you have been saved!* Eph. 3 – *The mystery of Christ is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus. For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name.* Eph. 4 – *I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, but instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ.* Eph. 5 – *Follow God's example, therefore, as dearly loved children and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. You were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light!*

Then we finally get to our verses for today with instructions for living as a Christian family. These verses are so hard for so many people because we get hung up on a word here or there, or a thought that doesn't jive with what I think my life should be like. But did you notice how long it took to get to this part of Paul's letter? We don't start here! This is never the first thing out of the gate, as if everything else about who we are and what we do depends on this. No, in fact it's the other way around. These words are spoken to people who had drowned and died in the darkness of sin and unbelief, and who now were raised to life and light by the power and saving work of Jesus Christ. THAT'S what makes us Christian!! We are Christian because of Christ!

And now to the people whom he has saved and whom he loves with an everlasting love, God instructs: *Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.* With one sentence, we are all reminded that nothing we ever do in our lives should be focused on “what does it get ME.” Every one of our lives is to be lived in service to Christ and to each other, always looking for ways to be **a blessing** to them. Then he gives some specific details, again reminding us that, as Christians, there is a good plan in place from God for how we can be those willing servants who bless each other in whatever family vocations we have in life:

Wives: Submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. Now, as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything. Wives, you have been given an amazing responsibility like no other: you are the person whom God has chosen to join to your husband in holy unity as the one who completes him. Women, you were made because God’s world wasn’t perfect without you. A wife gets to be the body that accomplishes so much blessing by being connected to and working with the head, her husband. Appreciate and embrace the role God has given you as the noble helper, a title which God has given not just to you but also to himself! God is called our Helper in places like Psalms 54 and 121, which means there is absolutely nothing degrading about this role – God our Helper blesses others, and you get to do that too by providing for your family what men never can.

Husbands: Love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. After all, no one ever hated their own body, but they feed and care for their body, just as Christ does the church. Husbands, you have been given an amazing responsibility like no other: you are the person whom God has chosen to join to your wife in holy unity as the one who completes her. Men, you were made to take care of God’s creation! As the heads of household bodies, you are called to do everything necessary to provide for, protect, and care for that body. If the head were ever to tell the body to do something harmful to itself, that would not be a very good head! So also husbands do not lord their position over their wives, as if she is there to wait on you hand and foot. No, we submit to each other out of reverence for Christ, for the relationship of a husband to his wife is akin to the relationship between Jesus and his church. The church has no problem whatsoever submitting to Christ and his leadership because we know how much Christ sacrificed to serve us and save us. Men, take your responsibility seriously and faithfully serve the precious souls entrusted to your care.

Children: Obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. Honor your father and mother – which is the first commandment with a promise – so that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth. Children, you have been given an amazing responsibility like no other: you are the people whom God

has chosen to be a blessing and delight to your mom and dad. God decided your family was not complete without you, so he put you into the exact family he chose for you. It wasn't an accident! You have a place and position in your family that no one can fill better than you, because you are the one God put there to love your family, just as they are there to love you. And as your parents work hard to provide everything you need while growing up, listen to them and respect them as they do their best to help you in every way they can.

Parents: *Do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.* Fathers and mothers, you have been given an amazing responsibility like no other: you are the people whom God has chosen to care for the littlest members of his family, the ones who need the most help, guidance, and support. God decided that out of every possible combination of man and woman on earth, you were the best ones to care for the children you have been given. As you imperfectly strive to be the best parents possible and to provide for their needs on earth, always prioritize their relationship with the Lord, because only their faith in Jesus affects their eternity. Show them Jesus' love!

Now having heard all that, let's state a very obvious fact: not every family has all these members in them. Some of us are families of many, some of us are families of few or even one. But these words are still important for all of us, because we are surrounded by Christian families who need love and support, especially as we remember that we all belong to a much bigger family, and this time I don't mean your individual household. These are words God our Father and Jesus our Brother have chosen to share with us, people who have been joined to the holiest family by grace through faith. That means whether we are a husband, wife, mom, dad, son, daughter, brother, sister, or none of those things right now, we are still Christians – and that means we have a perfect family in Jesus.

And Jesus does everything necessary to create that family. He came to earth to live a life of perfect obedience as **a blessing for all**. He died on the cross to pay for every sin ever committed as **a blessing for all**. He rose from the dead to open the way to eternal life as **a blessing for all**. And now he send us, the members of his holy family, out into the world to share the good news of the Savior with everyone we possibly can. We have blessings beyond compare, and there are still more family members to be found. When we focus first on our relationship with God, his love becomes the center of everything for us. Then that love shows up in our relationships with everyone else too. So as God's holy redeemed people – Christians! – we thank God for the blessing of our earthly family, we rejoice to be part of a family of faith, and we eagerly go out into the world with the saving news of Jesus to be **a blessing to all**.

Jesus, thank you for the incomparable privilege and blessing of being in your family, and help every one of us be **a blessing to all** – bless our efforts for your glory and for the good of your people. Amen!

And the peace of God which goes beyond all understanding will guard and keep our hearts and our minds through faith in Christ Jesus. Amen.