

“THE CHRISTIAN FAMILY (#3): THE FIVE C’S OF A LASTING MARRIAGE”

(Ephesians 5:21-33, NRSV)

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[PROPS NEEDED: Gary Chapman book The Five Love Languages; Torn Piece of Paper]

[Cornerstone U.M.C.; 9-22-24]

--I--

1. Read NRSV Text: Ephesians 5:21-33 and Pray.
2. Two weeks ago, we began a worship called “*The Christian Family*,” in which we’re exploring biblical insights into creating and sustaining strong and vibrant families that are sources of joy and renewal in life.

A--And today, our focus turns to the relationship of **Marriage** as one type of relationship within a healthy Christian family.

B--Before I go further, though, let me invite those of you who are NOT currently married (whether because you're a widow/widower, are divorced, single by choice, or simply haven't gotten married yet)... *please don't tune out*, because many of the things I'll be talking about today can *also* be applied to *any* relationship, whether in or outside of our family (PLUS, next week I'll be offering a sermon on the unique joys and gifts of *Singleness* that married people will have to sit through!)

3. Now, I probably don't need to cite a lot of data to convince us that the institution of marriage is facing many challenges in today's world, with some people disillusioned with even the *idea* of it! ¹

A--In fact, our attitude is often like the response given to a pastor who visited a children’s Sunday School class that was talking about marriage, and the pastor them what it is that God says about marriage. And without hesitation, one little boy answered, “*God says, 'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do!'*”

B--Yet, despite the challenges of marriage in today's world, according to the Bible, God created marriage for our *good* -- NOT to be a *burden* to us, but a *blessing*. ²

C--So what, then, does it take to have a successful, blessed and *lasting* marriage?

D--Well, I want to suggest that scripture gives us at least five things -- all starting with the letter “C” -- hence the **FIVE 'C'S OF A LASTING MARRIAGE**.

--II--

4. The **first "C"** I think stands for **COMMUNICATION**.

A--Ephesians 4:15 says that we are to “*speak the truth in love,*” thereby growing and maturing in our faith -- I believe this verse is meant not only for all relationships *in general*, but for marriage relationships, *in particular*.

B--As I’ve counseled with couples throughout my years as a pastor, what I’ve observed is that the majority of marriages that fail end up doing so *not* necessarily because of abuse, neglect, or infidelity,...

1--...but simply because a couple hasn't learned how to successfully *communicate* with each other about their needs, desires, joys, concerns, fears and frustrations.

2--Problems in the areas of sex, money, careers, children and other things are most often just the *symptoms* of an inability of at least one spouse to effectively communicate with the other.

C--And effective communication means not just *talking*, but also *listening*!

1--Oh, many of us are really good at *talking* about and *telling* our spouse about *our own* needs and concerns, but we're not always good at listening to *theirs*.

2--Yet, good communication requires good two-way listening, along with our willingness to learn and practice what author Gary Chapman calls our spouse's "*Love Language*" (**SHOW BOOK The Five Love Languages...**)³

5. A **second "C"** of a successful marriage is **COMPLEMENT** (with an "E")-- meaning “*that which makes something complete/whole.*”

A--In Verse 31 of today’s text, Paul quotes from Genesis 2:24 which says that “*For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two will become one flesh*” -- meaning that there’s a *complementary* purpose to marriage.

1--I've often thought of marriage kind of like two halves of a piece of torn paper:
[DEMONSTRATE WITH HALVES OF PIECES OF PAPER...]

(a) Each of us has strengths & weaknesses in our own life & character...

(b) ...but our relationship with our spouse can be ONE SOURCE which enables us to have *more* wholeness and completeness in life.⁴

2--Christian author and theologian Bob Tuttle once put it this way, “*If both of you are EXACTLY ALIKE, then one of you is unnecessary!*”⁵

3--One of the greatest learnings that Trish and I have discovered about each other over the 35 years of being married is how not only to understand but grow to appreciate our *differences*

(a) ...that she likes her food (and many other things) simple and more plain
VS. I have to have all the toppings and special additions;

- (b) ...that she gets joy out of driving in being in control of the car, and I'm content to be in the passenger (and it doesn't work well vice versa!);
- (c) ...and that when we DO drive places together, we're likely to have two DIFFERENT ways to get there!

4--And as frustrating as these little differences feel, at times, we've come to understand that they are actually among our greatest strengths as a couple!

B--But I do need to point out something in scripture here that's often misunderstood -- the reality that in a *biblical* marriage, a husband and wife should see each other as *equals*.

1--It's true that some churches and Christians interpret today's scripture out of context to "prove" that the husband is the dominant member of a marriage -- after all, it clearly says that (Vs. 23) the "*the husband is the head of the wife*" and (Vs. 22) that "*wives should be subject to [their] husbands*" (KJV, NIV and CEB even use the word "*submit*").

2--But if we look more closely at the *context* of these verses, we'll find that the *dominant theme* (topic sentence) of this passage is NOT control/domination by the *husband*, but *mutual* submission of *both* wife *and* husband TO *Christ* ⁶ -- if anything, for Paul here the real "head of the household" is *not* the husband, but *Jesus*.

3--And another thing to know is that the Greek word here for "*submit/to be subject to*" ⁷ has nothing to do with authoritarian *control* or domination, but with *sacrificial LOVE* which is willing to lay down one's *life* for the other.

4--In his commentary on Genesis 2, Bible scholar Matthew Henry once explained:
*"Eve was made by God not out of [Adam's] HEAD to rule over Him,
 Nor out of His FEET to be trampled upon by Him,
 But out of His SIDE to be equal with Him,
 Under His ARM to be protected, and near His HEART to be loved."*

6. Yet, a lasting marriage also requires a third "C": **COMPLIMENT** (with an "I") -- the ability to give (and receive) *affirmation* to and from our spouse.

A--At a testimony night at church, a lady got up and said, "*We're living in a wicked land where sin is on every hand. And I've had a terrible fight with the old devil all week.*"
 And at that, her husband stood up beside her and said, "*Look, it's not all my fault; she's tough to get along with, too!*"

B--Too often today, we spend all our energies harping on what's *wrong* with our spouse, rather than complimenting them on what's *right*!

C--Yet, 1 Thess. 5:11 says we're to "*encourage one another and build up each other.*"

D--So, how are you *affirming* and giving compliments to your spouse? ...through your *words* (yes) but also through your *actions* -- flowers on an *unexpected* occasion, a simple hug, kiss, or a card telling our mate what we *like* about them. ⁸

7. **COMPANIONSHIP** is a fourth "C" to a lasting marriage.

A--That's essentially the meaning of Verse 28-29 in today's scripture, which says "*love your [spouse] as you would your own body, nourishing... and caring for [them].*"

B--I don't know how it is in *your* marriage, but Trish and I work hard at seeing the other as each other's *best friend*, and in that kind of relationship, there's *nothing* we wouldn't do for them.

C--Unfortunately today, many of us make the mistake of thinking marriage is a 50-50% proposition. But it's *not...* it's *100%-100%!*

1--Think how great marriage could be if we spent our lives giving 100% of who we are for our spouse, and they did the same for us.

2--We wouldn't need to always try to meet our *own* needs because our spouse would meet them *for* us! That's the beauty of marriage as *companionship*.

8. Finally, I believe the most important "C" of any lasting marriage has to be **CHRIST**-- he should be the foundation/center of our married lives.

A--Remember that Verse 21 says "*Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ.*"

B--If you look at a hair braid on someone head, at first glance it *appears* to contain *TWO* strands of hair woven together.

1--But if you ever tried to braid hair with just two strands, it'll just come apart!

2--No. The secret to a successful braid is a *third* strand which, though not outwardly apparent, nevertheless holds the other two together.

3--So it is in a Christian marriage: Christ's presence is the invisible "third strand" which holds the relationship of a husband and wife together. ⁹

C--And just as we learned last week that a truly Christian *family* has to invite Jesus to be the Lord and Savior of the *family*, so it is with a Christian *marriage* -- the husband and wife need to intentionally invite Christ to be at the center of *their* relationship, too.

9. Now, a Godly marriage (really... *any* successful relationship) probably contains more than we talked about this morning.¹⁰

A--But if we'll start by understanding and practicing these "Five C's,"...

1--*Communication*,...

2--*Complement*,...

3--*Compliment*,...

4--*Companionship*,...

5--and *Christ* at the center,...

B--...I think we'll be well on our way to creating and sustaining a lasting Christian marriage.

13. [PRAYER (for couples to give their relationship as husband and wife to Christ as Lord and Savior of their *marriage*)...]

14. [CLOSING HYMN: UMH#643, When Love Is Found]

ENDNOTES:

¹ With divorce, infidelity, abuse, neglect, and general lack of communication present in many marriages today, it's easy to understand why many people today feel this way.

² Of course, this is no easy task -- in the words of one author and seminary professor, marriage consists of "*two reasonably compatible people who are determined to make it work*" (Dr. Robert Tuttle, retired professor from Asbury Seminary). Similarly, columnist Ann Landers once wrote that "*A successful marriage is not a gift; it is an achievement.*" So, a successful and "blessed" marriage takes hard work and persistence; but when we do this, we find that God will bless us in wonderful and remarkable ways.

³ You can order the book from [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com), or visit Gary Chapman's website to take a free test/inventory to discover yours and your spouse's love language at <https://5lovelanguages.com/>

⁴ Please note that I do not say that marriage makes us COMPLETELY whole/complete -- that only comes through a living, ongoing relationship with God through Jesus -- I only say that we can be "more complete." In other words, God uses our spouse as ONE of HIS vessels/tools to bring us wholeness, but not the only one. Consequently, it's also important to remember that the Bible DOESN'T teach that we have to be married in order to be complete/whole. Again, God ordained marriage to be merely *one source* of our completeness.

⁵ Rev. Dr. Robert Tuttle, shared at the United Methodist Men's Couples Retreat at Simpsonwood Retreat Center (Norcross, GA), March 1992 I've also heard it said that marriage is a relationship of "*two reasonable human beings who have agreed to abide by each other's intolerabilities.*" and that "*Marriage is the art of two incompatible people learning to live compatibly*" [James S. Hewett, Illustrations Unlimited (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc, 1988), p. 331].

⁶ The passage topic sentence (Vs. 21) says "*Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ.*"

⁷ The Greek word is "*hypotasso*" = *to subordinate, obey, submit to out of loving sacrifice* (Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible, Greek term number g5293).

⁸ Martin Luther (founder of the Protestant Reformation) once wrote that “*It is impossible to keep peace between man and woman in family life if they do not condone and overlook each other's faults but watch everything to the smallest point. For who does not at times offend? Thus many things must be overlooked; very many things must be ignored that a peaceful relation may exist*” [--Martin Luther. "William and Catherine Booth," Christian History, Number 26].

⁹ Author Elizabeth Newenhuyse once wrote that “*Marriage... calls for faith of the most radical sort*” (Elizabeth Cody Newenhuyse, Marriage Partnership, Vol. 5, no. 1). In a like fashion, philosopher Antoine De SaintExupery once wrote that “*Love does not consist in gazing at each other but in looking outward together in the same direction.*” For a Christian relationship (marriage or otherwise), that mutual “direction” is towards Christ himself.

¹⁰ After hearing this sermon previously, various people have suggested the following three *additional* “C”s for a successful, lasting Christian marriage:

CHURCH, which arises out of the fifth “C” emphasis on “Christ.” Warts and all, we need the institutional church in our marriage relationships. Throughout the New Testament, the early church dealt not only with “spiritual” issues such as sin, salvation, redemption, etc., but also with the physical ramifications and contexts of those issues (See the entire book of 1 Corinthians, for example). This included ways that the early church helped couples in their marriages in *practical* ways. Similarly today, if we’ll take advantage of them, the church needs to (and does) provide programs/ministries addressing the needs of married people, such as couples' conferences/retreats, Marriage Enrichment seminars, Marriage counseling, social opportunities, and even ministry to people hurting from divorce. In fact, a truly Christ-like marriage is intended to be a kind of Church in miniature: a place and relationship whereby two persons can grow and be supported and encouraged in their Christian journey -- a kind of “home base” that one can return to for refreshment/renewal before facing the world.

COMMITMENT -- A successful Christian marriage certainly takes two persons who are totally and completely *committed* to one another and to their own marriage relationship. Even when “the going gets rough,” a couple who are committed to each other and committed to *making* the relationship work not matter how long or how much counseling or work it takes is the couple who will success and persevere/persist through the tough times in their marriage.

COURAGE -- As with the creation and maintenance of a successful Christian family, creating and maintaining a successful and blessed Christian marriage takes courage and boldness on the part of each individual partner. Daunting though they may seem, they never let fear of their problems or differences keep them from “sticking with it” to ensure that they are successful *in the end*.