

Have you ever noticed the fake family photos that come inside new picture frames? They always look too perfect, don't they? The parents are always attractive, with perfect hair and skin, wearing the most stylish clothing. I mean, check out dad's loose tie/rolled up sleeves combo! The kids are beautiful. They're always smiling, wearing stain-free clothes, sitting patiently for the photographer to take more pictures. A picture perfect family.

But let's be honest. Real families don't look like that, right? I mean, what family with four kids owns a white couch and white rug? I bet five minutes later Junior spilled red Kool-Aid and ruined both. This is probably a more realistic depiction of most families, right?

But as unrealistic as that first picture perfect family was, I think families today feel pressured to display that persona. Look like professional models with nice clothes, cars, and houses. Possess a bulging bank account, and a Facebook filled with pictures from another perfect family vacation. Get your kids involved and excelling in every possible activity and academic endeavor, so people can marvel at your "picture perfect" family.

But should we feel that kind of pressure? Or is there a more perfect picture for our families to pursue? As we begin our new sermon series, "God's Wisdom for Your Family," that's what we want to better discover. Not the world's wisdom or expectations, but God's wisdom and picture perfect plan for our families. It's a much more beautiful picture. Even better than the White Couch family.

God lays out that picture perfect family blueprint in the book of Ephesians. And it's shockingly devoid of extracurriculars and vacations.

In the first three chapters of Ephesians, God's inspired writer, the Apostle Paul, piles up praise to God and repeatedly describes God's amazing grace. Then, in the last three chapters, Paul describes how Christians should live in response to God's amazing grace, including instructions for Christian families.

Paul address wives first. ***"Wives, submit to your husbands as 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."***

Two words in, people start pumping the brakes. That word, "submit" brings to mind a helpless woman, entirely dependent on her husband; always on call to do whatever he commands, like at best, an employee, or at worst, a slave. People hear "wives, submit" and start screaming, "God thinks women are inferior; incapable; unimportant!"

But that's not what God's saying at all. Let me share three passages from Scripture that make it very clear that "submission" has nothing to do with value or importance. First, Paul writes in Galatians, ***"There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you all are one in Christ Jesus."*** To God, there's no hierarchy of value for race, social status, or gender. All are equally valuable and important, because all are one in Christ.

Second, in Luke, we're told that the boy Jesus ***"was obedient to"*** his earthly parents, Joseph and Mary. The word translated "obedient" is the same Greek word as "submit" in our text. Did the perfect God-man Jesus submit to the will of his sinful, human parents because he was less valuable than them? Of course not!

Finally, in 1 Corinthians, Paul writes, ***"The Son himself will be made subject to him who put everything under him, so that God may be all in all."*** Again, "made subject to" is the same Greek word as "submit." Does God

the Son submit to God the Father because he is less powerful? Absolutely not! The three persons of the Trinity are co-equal in power and glory!

A person doesn't submit because they're not as important. Rather, someone submits, giving up some of their rights, so God's will can be done. Literally, "sub-mission" means to be "under the mission." And God's "mission," is always to bless his people! That means when a wife submits to her husband, God promises to bless her through it.

As Paul writes, a wife who submits to her husband submits **"as to the Lord."** That means submitting is another way a woman serves God, and shows her faith. Some assume a woman who submits to her husband must be weak. I think the opposite is true. A woman who willingly submits to her husband displays incredible strength! Strong Christian character, strong faith, and strong love for God. She trusts that although she sacrifices, her Savior Jesus will bless her, provide for her, and care for her.

But it can be a challenging concept if we only focus on God's instruction to wives. That's why Paul reminds us what God told Adam and Eve when he united them in marriage. **"A man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh."** God didn't design marriage to be two people working independently from each other. Husband and wife become one flesh in marriage. Therefore, husband and wife work together as a unit, not for the good of each individual, but for the good of the two become one flesh.

It's like a three-legged race. The two people can only run the race well if they work together as one. If they try to run independently, they'll do nothing but flail and fall. God designed marriage to work the same way.

Because husband and wife are one, God's instructions to wives go hand in hand with God's instructions to husbands. Paul says, **"Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her...Husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies."** The husband is appointed to be the head of the household, but he's not supposed to use that authority to lead his wife and family like a greedy, demanding king. No, the husband is to love his wife how Christ loved the church.

And how does Christ love his church? Christ loved the church enough to willingly sacrifice his power and life to save it. That's the model for how a husband is to love and lead his wife. Not greedily self-serving, but humbly self-sacrificing. God expects husbands to sacrifice everything, even themselves if necessary, to provide for the good of his wife. That's a challenging call from God too!

You can see the wisdom of God's design, can't you? Wives, how much more willingly can you submit when your husband leads while communicating with, caring for, and loving you over everything else? Husbands, how much more willingly can you love your wife in a self-sacrificing way when she loves, respects, and trusts you to lead? When husband and wife carry out the roles God gave them, marriage can truly be "picture perfect."

Paul continues with God's instructions for "picture perfect" relationships between parents and children. **"Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right."** Pretty simple, right? But so important that God records it as one of the Ten Commandments given to govern all people for all time.

But once again, we see how God's plan requires all the family roles to work together. Children are to obey and honor their parents, but God wants parents, and fathers especially, to also treat their children with love and

respect. ***“Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.”***

We'll focus on parenting quite a bit in future weeks of this series, so I'll only touch on it briefly. But notice, dads. What's the most important role God's given you? Not, "Make sure they can throw a spiral" or "make sure they get into a good college" or "make sure they think you're cool." Fathers, our main job is to feed and nourish our children with God's Word.

So, that's God's blueprint for picture perfect families! If spouses, parents, and children live according to their God-given roles, their family will be picture perfect!

But here's the question: Is that what your family looks like? Or does your family look even less like God's picture perfect family than they look like the white couch family from earlier?

Let's face it, our families' day to day actions are far from picture perfect, right? Wives, do you always honor and respect your husband willingly and joyfully? Husbands, do you always put your desires last to put your wife's needs first? Children, do you always obey your parents with perfect love and respect? Parents, do you always focus on your children's spiritual needs, and never let anger or frustration creep into your discipline?

If we hang an honest portrait of our family life next to God's "white couch and beautiful smiles" description of a picture perfect family, our pictures are marred by the mud, red Kool-Aid, tantrums, bad hair days, and coffee stains of our sin and failure to carry out the roles God has given. We fail because these roles require us to ***“submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.”*** And our natural inclination is not to submit, but to demand that everyone submits to us.

And yet, you're already picture perfect. How? Notice the common thread in each of God's instructions—***“Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord.” “Husbands, love your wives just as Christ loved the church.” “Children, obey your parents in the Lord.” “Fathers, bring [your children] up in the training and instruction of the Lord.”***

The recurring theme in this perfect picture is that Christ is present in all of them. Christ, who ***“gave himself up for [the church] 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.”***

On our own, our families are far from picture perfect. But through faith in Jesus, God doesn't see a family that's filthy with the stains, wrinkles, and blemishes of sin. Rather, because Christ lived a life of perfect submission and perfect self-sacrificing love, the Father sees you as a picture perfect family. White couches, white rugs—white robes of righteousness, washed clean in the blood of our Savior Jesus!

And that beautiful truth motivates us to carry out these God-given family roles. Right in the middle of Paul's instructions for family members, he breaks into a note of joy that reminds us of God's grace. The driving force behind Christian submission and self-sacrificing love—***“for we are members of [Christ's] body.”*** Spouses, love each other as one flesh, because you belong to Christ's body. Children and parents, love and honor each other, because God is our Father, and we are his children. We strive to live in love in our families, because Christ has lovingly brought us into his picture perfect family. It sounds too perfect. But it's true. God promises that, to your family.