

# SWIMMING AGAINST THE TIDE

## Being Holy in an Unholy World

### *“Holiness At Home”*

Ephesians 5:15-6:4

We’re in the midst of a series of sermons entitled **“Swimming Against The Tide”** with a sub-title: **“Being Holy In An Unholy World.”** God wants every one of us to live holy lives.

The Scripture says in **Ephesians 1:3**, *“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight”* (Ephesians 1:3-4 New International Version).

God’s plan for your life is for you to be holy. He says to us on more than one occasion in Scripture, *“Be holy, because I am holy”* (Leviticus 11:44 New International Version). In **1<sup>st</sup> Peter 1:15**, Simon Peter writes, *“Just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written, ‘Be holy, because I am holy’”* (1<sup>st</sup> Peter 1:15-16 New International Version).

And so during these Sunday morning worship services, we have been focusing upon the **Beauty of Holiness**.

**Dr. Billy Graham** writes in the *“Introduction”* to his book, *The Holy Spirit: Activating God’s Power In Your Life*:

Man has two great spiritual needs. One is for forgiveness. The other is for goodness...God heard that first cry for help, that cry for forgiveness, and answered it at Calvary. God sent His only Son into the world to die for our sins, so that we might be forgiven. This is a gift for us—God’s gift of salvation...But God also heard our second cry, that cry for goodness, and answered it at Pentecost.

God does not want us to come to Christ by faith, and then lead a life of defeat, discouragement, and dissension. Rather, He wants to ‘fulfill every desire for goodness and the work of faith with power; in order that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you’ (2<sup>nd</sup> Thessalonians 1:11-12). To the

great gift of

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forgiveness God adds also the great gift of the Holy Spirit. He is the source of power who meets our need to escape from the miserable weakness that grips us. He gives us the power to be truly good.

Holiness is not something that is narrow or negative or nitpicky. It is empowering. It is liberating. It is a beautiful and wonderful thing.

Now I was tempted today, because it is **Mother’s Day**, to set this series of sermons aside for a week and bring a traditional kind of Mother’s Day message...something like *The Wonderful Gift of Motherhood* or *Seven Ways to Love Your Mother* or *Heaven Help the Home* or *How to Be a Godly Mother*...or something like that.

But as I was praying about what I should preach about and whether I should interrupt this series of sermons about holiness, my eyes were drawn (I believe by the Spirit of God) to one of the classic “holiness” scriptural passages. Any preacher who has ever preached a sermon on scriptural holiness has probably at some point in his life preached a sermon from this text.

I’m talking about the words of the apostle **Paul** in **Ephesians 5**—specifically, **verse 18**, but let me read it for you in its context beginning with **verse 15**.

**Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord’s will is. Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit. Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.**

Ephesians 5:15-20 New International Version

*“Be filled with the Spirit.”* Any and every holiness preacher who is worth his salt has focused upon and emphasized this passage of Scripture. *“Be filled with the Spirit.” “Just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do!”*

But here's where the Spirit of God spoke to me these past couple of weeks. Usually we stop reading there. It's the end of the paragraph. It completes the thought. It's a nice, short, concise passage of Scripture to

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read and preach from and so that becomes our text.

But the Scripture passage doesn't end there. That's not the end of the chapter. Paul has more to say about this matter of holiness. And, so, he writes on. *But do you remember what he talks about in his very next breath? He talks about our homes, our marriages, our families, our children, our parents...how we act and live and talk and relate at home.*

You see, holiness begins at home. Someone has said, *"Home is the seminary of all other institutions."* John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, said, *"I learned more about Christianity from my mother than from all the theologians of England."*

C.T. Studd, one of the greatest missionaries who ever lived, once wrote, *"The best test of a sanctified man is to ask his family about him."*

So notice what the apostle Paul says right after he exhorts us to *"be filled with the Spirit."* He brings up the "s" word—**submission**. Ugh! *We don't like that word, do we!* It sends cold chills up and down our spines. We bristle at the sound of that word. Submit? SUBMIT?

*"I'm not going to submit!"* That's oppressive. That's tyrannical. That's a sign of weakness. *"I am woman, hear me roar!"* *"I'm a man. God made me the head of this home!"* *"Don't talk to me about submission."* Oh, how we get all of these negative vibes when we hear this word "submit."

But after exhorting us to *"be filled with the Spirit,"* the very first thing Paul talks about is this matter of submission and he talks about it in terms of our homes, our marriages, our families, our children, our parents, the way we act and live and talk and relate with those closest to us.

The next verse in this passage is **verse 21**. Let's read on from there.

**Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. Wives,**

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**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.**

**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 his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the Church—for we are members of his body.**

**"For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh." This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church. However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.**

**Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. "Honor your father and mother"—which is the first commandment with a promise—"that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth."**

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

Ephesians 5:2–6:4 New International Version

I want to emphasize three things this morning on this **Mother's Day** that flow from Scripture. These are the three things I want you to take home with you this morning.

**Number One – Our Families Are Tremendously Important.** Now you probably already know that...but I just want to re-emphasize that truth this morning from Scripture.

When God created the world, He established the family. It was

important to him. Someone has said it like this. Human history began with a wedding—because creation wasn't finished until there was the “*marriage*” of Adam and Eve. And human history will end with a marriage—the “*marriage supper of the Lamb*” in heaven.

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Small wonder that Jesus' first miracle was at a wedding—the wedding in Cana of Galilee when Jesus turned water into wine. God is the one who established families. He said, “*A man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh*” (Genesis 2:24 New International Version).

Families aren't just some kind of sociological pattern that has evolved through the course of human history. It's not just some kind of “mating” pattern that identifies the “human animal.” When God created the world, he established families.

When God gave the Law, He protected the family. Two of the *Ten Commandments* speak specifically to the protection of the family. God wanted to protect the **parent-child relationship** and so the **5<sup>th</sup> Commandment** says, “*Honor your father and your mother*” (Exodus 19:12 New International Version).

God also wanted to protect the **marriage relationship** between the husband and the wife and so the **7<sup>th</sup> Commandment** says, “*You shall not commit adultery*” (Exodus 19:14 New International Version).

When God wanted to reveal Himself, He often used images of the family. For instance, He said, “*As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him*” (Psalm 103:13 New International Version).

In another place, He says, “*As a mother comforts her child, so will I comfort you*” (Isaiah 66:13 New International Version).

He said to people who had been unfaithful to Him, “*Return, faithless people, declares the Lord, for I am your husband...I will cure you of backsliding*” (Jeremiah 3:14, 22 New International Version).

When He talks to us about prayer, He says, “*Which of you, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will*

*give him a snake? If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him?*” (Matthew 7:9-11 New International Version).

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When God talks about the church, He refers to her as His “bride.” In fact, He says, “*As a bridegroom rejoices over his bride, so will your God rejoice over you*” (Isaiah 62:5 New International Version).

Even when God disciplines us, He disciplines us in the spirit of a loving father disciplining his son. He says,

**Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father...Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness. No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.**  
International Version

Hebrews 12:7, 10-11 New

When God wanted to invade our world and live among us as our Guide and Savior, He entered a family. He came into this world as a child, not an adult. He lived in a family. He had siblings. He obeyed His parents. He cared for His mother.

God must think that families are pretty important. So should we. Let's face it. If things are bad at work but fine at home, we can handle it. But if things are fine at work and fine financially but bad at home, then life is just miserable. We can't handle it.

And, so, that's the first thing I want to emphasize this morning – **Our families are tremendously important.** Never, never, never lost sight of that fact! Yes, life is busy. Yes, you want to do well in your chosen profession. Yes, making money is important. It comes in pretty handy at times. Yes, you want to provide as much financial security for your life as possible. Yes, you need to find some outlets in your life that bring you joy. **But never at the expense of your family.**

Our families are tremendously important. Now here's the second thing I want to emphasize this morning on this **Mother's Day**.

**Submission Is The Golden Key That Unlocks Happiness Within The Home.** Now I know that just sounds crazy. It seems that the opposite would be true. But when the Bible begins to talk about harmony

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within the home, it always begins with this issue of submission.

Now that really shouldn't surprise us because the "golden key" that unlocks the doorway to an intimate, personal relationship with God is this thing called "**submission.**"

Jesus said, "***If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it***" (Luke 9:23-24 New International Version). That's just another term for "**submission.**"

Think of some of the hymns we sing. *What do they talk about?* Surrendering, submitting to God.

**All to Jesus I surrender,  
All to Him I freely give;  
I will ever love and trust Him,  
In His presence daily live.**

**I surrender all,  
I surrender all.  
All to Thee, my blessed Savior,  
I surrender all.**

Or what about this one—the third verse of "**Rock of Ages**"?

**Nothing in my hand I bring,  
Simply to Thy cross I cling;  
Naked, come to Thee for dress,  
Helpless, look to Thee for grace;  
Foul, I to the fountain fly,  
Wash me, Savior, or I die!**

Someone has put it like this: "***If you will lay yourself at Christ's feet, He will take you into His arms.***" When all that you are is available to all that God is, then all that God is is available to all that you are.

God can't fill with His Spirit a vessel—a person—that is already filled with other things. He can only fill an empty vessel, a person that is surrendered and submissive to Him.

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*So why should it surprise us when God reveals to us that holiness at home begins with this thing called "submission"?* It's the "golden key" that unlocks happiness within the home. The Bible says, "**Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.**"

And then it gets real specific. "***Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord.***" Oh, men love to quote that verse, don't we? Especially in the middle of a marital disagreement! But you see, that verse isn't written to me! That verse is written to my wife. **There are federal laws against opening other people's mail!**

My verse is **verse 25**. "***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 blemish, but holy and blameless.***"

*Do you remember how Christ loved the church? Do you get what He is saying here?* Even though we as human beings can be sinful and despicable and displeasing and evil, Jesus has chosen to love us nevertheless, to pour His grace out upon us, to treat us better than we deserve to be treated, and to present us to His Father as though we are perfect and clean and holy and blameless and spotless.

I'm not making this stuff up. The Bible says in **Romans 3:22**, "***This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe***" (New International Version). It's not our righteousness he's talking about. Our righteousness is as "**filthy rags**" in His sight. But Jesus clothes us with His righteousness, covers us with His blood, provides for us a "wedding garment" for the marriage supper of the Lamb that is pure and spotless and wrinkle-free.

Now here's the thing. I am to love my wife in that same kind of way. You know, Paul isn't really talking about **authority**, my rights, my power, my privileges, when he talks about leadership here—me being a leader in the home. He is talking about **responsibility**. My responsibility is to be the peacemaker—to be the one to build the bridge and to mend the relationship when it gets broken. *Isn't that how Christ loved the church?*

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You see, when we have a disagreement, I don't have the right to sit in a corner and mutter under my breath, "*She's wrong...and she knows she's wrong. She owes me an apology. She needs to change her ways and I'm just going to sit here and stew until she's ready to admit that I'm right.*"

*Aren't you glad that's not how God treats us?* Because, listen, we're proud creatures. If God had waited for **Adam** and **Eve** to have changed their ways and admit their error and come crawling back to Him, He would still be waiting. They were hiding. They were ashamed. They were afraid. It was God, the One who had been wronged, that went hunting for them, crying out, "*Adam, where are you?*"

Now, yes, my wife has a role to play, too. Her verse is **verse 22**. But that's her mail to open and I need to leave that in her hands. Yes, she's to be submissive, too. But, again, it has little to do with *authority* and privileges and rights and everything to do with *responsibility*.

She, too, is to be dedicated to living by this principle of *submission*—being a peacemaker, taking the first step, building a bridge and helping to mend the relationship when it gets broken. But even if she doesn't accept the responsibility of her role, if I'm going to love like Jesus loved, then I'll be the one to take that first step, I'll be the one to try to bring reconciliation to the relationship, I'll be the one to forgive, I'll be the one to be gracious and treat her better than she deserves to be treated.

**Now here's the really cool thing.** If both of us try to put these principles into action—if both us try to beat each other to the apology

rather than to the punch, how long do you think that disagreement will last? Not long! Not long at all.

What a difference that could make in our homes! **Living by the principle of mutual submission creates an atmosphere for love and appreciation, not bitterness and resentment.**

Now there's a word here for children. *You thought you were going to*  
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*get off easy this morning?* Children are also to live by this principle of *submission*. "**Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. 'Honor your father and mother'**" (Ephesians 6:1-2 New International Version).

And because God knows us so well, He has a special word for us fathers when it comes to our relationship with our children. "**Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord**" (Ephesians 6:4 New International Version).

Don't drive them—lead them. Don't push them too hard—encourage them. Don't set the standard of your expectations so high that they can never reach it—but be quick to pick them up when they fall and forgive them when they fail and to bind up their wounds when they hurt.

**Our families are tremendously important. Submission is the golden key that unlocks happiness within the home.** Now here's the third thing I want to emphasize this morning.

**My Earthly Relationships With The People Around Me Will Profoundly Affect My Heavenly Relationship With God.** Our horizontal relationship with the people around us and our vertical relationship with God are intricately connected together.

*Do you remember how Jesus taught His disciples to pray? "Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors."* It's the only part of the prayer that Jesus felt He needed to expound upon. He said, "**For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins**" (Matthew 6:14-15 New International Version).

You can't be **right** with God and **wrong** in the ways you relate with

other people. The Bible says in **1<sup>st</sup> John 4:20**, “*Anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen*” (New International Version).

Here’s my point. If I’m going to be serious about this call to holiness, this call of God to live a holy life, it must begin at home. I can’t be **wrong** at home and **right** with God.

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Our families may come in many different sizes, styles, and shapes. We may not all have happy, fairytale families to talk about. But whatever they may have been and whatever they are—perhaps broken and fractured and damaged—God wants to nurture them and enrich them...and it begins with you and with me.

So let me close the message this morning by giving you four questions to think about and pray about.

- **Could God use my family as an example to others of His relationship with humanity?**
- **Could God use my marriage as an example of Christ’s love for the church?**
- **If God were looking for a family to which He could entrust His only Son, could He choose my family and do it with confidence?**