

**FUNDAMENTALS OF FAMILY:  
COMMITMENT  
Ephesians 5:22-6:4**

Dr. J. Howard Olds  
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Last September, Sandy and I celebrated our 43<sup>rd</sup> wedding anniversary. I could tell you today that it's been 43 years of heavenly bliss, but she would correct me by saying there's been a lot of hell in the mix. Like all couples we married for better for worse, for richer for poorer, and in recent years it has been a lot more sickness than health. Yet, relationships are held together by an invisible cord called commitment. Commitment is an island of certainty in a sea of change. We are not human butterflies fluttering through other people's lives stopping long enough to get what we want, then flying off. We are human beings capable of making one thing certain in an uncertain future. That is "I will be there, no matter what," and that's that I want to talk about today.

**COMMITMENT IS NOT A PRISON OF POWER IN A WORLD OF CONTROL**

Power corrupts, absolute power absolutely corrupts.

Marriages built on power are sure to crumble. The Bible can help us or the Bible can hurt us. When passages like the one today about "*wives submitting to your husband,*" are used as an excuse for power and control, marriages are sure to crumble.

A prominent pastor in this country says Ephesians 5:22 means that a wife should relinquish her rights and fall in line under her husband's authority like a soldier obeys his commanding officer. It might not be the wife's desire to fall in line under her husband's orders, but it is her spiritual calling under God. Let me kindly comment, "That's heresy." Power corrupts and absolute power absolutely corrupts. When love of power replaces the power of love, families are destined to disaster. Let me tell you the shocking words in this passage for those who heard it first. It was not women being submissive, which would have been an improvement over their present standing. It's "*Husbands love your wives just as Christ loved the Church and gave himself for it.*" What Paul explains in five verses set in motion a social revolution in which women could no longer be treated as pieces of property, to be used or abused at every husband's whim. So let me say it the best I can. "Marriage is a sacred covenant in which two persons form a partnership where they love, honor, and cherish each other for a lifetime."

Parenting built on power is certain to fail. What's true of marriage is likewise true of parenting. In Roman culture, a father had full control of his children.

When a child was born, the baby was placed before the father's feet. If the father stooped and lifted the child, the child lived. If the father turned and walked away, the child died. Roman fathers had the power to sell their children into slavery, work them in the fields, and punish them at will. Can you imagine the eyebrows raised when Paul writes, "*Fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath but bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.*" As a parent, let me give you this advice from the trenches. Parenting by power and manipulation is a loser's game. Controls work for a while, but children grow up and you are no longer there to apply the pressure. You can bribe a child for a season, but kids are smart, they learn the manipulation game and they will return the favor. Love your children no matter what. Help them set appropriate boundaries and establish inner discipline. Encourage them to pursue their God-given potential without pressuring them to please you. Be there for them when they need you. Give them wings so they can fly. Always remember that love covers a multitude of sins.

### **COMMITMENT IS A PROMISE OF PRESENCE IN A WORLD OF SELFISHNESS**

Servant Leadership is the teaching here. Love seeks to SERVE. About 30 years ago, Robert Greenleaf gave us the book, Servant Leadership in which he advocated service above self in business, in education, in churches, and other institutions of society. Just as Jesus came "*not to be served, but to serve,*" so we must develop that attitude in our relationships with others. Great leaders are servant leaders. They make sure other people's highest priorities and needs are being met. Servant leaders enrich, encourage, empower, and enable other people to reach their full potential. So I pose the question, if servant leadership works in business, why wouldn't it work in family? Is that not what Jesus meant when he said, "*Submit to one another out of reverence to Christ?*"

Some of you would drive three hours in the pouring rain to help a business client work through a problem and then complain mightily if your wife asked you to stop at the grocery for some milk on the way home. Some of you would spend most of the day playing golf with a potential customer and then ignore your son when he wants to play ball. Some of you would rather make a meal for your neighbor than prepare a meal for your family. Why would we rather serve the homeless, the addicts, the victims of natural disaster than the people in our own household? Foot washing for Jesus started with the disciples, the inner circle of closest friends. Why do we overlook our closest companions when striving to serve others?

Tom, a stock broker, decided to become a better husband. So he took his wife on a two week vacation to a secluded cottage. They walked on the beach. He complimented her new clothes. They even went shopping, which was not Tom's thing. Most of all, he didn't call the office even once. On the last night of the vacation Tom's wife broke down crying. When Tom asked what the matter was, she blurted out: "You know that check-up I had a few weeks ago. Did the doctor

tell you something he didn't tell me? Am I dying?" "No," replied Tom. "I'm just starting to live."

Sacrificial Love is the standard. Love is willing to SACRIFICE. "*As Christ loved the Church and gave himself for it.*" Sacrificial love is GIVING love. When love is young it seeks to get. Young love is about wanting to be happy. Mature love is about wanting someone else to be happy. Young love is about songs, movies, and breathless adventure. Mature love is about a wife going to a nursing home to feed her Alzheimer stricken husband even though he won't know her name.

Sacrificial love is UPLIFTING love. It is not about winning or losing an argument. It is about forging a future. Thomas A. Kempis writes, "Be not angry that you cannot make another as you wish them to be, since you cannot make yourself as you wish to be." How often do you tell your spouse, your children, your parents, your close companions the things you appreciate about them? Encourage one another. This is just the way loving people are.

Sacrificial love is NO MATTER WHAT love. No matter if he is genetically unlucky. No matter if she is destined to be a pain in the neck. No matter if they choose values we despise or despise the values we cherish. No matter what, they are ours. We love them anyway.

So, commitment in a single word is LOVE, "*To love as Christ loved the Church and gave himself for her.*" This is the word of the Lord as I understand it. Thanks be to God.