

We need to keep something in mind today and next Sunday as we proceed through the end of Ephesians 5. The Church has a calling. We are called to be the flesh in which God lives in this world and makes Himself known to the world. We are to live lives that are worthy of that calling. Such a life takes shape around three governing realities: 1) the unity of the Church, 2) the new attitude and lifestyle of the Church, and 3) the spiritual warfare of the Church.

The passages in Ephesians 5 for today and next Sunday teach us how marriage between Christians can represent God to the world. They challenge the mythology of our culture. They challenge believers to take them seriously.

I am not going to say what you expect me to say about these verses. So, listen for surprises. Neither will I prescribe for you how to put these verses to use in your relationships. Here's the invitation: let's look at the biblical text and at the world we live in and ask: "How can we make the Bible work in our world?"

Submit

The passage today speaks primarily about married, Christian women, but we will also talk some about men. The passage next Sunday will speak primarily about married, Christian men, but we will also talk some about women. Here's the text in Ephesians 5:22-24: **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.**

The emotionally charged word is **submit**. It seems to contradict current ideas of equality, and it seems to carry with it the idea of having to do things a wife doesn't want to do, especially if it she doesn't agree. This passage is especially offensive, if a husband uses it against his wife to demand that she do something she doesn't want to do. "Look! I'm the head of this house, woman, and the Bible says you are to submit. So do it!" That kind of behavior makes a woman loathe Ephesians 5. Fair enough! You'll get no argument from me. So, how can Christian couples make this part of the Bible work in their marriages? Answering that question in a way that glorifies God requires us to think more carefully about the word *submit*.

Suppose that submitting to your husband means tuning in to your husband's needs. Could you do that? Suppose that submitting to your husband means listening to your husband in a considerate way. Could you do that? I suspect most of you women do that anyway. You are nurturing by nature. Suppose that submitting to your husband means you can disagree, even sharply, with your husband. You do that anyway, so where did you learn the idea that submitting to your husband means you can't disagree with him? Have you actually heard a pastor say that? Did you ever hear your dad say that?

Now, it does mean that if you can't agree on a decision, and your husband makes it, then you support him. And if he makes the wrong decision, it means you don't throw it in his face. But isn't that how life works best wherever people work together?

A Word to Guys

This is where I need to talk about us men. The Bible says here that **the husband is the head of the wife**. If we think that means we just throw our weight around, we just don't get it. Good leaders can be decisive, they usually are; but they always want

ownership of ideas by the people who work with them. Great leaders want feedback from the people who work with them, including feedback that contradicts their own ideas. It helps them make better decisions. Why wouldn't that be good for your marriage and family?

Let me tell you guys a story you may not know. You do know that Penn State University was fined \$60 million, had football scholarships reduced from 25 to 15 per year, and were banned from bowl games for six years. And you know why. That wasn't the worst. The NCAA also gave other college coaches permission to recruit Penn State football players, and those players didn't have to wait a year to play for their new teams, which was the normal rule. Coach Bill O'Brien was not sure that Penn State could field a team for opening day in 2012.

Every starting player on the Penn State team was receiving a stream of e-mails from other coaches, asking if he would like to play for another team. Coach O'Brien told two players, linebacker Mike Mauti and fullback Mike Zordich, "This can't go on forever. So I'm going to tell them (the players), 'By Aug. 1, you're either with us or you're not.'" August 1 was just over a week away. Zordich said to Coach O'Brien, "I don't think that's a good idea. The players here don't know you well enough yet."

"At that moment, Zordich and Mauti might have been the only college football players in the country with the temerity to question the decision of their head coach. And O'Brien might have been the only college-football coach willing to listen." He did listen. They told the coach their idea, together they worked out a strategy, and in the end only one star player transferred to another college program. They also went 8-4 in 2012.

(<http://online.wsj.com/news/articles/SB10001424127887323455104579014553720253962>, accessed October 28, 2013)

Who were the leaders in that locker room? Was it Coach O'Brien? Was it Mike Mauti and Mike Zordich? Yes! They were in it together. But who bore final responsibility for the decision they made? It was Coach O'Brien. He is the head coach. And if 30 players had transferred, and the team had gone 1-11, He would have been held responsible, and he would have accepted responsibility.

Wives, your husband might make the decision – in my experience men often make the decision – to let you make the decision. And if you make a bad decision, your husband doesn't throw you under the bus; he owns responsibility for the mistake as if he had made it. That's how leadership works. That's what it means to be the head.

At this point I want you to be careful about extreme decisions that couples face. Suppose your child faces elective, life-threatening surgery that might save the child's life or take it, or suppose you had to decide to take your child off life-support, and the two of you disagreed. You'll want to know what submitting to your husband means in a situation like that. Of course, you want to know. We all want to know what we would do in situations like that. There are guidelines for such decisions, and the first one is: don't make such decisions by yourselves. That's a discussion for another day.

For today, it is enough to say: The better we married people handle the ordinary decisions of running a marriage and a household, the better we'll be prepared for the awful decisions that may come our way.

Sacramental Marriage

Christian Marriage with all its beauty and promise and all its conflict and danger is a visible representation of an invisible beauty and promise and of an invisible conflict

and danger between Christ and the Church. Listen again to the apostle's words: **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.** Your marriage can be "the scent of a flower (the world has) not found, the echo of a tune (it has) not heard, news from a country (it has) never yet visited." (Lewis, *The Weight of Glory*, 5) The politics of love between Christ and His Church becomes visible in this world in the politics of love between a husband and wife.

Did you see the movie, *Sleepless in Seattle*? The music track was mostly love songs from a previous generation. Celine Dion sang one of them: "When I fall in love, it will be forever." It was very beautiful, very emotional, and, like the movie, very misleading. It linked the permanence of marriage to the power of emotion. It forgot something. "'Yes,'" I answered you last night; 'No,'" I say today. Colors seen by candlelight do not look the same by day." And, of course, it took no notice of the transcendent meaning of marriage revealed in Ephesians 5.

Communion

We know how heart-wrenching divorce can be. Plenty of secular studies detail its negative impact on children. We, who are called to be the flesh in which God lives in this world, have a chance to make something beautiful by building marriages that pursue God's will.

As we hold in our hands the visible representations of the merciful body and blood of Christ, broken and shed for us, let's give thanks for the visible representation of Christ and the Church that we call Christian marriage. Let's pray for Christian husbands and wives to be more committed to the sacramental significance of marriage than to the fleeting emotions that once gave their love a jumpstart. Let's be as committed to the marriage as we are to our mate.