

Most of you know that I am a Detroit Lion's football fan. In fact on my desk in the church office is a picture of the 1957 world champion Detroit Lions, the last time the Lions did anything in football. My wife keeps razzing me that I should quit following a loser team and become a Packer convert. Never! The Lions still have many weaknesses, but I am ever hopeful one day they will be a Superbowl champion. One area of weakness is the Detroit Lion's offensive line. To be an offensive lineman is an inglorious job. You are basically a human bowling pin. You rarely score a touchdown. But if you don't do your job well, your quarterback and running back aren't going to be very effective no matter how talented they are. The offensive linemen need to focus on their job of blocking the opposing team so that the quarterback and running back can get done their job of getting into the end zone. Football is definitely a team sport.

Marriage too is a team effort. Husband and wife each have a different job given to them by God. The problem is we like to focus on what our spouse should be doing instead of what we need to be doing. But that would be like an offensive lineman pausing in the action to see whether or not the running back has safely tucked the ball into his gut as he runs. That split second pause will be enough for the opposing linebacker to blow by the offensive lineman and level the running back for a loss. How many marriages have been lost because the husband focused on his wife's shortcomings while the wife incessantly dissected her husband's faults? If you want to enjoy your marriage as God meant for you to enjoy it, then listen to the Apostle Paul this morning as he urges you to focus on your God-given role in marriage. Let's find out what that role is.

Someone once said that there are three phases to marriage. We start out with The Ideal when we are first married. We then move to phase 2 which is The Ordeal. Then for 50% of marriages we go to phase 3, The New Deal. But it doesn't have to end that way. But we need to follow the directives that Paul gives us here in Ephesians 5. Paul starts by explaining what the woman's role in marriage is. He said: "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" (Ephesians 5:22-24). "Submit to your husband." Can you believe Paul would say something like that, and that I would repeat it! What you need to remember is that Paul speaks about marriage with the same authority as when he spoke about the doctrines of election, grace, and salvation in the other parts of this letter to the Ephesian Christians. If you choose to ignore what Paul says regarding marriage and your role in it, you're choosing to ignore God himself. Since this directive concerning marriage comes from God you can be certain that it's good. Wives, it's for the sake of order that God wants you to line yourself up under your husband. To yield to him as the leader of the home. That's no different than what the pilot of a Boeing 747 does when he yields to the ground crew on the tarmac. The pilot does not submit to the crewman's outstretched hand because he is inferior or weaker. He yields because if he doesn't, he'll plow into an oncoming airplane or tanker wreaking havoc, just as a wife who says, "I will not submit!" wreaks havoc on a marriage.

If you're still not convinced that submitting doesn't somehow make you inferior, consider what Jesus did when he came down from heaven to win our salvation. Philippians 2 tells us that Jesus submitted himself to his Father's will and made himself nothing becoming obedient to death on a cross. By submitting to his Father's will was Jesus conceding that he was inferior to the Father? No! Even though he became human he still remained God's Son, equal in majesty, power, and honor with the Father and the Holy Spirit. Or consider this. When Jesus

became human to serve us and win our salvation, did he become inferior to us? Of course not! In fact Paul says that because of his humble service, Jesus is worthy of all glory and praise.

In the same way, wives submit to your husband in everything (Eph. 5:24). Put yourself under his leadership and guidance in all things, unless of course he tells you do something sinful. Submit by being an unselfish servant. Encourage; don't nag. Praise him for those things he does well and offer constructive criticism for the purpose of building him up, not tearing him down. How can you do that? Use a technique called the critique sandwich. Start with a positive comment, offer your criticism, and then end with a compliment. A critique sandwich might sound like this: "You are so good at fixing things. You tackle those tasks so promptly and efficiently (compliment). That's why I'm surprised you left your tools in front of the door. I'm afraid someone might trip over them (criticism). But I do love the new towel rack you put up. Thanks! (compliment) Don't you think that would be much better received than, "Move your tools! You're always leaving things for me to trip over."

To underline the fact that submitting is not a negative thing, Paul concludes his directive to wives by saying, "Submit to your husband as the Church submits to Christ" (Eph. 5:24). We Christians don't balk at the thought of submitting to Christ do we? After all he gave his life for us and loves us dearly. He even said, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28). Just as submitting to Christ means finding rest and comfort, so submitting to your husband means finding the blessings you want from marriage. Will your husband love and provide for you as Christ does? No, of course not. He's a sinner just as you are. But he is also forgiven, as you are, and with God's help he can provide the happiness and love you seek in your marriage.

Husbands, did you just hear what I just said? Our role in marriage is to provide love and happiness. Paul put it this way: "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" (Ephesians 5:25-31).

It's interesting isn't it that Paul spends more time talking to husbands about their role in marriage than he does to wives? He says that we are to be the head of the wife. The role of headship, however, is not lordship. Acting as head means being like Christ. Just as Christ loved the Church so much that he gave his life up for her, we are to love our wife so much that we are willing to give up our life for her. If we do love our wife this much, then we certainly will be willing to give up a round of golf with the boys, or even change plans with a friend, to keep our wife happy. You see being the head means being a servant-leader. It means being willing to make sacrifices, just as Jesus sacrificed himself for us.

If we are hesitant to serve our wife through sacrifice, then let's consider this "selfish" reason for doing so. Paul said that in marriage the "two become one" that is husband and wife are glued together. When we take care of our wife we take care of ourselves. It's like the quarterback who unselfishly calls in the field-goal kicking unit to win the game with a sure chip shot from the 20-yard line than trying to force the ball into the end zone himself so he can be the hero. Such selfishness is sure to lose games and hurt the team. In the same way, husbands, we have been given the task of managing our household. This doesn't mean that we should make the

decisions without consulting our teammate. To do so would be selfish. Let's recognize the gifts that God has given to our wife and admit that she may be better at keeping the finances or organizing the family trip than we are. Letting her use her talents for the good of the team is not giving up our role as the head; it's being a wise servant-leader. But please don't think that I'm suggesting we just kick back and let our wives do all the work. Lead by serving your wife; that's what it means to be the head.

God's plan for marriage is really simple: husbands love your wife; wives submit to your husband. Where it comes undone is when the husband insists that the wife submit, or the wife nags instead of encourages her husband to be a better leader. That's no different than the offensive line yelling at the running back for not having better moves, and the running back retorting that the offensive line needs to stop letting themselves be shoved around. That kind of bickering isn't going to help the team. No, the offensive line needs to focus on its job and the running back on his.

Remember, God himself glued the two of you together in marriage to make each stronger and better equipped to raise a family and face the world. Unfortunately we don't often see our spouse as a column of support God attached to us but a weight that slows us down like a ball and chain attached to the ankle. It's no wonder we often manipulate instead of serve, and demand rather than supply. In spite of those sins there is still hope for you and your marriage. Did you hear what Paul said Jesus did with us through baptism? He cleansed us with his blood so that we are radiant, without stain, wrinkle, or blemish (Eph 5:26, 27). Just as digital imaging software removes blemishes, wrinkles, and even whitens teeth on a portrait, the blood Jesus shed on the cross removes our sins so that in every way we are beautiful to God. Since that is how God sees each of us, isn't that how we will want to look at one another, especially our spouse? Your spouse, like you, is a child of God - beautiful in every way.

One final point. If you talk to any Christian couple today, who is following Paul's directive to husbands and wives, they will tell you that the word "Commitment" is essential to any long-term marriage today. When God says, "Cleave" he means you are literally stuck with each other. It reminds me of a Midwest weed, that sometimes gets stuck to your shirt, called a Cocklebur. You try to pull it out this weed, and you just can't. That's the way we need to view our marriages. There is no escape clause. We are stuck with each other. Winston Churchill once said, "Wars were not won by surrendering, and surrendering is not an option if you plan to win the war." Or if the Chevy is broken, you fix the Chevy, you don't go looking for a new Cadillac. Marriage is for better or for worse. And that mindset needs to be ingrained in a couple's heart from the start.

May God continue to help the couples of Open Bible keep their focus on the roles that have been given to them in marriage. May our marriages that we presently find ourselves in be strong marriages. And may our God also provide healing and support for those who have suffered from divorce. Focus is where its at! Focus on the direction given in God's Word.