

Ephesians 5:18b,21-33
Pentecost 14B (Proper 16B)
August 26, 2018

“The Ultimate Team – Husband and Wife”

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Paul teaches us, (Ephesians 5:32) “*This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.*”

In sports there are individual sports and team sports. In a team sport, all the players play different roles ... sometimes they lead ... sometimes they follow. But, when on the field all are essential to the team’s success. Whatever the case, for the sake of team unity and success, they all choose to submit to the larger goal of the team. I would argue that life itself is a team game.

We’ve been stepping through Ephesians for several weeks now. In this letter, Paul reminds us that God our Father has chosen us as His own children. We have been redeemed by His Son, Jesus Christ through His sacrifice. The Holy Spirit has called us into faith, sealing us as God’s children in baptism. Now, as members of God’s family, He desires unity among His children. This is the theme of Ephesians ... unity ... one Lord, one faith, one baptism.

But unity only happens when those to be unified willingly subordinate themselves for the greater good of the team. Paul leads into our next sections of Ephesians by urging us, (Ephesians 5:18b, 21) “*Be filled with the Spirit ... submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.*”

Filled with the Holy Spirit, we submit voluntarily to Christ and His Word in our lives. Not only for a couple hours on Sunday, is our daily worship – 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year – in our God-given vocations ... roles on God’s team He has gifted us with.

In this next part of Ephesians which we enter into today, God’s Word tells us how to play well on His team through our vocations ... the roles He has given us to play in our lives. He details how we act in our vocations as employees and employers, as children and parents, and as

husbands and wives. He leads with the husband-wife relationship. Many in the world see this section of Ephesians, “The Table of Duties,” as Martin Luther called it, as irritating and restrictive. And for those of the world, not under the influence of the Holy Spirit, this feels about right. But, for us, the “Chosen, Redeemed, and Sealed Children of God” and members of His family, we see differently. We see this Table of Duties as how we are to live in God’s creation as His children in response to His love for us. That doesn’t make it any easier to do … we are after all, also sons and daughters of Adam and Eve, prone to our own sinful selfishness. And when it comes to marriage, there is certainly no exception.

A friend told me of a one-liner from old school comedian named Henny Youngman that went, “*You know what I did before I got married? ... Anything I wanted to.*” A funny line, but unfortunately, this is what too many in the world try to do in marriage too. They try to live like they’re still single … and this doesn’t work. Marriage you see is a “team game.” The ultimate team isn’t the 1927 Yankees, the Red Auerbach Celtics or Showtime Lakers, the Steel Curtain Steelers, or the classic Montreal Canadiens … it’s the husband and wife! Those who choose to submit to and love each other … (**Ephesians 5:24**) “*as the church submits to the Christ*” and (**Ephesians 5:25**) “*as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her.*”

Just because we’re Christians doesn’t mean we can stand before the altar, speak our wedding vows, and immediately reshape ourselves in terms of God’s will for us … from selfish singles involved in an individual sport into teammates on the ultimate team. Many of us can attest to this, through personal experience, as a fact I’m guessing. Overcoming “selfish singleness” is hard work. And there are any number of models we can turn to in the world to help us do this hard work. Marriage models can include our own parents … people in this congregation … our neighbors. And there’s nothing wrong with these models. But I’d like to propose a model that

I'm guessing, if you spent time digging into these other models of successful team play, is the bedrock basis for each of them. It's the model Paul proposes in Ephesians.

Paul advises us on God's thoughts for forming the ultimate team of husband and wife,

(Ephesians 5:22, 24-26) “*Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord ... Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands.*

Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word.” It's a model based on Christ and His church ... Christ loves His church that He heads ... in response, His church submits to Him in love. Once again, please hear Paul's words, (Ephesians 5:32) “*This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.*”

Paul starts by urging wives to follow the model of the church, the bride of Christ, and its submission to Jesus. Just as the church gratefully receives the ministry of Christ, and joyfully submits to His leadership in all things, Paul urges women, called to the vocation of wife, to willingly submit to their husbands.

Submission ... this word carries a lot of baggage – invoking images of enslavement, surrender, inferiority, and worse. A key to understanding (Ephesians 5:22) “*Wives, submit to your husbands*” is found earlier. Paul says, (Ephesians 5:21) “*Submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.*” Submission here is a choice ... it isn't compelled. Compelled submission – where one side wins and the other loses – is oppression! This isn't Paul's meaning at all!

I read a good analogy of the meaning from the relationship between a pitcher and catcher on a baseball team. Both players are on the same team. They both have the same goal ... contribute to winning the game. Both are necessary to the success of the team. The team fails if one or the other isn't there. The catcher tells the pitcher what kind of pitches, based on the pitcher's

strengths, to throw. The pitcher submits to the catcher's judgment and throws the pitch to the catcher who catches it. Sometimes the pitcher has a better idea. So, they talk it over and come to an agreement. The catcher isn't better than the pitcher. The pitcher isn't inferior to the catcher. The arrangement where the pitcher follows the catcher's lead works best for the team.

Wives are called to submit to their husbands, not out of inferiority or surrender or enslavement. They are called to submit to their husbands by choice, out of reverence for Christ, because that's how God, our creator, has ordered things in the best interest of those He created.

Paul immediately calls on husbands to love their wives ... as Christ loved the church. This "love" is a special kind of love. It's not the superficial love between friends or physical love of attraction. **It is the kind of love that** expresses itself in total concern for his wife's well-being. **It's the kind of love that** appreciates her unique God-given skills, talents, and ideas. **It's the kind of love that** praises her strengths by submitting to them whenever needed for the good of the team. It is that completely unselfish, one-way, sacrificial and servant-like love known as "agape." The love Jesus has for each of us.

Jesus showed His love for us by leaving His own Father in heaven. With the approval of His Father, the King of kings became a servant to His people, joining Himself to us, people God created in His image. He willingly gave up everything He had, the comfort and glory of His throne in heaven, to serve us. He lived like us in everyway ... except for sin.

But, even Jesus, the King of kings and Lord of lords, Son of God Himself willingly submitted to others ... though this never, ever made Him inferior or lesser. As a child, Luke recounts how Jesus grew up in Joseph's and Mary's home and (**Luke 2:51**) "*was submissive to them.*" Yet He was still the Son of God. Later, He stooped to His knees to wash the filthy feet of His disciples, performing the lowest servant's task. Yet He remained the Son of God.

In speaking about His true home, He said, (John 6:38) “*For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me.*” Though He submitted to the will of His Father, He never became less than His Father. Even as Jesus willingly submitted in these and many other ways, He remains King of kings and Lord of lords … He remains co-equal in His divinity with God the Father and the Holy Spirit. And what was the will of His Father?

Sinless Himself, He submitted to the will of His Father by submitting to the earthly authorities. (Philippians 2:6-8) “*Though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.*” Jesus took upon Himself all of our sins … taking them to the Cross where He gave His life as a sacrifice so that we may live. Rising from the dead, He defeated the power of sin and death to separate us from God. By the power of the Holy Spirit, through Jesus’ loving sacrifice we are made one with God our Father. One Lord, One Faith, One Baptism … we in the church are joined with Him because He loved us and gave Himself up for us. Then, because He loves us, we in the church submit to Him. We give up our selfish, singleness … holding fast to Christ.

This willing submission takes place in all of our vocations, not only on Sunday, here in worship, but also on Monday through Saturday as we live our lives as parents and children … as supervisors and workers. In all these places, God has placed us on various teams to be His players in His creation. Through our roles on His team, we all willingly submit to Him and His Word. In these God-given relationships, we daily worship God by the power of the Holy Spirit, as we willingly subordinate ourselves to those God has placed over us … or by acting as His

means to deliver His gifts to those placed under us. (Thomas M. Winger, Concordia

Commentary – Ephesians, page 637, 2015)

The evil one, Satan, is real. He desires nothing more than to sow seeds of hate and discontent, doubt and deceit. Satan clearly craves any opportunity to destroy the church … the team of believers united in Christ! Willing submission though never means accepting abuse, tyranny, infidelity or any other ungodly behavior from others … even if it seems acceptable to the “rule of man.” Our Father in heaven calls us to submit only to the Lord and His will enacted through others. If they act counter to His will, submission quickly becomes oppression … and our Father doesn’t approve of or tolerate the oppression Satan sows in the world.

Fortunately, none of us is alone in the battle against Satan and his co-workers in the world. If Satan has caused your relationships with others or the church to break apart … you are part of the body of Christ and we all feel your pain. Call out to God … trust Him to ease your pain … to bring healing to you. If Satan has caused struggles in a relationship with others or the church right now … you are part of the body of Christ and we all feel your pain. Call out to God … trust Him and ask for help to endure your struggles. Call out to His church … ask for help, we’re here for you. If, however, your relationships with others and the church seem to be fine right now … you are a part of the body of Christ and we rejoice with you. Call out to God … give thanks to Him and ask Him to continue to strengthen you and use you to strengthen others.

The mutual self-giving of husband and wife … it is one way we can see the sacrificial love of Christ for His church and the church’s servant love for Christ in the world we live in now … It is one way to taste, here on earth, the heaven that awaits us all … where we, the Bride of Christ, will be joined together as one with our Groom, Jesus Christ, for all eternity. Amen.

James Kent