

Ephesians 5:25–33

Outline of Ephesians

Your Divine Calling (1:3–3:21)

Your Practical Calling (4:1–6:20)

Paul's purpose in writing Ephesians is summarized in Eph. 4:1 ... "Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, ..." Part of the sub context that comes into play for this section is the end of Paul's command to be filled with the Spirit. At the end of that admonition, he instructs the Ephesians to "be subject to one another in the fear of Christ," vs. 21. After outlining the responsibility of wives to submit to their husbands (this is how wives are to be 'subject to one another'), he then turns to the husbands and gives the lengthiest instructions concerning marriage by illustrating the relationship between Christ and the church.

Poor Man's Diagram

- ²⁵ Husbands, love your wives,
just as Christ also loved the church
and
gave Himself up for her,
²⁶ so that (ἵνα) He might sanctify her,
having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word,
²⁷ that (ἵνα) He might present to Himself the church in all her glory,
having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing;
but
that (ἵνα) she would be holy and blameless.
- ²⁸ So husbands ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies.
He who loves his own wife loves himself;
²⁹ for no one ever hated his own flesh,
but
nourishes and cherishes it,
just as Christ also *does* the church,
³⁰ because we are members of His body.
- ³¹ FOR THIS REASON A MAN SHALL LEAVE HIS FATHER AND MOTHER AND
SHALL BE JOINED TO HIS WIFE, AND THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH.
- ³² This mystery is great;
but
I am speaking with reference to Christ and the church.
- ³³ Nevertheless, each individual among you also is to love his own wife
even as himself, and
the wife must *see to it* that she respects her husband.

Ephesians 5:25–27

The command Paul gives is for husbands to love their wives. The word love here is from ἀγαπάω, in its simplest translation means 'to love.' The word will be used six times in this section of Ephesians. Since the command is a present imperative, Paul is instructing husbands to love their wives as an ongoing process, i.e., continually. What is apparent upon detailed study of all the words translated 'love' is that this agape love refers to love irrespective of merit, even to the undeserved. Husbands are to love their wives even if they are unloving back, or are not adhering to their God ordained role to be in submission to her husband. We tend to use the word 'unconditional' in this context as it perfectly conveys what Paul has in mind here when he tells husbands to love their wives. There are no preconditions placed on this command, we are to love our wives ... period.

This is a very unique command for husbands to love their wives. There is no counterpart in the OT, the rabbinic literature of the Second Temple period, or in the literature of the Greco-Roman era. The command is very inflexible, at the same time there is not much detail about how a man is to do that. Instead, Paul begins to strike a Christological illustration of what a husband's

love towards his wife should look like. It should be noted that we as Protestants tend to view the headship of the husband as the main comparison in this illustration, but the context is clearly emphasizing love not headship.

What is important to determine from this section is whether Paul is using the illustration of Christ and the church as an example of how husbands should love their wives ... or as an illustration of the working of the marriage relationship. Perhaps it is a little of both. How does Christ love the church? What is the outward evidence that He loves the church? Like many of the musings of Paul ... he goes on to tell us. 'He gave Himself up for her.' In the same way that Christ gave Himself up for the church, a husband is to love his wife. That Jesus gave Himself for the church is the supreme example of His love for the church. The verb used here is an aorist tense pointing to a completed past action and certainly points to the cross of Calvary. It was there that He made the ultimate sacrifice in giving His own flesh as a ransom to save the church. How does that part of the illustration pertain to husbands loving their wives? Should a man be willing to lay down his life for his wife? Some would say absolutely! If you happen to hate your wife (the opposite of loving like Christ loved the church) then perhaps you would not be willing to lay your life down for her.

For what purpose was this laying down of His life? Paul presents this purpose by three ἵνα clauses. In koine Greek, the ἵνα clause typically conveys the results of the main verb uses a subjunctive verb in its construct. The three clauses include 'that He might sanctify her,' 'that He might present to Himself,' and 'that she might be holy and blameless.'

Let's look at each. What does it mean to sanctify her? It means to separate. Separate the church from what or to what? Perhaps ... from the world of sin, and ... to God. It expresses the idea of being set apart or consecrated for God service to Himself. This was the purpose of the sacrifice of Christ for the church, to set it aside for service. The next part certainly has created controversy in church history. The text says 'having cleansed her by washing' or literally, 'by bathing.' The Roman Catholic church links this directly to water baptism as a sacrament. This is a highly unlikely interpretation for one simple reason ... as Erdman (via Hoehner¹) observes ...

Nowhere in the NT is the rite of (*water*) baptism used in connection with the entire Christian community but only in connection with individual believers ... baptism is always administered individually whereas this context speaks of the effect of Christ's death on the body of believers.

I.e., the imagery is of the cleansing of the entire church, not an individual in liturgical baptism. What is most likely in view here is the parallel with first century marriage customs. Hoehner explains ...

... not only is this a metaphorical expression of redemption, but it also evokes the imagery of the bridal bath. This is significant since the present passage deals with the relationship of the husband to his wife. The prenuptial bath in Jewish marital customs reflected the imagery of God's marriage to Israel related in Ezekiel 16. At the time of her birth, Israel was in a pitiable state, lying in blood, uncleansed by the washing of water, and was abhorred by all (Ezek. 16:4–6). When she grew up God entered into a covenant with her and bathed her with water, washed off the blood, anointed her with oil, and clothed her with the finest materials, making her exceedingly beautiful, fit to be a queen (16:8–14). The custom of prenuptial bathing seems to be practiced also among the Greeks. Analogous to this bridal bath, the present verse relates that Christ's death on behalf of the church was to cleanse her by the "washing of the water."

Normally in an ancient Jewish wedding the bride would prepare herself by washing in the bridal bath after which the bridegroom would go with his friends to her house to procure her and bring her to his house to present her to his father. In similar manner, Christ prepares the bride, the church, with the purpose that he might present her to Himself.

Ephesians 5:28–30

Paul then begins to help explain what it means to love your wife as Christ loves the church. He makes the statement that we are to love our wives as we love our own bodies. It is possible that Paul is drawing a simile to the well-known command 'love your neighbor as yourself.' But he is going to make a reference to the church being the body of Christ. Since a man will always, without training, know how to take care of his own body (bathing, eating, sleeping, etc.), Paul is telling husbands that the same zeal in which we take care of our bodies should be applied to loving our wives. Why? He goes on to tell us ... because no one ever hated his own body. Let me rephrase ... no MAN ever hated his own body lol! It is interesting that Paul uses the term σάρκα 'flesh' here ... perhaps in anticipation of his upcoming quotation of Genesis 2:24. Rather than hate his own flesh, a

¹ Hoehner, Harold W., *Ephesians, An Exegetical Commentary*, Baker Academic, Grand Rapids, MI, 2002.

husband naturally nourishes and cherishes it ... words depicting the careful upbringing of children. In the same manner as a man who loves his own flesh, Paul goes on to tell us that “Christ also loves the church.” This is why the church is often portrayed as His body. Christ nurtures and takes tender care of the church ... because we the church are members of His body.

One final interesting textual variant occurs at the end of verse 30 ... many of the extant manuscripts add the phrase “out of His flesh and out of His bones.” The compilers of the UBS 3 Greek text give a summary of the variants in the apparatus but only score the deletion in modern versions a B (A score of A would be the most confident score). For example, the KJV would have verse 30 as

For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones. (Eph 5:30 KJV)

One of these days I’ll do a month-long Sunday School class and introduce you to textual criticism. But for now, its interesting that the modern versions omit this phrase. I mean, it fits the context of the coming Genesis citation by Paul ... in that what was Adam’s expression after he saw Eve? ‘This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh.’

Ephesians 5:31–33

Now, why is it that a husband is to love his wife as his own body? Paul fires home the fact that when a husband takes a wife, “the two become one flesh.” This is not merely depicting the physical intimacy in the marriage relationship. The Greek translation is very interesting ... it literally means ... “the two into flesh ... one.” The two distinct human beings in some sense become one. This is why husbands should love their wives ... because they love their own body and they are now one flesh with their wives. This is a mystery ...

As Paul then states ... He says that this, the concept of the church being the body of Christ. We are his body, and in the latter parts of the book of Revelation, we will be His bride. Paul then summaries the section and reiterates the commands to husbands and wives. In this case, Paul says something slightly different ... he for husbands to love their wives as themselves but he tells the wives to respect their husbands. It is my conjecture that the word respect here is too mild a meaning for the word φοβέω. Typically, this word is translated ‘fear,’ and some translations actually use that English word here. However, the proper understanding I believe Paul is meaning here is the wife is to have reverence or respect, not for her husband as a person, but she is to have reverence or respect for his role in the household.

Application:

Clinton Arnold has such a good practical section on what it means for wives to submit to their husbands and husbands to love their wives as Christ loved the church.

Wives – what does it mean to submit?

- It does not mean that the wife loses her voice and decisions are made unilaterally
- It does not set the wife up for emotional, verbal, or physical abuse
- To receive her husband’s love, care, and provision
- To provide encouragement, support, and input to her husband’s initiatives to give vision and direction to the family
- To resist the temptation to ‘take control’
- To resist the impulse to undermine or complain about the leadership her husband provides
- To align her spending habits with the priorities she agreed upon with her husband for the vision and direction of the household

Husbands – what does it mean to love your wife as Christ loved the church

- To grow in a willingness to deny himself to ensure his wife’s well-being and care
- To care for her in a compassionate and loving way when she is sick
- To be willing to lovingly care for his wife as long as she would need it if she were to become disabled or terminally ill and could provide nothing to him in return
- To resist the impulse to spend money on things that are outside of the priorities that the two have established for the household

- To be vigilant to guard against tones and language that could wound his wife
- To spend regular quality time with his wife and consistently make her feel precious to him
- To take every precaution not to demean his wife by looking at other women in inappropriate ways and desiring them in his heart
- To deny himself of the desire to relax when his wife needs to talk or engage (e.g., turning off the sports channel when his wife has an emotional need he should attend to)
- To lead and not boss or rule
- To resist the temptation to any form of self-centered demanding
- To learn to discern his wife's needs and strive to meet them
- To recognize his wife's giftedness and identify ways to support her and give her opportunity to express her gifts
- To be responsible for seeking his wife's input on casting vision and direction for the family oriented around God's kingdom purposes
- To take the initiative in conflict resolution
- To concentrate on what this passage speaks about his role rather than to insist that his wife fulfill her role

Ephesians 5:25–33

²⁵ Οἱ ἄνδρες, ἀγαπᾶτε τὰς γυναῖκας, καθὼς καὶ ὁ Χριστὸς ἠγάπησεν τὴν ἐκκλησίαν καὶ ἑαυτὸν παρέδωκεν ὑπὲρ αὐτῆς,
The husbands, love the wives, just as also the Christ loved the church and Himself He gave on behalf of her,

²⁶ ἵνα αὐτὴν ἀγιάσῃ καθάρισας τῷ λουτρῷ τοῦ ὕδατος ἐν ῥήματι,
so that He might sanctify having cleansed the washing of the water in word,

²⁷ ἵνα παραστήσῃ αὐτὸς ἑαυτῷ ἔνδοξον τὴν ἐκκλησίαν, μὴ ἔχουσιν σπίλον ἢ ρυτίδα ἢ τι τῶν τοιούτων,
so that He might present her to Himself glorious the church, not having stain or wrinkle or any the such/thing,

ἀλλ' ἵνα ἡ ἀγία καὶ ἄμωμος.
but so that it might be holy and without blemish.

²⁸ οὕτως ὀφείλουσιν [καὶ] οἱ ἄνδρες ἀγαπᾶν τὰς ἑαυτῶν γυναῖκας ὡς τὰ ἑαυτῶν σώματα.
Thus so they ought also the husbands to love the of himself wives as the himself body.

ὁ ἀγαπῶν τὴν ἑαυτοῦ γυναῖκα ἑαυτὸν ἀγαπᾷ.
The one loving the himself wife himself loves,

²⁹ Οὐδεὶς γάρ ποτε τὴν ἑαυτοῦ σάρκα ἐμίσησεν ἀλλὰ ἐκτρέφει καὶ θάλπει αὐτήν, καθὼς καὶ ὁ Χριστὸς τὴν ἐκκλησίαν,
no one for ever the himself flesh hates but he nourishes and cherishes it, just as also Christ the church,

³⁰ ὅτι μέλη ἐσμὲν τοῦ σώματος αὐτοῦ.
so that members we are of the body of Him.

³¹ ἀντὶ τούτου καταλείπει ἄνθρωπος [τὸν] πατέρα καὶ [τὴν] μητέρα
For this shall leave a man the father and the mother

καὶ προσκολληθήσεται πρὸς τὴν γυναῖκα αὐτοῦ, καὶ ἔσονται οἱ δύο εἰς σάρκα μίαν.
and shall cleave to to the wife of him, and shall become the two into flesh one.

³² τὸ μυστήριον τοῦτο μέγα ἐστίν· ἐγὼ δὲ λέγω εἰς Χριστὸν καὶ εἰς τὴν ἐκκλησίαν.
the mystery this great it is, I but I speak into Christ and into the church.

³³ πλὴν καὶ ὑμεῖς οἱ καθ' ἓνα, ἕκαστος τὴν ἑαυτοῦ γυναῖκα οὕτως ἀγαπάτω ὡς ἑαυτόν, ἡ δὲ γυνὴ ἵνα φοβῆται τὸν ἄνδρα.
Nevertheless also you the to one, each the of him wife thus loves as himself, the and wife so might fear the husband.