



Ephesians - Chapter Five

IX Ephesians 4:25-5:2 - Rules for the New Life (continues/concludes)

Summary of Chapter Five

Paul writes of the practical applications of Gospel living with respect to what is expected of those who have come to Christ. Their lives should reflect the nature of God and Paul cites particularly the need to refrain from a whole host of sexual sins, including those that were part of secret pagan rituals, as well as avoiding listening to the idle talk of unbelievers, who may be seeking to lead them away from the Gospel truth.

Paul warns them to stay away from the darkness that is in the world but instead to seek the light that comes by being filled with Holy Spirit. This will lead them into songs of praise and thanksgiving, keeping them focused on what is good.

Paul then turns his attention to the responsibilities within the marriage union; the wife is called upon to subject herself to her husband out of respect for him as the head of the family, just as Christ is the head of the church. In return, the husband is to love, care and provide for his wife.

IX.b Ephesians 5:1-2 - Exhortation to self-sacrificial love

Paul calls on his readers to imitate God through the example of Christ's love.

¹ Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children, ² and live in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

Verses 1-2 were commented on at the end of Chapter Four as they concluded the major section being reviewed there.

Ephesians 5:3-20 - Renounce Pagan Ways

Paul gives general instructions on how Christians are to lead holy lives. He centres on wisdom in speech, sexual purity, associations, and other similar aspects of a thankful life.

³ But fornication and impurity of any kind, or greed, must not even be mentioned among you, as is proper among saints.

Ephesians 5:3

Fornication or sexual immorality is a general term, Greek *porneia*, and covers all sexual sins, including adultery, fornication, homosexuality, paedophilia, etc. Elsewhere Paul writes: <<***Shun fornication! Every sin that a person commits is outside the body; but the fornicator sins against the body itself***>> (1 Corinthians 6:18).

Greed or covetousness is a jealous longing for what others possess and was contrary to God's commandments: <<***You shall not covet your neighbour's house; you shall not covet your neighbour's wife, or male or female slave, or ox, or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbour***>> (Exodus 20:17), for it amounts to idolatry: <<***Put to death, therefore, whatever in you is earthly: fornication, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed (which is idolatry)***>> (Colossians 3:5).

Greed for money is often the downfall of many people: <<***For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, and in their eagerness to be rich some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pains***>> (1 Timothy 6:10). See also v.5.

Must not even be mentioned among you. Christians must be careful to guard their integrity and public reputation because public sin dishonours God, who has chosen them to be holy; refer to the comments on Ephesians 1:4.

As is proper among saints shows this is a lesson for the entire global church, everyone who would call on Jesus as their Lord.

⁴ Entirely out of place is obscene, silly, and vulgar talk; but instead, let there be thanksgiving.

Ephesians 5:4

Thanksgiving, in contrast to obscene, silly, and vulgar talk, is the positive way to speak, and it also counteracts covetousness (v.3). The way to avoid coveting others' possessions is to concentrate with thanks upon the good things the Lord has given (vv.19-20). This links to Paul's recent command: <<***Let no evil talk come out of your mouths, but only what is useful for building up, as there is need, so that your words may give grace to those who hear***>> (Ephesians 4:29).

These things mentioned here are useless, as well as a waste of time and effort. They only ever serve a negative purpose, which is to speak or act in an ugly way, whether as stupid humour or to ridicule others. Such 'jesting' suggests

turning any serious or good subject into a joke, which could be obscene or offensive, and making fun of others to pull them down.

⁵ Be sure of this, that no fornicator or impure person, or one who is greedy (that is, an idolater), has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.

Ephesians 5:5

Be sure of this. Paul is emphatic in his understanding of what will happen to those who continue to live inappropriate lifestyles, especially those who have made a profession of faith.

Idolater. Covetousness places one's ultimate allegiance in the acquisition of the possessions of others, which often leads to other grave sins, such as in 1 Kings 21:1-19. Paul says this is tantamount to idolatry; refer again to Colossians 3:5.

Inheritance here means that those that have been accepted as the children of God, a free gift of grace given to genuine believers in Christ: *<<In him you also, when you had heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and had believed in him, were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit; this is the pledge of our inheritance towards redemption as God's own people, to the praise of his glory>>* (Ephesians 1:13-14). The negative inference here shows that such people were not true believers.

Kingdom of Christ and of God. Paul speaks of Christ ruling now from the right hand of God: *<<Who is to condemn? It is Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us>>* (Romans 8:34), *<<Then comes the end, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father, after he has destroyed every ruler and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. For 'God has put all things in subjection under his feet.' But when it says, 'All things are put in subjection', it is plain that this does not include the one who put all things in subjection under him>>* (1 Corinthians 15:24-27), *<<God put this power to work in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the age to come. And he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church>>* (Ephesians 1:20-22), and: *<<So if you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God>>* (Colossians 3:1). Believers have already been brought into his redemptive Kingdom: *<<and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus>>* (Ephesians 2:6), and: *<<He has rescued us from the power of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins>>* (Colossians 1:13-14), although it will be consummated only at his Second Coming: *<<But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have died. For since death came through a human being, the resurrection of the dead has also come through a human being; for as all die in Adam, so all will be made alive in Christ. But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, then at his*

coming those who belong to Christ. Then comes the end, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father, after he has destroyed every ruler and every authority and power>> (1 Corinthians 15:20-24), and: <<In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I solemnly urge you: proclaim the message; be persistent whether the time is favourable or unfavourable; convince, rebuke, and encourage, with the utmost patience in teaching>> (2 Timothy 4:1-2). For Paul the Kingdom of God in its fullness is the eternal realm that believers will finally and fully enter through resurrection immortality: <<What I am saying, brothers and sisters, is this: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable>> (1 Corinthians 15:50), and: <<As you know, we dealt with each one of you like a father with his children, urging and encouraging you and pleading that you should lead a life worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory>> (1 Thessalonians 2:12), but it should also be experienced in some measure now in this age, through the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit: <<For the kingdom of God is not food and drink but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit>> (Romans 14:17).

What then is the difference between the Kingdom of Christ and of God? Paul spells it out: <<*But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. Then comes the end, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father, after he has destroyed every ruler and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. For 'God has put all things in subjection under his feet.'* But when it says, 'All things are put in subjection', it is plain that this does not include the one who put all things in subjection under him. When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to the one who put all things in subjection under him, so that God may be all in all>> (1 Corinthians 15:23-28). Therefore, what Paul is saying to the Ephesians is that, since Christ is King now and God the Father will be rightfully established as King in the age to come, not only will unbelievers fail to participate in the future Kingdom, they cannot be part of the present one established through the Cross either.

⁶ Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes on those who are disobedient.

Ephesians 5:6

Let no one deceive you because of these things. A common deception throughout church history has been the notion that professing Christians can lead unrepentant, sinful lives after conversion to Christ, refer to 2 Timothy 3:1-9, 2 Peter 2:1-3, Revelation 2:14 and 2:20, and not suffer the consequences. But these practices lead to the wrath of God in judgment, for example: <<*I gave her time to repent, but she refuses to repent of her fornication. Beware, I am throwing her on a bed, and those who commit adultery with her I am throwing into great distress, unless they repent of her doings; and I will strike her children dead. And all the churches will know that I am the one who searches minds and hearts, and I will give to each of you as your works deserve>> (Revelation 2:21-23).*

Those who are disobedient. This Hebrew-inspired phrase, often translated as 'sons of disobedience', describes people who habitually live in disobedient sin without repentance and thereby prove themselves to be children of the devil; refer to comments made on Ephesians 2:2 and 1 John 3:10. Jesus described the unbelieving Jews in this way: *<<You are from your father the devil, and you choose to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks according to his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies>>* (John 8:44), and likewise Judas as one destined to be lost to him: *<<While I was with them, I protected them in your name that you have given me. I guarded them, and not one of them was lost except the one destined to be lost, so that the scripture might be fulfilled>>* (John 17:12).

⁷ Therefore do not be associated with them.

Ephesians 5:7

Therefore do not be associated with them. Paul is not telling Christians to avoid all contact with nonbelievers but to avoid joining with them in their sin. It also means to avoid listening to or entering into debate with those who would try to lure believers away from the truth of the Gospel, as was Satan's main tactic: *<<Now the serpent was more crafty than any other wild animal that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, 'Did God say, "You shall not eat from any tree in the garden"?'>>* (Genesis 3:1).

⁸ For once you were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light. Live as children of light — ⁹ for the fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true.

Ephesians 5:8-9

For once you were darkness is a reference to the time before they had been taught about Jesus. This reveals a polar opposite to the character and nature of God that cannot coexist within a true believer's heart. Darkness after all represents fear, hate, lying and sin; all the activities that no decent human being would want to reveal but which can lie even within a believer's heart who has not fully come into the light and life of Jesus as the Christ. It is worth quoting the words from John's Gospel: *<<And this is the judgement, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed. But those who do what is true come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God'>>* (John 3:19-21). Those who walk in darkness but claim to have fellowship with God are either delusional, are certainly misguided or are perhaps in fellowship with something that is not of God. Satan still maintained contact with God but it cannot be termed fellowship: *<<One day the heavenly beings came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan also came among them. The Lord said to Satan, 'Where have you come from?' Satan answered the Lord, 'From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking up and down on it'>>* (Job 1:6-7).

In the Lord you are light. Jesus had taught this in the Sermon on the Mount: <<*You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hidden*>> (Matthew 5:14).

Live as children of light means to reflect God's perfection in the human sphere and includes both correct doctrine, that is, truth and moral purity, i.e. holiness. The symbolism of light as knowledge also implies that, when Christians 'live in the light', their lives will be known, and will not contain hidden sins, falsehoods or deception. Such walking in the light results in deep divine and human fellowship, and progressive cleansing from all sin: <<*This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light and in him there is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with him while we are walking in darkness, we lie and do not do what is true; but if we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin*>> (1 John 1:5-7).

C.S. Lewis once wrote: 'We believe that the sun is in the sky at midday in summer not because we can clearly see the sun (in fact, we cannot) but because we can see everything else'. Humans cannot see the light; but by and in the light they too can see everything else.

Fruit of the light is similar to fruit of the Spirit: <<*By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things*>> (Galatians 5:22-23).

¹⁰ Try to find out what is pleasing to the Lord.

Ephesians 5:10

The Bible gives general principles for life, but followers of Christ must use wisdom to try to find out how to apply those principles to the concrete issues of their lives. The book of Proverbs is of great help in this regard. Such wisdom may be defined as 'the skill of godly living', which one must thoughtfully discern, apply and practice in order to live in a way that is pleasing to the Lord. It was a phrase familiar to Paul and used extensively in Scriptures concerning ritual sacrifice, for example: <<*Every native Israelite shall do these things in this way, in presenting an offering by fire, a pleasing odour to the Lord*>> (Numbers 15:13). It was said of King Jeroboam's son Abijah: <<*All Israel shall mourn for him and bury him; for he alone of Jeroboam's family shall come to the grave, because in him there is found something pleasing to the Lord, the God of Israel, in the house of Jeroboam*>> (1 Kings 14:13), and of the restored nation of God: <<*Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the Lord as in the days of old and as in former years*>> (Malachi 3:4).

¹¹ Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them.

Ephesians 5:11

Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness. Believers are to refrain from the ways of the world and not engage in activities that oppose God's will and his ways, no matter how culturally acceptable they may have become: <<*Besides*

this, you know what time it is, how it is now the moment for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we became believers; the night is far gone, the day is near. Let us then lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armour of light>> (Romans 13:11-12), and: <<Do not be mismatched with unbelievers. For what partnership is there between righteousness and lawlessness? Or what fellowship is there between light and darkness?>> (2 Corinthians 6:14).

Expose means either to reprove or to convince through argument and discussion (v.13), at the same time taking great care not to gossip or to slander others. Instead, Christians should show by their lives and their wise interactions that the works of darkness are not to be ignored among God's holy people.

¹² For it is shameful even to mention what such people do secretly;
¹³ but everything exposed by the light becomes visible, ¹⁴ for everything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says,

‘Sleeper, awake!
Rise from the dead,
and Christ will shine on you.’

Ephesians 5:12-14

It is shameful even to mention. It does not matter whether a person wishes to discuss what is being done in secret either to bring it to light or to gossip about it, Paul is clear that it has no place in general discussion. However, this does not exclude it from forming the basis of a frank dialogue to bring a person back to the ways of Christ in love.

What such people do secretly is a reference to some of the pagan rituals and initiation rites that were common in Paul's day, things that were often undertaken during the cover of darkness and kept private. Compare this with Jesus, who always spoke openly and in public: *<<Jesus answered, ‘I have spoken openly to the world; I have always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where all the Jews come together. I have said nothing in secret’>> (John 18:20).*

Everything exposed by the light becomes visible is again very similar to the teaching of Jesus: *<<For there is nothing hidden, except to be disclosed; nor is anything secret, except to come to light>> (Mark 4:22).* The appearance of the light, which is truth, makes all these things obvious and seen very clearly for what they are. It also makes clear what their true purpose and end product are. That is why they are reprov'd or spoken against as dangerous and destructive sins.

It says. The quotation is not of any particular OT passage but is probably a combined reference to several, perhaps forming an early Christian poem or hymn, and probably inspired by Isaiah: *<<Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you>> (Isaiah 60:1).* Paul may also have been considering verses such as: *<<The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness – on them light has shined>> (Isaiah 9:2), and: <<Your dead shall live, their corpses shall rise. O dwellers in the dust, awake and sing for joy! For your dew is a radiant dew,*

and the earth will give birth to those long dead>> (Isaiah 26:19), adding Christ will shine on you to indicate the true benefit.

Here, Paul describes the Gentiles' former condition as spiritually asleep, as dead in their trespasses and sins. Nevertheless they were able to be awakened by the voice of Christ in the Gospel, and to recognise its mercy and truth. By accepting God's offer they were born again into the light of Christ and his salvation. Essentially, it is a call to wake up and rise up for God.

¹⁵ Be careful then how you live, not as unwise people but as wise,
¹⁶ making the most of the time, because the days are evil.

Ephesians 5:15-16

Be careful then how you live. The believer is not to continue life oblivious to the consequences of their actions or the lifestyle choices they are making. They are to constantly monitor what they are doing and measure it against the teaching of Jesus.

Not as unwise people could be a reference to their pagan neighbours or those of faith who are falling back into old ways. The prophet used a similar description for the ten northern tribes of Israel before they were removed from their land by the Assyrians: <<*Ephraim's iniquity is bound up; his sin is kept in store. The pangs of childbirth come for him, but he is an unwise son; for at the proper time he does not present himself at the mouth of the womb*>> (Hosea 13:12-13).

Making the most of the time. The phrase translates the Greek *exagorazō*, which can also mean 'redeem' or 'purchase'. Christians must actively take advantage of the opportunity to do good: <<*So teach us to count our days that we may gain a wise heart*>> (Psalm 90:12). Wisdom is especially needed in an evil age where the pathway of holiness is not always immediately clear until one reflects on God's Word and discerns his holy will.

This concept could lead people to an obsessive lifestyle, calculating and counting every minute, and giving oneself and everyone else no peace. Any person who finds themselves in such a situation needs to know that it is OK just to relax in God's grace and provision, bathe in his peace, and to allow him to lead rather than them trying to strive to achieve everything.

¹⁷ So do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.

Ephesians 5:17

So do not be foolish describes those who act like madmen, as in a drunken stupor, irrational and out of control. This must be always avoided.

Understand the will of the Lord. This does not mean that a person tries to discern God's secret counsel, his 'hidden will', but that he applies God's general guidelines for life as found in the Bible, his 'revealed will': <<*The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the revealed things belong to us and to our children for ever, to observe all the words of this law*>> (Deuteronomy 29:29).

¹⁸ Do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery; but be filled with the Spirit, ¹⁹ as you sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs among yourselves, singing and making melody to the Lord in your hearts, ²⁰ giving thanks to God the Father at all times and for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Ephesians 5:18-20

Do not get drunk is sensible teaching, for drunkenness leads to loss of control, especially with regard to making rational choices.

Wine was the staple drink of the ancient Mediterranean world and was fermented in order to preserve it from turning into vinegar. It was viewed as a gift from God and something to be enjoyed in moderation: <<Go, *eat your bread with enjoyment, and drink your wine with a merry heart; for God has long ago approved what you do*>> (Ecclesiastes 9:7).

Be filled with the Spirit. As earlier in 4:28, Paul expresses a negative exhortation, what the saints are to stop doing, along with a positive command, what the saints are to start doing. Whereas alcoholic spirits can control the mind and ruin one's judgment and sense of propriety, leading to debauchery, in contrast with this, being filled with the Spirit leads to self-control along with the other fruits of 'love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, and gentleness' as Paul records in Galatians 5:22-23 and referred to earlier in the chapter. The command in Greek, *plērousthe*, is a present imperative and does not describe a onetime 'filling' but a regular pattern of life.

Being filled with the Spirit is a positive action as it results in joyful praise through singing and making melody to the Lord. This may refer to different kinds of psalms and hymns and spiritual songs found in the OT Psalter. It seems more likely, however, that Paul is referring both to the canonical psalms and to contemporary compositions of praise. Paul continues his thoughts in the contemporaneous letter sent to Colossæ: <<Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God>> (Colossians 3:16).

Spiritual communicates the influence of the Holy Spirit's filling in the believer's acts of praise.

At all times and for everything shows just how bountiful God is in his giving to those who belong to him and that the correct response is just to give thanks day by day or hour by hour rather than just on a Sunday morning. And singing songs of praise, whether out loud or in the heart, is an excellent way of actually practising one's faith. It is one of the best ways of keeping any unhelpful thoughts out of the mind and focusing on God in all things.

The singing that Paul has in mind is the ultimate antidote to living in the darkness of immorality that pervades the surrounding world. Yet again his emphasis is on the mind, and the need for wisdom. It is vital not to slide along through life in a general foolish haze, hoping things will work out all right but

not being prepared to think them through, to figure out where this or that type of behaviour will really lead.

To pray in the name of Jesus means to pray in faith, trusting in him as the mediator with God the Father on 'the throne of grace': <<*Jesus said to him, 'I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me'*>> (John 14:6), <<*Let us therefore approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need*>> (Hebrews 4:16), and: <<*Therefore, my friends, since we have confidence to enter the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain (that is, through his flesh)*>> (Hebrews 10:20).

Praying in Jesus' name means praying in a way consistent with his character and his will, for a person's name in the ancient world represented the person's key characteristics; it also means coming to God in the authority of Jesus. Probably both senses are intended here. Adding: 'in the name of Jesus' at the end of every prayer is neither required nor wrong. Effective prayer must ask for and desire what Jesus delights in.

XI Ephesians 5:21-6:9 - Submission to One Another

Submission is illustrated in various family relationships: wives/husbands in vv.22-33, children/parents in 6:1-4, and servants/masters in 6:5-9. Paul addresses very similar issues in Colossians 3:18-25.

XI.a Ephesians 5:21-33 - The Christian Household

The first example of general submission (v.21) is illustrated as Paul exhorts wives to submit to their husbands (vv.22-24 and v.33). Husbands, on the other hand, are not told to submit to their wives but to love them (vv.25-33).

XI.a.i Ephesians 5:21 - Submission in general

Verse 21 is transitional, connecting with the previous section and leading to what follows.

²¹ Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ.

Ephesians 5:21

Grammatically, be subject to or submitting is a participle in Greek and is dependent on the verb in v.15. It explains further how to walk in wisdom since vv.15-21 are one long sentence in Greek. It also states a general principle of submission, which is illustrated in 5:22-6:9. Absolute 'mutual submission' is popular today, particularly where egalitarian philosophies are the rule. But what Paul meant by submitting to one another is explained through the particular examples of family relationships (5:22-6:4), so it is likely that being subject to one another means 'submitting to others according to the authority and order established by God', as reflected in the examples that Paul gives in the following verses.

XI.a.ii Ephesians 5:22-33 - Wives and husbands

Paul deals with the relationship between men and women within the context of marriage. Although it was the cultural norm for wives to 'obey' their husbands he is careful to use a different term, calling them to submit or be subject to. This is more in line with the creation account of social ordering which speaks of equality and partnership within the different gender roles.

Paul associates the ordering within a marriage to the relationship that needs to be applied to Christ and his church. As the head of the church, Jesus has the authority to which all believers are called to submit.

²² Wives, be subject to your husbands as you are to the Lord.

Ephesians 5:22

Wives, be subject to your husbands. Paul's first example of general submission from v.21 is the right ordering of the marriage relationship, as Paul confirms: <<*Wives, be subject to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord*>> (Colossians 3:18). In 1 Peter 3:1-7, the apostle also gives a similar summary of the marriage relationship.

The submission of wives is not like the obedience children owe parents, nor does this text command all women to submit to all men, i.e. to your husbands, not to all husbands! Both genders are equally created in God's image: <<*Then God said, 'Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.' So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them*>> (Genesis 1:26-27), and heirs together of eternal life: <<*There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise*>> (Galatians 3:28-29). This submission is in deference to the ultimate leadership of the husband for the health and harmonious working of the marriage relationship.

As you are to the Lord assumes the natural subjection that a Christian has to their Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

²³ For the husband is the head of the wife just as Christ is the head of the church, the body of which he is the Saviour. ²⁴ Just as the church is subject to Christ, so also wives ought to be, in everything, to their husbands.

Ephesians 5:23-24

The husband is the head of the wife. This is the grounds of the wife's submission to her husband and is modelled on Christ's headship over the church. Just as Christ's position as head of the church and its Saviour does not vary from one culture to another, neither does the headship of a husband in relation to his wife and her duty to submit to her husband in everything.

Paul is not suggesting here that a man should dominate a woman in the marriage relationship but is designed by God to be the provider and is also to set an example to her by the way he conducts his own life.

Head, Greek *kephalē*, here clearly refers to a husband's authority over his wife and cannot mean 'source', as some have argued. In fact, there is no sense in which husbands are the source of their wives either physically or spiritually. In addition, in over 50 examples of *kephalē* in ancient Greek literature, with the idea 'person A is the head of person(s) B', person A has authority over person(s) B in every case: <<**And he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church**>> (Ephesians 1:22), <<**and you have come to fullness in him, who is the head of every ruler and authority**>> (Colossians 2:10). Refer also to the comments made on 1 Corinthians 11:3.

²⁵ Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, ²⁶ in order to make her holy by cleansing her with the washing of water by the word, ²⁷ so as to present the church to himself in splendour, without a spot or wrinkle or anything of the kind – yes, so that she may be holy and without blemish.

Ephesians 5:25-27

Love. Paul now turns to the duty of husbands. He does not command the husband to submit to his wife but instead tells the husband that he must give himself up for her. Thus, husbands are to love their wives in a self-sacrificial manner, following the example of Christ as their role model in husbandry, who gave himself up for the church in loving self-sacrifice. Clearly, the biblical picture of a husband laying down his life for his wife is directly opposed to any kind of male tyranny or oppression. The husband is bound by love to ensure that his wife finds their marriage a source of rich fulfilment and joyful service to the Lord. Notably, Paul devotes three times more space to the husband's duty, nine verses, than to the wife's, three verses.

The focus in these verses is on Christ, for husbands do not sanctify or make their wives holy or cleanse them of their sins, although they are to do all in their power to promote their wives' holiness. Make holy here means to consecrate into the Lord's service through cleansing.

Paul, of course, lived in a world where women were not only regarded as lesser beings but, as often as not, as impure. Their regular bodily functions were deemed to make them dangerous for a man who wanted to maintain his own purity. Paul sees the action of Jesus and, by the parallel he has set up, the action of the husband, as taking the responsibility to bring the wife to full purity. Instead of rejecting the wife at times of technical impurity, the husband is to cherish and take care of her, to look after her and let her know at all times that she is loved and valued. If husbands, not least Christian husbands, had even attempted to live up to this wonderful ideal, there would be a lot less grumbling about bossy or bullying men in the world today.

Paul assumes, as do most cultures, that there are significant differences between men and women; differences that go far beyond mere biological and

reproductive function. Their relationships and roles must therefore be mutually complementary, rather than identical. Equality in voting rights, and in employment opportunities and remuneration, which is still not a reality in many countries, should not be taken to imply such identity. And, within marriage, the guideline is clear. The husband is to take the lead, although he is to do so fully mindful of the self-sacrificial model which Christ has provided. As soon as 'taking the lead' becomes bullying or arrogant, the whole thing collapses.

The washing of water. This might be a reference to baptism, since it is common in the Bible to speak of invisible, spiritual things, in this case, spiritual cleansing, by pointing to an outward physical sign of them: <<*Do you not know that all of us who have been baptised into Christ Jesus were baptised into his death? Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life*>> (Romans 6:3-4). In John's Gospel, Jesus frequently speaks in terms of the visible, physical world: birth, water, bread, his body, and light, to teach about the unseen spiritual world.

There may also be a link here to Ezekiel 16:1-13, where the Lord washes infant Israel, raises her, and eventually elevates her to royalty and marries her, which would correspond to present the church to himself in splendour at his marriage supper: <<*I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you*>> (Ezekiel 36:25), and: <<*Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready; to her it has been granted to be clothed with fine linen, bright and pure' – for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints. And the angel said to me, 'Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.'* And he said to me, 'These are true words of God'>> (Revelation 19:7-9).

This is also representative of the way women were prepared to be a consort to the king in ancient times, as described in: <<*The turn came for each girl to go in to King Ahasuerus, after being twelve months under the regulations for the women, since this was the regular period of their cosmetic treatment, six months with oil of myrrh and six months with perfumes and cosmetics for women*>> (Esther 2:12).

Without blemish. The church's utter holiness and moral perfection will be consummated in resurrection glory, but is derived from the consecrating sacrifice of Christ on the Cross. This is not so much about the perfect physical state of the resurrection body, but alludes to the inner perfection that mankind could never attain to in their mortal, inherently sinful bodies.

²⁸ In the same way, husbands should love their wives as they do their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. ²⁹ For no one ever hates his own body, but he nourishes and tenderly cares for it, just as Christ does for the church, ³⁰ because we are members of his body.

Ephesians 5:28-30

Paul reiterates a husband's calling to self-sacrificial love for his wife by comparing this love with regard for one's own body, i.e. their own bodies, himself, and then to Christ's love for his body. This makes it quite explicit that the body for which Christ sacrificed himself was not his own person but the body which is the church.

That a man should love his wife as his own body can also be seen as a reference to the fact that woman was originally created out of man: <<So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then he took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. And the rib that the Lord God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man>> (Genesis 2:21-22). Originally, the first woman came from man but since then, as ordained by God's method of procreation, all men have come from women: <<For just as woman came from man, so man comes through woman; but all things come from God>> (1 Corinthians 11:12).

In the cultural context of Paul's day it should be remembered that both Greeks and Romans thought highly of their physical bodies and would frequently display themselves naked, whether in sporting contests or during orgies.

³¹ 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.'

Ephesians 5:31

The command for a husband to love his wife as he loves <<*his own body*>> (v.29), originates in the creation reality that God joins husbands and wives together to become one flesh. Paul's quotation is from Genesis 2:24, speaking of marriage before there was any sin in the world, and is referenced several times in the NT: <<He answered, 'Have you not read that the one who made them at the beginning "made them male and female", and said, "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh"?'>> (Matthew 19:4-5), <<"For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." So they are no longer two, but one flesh>> (Mark 10:7-8), and: <<Do you not know that whoever is united to a prostitute becomes one body with her? For it is said, 'The two shall be one flesh'>> (1 Corinthians 6:16).

³² This is a great mystery, and I am applying it to Christ and the church. ³³ Each of you, however, should love his wife as himself, and a wife should respect her husband.

Ephesians 5:32-33

By mystery Paul means the hidden plan of God that has come to fulfilment in Christ Jesus: <<he has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ>> (Ephesians 1:9), <<and how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I wrote above in a few words, a reading of which will enable you to perceive my understanding of the mystery of Christ>> (Ephesians 3:3-4), and: <<Pray also for me, so that when I speak, a message may be given to me to make known with boldness the
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mystery of the gospel>> (Ephesians 6:19), thus his quotation about marriage from Genesis Chapter 2 in v.31 ties in to the relationship between Christ and his church.

The proper response to God's institution of marriage and the clearly stated nature of the relationship must be a permanent bond of unity. Every man, in particular, is called upon to **love his wife as himself**. All the love that he can give to his wife will also benefit him, benefitting them together. The wife is called upon to **respect her husband**. This includes respect for his greater strength as he protects and provides for her, the created order of things that is not so prevalent in modern western cultures. Other than this they are equal in value and all rights, irrespective of their cultural background or era.

Paul's meaning is profound: he interprets the original creation of the husband and wife union as itself modelled on Christ's forthcoming union with the church as his 'body' (v.23). Therefore, marriage from the beginning of creation, as recorded in Genesis Chapter 1, was created by God to be a reflection of and patterned after Christ's relationship to the church. Thus Paul's commands regarding the roles of husbands and wives do not merely reflect the culture of his day but present God's ideal for all marriages at all times, as exemplified by the relationship between the bride of Christ, the church, and Christ himself, the Son of God: <<*Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death – even death on a cross. Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father*>> (Philippians 2:5-11).