

Exegesis of Ephesians 5 (With Focus on the Section on Marriage)

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In our first session of study of chapter five of St. Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians, which we undertook at our May conference, we worked through the first twenty-one verses of this chapter. Our task in this session is to complete our study of this chapter, and so during the course of this session we will be taking up the study of verses 22-33, in which we have Paul's great section on marriage that for the good of our Christian homes and for the honor of God every Christian couple would do well to come to a thorough understanding of and to regularly contemplate.

Since this section should, of course be considered in the context of what has gone before in this chapter, especially since the things Paul has already said to this chapter are in many ways related and foundational to what he is now going to say in the rest of the chapter, a summary overview of the chapter is in order at this point, and not only of verses 1-21, but also of verses 22-33 together with verses 1-21, so that the connection is plainly evident as we take up these latter verses.

This chapter contains a number of admonitions which may be grouped as follows: Verses 1-5: Admonition to walk as God's children in Christ-like, self-giving love which seeks to help others; hence to avoid all manner of immoral sexual behavior whether in deed, thought, or word, such behavior being contrary to the love in which we are to walk, flowing instead from greed, and excluding those who walk therein from God's kingdom. Verses 6-10: Admonition not to be deceived by unbelieving, ungodly man who promote walking in immoral sexual behavior, for those who do walk in the works of darkness and do not repent are indeed under the wrath of God and will thus receive damnation. Verses 11-14: Admonition to walk as children of light, and to reprove the unbelievers and ungodly, thus seeking to win them from their contrary walk to Christ, to the end that they too may come to the light that is to be found in him and receive his salvation with us. Verses 15-21: Admonition to walk wisely for the sake of the eternal welfare of all concerned, the unconverted around us, as well as our fellow-Christians around us, endeavoring to bring the unconverted to faith and to edify our fellow-Christians in the faith.

Moving on from admonishing us as to how we are to walk toward our fellowmen in general, Paul now proceeds to the matter of relations in our homes. Verses 22-33: Admonition to spouses concerning their duties toward each other according to their relative stations in marriage. Here then, Paul turns our attention to the holy estate of marriage, in which God's good gift of sex finds its proper God-directed, God-pleasing, wholesome meaningful fulfillment in the bonds of wedded love and faithfulness, in the most salutary contradistinction to the sexual immorality of which Paul has spoken earlier in this chapter which God abhors and condemns and from which men should flee to Christ for forgiveness.

From this summary overview of the chapter we see then that it is upon the important related groundwork laid in verses 1-21 that Paul proceeds in verses 22 and following to deal with the subject of marriage.

Also, in preparing to take up the study of verses 22-33, we must now look particularly at the last sentence before those verses, and consider this sentence as it stands in the most immediate context of that great section on marriage, The apostle writes in this sentence which runs through

Verses 18-21, AND BE NOT DRUNK WITH WINE, WHEREIN IS EXCESS: BUT BE FILLED WITH THE SPIRIT SPEAKING TO YOURSELVES IN PSALMS AND HYMNS AND SPIRITUAL SONGS, SINGING AND MAKING MELODY IN YOUR HEART TO THE LORD. GIVING THANKS ALWAYS FOR ALL THINGS UNTO GOD AND THE FATHER IN THE NAME OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST SUBMITTING YOURSELVES ONE TO ANOTHER IN REVERENCE OF CHRIST.

Though this sentence is not directed first of all to spouses in regard to their conduct in marriage in particular, but is, to begin with, directed to Christians in general in regard to their association with one another, it should not, however, be taken as having no direct and intended relation to the coming section on marriage, as though there is a break of thought, and as though Paul, in taking up the subject of marriage in verses 22-33, is going on into something quite apart from what he has been talking about in this previous sentence. Not at all. On the contrary, this sentence constitutes also Paul's purposeful approach into his discussion of marriage. For though everything that Paul says in the sentence of verses 18-21 applies, of course, to Christians in general, also apart from marriage and the home, all he says here speaks in a very important way also to husband and wife in particular as far as their marriage and home is concerned, and Paul would certainly have them discern this and thus apply what he says here to their own situation. It is to the great good of their home as well as to the honor of God that they should do this. Indeed, what good will result for their marriage and their home if both husband and wife practice together all these things called for in this sentence, i.e., if both husband and wife, rather than being drunk with wine, conduct themselves in Christian sobriety in the Holy Ghost, being filled with in the Spirit intent on surrendering themselves to his blessed sway; if both seek to edify one another in the faith through Psalms, through Christian hymnody, and the like based on God's Word, if they both endeavor to radiate Christian cheerfulness; if they both strive to maintain a spirit of Christian thankfulness in all things, if they both practice the proper Christian humility toward each other! As these things are cultivated by husband and wife, it will help them immeasurably in overcoming all manner of problems and difficulties which may come into their marriage and home and in making their home the kind of home the Lord would have it be, a truly Christian home which will be useful for the Lord's cause, and where much joy will be found in Him.

Having made these over-all observations in regard to this sentence, there is one statement in particular of this sentence that we should now consider in greater depth in relation to the section on marriage which follows, since this statement constitutes the very basis of and entrance into Paul's discussion in regard to marriage, and that is the last statement of this previous sentence, namely, verse 21, which says,

Verse 21, SUBMITTING YOURSELVES ONE TO ANOTHER IN REVERENCE OF CHRIST

Let us note first of all here that since this admonition, "Submitting yourselves one to another in reverence of Christ," is a blanket admonition intended for all Christians to observe toward one another, it follows that it is also an admonition which Christian husbands and wives are to observe toward one another. Thus, as they read this admonition of verse 21, they are to know even before they go into Paul's great section on marriage that a mutual self-submission is to characterize their association among themselves too. With his next words following verse 21 Paul will then proceed to show husbands and wives how this admonition to mutual self-submission should be carried out on the part of each toward the other, i.e. in what manner they should each practice submission toward the other, for there is a difference in the manner.

One is, of course, aware that there are those who would take exception to what has just been stated. They note that Paul goes on to assert, as indeed Scripture does throughout, that the husband is the head of the wife, and that the wife is to be in subjection to the headship of her husband, which we agree is certainly true. And on the basis of this they reason that it would therefore be incongruous and wrong to say that the husband should also practice submission toward his wife, and that therefore it should not be said that there is to be a mutual self-submission of husband-and wife toward each other in marriage.

But we would observe that in reasoning thus one has not really heard out what Paul is saying here in verse 21 to all Christians, and has not caught what God's Word is indeed saying therefore also to both husbands and wives, yes, also to husbands, namely that there is indeed to be a mutual self-submission on the part of each toward the other, including on the part of husbands toward their wives, and this in reverence of Christ. And a little further consideration will show that there really is not the incongruity in connection with this matter that one might have at the first thought there to be; a paradox, yes, that the husband who is the head of the wife, and therefore in authority over her, should also practice self-submission toward his wife, and that not only should

she submit herself to him; a paradox, but not an incongruity; a paradox with a wonderful resolution. And that resolution will be reflected by Paul throughout his section on as he there shows the different manners in which each spouse is to practice self-submission toward the other.

Key to hearing Paul out and to catching what he is really saying is a proper understanding of the meaning, of the verb ὑποτάσσω, “to place or arrange under,” and thus “to submit,” of which the word ὑποτασσόμενοι “submitting,” here in verse 21, is the nominative plural masculine participle present middle. This word need not always be understood, nor should it always be, as having the sense of subjecting one’s self to authority, i.e., in the sense of obedience; for while it does indeed sometimes have that sense, it also sometimes has the sense of lovingly and humbly placing one’s self beneath others in the interest of working their welfare, of seeking their good even ahead of one’s own, of serving others in humility and love, but without any implication of obedience on the part of the one thus submitting. This kind of submission that verse 21 calls upon all Christians to observe toward one another, and therefore also upon husbands to observe toward their wives — this kind of submission a husband can observe toward his wife, and still retain his headship and carry out the rule over his wife which God expects him to carry out, and so there is no incongruity here. In fact, if a husband practices this kind of submission toward his wife, even his rule is then carried out as lowly-minded, loving service, which is what God intends, and it will not be exercised in a self-seeking, high-handed, domineering, arrogant manner as “lording it over” her, of which God disapproves.

Concerning the fact that ὑποτάσσω in the New Testament has these two senses, the one involving obedience to authority, the other not, some the one, sometimes the other, depending on one’s station in life, is indicated in the Arndt & Gingrich *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* where under ὑποτάσσω it is noted that in some passages it is used in the sense “of actual subordination to persons worthy of respect: toward the husband,” (and then Eph 5:22; Col 3:16; Tit 2:5; and 1 Pe 3:1,5 are entered, all of these being passages referring to the wife’s submission), and that in other passages it is used “of submission in the sense of voluntary yielding in love,” (and then 1 Co 16:16; Eph 5:21—the very passage with which we are dealing, and 1 Pe 5:5 are entered as passages in which ὑποτάσσω is used in this latter sense).

Kittel’s *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* also says the following pertinent to our discussion of ὑποτάσσω: “For a material understanding of the verb in the NT its considerable range of meaning should be noted, especially in the middle.” And let us note that it is the middle we have before us here in verse 21 with the form ὑποτασσόμενοι. Kittel continues: “Originally it is a hierarchical term which stresses the relation to superiors. But one should note that the subordination expressed may be either compulsory or voluntary. ... In the NT the verb does not immediately carry with it the thought of obedience.” Then, having spoken of the instances in which ὑποτάσσω does carry with it the thought of obedience, Kittel says, “The remaining use of ὑποτάσσομαι in the NT exhortation suggest that the general rule demands readiness to renounce one’s own will for the sake of others, i.e., ἀγάπη and to give precedence to others.” (See ADDENDUM for more from Kittel in regard to this matter.)

Such submitting which Paul here calls for in verse 21, “Submitting yourselves one to another in reverence of Christ,” is the same kind of submitting which he calls for in other wards in Philippians 2:3-4 where he says, “Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but also on the things of others.” It is the same kind of submitting which he calls for when he says in Romans 12:10, “Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love, in honor preferring one another.” It is the same kind of submission which he calls for when in Galatians 5:13 he says, “By love serve one another.”

Now, understanding Paul’s admonition which he makes to all Christians here in verse 21, “submitting yourselves one to another in reverence of Christ,” to mean that they should in lowliness of mind and love seek the good of one another even as their very own, yes, even before their own, then his words that we should do this “in reverence of Christ” break forth in exceedingly rich and strongly winsome meaning. Did not Christ, the eternal Son of God, who became also true man—did not Christ, the God-man, who is Lord over us all, do this very kind of submitting in relation to all of us? Philippians 2:5-8 states the whole matter about which we are

speaking very well, “Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.” So does our Lord himself state this whole matter very well in Mark 10 when, in seeking to correct the sinful ambition of his disciples to “lord it over” others in his kingdom, he instructs them that while the rulers of the Gentiles “lord it over” those under them in their kingdoms, such a spirit should not be found among them (his disciples) in his kingdom, but an entirely different spirit should obtain and prevail among them, saying, “But so shall it not be among you: but whosoever will be great among you, shall be your minister: And whosoever of you will be chiefest, shall be servant of all for even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.” (Mk 10:43-45). We look at him, our Lord, in the upper room in Jerusalem on the night of his betrayal. We behold the humble, loving service that he, the Lord over all, renders the disciples, as he gets down on his knees on the floor, puts the basin down in front of him, and then proceeds to wash the feet of his disciples, one disciple after the other, drying their feet with the apron (or towel) he had put on for that purpose. That menial servant task he, their very Lord and Master, performs, which any one of the disciples might have volunteered to do, but none had been inclined to submit himself to do that lowly task. Peter thinks it is utterly beneath his Lord to perform that task, and would refuse to let Jesus put himself below him like that. But then comes Jesus’ reply to him, “If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me.” We know what Jesus meant by that, pointing to that far more important, yes, absolutely indispensable washing which was necessary for Peter and all of us, which He our glorious and gracious Lord, Very God of Very God, and also true man, with unsearchable love and lowliness of mind went about providing in our stead the next day, when in marvelous self-forgetfulness, thinking only of our need and welfare, he poured out his infinitely precious life-blood to wash us “clean every wit”! What deep self-submission toward us beyond comprehension that for our eternal good he the Lord of life, stooped down before us and took up the burden of all our sin and bore them all to the cross and then atoned for them all by giving his life into death as “a sacrifice to God for a sweet smelling savor” as the second verse of the chapter we are studying puts it! And now he who washed his disciples’ feet says, “Know ye what I have done to you? Ye call me Master and Lord: and ye say well” for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Master have washed your feet; ye ought also to wash one another’s feet. For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you. Verily, verily, I say unto you, the servant is not greater than his lord, neither he that is sent greater than he that sent him. If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them.” (Jn 13:1-17). And we do know these things; we know what he means. And how can we but be deeply moved to” fear, awe, reverence of him, and thus stirred, warmed, and inspired by his example now to practice the same self-submission toward one another, in lowliness of mind and in love serving one another, having one another’s needs and welfare foremost at heart, even before our very own!

“Submitting yourselves one to another in reverence of Christ, so writes Paul here in verse 21. Indeed! “In reverence of Christ!” Reverence not only in respect to this that he is our mighty Lord over us, but also that he is this kind of Lord who served us in that profound self-submission on which we have reflected such reverence is to move all Christians to the same kind of self-submission one to another; and that goes also for husbands in regard to their wives. And no, there is nothing incongruous about that. No more than there was something incongruous about Christ’s submission to serve us in our need! He still remained Lord completely! Even so, the husband still remains head, and nothing of his headship is surrendered, yielded, or even compromised, by his practicing this kind of self-submission toward his wife. The rather, as before indicated, it is actually only through this kind of submission that a husband can carry out his headship in the home in the manner in which he should, as we shall see further as we study the section on marriage which we have before us in verses 22-33.

We have dealt with this matter concerning the understanding of the word ὑποτάσσω at as much length as we have because of the fact that there has been much misunderstanding even among conservative Lutheran exegetes concerning what Paul is saying with this statement, “submitting yourselves one to another in reverence

of Christ,” whereby they have not seen that there is indeed also a manner in which this is to be applied to husbands in regard to their wives, i.e., that they too should practice self-submission toward their wives, but have asserted that since the husband is the head of the wife he is therefore not to practice self-submission toward her, and have indicated that verse 21 therefore is not really integrally related to what follows in verses 22-33, but rather is to be construed as being coordinated particularly with what has preceded. In that misunderstanding they miss an important part of what Paul has in mind in verse 21 especially as it relates to all that follows in his section on marriage and at the same time they fail to see the thorough unity of this chapter throughout.

We are now ready to proceed and consider this great section on marriage and the home, the admonitions of which all spouses should consider with truly sanctified ears and hearts, and to which for God’s honor and the good of their homes they ought to consecrate themselves to wholeheartedly fulfill. As we consider this section we shall find Paul showing, as before said, in what manner the admonition of verse 21, “Submitting yourselves one to another in reverence of Christ,” should be carried out on the part of each the husband and the wife toward the other, there being, of course, a difference in the manner as we noted.

First he takes up first the entire manner in which the wife should submit herself toward her husband, saying in

Verse 22, WIVES, SUBMIT YOURSELVES UNTO YOUR OWN HUSBANDS, AS UNTO THE LORD

The close connection of this verse with the foregoing verse is seen from the fact that the verb “submit” is not again repeated here in the Greek of verse 22, but must be supplied from the previous verse. Thus what in the Greek of verse 22 merely reads, “Wives to your own husbands as to the Lord,” by the necessary supplying of “submit” from the previous verse, reads in the English, “Wives submit yourselves to your own husbands as to the Lord.”

So now first Paul here directly and specifically speaks to the wives about the fact that they are to submit themselves to their husbands. Of course, every facet of submission which verse 21 urges upon Christians in general to observe toward one another, is to be observed by wives toward their husbands too—the lowliness of mind, the refraining from selfish interest and self-seeking, the love which seeks the advantage of the other before one’s own, and so forth. But Paul in telling the wives that they are to submit themselves unto their own husbands *as unto the Lord* (ὡς τῷ κυρίῳ), by the words “as unto the Lord” immediately lays it upon the hearts of the wives that their submission to their husbands involves more than the submission which all Christians should observe toward one another spoken of in verse 21. For since they are to submit themselves unto their own husbands “as unto the Lord,” i.e., in the same manner as we submit ourselves unto the Lord, their submission unto their husbands involves respecting their husbands as being in authority over them, it involves, obedience to their husbands. Paul himself makes plain that that is what he means by saying that the wives should submit themselves to their own husbands, “as unto the Lord,” as he now goes on to say in

Verse 23, FOR THE HUSBAND IS THE HEAD OF THE WIFE, EVEN AS CHRIST IS THE HEAD OF THE CHURCH, AND HE IS THE SAVIOR OF THE BODY

The husband is the head (κεφαλή) of the wife because God has made him the head even as God also “gave Christ to be the head over all things to the church.” (Ephesians 1:22). By saying that the husband is the head of the wife, Paul points to the order between man and wife established by God already at the creation. He made Adam first, and then from Adam he made Eve, and he ordained that Adam should have the headship over Eve, and that she should be in obedience to him. This order stands from the creation down to the end of time, as God himself affirms throughout all of Scripture, including also here through Paul in these words under consideration.

Now, the husband is the head of the wife, *even as Christ is the head of the church*, says Paul. Christ as head of the church is in charge in the church. He gives the directions for the church. He guides the church. Even so, it is the husband's responsibility to be in charge in the home, to give the directions for the home, to do the guiding there. That is why the wife is to submit herself obediently unto her husband as unto the Lord, because the husband has the same relative position of headship over her as Christ has over the church.

Christ's headship over the church is, of course, a most benevolent headship, and Paul is quick to note that, adding, "For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church, and *he is the Savior of the body* (αὐτὸς σωτήρ τοῦ σώματος)." By "the body" Paul, of course, has reference to the church. Elsewhere, too, he calls the church Christ's body, as in Colossians 1:18, where concerning Christ he says, "And he is the head of the body, the church," and in Ephesians 1:22, where he says that God "gave him to be the head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him that filleth all in all." By calling the church *Christ's body*, Paul brings out the closeness of the church to her Lord, the mystical union of the heavenly bridegroom with his bride, the church. And by saying that he is *the Savior* of the body Paul brings out the concern of Christ for his church as he rules over her. Indeed, He gives all the directions that he does, and does all the guiding which He does, for the church's welfare, that the church might be delivered from all harm and danger and have his help and salvation and be kept in safety with him. Paul's remark here about Christ being the Savior of the body speaks clearly as to what should also be the nature of the headship of the husband over the wife. The husband's rule is also to be one of benevolent concern for the welfare of his wife and home. From that concern all of the directions he gives and all the guiding he does should flow. Paul will say more concerning the nature of the husband's headship over the wife and home in short order, as he moves on from what he has to say in regard to the wives in particular. And he will also then take up the matter of the God created closeness between husband and wife, toward which he is thinking in connection with his remark in which he referred to the church as Christ's body, by which he brought out the closeness between Christ and his church. But before he does so he first completes the words of admonition which he has here concerning the wives in particular, saying

Verse 24, THEREFORE AS THE CHURCH IS SUBJECT UNTO CHRIST, SO LET THE WIVES BE TO THEIR OWN HUSBANDS IN EVERYTHING

Christ's dear church, the *Una Sancta*, the One Holy most dutifully subjects herself to the rule of her Lord. She knows he is in charge, and she would have it no other way. She does not challenge his headship in anything. As through his Word he gives the directions for his church, she gladly heeds them, she does not presume to give him directions. As he guides by his Word, she gladly follows; she does not resist following. Indeed, his dear faithful church wants to abide in the fullest obedience to him and his Word in all things. As he bids his church work for him in his glorious cause, wanting her to have part with him in it, she does so with diligence for his name's sake, joyful that she can serve her head, her Lord, thus.

Such is the submission, instructs the apostle, which wives should accord unto their husbands, dutifully subjecting themselves to the rule of their husbands gladly receiving their directions, not presuming to give them directions! Gladly following their guidance, not resisting to follow: willingly abiding in obedience to them in all things. As her husband enlists her help in his cause, wanting her to have part in it, the wife, remembering that God has ordained that she be a helper to her husband, such as in bringing up their children, in directing and guiding them aright, in caring for their home, and the like, should gladly and diligently be of service to him, so that the words of Proverbs 31:11-12 may apply to her. "The heart of her husband doth safely trust in her, so that he shall have no need of spoil. She will do him good and not evil all the days of her life."

We note the words "in everything" (ἐν παντί) Wives subject yourselves unto your own husbands "in everything" The husband is in charge of the home, and, as such, in charge of the decisions that must be made. And the wife should not want it to be otherwise. She should not seek to usurp his responsibility in this. She should not seek to get him to abdicate it, nor should he do so. It does not become her to dispute and contend

with him, to nag at him and be demanding. As he ponders things which must be decided upon, the wife may certainly in a respectful way offer her thoughts and ideas for his consideration, and convey to him any information which she may feel may be-useful to him. And the husband will gladly receive the thoughts and ideas and information thus contributed by his wife, knowing that he can often benefit much from such contributions from her. For while, as Scripture says, in Christ, the church's Head, are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge (Col 2:3), the husband will realize that this is not so of him himself, and so he will welcome his wife's contributions of thought. But then his wife must realize that it is finally up to him on the basis of all the information he has gathered, to be in charge of the decisions in the home. In some instances, perhaps in many instances, there may be things which he may simply decide to entrust to his trusty, devoted, capable wife to decide on and take care of. But otherwise, in all other matters in which he feels that he should not delegate the making of decisions, but that he himself should make them, he then is the one to make them, and his wife, having respectfully shared her thoughts with her husband, should then reverently accept and abide by the decisions he has made. The only exception is if he would decide and order some thing to be done contrary to God's will expressed in his Word. Then, of course, the principle obtains for the wife to follow: "We ought to obey God rather than men." (Acts 5:29). Paul, however, sees no need to even mention that exception here, since he knows that his readers know that, and he has the confidence that the Christian husband will endeavor to be most careful not to make decisions which are contrary to God's Word, but to guide his home in full accord with it. But apart from such an obvious exception, in all other matters it behooves the wife to willingly and reverently bow to the headship of her husband, even as the church thus bows to the headship of her Lord, as the apostle here instructs: "Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything." What a beautiful example the church, the *Una Sancta*, has given wives. When wives thus subject themselves to their husbands in everything, as the church does to Christ, they come to true beauty with the church—the beauty of being an obedient, God-fearing wife.

Here then is the manner in which wives are to submit themselves unto their husbands, namely, *as unto the Lord*.

Paul now proceeds to speak to husbands regarding the manner in which they are to submit themselves in regard to their wives. He says,

Verse 25, HUSBANDS, LOVE YOUR WIVES, EVEN AS CHRIST ALSO LOVED THE CHURCH AND GAVE HIMSELF FOR IT

While husbands are not to submit themselves to their wives with the submission of obedience as though their wives were in authority over them, since it is the husband who is the head of the wife, and the wife is to be in obedience to him, Paul does here, however, lay it upon the hearts of husbands that they should observe toward their wives the Christ-like self-submission of loving service which is incumbent upon all Christians toward one another, of which we have already spoken at considerable length at verse 21 in connection with our approach to this section on marriage. Now if this Christ-like submission is incumbent upon all Christians toward one another, how much more is it not incumbent upon husbands toward their wives, since God in giving them the headship over their wives has thus given them a far greater responsibility toward their wives to seek their welfare in particular above others outside the home!

The admonition for husbands to observe such submission toward their wives is implicit in the directive here given to husbands, "Husbands, love your wives..." For the word which Paul uses here in directing the husbands to love their wives of necessity involves such self-submission. It is the word *ἀγαπάτε*, which calls for the highest kind of love, the love which consists of intelligent, thoughtful, heart-felt concern for another, and which issues forth in lowly minded, selfless, self-giving service on behalf of another.

We really learn what this love is in Christ; yes, we see it in him in incomprehensibly great dimensions, for it was this love on his part which constrained him, the eternal Son of God, to come down from heaven and become man; for us, and as the great God-man, to place himself under all of us, and, laden with our sins, to go

to the cross and lay down his life for us there. Indeed in Christ we learn the nature of that love which husbands are to have for their wives and Paul underlines that for our thought when he says, “Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church and gave himself for it.”

The reason Christ gave himself in such love for the church was, as Paul continues,

Verse 26, THAT HE MIGHT SANCTIFY IT, BY CLEANSING IT WITH THE WASHING OF WATER BY THE WORD

In his loving concern he wanted to sanctify (ἀγιάση) the church; he wanted to deliver us from our sins, to make us holy, to set us apart for himself as his dear church. To do that he had to provide cleansing for us, he had to take away our sins. That is why he laid down his life for us and shed his precious blood for us. By that he accomplished that unspeakably great and precious work of procuring cleansing for us, as St. John says, “The blood of Jesus Christ God’s Son cleanseth us from all sin.” (1 Jn 1:7).

And so that the cleansing which he obtained for us by giving himself for us in love might be conveyed and applied to us, our Lord instituted a wonderful Sacrament, the Sacrament of Holy Baptism which Paul here calls “the washing of water by the word” (τῷ λουτρῷ τοῦ ὕδατος ἐν ῥήματι). By this Sacrament the cleansing which he obtained is conveyed and applied. This then is a wonderfully powerful washing. And, of course, as Luther noted so well, it is not the water of baptism alone which does this powerful cleansing, but the Word of God which places the cleansing procured by Christ on the cross into this sacrament: and this cleansing so conveyed is received by faith which Baptism also works. Thus, since it is God’s Word which is connected with Baptism that makes baptism the powerful sacrament that it is, that is why Paul calls it “the washing of water by the word.” By this sacrament then, Christ sanctifies his church, consisting of all who come to him by this sacrament, and does so for the purpose which Paul expresses in the next verse,

Verse 27, THAT HE MIGHT PRESENT IT TO HIMSELF A GLORIOUS CHURCH, NOT HAVING SPOT OR WRINKLE, OR ANY SUCH THING, BUT THAT IT SHOULD BE HOLY AND WITHOUT BLEMISH

The purpose then for his giving himself for the church in great love and for sanctifying it by the cleansing of baptism is that his church may be to him a most beautiful and holy bride adorned in the unsullied garments of righteousness and holiness which He Himself has provided for her in his self-effacing, self-giving love.

Regarding the question as to whether this verse with its statements about Christ purposing to present the church to himself without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, and that it should be holy and without blemish goes on from the thought of his cleansing the church through baptism to speak also of bringing the church then also to walk in holiness of life, we would mention that the power to begin walking in such newness of life is certainly also bestowed and implanted by baptism, on account of which Paul elsewhere calls baptism “the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghosts.” (Tit 3:5). Our walking in such holiness of life, however, will not become perfect this side of heaven, since our old sinful nature still inheres in us till death, continually pulling us down from perfection, which we earnestly deplore. Yet by the power bestowed and planted in us by baptism we fervently strive to progress in holier living and look confidently to the Holy Spirit to enable us so to progress as we make a devout use the means through which he works, namely, Christ’s Word and his Holy Supper, until we finally stand before our Lord in glory in the life to come. Then with this sinful nature forever put away, we shall stand before him completely holy not only in the sense of being cleansed of our sins, but also completely holy as far as our life and conduct is concerned. But already now the church is holy and without blemish, without spot and wrinkle in the sense that it has been perfectly cleansed of all sin through baptism. In this way she is a most beautiful, holy, glorious church before him already now. Oh for that eternal day when our life comports completely with this, and then in every way we, his church stand before him such is beautiful, holy, glorious church! Together with our Lord we await that day!

We would note here that while Paul here in this section of Ephesians 5 mentions only the church as the object of Christ's love and of his giving of himself to provide cleansing elsewhere in his epistles he certainly also proclaims that Christ loved and gave himself to provide cleansing for all men, as Scripture proclaims throughout. But unbelieving men repudiate him and what he in his great love has done for them also, and thus go lost by their own fault. It is only the believers who appropriate to themselves and thus receive the cleansing which he has obtained for them. When then Paul here only says, "Christ lived the church and gave himself for it," he does it in considered context of this truth that it is Christ's church alone which receives the benefits of his great sacrifice made for us in such love.

Here then, from this great love of Christ whereby he has done for his church that Paul here speaks of, husbands are to learn how they are to love their wives yes, they are instructed so to love them, with such a lowly minded, self effacing, self-sacrificing, helping love: a love out of which they are committed to supplying the needs of their wives, their physical needs, and also indeed, above all their deepest needs their spiritual needs, and will spare no effort and cost to themselves in endeavoring to do so a love out of which they put forth every effort to edify their wives in the Lord, to help them to be spiritual beautiful with the beauty which the Lord desires in their hearts.

This then points the way in which the husband is to carry out his headship of the wife; not in thoughtlessness, coldness, hardness, as though she is one whom he can roughly order around to do his bidding, and as though she is one he can use to seek his own selfish advantage. Not at all! To be sure, he is the head, and his wife is to respect him for his headship, and to obey him as her head. But his headship is to be carried out with nothing but the purpose of purest loving service, like unto that of Christ toward his church.

Paul continues to set forth how husbands should love their wives also in the following verses. He says,

Verse 28, SO OUGHT MEN TO LOVE THEIR WIVES AS THEIR OWN BODIES. HE THAT LOVETH HIS WIFE LOVETH HIMSELF.

In saying, 'So men ought to love their wives as their own bodies.' Paul is taking up again on a thought which he began back in verse 23, when he said; "For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church, and he is the Savior of the body." At that point we noted that in referring to the church as Christ's body, Paul was bringing out the closeness which exists between the church and her Lord, the mystical union of the heavenly bridegroom with his bride, the church. Even so says Paul here now in verse 28, husbands ought to lovingly regard their wives as being in a precious closeness, a precious oneness, with themselves; yes they should thus regard them as actually being part of their very own selves. For they have been brought by God into such a profound oneness in the marital union that they are indeed one together. Because husband and wife are thus one in such a profound oneness bestowed by God, so it is that Paul says, "He that loveth his wife loveth himself."

In view of this profound oneness of husband and wife, in view of this that a man's wife is part of his very own self, how can a man possibly then withhold love from his wife? How then can he treat her with hate? Indeed considering that one's wife is a very part of himself, yes, his own flesh with him, it would be completely inordinate not to regard her with love, says, Paul as he continues in

Verse 29, FOR NO MAN EVER YET HATED HIS OWN FLESH BUT NOURISHETH IT AND CHERISHETH IT EVEN AS THE LORD THE CHURCH

That is how a man regards his own flesh. He doesn't hate it; he doesn't treat his own flesh with rudeness and cold hard inconsiderateness: never! Just so, since his wife is one flesh with him, he should never treat her in such a loveless manner either. Rather than treat his own flesh with lovelessness a man has much concern for himself most readily he provides and cares for his own flesh, as Paul says, he nourishes and cherishes it even as the Lord the Church. Just so, since his wife is one flesh him, so should a husband regard her with like most

ready loving concern caring and providing for her. Once more Paul points husbands to Christ to learn of him to do this in saying, “even as the Lord the church.” To this end they are to consider well how heartily he provides for his church—nourishing it with Word and Sacrament, giving it his constant care, keeping it under his protection.

Paul continues and states the reason why Christ does this for his Church saying in

Verse 30, FOR WE ARE MEMBERS OF HIS FLESH AND OF HIS BONES

Thus Paul brings out that it is because of that precious closeness which Christ has with his church that oneness, that mystical union in which he is the head and we are the members of his body—it is because of this that Christ cares for and nourishes and cherishes us as he does. Let husbands be warmed mightily by Christ’s example to do the same toward their wives with whom they have been brought into the precious closeness, the profound oneness of the marriage union!

Now Paul quotes Genesis 2,24,

Verse 31, FOR THIS CAUSE SHALL A MAN LEAVE US FATHER AND MOTHER AM SHALL BE JOINED TO HIS WIFE, AND THEY TWO SHALL BE ONE FLESH

With these words Paul continues to emphasize the closeness of the marriage relationship, the profound oneness of husband and wife in which they have been joined together by God himself. That this is a oneness which they have not simply arrived at by themselves but into which God has joined them, Jesus brings out when he says, “What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.” (Mt 19:6). It is a oneness to which by God’s design the sexual union gives expression, and of which the sexual union is a very sacred part, but which involves their total lives.

In God’s plan, once the marriage union has been entered into by man and wife, the husband-wife relationship now takes precedence even to the former child-parent relationship. And though children are certainly still to honor their parents as long as they live, once joined in marriage their primary, yes, unconditional commitment and devotion is then to be to their spouse as far as earthly relationships are concerned.

Since then husband and wife are brought into such a precious closeness and oneness in marriage, a closeness and oneness like unto that between Christ and his church, what devotion and care the husband should then exercise to lead in making their marriage more and more what God intends it to be, and by the same token, how eagerly the wife should follow her husband in the same undertaking so that as the relationship between Christ and his church is most beautiful before God, so theirs as man and wife might become more and more so before him too, according as he intends it to be.

In regard to this profound oneness of husband and wife which Paul has brought out so well, he now says,

Verse 32, THIS IS A GREAT MYSTERY: BUT I SPEAK CONCERNING CHRIST AND THE CHURCH

What wonderful insights into the mystery of Christ and his church, i.e., concerning the most profound oneness of Christ and his bride the church Paul shows us throughout this grand Epistle to the Ephesians! By way of expounding that great mystery and now relating it to marriage here in his great section on marriage, Paul has also then given us some precious insights into the similar profound oneness of husband and wife in the light of the even far higher oneness of Christ and his church which he has shown is the pattern for marriage. It, namely the oneness of husband and wife in marriage, is indeed a deeper oneness than we can fathom and we must be filled with wonder as we contemplate it.

Paul now closes his discussion in regard to marriage by summarizing the duties of spouses in the light of all that he has said, saying,

Verse 33, ONLY LET EVERYONE OF YOU IN PARTICULAR SO LOVE HIS WIFE EVEN AS HIMSELF: AND THE WIFE SEE THAT SHE REVERENCE HER HUSBAND.

Having led into this great section on marriage with the admonition, “submitting yourselves one to another in reverence of Christ,” and having shown throughout this section in what manner each spouse is to do this according to their different roles in marriage, Paul now with this closing verse of this chapter reiterates once more how each spouse is to do this. The husband is to carry out his headship in love—love as deep as that which he has for himself. He is to carry out his headship in that divinely directed love which is self-effacing, self-giving love, out of which he humbly and willingly bends down and serves to care for his wife in her various needs. And the wife is to carry out her role as wife in reverence for her husband—that divinely directed reverence that includes humble and ready obedience to her husband because of the authority that God has vested in him in making him her head.

Here then we have worked our way through Paul’s great section on marriage and all of Ephesians chapter 5. Here we have a powerful Word of God showing us Christians how we are to view matters of sex and marriage, and how we who are Christian spouses are to live in marriage. It is a very different word than we hear from the world with its rampant sexual immorality and its low view of marriage, yes, its contempt for marriage and for the God-ordained order in the home. May God give his people hearing ears to hear what he has to say rather than what the world has to say!

The more faithfully and earnestly we heed what he says to us, the more our homes will become havens of peace and happiness, fortresses of strength for those within, rather than the shambles of misery and wreckage we see around us so much in our world today. The more faithfully and earnestly we heed his Word, the more our homes will serve to honor him, and be a great blessing to those within.

ADDENDUM (promised at page 5, end of second paragraph)

Following are some more thoughts of pertinent interest—from Kittel’s *Theological Dictionary* in regard to ὑποτάσσομαι: “The demand for mutual submission among Christians shows especially that ὑποτάσσομαι bears a material relationship to Christian ταπεινοφροσύνη (i.e., the “lowliness of mind” which Paul calls for in Philippians 2:3). “Paul requires ταπεινοφροσύνη from the community, Not ‘self-seeking’ nor ‘vainglorious boasting’ as self-glory should control their mutual relations but ταπεινοφροσύνη. The two sentences which follow” (i.e., in Philippians 2) “show that it is the resolution to subject oneself to others and to be more concerned about their welfare than one’s own which should control their mutual relations. “The term ταπεινοφροσύνη thus catches up what Jesus said about greatness through service.... It is given its distinctive shape by Jesus’ own conduct, which in Php 2:5-11” (the section which starts out, “Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus”) “is viewed from a standpoint which serves as the basis of Paul’s admonition.... By the Christ event the submission of man to God is made also the content of relations between men since God himself acts thus in Christ. Man now subordinates himself to others in service. This has nothing to do with self-disparagement or servility. In such ταπεινοφροσύνη others are taken seriously because God himself takes men seriously and refers them to one another by his acts. Only by ταπεινοφροσύνη, refraining from self assertion, can the unity of the congregation be established and sustained. Without ταπεινοφροσύνη it would crumble. ταπεινοφροσύνη thus acquires its positive significance through the unity of Christ’s unity, which is above individuals...”