

“Ephesians”

Fall Series 1

Lesson 8

“Ephesians 5:15-33”

Objective: To understand the message that Paul meant to convey to his audience and then to come to understand what that message means for us today as those living in the 21st century. We will seek to ascertain what this message means and to determine how we are intended to live our lives as those who are disciples of Christ in our modern context in light of the message it contains.

Materials: We will begin by examining carefully the Greek text of Ephesians, examine other early translations such as the Syriac Peshitta, and any other sources along with the historical setting of the first century Roman world that can help us to understand the original meaning. We will then examine early interpretations and understandings and examine commentaries and modern interpretations to enlighten our understanding for our contextual situation.

Procedures

1. We will begin by translating the text from Greek into English
2. We will examine the contextual setting and seek to understand as much as we possibly can about the historical, cultural and social settings in order to understand the message.
3. From here we will seek to find out how to best apply the calling that Paul has for the early disciples to our modern contextual framework in order to do our very best to live as disciples of Christ in our modern era.
4. We will seek to understand the attitudes that we are called to have as disciples and to reflect not only the actions that are the calling of a disciple, but also to learn how to form our attitudes to reflect our calling as followers of Jesus Christ.

Translation

Ephesians 5:15 **Then beware how you live, not as fools but as wise, ¹⁶ redeeming the time, because the days are evil. ¹⁷ Because of this, do not be foolish, but think about what the will of the Lord is. ¹⁸ Do not get drunk on wine, which is reckless living, but be filled with the Spirit, ¹⁹ speaking to one another [in] Psalms and hymns and spiritual odes, singing and playing a harp in your heart to the Lord, ²⁰ giving thanks always, for everything, in the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ, to God the Father. ²¹ Submit to one another in fear of Christ, ²² the wives (submit) to their own husbands as to the Lord, ²³ because a husband is head of the wife just as Christ is head of the assembly, He is Savior of the body; ²⁴ but just as the assembly submits to Christ, thus also the wives (submit) to the husbands in everything. ²⁵ Husbands, love your wives, just as also Christ loved the assembly and gave Himself up for her, ²⁶ in order to sanctify her, cleansing her in the washing of water in the word ²⁷ in order to present Himself with a splendid assembly, not having stain or wrinkle, or anything of**

the kind, but rather that she might be holy and blameless. ²⁸

In this way [also] the husbands are to love their own wives just as they do their own bodies. The one who loves his own wife loves himself. ²⁹ For no one ever once hated his own flesh, but nourishes and takes care of it, just as also the Christ does for the assembly, ³⁰ because we are part of His body. ³¹ *For this reason a man leaves [the] father and [the mother] and will be united to his wife, and the two will become one.* ³² This is the great mystery; and I am speaking about, Christ and the assembly. ³³ Nevertheless also each of you must love his own wife as himself, and the wife should fear the husband.

Lesson


Paul continues in this section his admonitions to his audience, he challenges them to live in such a way that their lives reflect the reality of what God has done for them in Jesus Christ. They are called to be different from the way they were before, coming to a knowledge of Christ. They are to react differently, treat one another differently, fear and respect different things, and in different ways. Their relationships will be changed too, especially the relationship with family. How many times has it been the case that a person would act one way at church, when they were with church people, and then in a different way when they were with their family, in private? This is hypocrisy, acting, and it does not reflect the reality of a person's genuine being. Paul expects the power of Christ to penetrate every aspect of a person and to create in them a clean heart, to fill a person with the Holy Spirit.¹

This is to be the consequence of what God has done for the follower of Jesus, as described by Paul in the first 3 chapters of his letter. He calls for the followers of Christ to : ^{5:15} **Then beware**

¹ Psalm 51:9-11 **Hide your face from my sins; wipe away all my guilty deeds! 10 Create a clean heart for me, God; put a new, faithful spirit deep inside me! 11 Please don't throw me out of your presence; please don't take your holy spirit away from me.** CEB.

how you live, not as fools but as wise,.... The call here is one that challenges the followers of Christ to have a self-awareness. They are to examine themselves and be aware of how it is that they live, how they treat others. All too often in today's world it is the case that attention is focused on how others are living and acting, rather than upon the one person we can actually change, ourselves. There is the tendency to want others to change their behavior and their attitudes. Such a focus is beyond our ability to control. We cannot control others. The heart of a tyrant seeks to control others and to make slaves of them for the desires and wishes of self. The way that Paul advocates here is vastly different in focus. The focus here is upon Christ as the one is to be the master, and not the self.

This focus challenges the audience of Paul as it does us in many ways. This is a hard way for us to comprehend, and it goes against our animalistic instincts of insuring that we are granted our rights and what we want and need. Paul challenges his audience to have a different agenda, a different focus, one that seeks the benefit of the Kingdom of God, the benefit and expansion of His influence and His sovereignty. This is an agenda



that trusts God in unique and powerful ways that are only possible with God's help, else our hearts would betray us to seek to preserve self and pursue our own self interests.

The definition of "wise" here is not the definition that is so often given by the world:² the definition here is rooted in the trust of God and the pursuit of His agenda and His designated path. This means listening to God even when our inner self indicates that this path will harm us, or even lead to our own destruction. This is what Jesus did; He trusted God above all else and laid down His life in service of God and His Kingdom. He sought only to follow the will of God and not to seek His own well-being. This is a path that the world continually tells us is not wise and that we would be a "fool" to walk such a path. Paul understands that this is the message of the world. This is a message that deceives us and diverts us from the destiny that is prepared for the children of God. This is an elemental component to the act of transformation

² Definition of "wise." - *Having or showing the ability to make good judgments, based on a deep understanding and experience of life.* <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/english/wise>

that will make the world become better than the current world which is dominated by the prince of this world and his agenda.³

The contrast between the “wise” and the “unwise” is very much at home in Jewish, and early Christian writings.⁴ The reference here is a challenge to pay attention to, and to live, a life that is in alignment with “ethical behavior,” as is defined by God. This behavior stands in stark contrast to the behavior that was normally expected from Gentiles by the Jews. Gentiles were considered very unethical and not to be trusted as they followed a different path, walked a different way than what was expected of the people of God. Paul here challenges the followers of Jesus to not only be conscious of being ethical, but he also challenges them to be: **16 redeeming the time, because the days are evil.** Some translate this section focusing on “opportunities,” and taking advantage of each “opportunity” that is presented.

Certainly, this is not alien to the context here, but I find that the way I have chosen to translate this section covers this and also

³ Ephesians 2:2 - **in which once you walked according to the lot of this world, according to the ruler of the power of the air, the spirit now working in the sons of unbelief.** 2 Corinthians 4:4 - **The god of this age has blinded the minds of those who don't have faith so they couldn't see the light of the gospel that reveals Christ's glory. Christ is the image of God.** CEB.

⁴ Thomas B. Slater, *Ephesians*, in the Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary series (Macon GA: Smyth & Helwys, Publishing Incorporated, 2012), pp. 139, 148. Proverbs 4:10-14; *Community Rule (1QS)* 4:23-24; Matthew 7:24-27; 1 Corinthians 1:18-3:23.

challenges us to more deeply be conscious of not to wasting the “time” nor the “opportunities” given to us by the grace of God. This seems to me to fit the context of what Paul is saying here and the challenge seems more exhaustive than just to translate the word **καιρόν** (*kairon*) as “opportunity.” The translation I have chosen also reflects the more frequent usage of this word in the Greek world as well. I find it thought-provoking to contemplate what it means to “redeem” (**ἐξαγοράζω** - *exagoradzo*), or “to buy out” time. Literally it means to “buy out” the time here. The implication being that, “Those who have insight will have the right attitude to time, using it to discover and practice the will of the Lord.”⁵ I love this quote; I find it challenging and insightful. “Time is like currency and it like money is to be spent in furtherance of the aims of the Kingdom and not upon selfish pursuits and pleasures.”

This meaning is reiterated in the next verse where Paul will challenge his audience to not only recognize that the times that his audience are living in, are “evil” (**πονηραί** - *ponerai*). When this word is used in a moral sense it has the sense of “worthless.”

⁵ Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, in the Word Biblical Commentary series, Vol. 42 (Waco TX: Word Books, Publisher, 1990), p. 341.

Though Paul recognizes this about the time of his existence, he challenges his audience to do something about this state of affairs. He challenges them to “redeem” or to “buy back” this time and not allow it to be useless time, but to “redeem” it so that it will be useful. If God’s people are doing His will, and seeking to expand His Kingdom, and His influence then this time will truly be “redeemed,” and will no longer be useless and without meaning.

Once again Paul will seek to contrast what is “wise” and what is “foolish.” He will help us define the difference more fully here as he challenges the audience to: ¹⁷ **Because of this, do not be foolish, but think about what the will of the Lord is.** The focus once again is upon the “**will of the Lord.**” The “**will of the Lord**” is the definition of what it is to be wise, and to pursue any other will is the definition of what it is to be “foolish.” When we pursue our own agenda, and our own will, then we are in fact acting foolishly. Such individuals are also acting as “immoral” people because this is not ethical behavior as defined by the life of Jesus, or by the calling of His example of sacrificial living. The definition of what is “moral,” and what is “wise,” is found in doing the “**will of the Lord.**”

Perhaps it is the case that Paul knows that still his audience will not understand the message he intends to convey by using these general terms, so, he gets more specific with regard to the behavior that concerns him. ¹⁸ **Do not get drunk on wine, which is reckless living, but be filled with the Spirit,....** The first part of his challenge is to avoid getting “drunk.” He defines this as “reckless living” (*ἀσωτία* - *asotia*). Another way of defining what Paul intends to convey here is that he does not expect them to live in “wastefulness,” or as a prodigal. We can perhaps be reminded of the story of Jesus and the prodigal son.⁶


Instead Paul challenges the followers of Christ to live lives that are Spirit-filled lives. The understanding of the ancients, with regard to how wine made someone drunk, is not the same as it is for us today. For the ancients the idea was that there was a spirit in the wine that took control of the person who drank too much wine, and that spirit then possessed the person. They did not see getting drunk as a chemical process, but as allowing an outside influence, in the form of the spirit, or a god, that possessed the plant to occupy the body of the one who imbibed it. The contrast

⁶ Luke 15:11-32.

here is then between allowing oneself to be influenced by this evil, outside spirit and allowing oneself to be influenced the Holy Spirit of the Living God. Paul here challenges his audience to opt instead for the influence of the Holy Spirit.

The result of being filled with the Holy Spirit of God instead of the wine will be that of: ¹⁹ **speaking to one another [in] Psalms and hymns and spiritual odes, singing and playing a harp in your heart to the Lord, ²⁰ giving thanks always, for everything, in the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ, to God the Father.** Often, we have applied these verses to our formal worship assembly, especially in churches of Christ. Such an understanding is not to be found in these verses. This is one of the two sets of verses that are used to indicate that God is only pleased with *a cappella* singing in worship.⁷ To use this verse in Ephesians in such a manner is to distort and deform its meaning beyond recognition of what Paul will have intended as indicated by the context. He is not trying to give instructions regarding one small corner of a person's life here, but instructions regarding its

⁷ The other comes in Colossians 3:16 - **The word of Christ must live in you richly. Teach and warn each other with all wisdom by singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. Sing to God with gratitude in your hearts.** CEB.



totality. This is the way all of life is to be lived not just from 10:30 AM to noon on Sunday morning.

We need to recognize that the Psalms were indeed the songbook and prayerbook of the ancient Jewish people. These were words of praise to God and encouragement to one another challenging believers to lift their voices and their hearts up to God. The words given here are as much about attitude as they are about practice. Paul is not here challenging his audience to practice some legal requirement, but to have an attitude that encouraged them to continue becoming what God had called them to be as His children, to reflect His nature and to reflect trust in Him. These verses are very challenging to the personality. They call for the people of God to be a joyous people, not a complaining or sour people focused on the negative, always critiquing and pointing out what is wrong with the world. God knows what is wrong and He knows how to redeem the wrong, and He does not need us to be armchair quarterbacks, or film critics.

The children of God are to be out marked by their joyous spirit and their thankfulness. What are they to be thankful for? They are to thankful for “everything.” What is included under the

term “everything?” Nothing is excluded. The idea here is that the people of God are to reflect in their attitude the recognition that the promises of God are more important than all else and they dictate our perception of reality. They are not to be “chicken little;” people who always run around screaming that the sky is falling. Perhaps in this season of national elections we should reflect long and hard upon the words of Paul here. We have so much to be thankful for and that thankfulness does not come only when a certain person, or a certain party, is in power, because the reality is that all these things and all these people are temporary and limited. The Unlimited One is our Father and our source of our strength and our optimism.

In the midst of this attitude of thankfulness and optimism, Paul challenges the followers of Jesus to be people that are not proud, arrogant, and boastful, but to be people that serve and submit to one another. They do this not because they must, or because they are forced to do so, but because they fear displeasing Christ. ²¹ **Submit to one another in fear of Christ,** There is perhaps much misunderstanding with regard to the word “fear” (φόβω - *phobo*). This is the word that our English word

“phobia” is derived from and it has a primary meaning of “fear” or “terror.” If you look at your English translations, they will most likely translate this word as “reverence.” This is not the general meaning of this word at all. Even where it is rarely possible, even there, it has more the connotation of “awe.”

For those who are rebellious, and enemies of Christ, “terror” is probably the best sense for the meaning of this word. For those that love Him and seek to follow His path, to follow in His footsteps, fear is still perhaps the best translation. For those who love God, the fear is not one of dread or terror, but one founded in a great desire to please Him and to never have Him be ashamed of them or disappointed in them. When my wife was growing up her father never spanked her, because just the notion that he might not be proud of her, or pleased with her, was enough to send her into hysterics. She never wanted him to fail to be pleased and proud of her because she loved him and sought to honor him so much. For those truly devoted to Christ I believe this is the same type of fear that they have. They fear not living up to the standard of Christ, being like Him, and walking like He did, and thus of displeasing God. In such as these, the fear is real and palpable and

draws them ever closer to the heart of God in trust and obedience. This is not as the result of fearing the fires of hell, but of fearing something far worse; at least it is worse for the tender heart of the person devoted to Jesus and devoted to loving God with a passionate fiery love.

It is out of this context, that Paul will move on to address relationships that are extremely close and where all hypocrisy and acting is stripped bare, in the family. He will begin with the relationship between wives and husbands and lay out instructions for them to mutually submit to one another. Paul's instructions do not depart from the normal socially accepted norms of the locale or the time. However, the focus here is not simply upon wives submitting to husbands, but Paul also draws attention to how the "assembly" (the church) is to stand in submission to Christ. ²² **the wives (submit) to their own husbands as to the Lord,** ²³ **because a husband is head of the wife just as Christ is head of the assembly, He is Savior of the body;** ²⁴ **but just as the assembly submits to Christ, thus also the wives (submit) to the husbands in everything.** Paul does not grant here, a license for abusive behavior, or for some form of domination. Instead,

there is the implicit challenge that the husband stands in the position of Christ as He stands in a position of both responsibility and love.


What is implicit in this passage will actually be spelled out far more fully in the verses that follow. One must not rip this passage from its moorings and use it as a club, or merely as a proof-text to empower some preconceived agenda. Husbands are to love their wives; and here Paul had a choice of words that he could have used for “love” and he chose one that has a long history of association with covenant loyalty to God in the Greek Old Testament to express the obligation of self-sacrifice, concern for others, and extreme loyalty as is demonstrated by God in salvation history.⁸ This word for “love” has been richly painted and textured by its usage in the Greek Translation of the Old Testament. I was

⁸ Genesis 22:2; 24:67; 25:28; 29:18; 29:20; 29:30; 29:32; 34:3; 37:3; 44:20; Exodus 20:6; 21:5; Leviticus 19:18; 19:34; Deuteronomy 4:37; 5:10; 6:5; 7:8,9; 7:13; 10:12; 10:15; 11:1; 11:13; 11:22; 13:3; 15:16; 21:15-16; 23:5; 30:6; 30:16; 30:20; 32:15; 33:5; 33:12; 33:26; Joshua 22:5; 23:11; Judges 5:31; 14:16; 16:4; 16:15; Ruth 4:15; 1 Samuel 16:21; 18:16; 18:20; 18:22; 18:28; 20:17; 2 Samuel 1:23; 7:18; 12:24; 13:1; 13:4; 13:15; 13:21; 19:6; 1 Kings 3:3; 5:1; 10:9; 11:2; 1 Chronicles 17:16; 29:17; 1 Chronicles 2:11; 9:8; 11:21; 20:7; 1 Esdras 4:25; Nehemiah 1:5; 13:26; Esther 6:9; Judith 9:4; Tobit 4:13; 13:12; 14:7; 1 Maccabees 4:33; 6:11; 3 Maccabees 6:11; 4 Maccabees 13:24; 15:3; Numerous places in the Psalms; Proverbs; Ecclesiastes; Song of Solomon, Job 19:19; Wisdom 1:11; 4:10; 6:12; 7:10; 7:28; 8:3; 8:7; 11:24; 16:26; Sirach 1:10; 2:15; 3:17; 3:26; 4:10, 12, 14; 6:33; 7:21, 30, 35, 13:15; 24:11-30:1, 5, 16; 45:11; 46:13; 47:8, 16, 22; Psalm of Solomon 6:6; 9:8; 10:3; 14:1,6; 17:16; Hosea 3:1; 4:18; 8:9, 11; 9:1, 10, 15; 10:11; 11:1; 12:8; 14:5; Amos 4:5; 5:15; Micah 6:8; Zechariah 8:17, 19; 10:6; Malachi 1:2; 2:11; Isaiah 1:23; 3:25; 5:1, 7; 41:8; 43:4; 44:2; 48:14; 51:2; 56:6; 57:8; 60:10; 61:8; 63:9; 66:10; Jeremiah 2:25; 5:31; 8:2; 11:15; 12:7; 14:10; 30:31; 38:3; Baruch 3:37; Lamentations 1:2; Ezekiel 16:37; Daniel 3:35; 4:27; 9:4; Bel and the Dragon 38.

told at University that the New Testament writers chose this word because it was devoid of deep meaning and that the apostles and the early church injected new meaning and richness into it. This is very misleading, as this word had already been used for hundreds of years by Greek speaking Jews as they translated the Hebrew Scriptures for use by those who no longer were able to read the Hebrew Scriptures or understand spoken Hebrew.⁹

Paul does not leave it to his audience to comprehend this meaning, but he provides clarity and precision to what he intends people to understand from his instructions. ²⁵ **Husbands, love your wives, just as also Christ loved the assembly and gave Himself up for her,** In a powerful and poignant statement Paul begins narrowing the definition he intends his audience to comprehend. The love that he expects from husbands for their wives is the kind that Christ had for the people that would become His followers, but in reality, included even His enemies. He challenges husbands to love their wives in a manner commensurate with the love that Christ has for the church

⁹ We find this issue coming to the forefront in the early church as there was the conflict between the Hellenists and the Hebrews. Acts 6:1 **Now during those days, when the disciples were increasing in number, the Hellenists complained against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution of food.** NRSV.



(assembly). He reminds the audience that this love was selfless in nature: Christ gave Himself up for “His wife, His bride,” the church.¹⁰ Christ gave His life for the church and Paul here challenges husbands to have this same kind of love for their wives.

This is the challenge that Paul delivers to his audience; the ultimate example of selflessness. The relationship between two people that hold this ideal as the basis for how they relate to one another is founded upon an incredible foundation. Two people submitting to one another in this manner will enrich, strengthen, and empower one another in a uniquely Christian way. They will live in a manner that seeks the welfare of the other over their own welfare and needs. Those living this life seek the happiness of the other person rather than their own happiness. Their focus reflects the nature of God Himself that was so powerfully displayed in the sacrifice of Jesus, His Son.

Even in this, Paul is not content that his audience will fully understand him. In light of this, he provides additional clarification and a clear example of his expectations. The husband is to live his life: ²⁶ **in order to sanctify her, cleansing her in the**

¹⁰ 2 Corinthians 11:2; Revelation 18:23; 19:7; 21:2, 9, 17.


washing of water in the word ²⁷ **in order to present Himself with a splendid assembly, not having stain or wrinkle, or anything of the kind, but rather that she might be holy and blameless.** He is to be raising her up to be clean, holy, and blameless, without any stain, or wrinkle, of any kind. The focus of how to do this is found in the “word” (ῥήματι - *remati*)¹¹. The life agenda of the husband is to be focused on the wife and is to be the same as the purpose of Christ for the church. “Christ’s death accomplished the Church’s sanctification or holiness. Holiness is a cardinal virtue in Ephesians (see 1:1, 4; 2:19; 5:3).”¹²

You may ask what it means to be “holy?” For something to be “holy” it was set apart in a way that meant it could not be contaminated by any blot, or stain of sin, or evil. Smyth sees the concept of “washing” (λουτρῶ - *loutro*) to be a reference to baptism.¹³ In our modern world, the concept of “holiness” has lost its currency. Often, this concept has been associated with certain contemporary segments of Christianity as identity markers of this

¹¹ I assume this to be the word of God.

¹² Thomas B. Slater, *Ephesians*, p. 157.


¹³ Thomas B. Slater, *Ephesians*, p. 157.



particular group.¹⁴ However, Paul was deeply concerned that this would be a part of the relationship of the husband and the wife and that this would be a priority. Surely it is the case that it should continue to be a priority for us today. This means that a central element in marriage is that the husband should be seeking the sanctification, and the purification of his wife.

What exactly does this mean? It means that the husband should make this a central focus, a central concern. This is more important than, making a good living, having a family, having children, having happiness, or some other agenda. I have been to a great many weddings in my lifetime and seldom have I seen this to be a central focus of the vows taken. Often there is focus on the wife honoring, and obeying the husband, and the husband protecting and caring for the wife, but seldom have I even heard the word “holy” mentioned. This makes me sad, and also causes me deep concern. It has even been the case, that in some recent weddings, that I have attended, that there are no vows of any kind, at all. The message that I have taken away from these weddings is

¹⁴ Pentecostals.



that the participants plan to stay together only as long as they remain physically attracted to one another.


The implication then seems to be, that once that attraction, or feeling, is gone so is the relationship gone. This is certainly not a great foundation for a lasting, godly, relationship. Rather it seems to make the statement that relationship will be maintained only as long as it benefits me, the individual. The focus is totally the opposite of what Paul challenges his audience to have. It is also totally at odds with the example of Jesus. Christian marriages should be the strongest, most robust, relationships that exists in our world: that is, if they are the type of relationship that Paul challenges his audience to have.

I spoke with Randy Porter, our church counselor, who deals a lot with people that are having problems with marriage. One of the things that he cited as being a major issue with marriage problems today, is the pursuit of the American Dream, where individualism is such a central plank. Even for those that are wanting to be followers of Christ, what they really want in becoming a Christian is a personal savior, not the savior of a community, or of a group. They are so focused on their own

salvation, their own rescue from damnation that there is no room for community, or even the type of relationship called for here by Paul. There is not even room for a really spiritual community that includes a spouse. The focus that they have is so fully concentrated upon this central tenet, of individualism, that the message of the Bible and of the Christian faith morphs into simply becoming a part of pursuing the American Dream. It becomes about pursuing self-fulfillment, personal happiness rather than allowing the message of selflessness, and the focus on the other have its proper place. This drastically, and pervasively, distorts the message of Paul in his letter.

The gift of grace given by God becomes this great personal free/pure gift that is given to the individual. Such a perspective on giving and gifts was totally an alien idea in the ancient world. “But the ideal of pure “altruism” (a term created in nineteenth-century France) necessitates the suppression of these traditional elements.”¹⁵ It is important that we understand that the gift/grace of God is not given without anticipating a response from the recipient. Paul did not need to explain this to an ancient audience,

¹⁵ John M. G. Barclay, *Paul & the Gift* (Grand Rapids MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2015), p. 59.



but for modern audiences we have come to understand the words of Paul with regard to gift/grace in a way that distorts and even destroys Paul's intended message.

It was the case that in the ancient world there was always the understanding that any gift that was given anticipated a response. Often, it was the case that the response was anticipated to be something other than another gift, certainly of equal value; such as by the recipient returning gratitude, or honor to the giver of the gift. Certainly, it was the case that such a response in no way earned the gift, or made the recipient deserving of the gift as if it were payment. Barclay lays out the evidence for this understanding in a very clear, thorough, and pervasive manner in his book.¹⁶ A part of the response of gratitude that is anticipated is what Paul conveys in chapters 4-6 of Ephesians. A part of that response is to be lived out in the midst of the marriage relationship. Understanding the magnitude of the gift of God's "favor" Paul explains the form that the expression of gratitude and honor are to take. That expression is to be reflected in living like Christ with selfless love and concern for others, and for the

¹⁶ John M. G. Barclay, *Paul & the Gift*.

agenda of God rather than for personal fulfillment and aggrandizement.

This understanding stands as part of the motivation for the response that Paul lays out to his audience here and in the other parts of his epistle. The walk of discipleship (the following of Jesus) is to be one that is marked by emulation of the traits of Jesus and of God. Husbands have the opportunity to do this for their wives. This can be displayed in their “love” for their wife. As if there is the possibility that this motivation is not in itself sufficient Paul lays out additional reasons. ²⁸ **In this way [also] the husbands are to love their own wives just as they do their own bodies. The one who loves his own wife loves himself.** In this verse, and in those that follow, Paul challenges husbands to love their wife as they did their own body, and to care for their wife in a manner commensurate with the way they care for themselves. They are to “love” their wife. Here, he will use this loaded term *ἀγαπάω - agapao* (to love) in order to connect the response of the husband response with the response of God to His people; as has been previously noted in the Old Testament.

Paul continues to lay out his reasoning, and in doing so indicates: ²⁹ **For no one ever once hated his own flesh, but nourishes and takes care of it, just as also the Christ does for the assembly,** ³⁰ **because we are part of His body.** This is an important message and Paul will continue to drive it home here, and expand upon it in the next chapter. He connects his reasoning back to the assembly in way that both challenges and at the same time introduces an additional layer of hope and promise. He connects what he is challenging his audience to understand with an element of hope and promise that is in this vein, that the followers of Christ are recipients of this same level of care and concern from Christ. It is in this way that Christ cares for *His body, the assembly* (the church). This connection between the care of Christ and the hope it brings also contains several elements of challenge as well. The challenge is for husbands to care for their wife in a way that reflects the way that Christ has and continues to care for the assembly: He lays down His life for the assembly.

³¹ *For this reason a man leaves [the] father and [the mother] and will be united to his wife, and the two will become*

one.¹⁷ It is in this verse that we are drawn back once again to the theme of unity. Paul will make reference here to this great unity expressed in the word “one” (אֶחָד - *ehad* - Hebrew:¹⁸ μίαν - *mian* - Greek). This is a word that expresses the ultimate unity, that indicates care, singleness of purpose, and love all wound tightly together. There can be no greater expression of unity than that which is expressed in the word “one.” Paul challenges his audience while also laying out great hope at the same time. ³²

This is the great mystery; and I am speaking about, Christ and the assembly. ³³ **Nevertheless also each of you must love his own wife as himself, and the wife should fear the husband.** It is in the midst of this complex and multilayered statement that Paul will provide both encouragement and challenge at the same time. So often we seek to simplify Scripture by accepting one aspect, or the other aspect, while failing to comprehend that the message is meant to convey deeper and broader meaning that is to be found in both.


¹⁷ Genesis 2:24 - **This is the reason that a man leaves his father and mother and embraces his wife, and they become one flesh.** CEB.

¹⁸ Deuteronomy 6:4 - **Hear, Israel: the Lord is our God, the Lord our one God;....** REB.

It is the case that often “ancient” is equated with “simple” and immature in mind and thought. In truth, nothing could be further from the truth, as the ancients were often very sophisticated and incredibly incisive in their comprehension and in their reasoning. They were not simpletons. In this context, Paul seeks to wrap what he is saying about husbands and wives together with what he means to indicate about the relationship between Christ and the assembly. Paul will use this deep and powerful human relationship to challenge the way that his audience thought regarding the relationship between Christ and the assembly. They are “one.”

Once again, the topic of “fear” (*φοβέω - phobeo*) is broached. As you look at your modern English Bibles this word is again transmuted into a weaker, less offensive word, “respect.”¹⁹ The Greek word used here is the source of our word “phobia.” This fear may begin as something negative and the seeking of avoiding something for selfish reasons, but this word also contains the more noble idea of the “fear” of disappointing another out of love and devotion to them. One meaning perhaps stands at the start of

¹⁹ Tyndale 1525 translation - **Nevertheless do ye so that every one of you love his wyfe truly even as him silfe. And let ye wyfe se that she feare her husbade.**



the journey while the other is a more mature meaning that stands at a point further along in the journey.


In all that Paul says here the challenge is to live worthy lives;²⁰ he challenges his audience to live worthy of the calling of Christ and to express gratitude and thankfulness for the great gift of God’s “favor” (grace) in a manner that reflects the nature of your Lord Jesus Christ. Paul continues to challenge his audience to live in a way that reflects their new reality, their new and transformed existence in Christ. This existence comes with a new set of priorities and parameters that are defined in the example of Jesus Christ.

²⁰ Ephesians 4:1 - **The word of Christ must live in you richly. Teach and warn each other with all wisdom by singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. Sing to God with gratitude in your hearts.** CEB.

Synopsis

In the totality of what Paul has written here, the overall message is intended to challenge the audience, the followers of Jesus, to live their lives “wisely” and to avoid being foolish. The audience is challenged to set good, godly, goals and to make good choices that stand in agreement with their calling and devotion to Christ; to avoid living foolish lives. They are to live under the influence of the Spirit and not to be influenced by the seeking after self-gratification. Their lives are to be filled with the Spirit, and that influence should stand as a guiding beacon for life in this new reality. The followers of Jesus are to be agents of thankfulness, and gratitude, that give expression to these things in the way they live their lives and in the way that they treat others; especially in the way they treat their own family.

Paul will begin here by highlighting the close relationship that exists between husband and wife as an area where this can and must be expressed most diligently and most clearly. He challenges his audience with the specifics of what this is to look like in day to day existence. Husbands are to reflect the nature and care of Christ for their wives. They are not to be focused on



themselves and their own needs and their own purification as an individualistic agenda. Their discipleship will come in the midst of service and sacrifice of the self for the other; in this context especially care and concern for the wife.

The unity expressed in this relationship will be both a test of, and an indicator of, a walk of wisdom and of faith on the part of both the husband and the wife. Fear, which for us is so often seen as a very negative thing should be understood in this context as possessing a range of meaning that initially is centered in the selfish ambition of self-preservation, but under the influence and transformative power of the Holy Spirit becomes something else, something noble, and something which enables and empowers a life dominated by self-sacrifice. The fear is then focused on disappointing the other, and their well-being, their happiness, and their salvation becomes a paramount issue in the following of Jesus.

Questions

1. When you think about being wise, what are some things that come to your mind?
2. When you think about the word “fool” what are some of the images that come to your mind?
3. How do you decide on how to prioritize your time?
4. What are some things in your life that challenge you to consider the will of the Lord for your life?
5. What are some things that you could do in order to live a more Spirit-filled life?
6. When you think of being “thankful” what are some ways that this can be expressed in your life?
7. When you think of submitting to another person what are some feelings that this brings to your mind?
8. What are some good aspects of fear?
9. Why do you think modern people perceive “fear” to be such a negative concept?
10. What does it mean for Christ to be “head” of the church?
11. What does it mean for the husband to be the “head” of the wife in the way that is described here by Paul?
12. What are some ways that these verses about the husband/wife relationship have been abused by people?
13. What are some ways that we might challenge people with these verses to live in a way that more closely reflects the calling of Christ?

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14. What are some ways that you have known husbands to sanctify their wives in the way that Paul challenges his audience to do here?
 15. How did Christ cleanse the assembly and in what ways does He still challenge us to be holy and blameless today?
 16. What are some ways that Christ takes care of the assembly?
 17. How would you define the word “mystery?”
 18. How do you think this word is appropriate for describing the relationship between Christ and the assembly?
 19. What are some ways that a person could promote “fear” in themselves?
 20. Why do you think “unity” or “oneness” is so important to Paul?

To Take Home

What is Important to know?

It is important to know that the focus of our life as a follower of Christ is to be very different than the expectations the world sets as a standard. Often it is the case that the American Dream is set out as a pursuit of personal happiness, and personal fulfillment. This is not the standard that Paul calls his audience to adopt in Ephesians. The standard for the follower of Jesus is to be found in the life of Christ. We are to live a life that is like His. What are some ways that you seek to live like Jesus?

Where is God in these words?

God is in these words challenging us to see the world in a different context than that which is to be found in the perspective of self as the center of our universe. So much of the reality of our world is focused upon our own personal happiness, our own personal fulfillment. So often the standard for this is what we set, or what the expectations of the world are. Such a perspective is unChristian and not in alignment with the word of God. What are some ways that you seek the will of God over your own will?

What does any of this mean for how I live my life?

This means that I will live my life in a manner that pursues the agenda of God and not the agenda of myself, or the agenda of the world. This will often mean losing friends and being shunned by people that are close to you. They will consider you a fool. How does the wisdom of following the way of Christ seem foolish to the world?

What is the word of God calling us to do?

The word of God calls to His children in the midst of the competing voice from our inner self that calls for us to take the easy, the convenient, path rather than the way of Jesus. Our example of how to live life, the way we are called to live by God, is found in its most pure and poignant form in the life of Jesus. His life was founded upon the will of God, pursuing the things of God, and sacrificing the things that are pleasing to self. So much of our society is focused on the happiness of the individual rather than upon the calling of God. What is one thing that you know God is calling you to do?