

“Christ Who Submits to the Husband and Loves the Wife”

Ephesians 5:21–33

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Ephesians 5:21–33 (PowerPoint)

Preface

Two thousand years ago, for what purpose was Jesus Christ crucified?

According to the Word of God we just read from the book of Ephesians, Jesus Christ was crucified so that wives could become able to submit to their husbands.

Also, He was crucified so that husbands could become able to love their wives as their own bodies.

To that extent, the first-person relationship of husband and wife—“you are me, I am you”—is a matter that shakes even heaven and earth, a spiritual issue that is most serious and most in need of resolution for God, and the most important foundation for God’s ultimate purpose of the re-creation of heaven, earth, and all things.

As we saw last week, man and woman, husband and wife, are the site of blessing ordained by God, the practice of blessing, and the smallest unit of community that is most essential and most important for humans—who were created as beings with social nature—to live.

If this smallest unit of community collapses, no matter how much that society adorns itself to look proper, in reality it will be distorted, unstable, and in fact already collapsing.

That is precisely why “the Triune God came, taking on the form of a human named Jesus Christ, in order to restore that most important foundational relationship,” says the Apostle Paul—who remained single all his life—not relying on his own experience or knowledge, but standing solely on the will of God, the Word of God, and the viewpoint of God, and in this Scripture passage he teaches us an important mystery of God.

Part One

In the beginning, the first man and woman created in the image and likeness of God—Adam and Eve—confessed to each other, “This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh,” and rejoiced in their first-person relationship of “You are my very self, the most important me of me,” delighting in being two yet one, and tasting the happiness of it. However, when they broke the promise with God and committed the most fundamental sin of not keeping God’s Word, from the very moment they sinned and became sinners,

they fell into a third-person relationship—"I and that"—a relationship that treats others as objects.

Genesis 3:11–12 (PowerPoint)

The words that Adam, who had rejoiced and loved his wife Eve, saying "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh," now hurled at her after breaking the promise with God and becoming a sinner were: "This woman!" "This woman!"

The symptom of the broken relationship with God manifested as hatred toward the closest person—someone he had felt to be "myself," "the most important me of me." And to such two persons, God spoke and admonished them about their future.

Genesis 3:16–19 (PowerPoint)

"Even your own child, who should be the fruit of your love and nothing but joy, will become a source of suffering for you. The relationship between husband and wife will fall into one of domination, power struggles, condescension, and mutual intimidation. And what's more, the relationship between you two is not confined to just the two of you. It extends to the earth—that is, the natural world—which will be affected by a destruction so severe that it can only be described as 'cursed,' creating a world of self-inflicted, consequential cycles that strangle humanity. In reality, you will end up walking a path toward death—returning to the dust of the ground, to eternal destruction." Thus, God spoke to Adam and Eve, who had become sinners, about the severe reality they would face.

Women's liberation movements and the issue of gender discrimination have been called out in society for a long time, but the world spoken of to humanity by God in Genesis 3:16—"Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you"—has indeed become this world. And human attempts to resolve this without God may be seen as a kind of desperate struggle without any fundamental solution.

Also, although it is said in world history that the call against environmental destruction began after the Industrial Revolution of the 18th century, according to the Bible, which traces the history of humankind, it states that it was "from the moment man sinned."

The reality that we are still unable to stop or abandon that destruction and continue to drive this society forward seems to be nothing other than the fulfillment of Genesis 3:17: "Cursed is the ground because of you."

The relationship between man and woman, husband and wife, is a fundamental, foundational, and base-shaking issue that affects heaven and earth, and the Bible has been directly speaking that truth to us humans since ancient times.

Part Two

Now, in Genesis chapter 3, not only is the problem pointed out and the future course worried about, but in the midst of this great problem, the method of God's solution—like God Himself diving into the problem—is recorded here as the most important teaching for humanity, as the Word of God.

This is the passage known as the *Protoevangelium*.

Genesis 3:15 (PowerPoint)

(Read twice)

The “I” here refers to God the Father. The “you” refers to Satan, the Devil, who disguised himself as a serpent and tempted Adam and Eve, causing them to fall into sin.

The “offspring of the serpent” refers to the fallen angels and evil spirits who follow Satan, and also to the people who live under Satan's rule and are on the path to destruction.

The “offspring of the woman” and the “he” are said to refer to the Messiah, Jesus Christ, who was born as a child of man for the sake of humanity.

In other words, to save Adam and Eve—whom God loved and who were uniquely created in the image and likeness of God among all created beings—and to save all people who come from them, God declares here His first gospel: He will send the Savior, Jesus Christ, who takes on human form as the offspring of the woman Eve, to strike the head of Satan and rescue them. This is the Word of Genesis 3:15, known as the *Protoevangelium*—the original gospel.

Further, in verse 21, there is also a Word that prefigures the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ on the cross.

Genesis 3:21 (PowerPoint)

Because they had sinned, Adam and Eve were driven out of the paradise God had made—the Garden of Eden, the Kingdom of God—and had to live as sinners in a world of sin. For them, God Himself made garments of skin and clothed them.

In the Garden of Eden, there was no such thing as the killing and eating of animals with red blood flowing through their bodies—there was no survival of the fittest or food chain. According to Genesis chapter 1, even the food permitted for humans and animals was only “green plants,” that is, just vegetation.

The natural order that God initially created was not a pyramid structure where the physically and materially stronger ones go to the top through natural selection and survival of the fittest. He did not create such an order.

However, as if breaking the peaceful natural order that He Himself had created, God slaughtered an animal, shed its blood, tore off its skin, and made garments for Adam and Eve. He did so with tender compassion, knowing they would now have to leave the Garden as sinners, and thinking, “They must be cold. It must be hard for them.” God gave them garments of skin to wear—symbolizing His love—although they now had to live and die with an inner sin like magma, always ready to erupt, forming a world of mutual blame, competition, conflict, and survival of the fittest.

This act of God clothing them with garments of skin is the origin of the sacrificial system for the forgiveness of human sins, described especially in Leviticus. It also prefigures the atonement on the cross by Jesus Christ, which is fulfilled in the New Testament.

As it is written in Philippians chapter 2: “Although He existed in the form of God, He did not regard equality with God something to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant, and was made in human likeness, and became obedient to death—even death on a cross.”

Indeed, something as unthinkable as the Creator God dying—a reversal of all creation—is what the Triune God did in order to save humankind.

And to whom was this work of salvation first declared and done? To the first man and woman, the first husband and wife—Adam and Eve.

Therefore, Adam and Eve were the first people in human history to receive God’s salvation, and they are surely in heaven now.

They heard the *Protoevangelium* spoken by God Himself and were clothed with the garments of skin that represent the atonement of Christ’s cross.

Now then, the words written in Ephesians chapter 5, which speak of “Christ revealed in the relationship between husband and wife,” are written with the salvation record of Genesis in mind.

I believe that in the mind and heart of the Apostle Paul, led by the Holy Spirit, the story of Genesis was circulating as he wrote these gospel words.

Ephesians 5:22–33 (PowerPoint)

Part Three

I believe that one of the greatest blessings God has given us is the life of the family that begins from the mutual love between husband and wife, wife and husband.

It is just as the Word says.

Of course, I don't think there exists any household or married couple in which everything is always peaceful 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, without discord, without conflict, without crisis, such that they could say, "We can tell everything about our home, our marriage to others, and show it to them."

Embarrassingly, our home is the same.

But even if there is discord, even if there is conflict, even if there are crises, even if there are things we can't talk about or show to others — even so, fortunately, if we are in Christ, because of Christ, in the fear of Christ, and in obedience to Christ, then for every couple, for every family, the way is opened to be in the words and promise of blessing: "the two shall become one flesh. This mystery is great."

We are able to know the Christ who appears in the relationship between husband and wife.

For me too, my relationship with my wife is the core of my life, and the key that determines my life.

Pastoral ministry as a pastor honestly contains many hardships, and the work itself can shake and pass through painful and difficult times. But if my relationship with my wife is good, firm, reliable, and secure, then in moments where I might collapse, I have been given the strength to overcome.

Conversely, no matter how well I may think the work of the church is going, if the home, if my relationship with my wife becomes unstable, the pastoral ministry inevitably becomes shaken.

Through such experiences, I feel that God has taught me personally just how important my relationship with my wife is.

Now, God, through the letter to the Ephesians written by the Apostle Paul, is giving us important and very concrete words regarding husbands and wives.

"Wives, submit to your own husbands," "Husbands, love your wives as your own bodies."

Are you submitting to your husband?

Are you loving your wife?

Which is more difficult and challenging: submitting to your husband, or loving your wife?

The Bible does not assign superiority or inferiority to men or women, nor does it apply discrimination or distinctions.

We could say it acknowledges positively the differences in roles that come from physical structure, as well as strengths or areas of excellence that each has. At the same time, I think it also acknowledges the individuality of each person that transcends male and female gender.

For example, Jacob seemed to prefer cooking at home — considered a woman's task at that time — over hunting, which was thought to be a man's job.

Deborah, who was both a judge leading Israel and a female prophet, though a woman, went out leading male warriors into battle and brought a great victory to Israel.

God created men and women each with physical and mental characteristics, yet at the same time, I believe He also recognizes the individuality of each person that goes beyond man-made images of "man" or "woman."

In other words, human beings are equal.

Galatians 3:28 (PowerPoint)

"For you are all one in Christ Jesus."

I believe this is the human figure that the Bible teaches — the equal and just figure of humans, of men and women, in Christ.

In other words, the word to wives, "submit to your husband," and the word to husbands, "love your wife," mean the same thing.

Somehow, we may have the impression that the word "submit" feels more coercive, more binding, more high-handed, something that must be done even suppressing one's emotions — more so than the word "love."

But here, I think "submit" and "love" are synonyms.

If you love, you want to serve. You want to submit.

If you are submitting, it is because you love, because you want to love.

I have once heard a poet write these words:

"People say they love freedom, but I love to submit."

I think it is a profound poem.

It is not the kind of "submission" that obeys out of fear of the other's power, or because there is no other option, but submission because one loves, because one wants to love, because one desires to love.

I believe that in the act of "submission," one can feel a joy that surpasses even freedom — a joy that is more than freedom.

Strictly speaking, to "submit" is "to love," and to "love," strictly speaking, is "to submit."

The words in Ephesians, "Wives, submit to your husbands. Husbands, love your wives," seem to be God's wish to us, saying, "Please live with the joy, the sense of purpose, fulfillment, and blessing of knowing and saying, 'You are bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh. You are the most precious part of me as a person.'"

Moreover, the fact that it was the Apostle Paul — who was single — who spoke these words, I feel, is something meaningful, or rather, a sign of God's deep providence.

Part Four

The book called the Bible is a word spoken broadly to all people, but when you look at each individual book, and also the words, you understand that there are recipients, readers.

For example, the Pentateuch is directed to the people of Israel, and the Epistle to the Ephesians is directed to the Christians living in Ephesus.

Then, the words, "Wives, be subject to your own husbands as to the Lord," are these words given to husbands, or to wives?

They are words given to wives.

The words, "Husbands, love your wives as your own bodies," are these words given to wives, or to husbands?

They are words given to husbands, right?

But interestingly, who prefers and likes the words "Wives, be subject to your husbands"? Is it the wives, or the husbands?

It is the husbands.

Although these words were not given to husbands, husbands take these words and confront their wives with them.

"It's what the Bible says, right? You are a Christian, you have been a believer for a long time, so obey me," something like that.

But this is a big misunderstanding, because the recipient is wrong, the address is wrong.

The words "Wives, be subject to your husbands" are not words given to husbands.

They are not words given to assert husbands' rights or to question wives; these words were given to wives, unrelated to husbands.

Also, the words given to husbands, "Husbands, love your wives," instead of husbands liking these words, it seems that wives like them.

If wives confront husbands saying, "Why do you do this to me when you are told to love your wife?" then although they have at least read the Bible, they have misunderstood it.

The Bible starts from taking seriously what is spoken to oneself.

If it says "Wives," then wives accept it; if it says "Husbands," then husbands accept it. We simply pray and work on sincerely receiving and doing what is meant.

Part Five

Now everyone, here is one more question.

Regarding the Word, "Wives, submit to your husbands," does the responsibility lie with the wives, or with the husbands?

I think, it lies with the husbands.

As I said earlier, if one truly loves, then to submit is neither such a difficult thing, nor something that wounds one's pride, nor something one does reluctantly and under compulsion, right?

It should come forth naturally from one's own will.

Then why is it that a wife dislikes submitting to her husband?

Because the husband is not living in such a way that makes the wife want to submit.

If the husband lives sincerely—faithfully, honestly, regardless of whether he succeeds or fails—loving his wife, then I think it is not such a difficult thing for the wife to submit to her husband; or rather, it may naturally become so.

Likewise, the responsibility of the Word “Husbands, love your wives” does not lie with the husbands, but in truth, I think it lies with the wives.

When the husband takes on the responsibility of the Word given to the wife, and the wife takes on the responsibility of the Word given to the husband, then “submission” and “love” will occur without hesitation, just like water naturally flows from above to below. And such a couple, such a home, I believe, is truly the kingdom of God made manifest on this earth—a heaven, the kingdom of heaven.

And such bearing of responsibility hinges on the words, “in the fear of Christ,” “as you submit to Christ,” and “as Christ loved.”

The Lord Jesus died for us when we were ungodly, did not know God, and were spiritually blind.

Regardless of whether the other party loved Him or submitted to Him, without holding them accountable for responsibility, He Himself took up even that responsibility and loved us.

To ask about one's own responsibility before blaming others—that is something we normally, that is to say, as those who are sinners by nature, cannot do.

That is precisely why, fearing Christ, as submitting to Christ, as Christ loved, and remembering that we are part of Christ's body—we must seek, and I want to seek, the help and guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Conclusion

God has opened the way for us, in our marital relationship, to once again live the atmosphere and form of Adam and Eve before sin was committed—the words, “This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh.”

Through Jesus Christ—this person under heaven by whom the way of salvation has been given to us human beings, and no other—through this person, that way has been opened.

Because she loves her husband, the wife desires to submit to him as her head; and because he loves his wife, the husband desires to love her as he loves his own body. Such a beautiful relationship is what God desires for us.

Of course, this does not mean that we must not quarrel or argue. Rather, even while clashing greatly, we do not forget the feeling that the husband bears the responsibility of the Word given to the wife, and the wife bears the responsibility of the Word given to the husband. And by the help of the Holy Spirit reminding us, we wish to be allowed to taste that blessing.

Because of this Word, I pray in the name of the Lord Jesus that your home—our homes—may be further renewed, further beautified, and become a place of blessing where we may taste even more the foretaste of heaven.

Let us pray.

Benediction: Ephesians 5:33