

Submission of the Bride (Eph. 5:22-33)

Today we will study 5:22-33. This passage is often read at Weddings. But this was not just written for weddings.

Needless to say, this passage was written as a result of the previous section. The main message of cp. 5 is “Be imitators of God as dearly loved children. And walk in love” (5:1-2).

As God’s dearly loved children, the character of Father God will be revealed in our relationships. And three relationships are listed here: the relationship between a wife and a husband (5:22-33), the relationship between children and parents (6:1-4), the relationship between a servant and a master (6:5-9).

Today we will look at the first one, the relationship between a husband and a wife.

1. Walk in love to the goal

22-33

Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. ²³ For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. ²⁴ Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.

²⁵ Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her ²⁶ to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, ²⁷ and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.

²⁸ In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. ²⁹ After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church— ³⁰ for we are members of his body.

³¹ "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh." ³² This is a profound mystery-- but I am talking about Christ and the church. ³³ However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.

Here, a little words are for wives and most of the words are for husbands. Not just the amount, but also a lot of the content are for the husband. And don't forget that the men and women, husband and wife mentioned here are believers who love and follow Christ.

It sounds like rules and commands. Do this or don't do that. But what is actually said here is what kind of relationships believers who love and follow Christ will naturally have with one another. Here it describes what those relationships will look like, and what it will be like to walk in love. With the presence of one another, we can grow and mature together as imitators of God, as dearly loved children.

Eph 4:22-24

You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; ²³ to be made new in the attitude of your minds; ²⁴ and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.

It is not the end. Not the goal. It is actually the beginning, the starting point of Christian life. Where are we going then? Our goal is "We all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ" (Eph 4:13). "From him [Christ] the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love" (Eph 4:16).

With the presence of one another, we can grow and mature together as imitators of God, as dearly loved children. And we learn about intimate relationship, unity in difference, and practice it. One of those important relationships is the one between a husband and a wife.

What we can learn here is not just limited to the relationship between a husband and a wife. We can apply this to every other relationship.

2. Christ's love for the church

God created the world, and it was wonderful. There were beautiful birds, and various animals. God also created human in his image. The first man, Adam gave

name to each living creature. But he couldn't find any partner suitable for him (Gen 2:19-20).

The bible tells us how Adam rejoiced when he met Eva for the first time: "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called 'woman,' for she was taken out of man" (Gen 2:23).

He felt that she is the very part of himself. Without her, he can't be he no longer. The love relationship began, and nothing else can disturb it.

Man could eat from any trees in the garden of Eden except just one tree. You might wonder why God had put such a dangerous tree there. But because of the tree, man could be reminded that he was under the authority of God. He could appreciate that it was because of God that he was now living happily there. He was living so happily with his wife. They loved each other very much.

Then one day, an incident happens. The serpent tempted the woman.

Gen 3:6

When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it.

Delicious, beautiful, something that makes her wise. The temptation for women still remains the same now. Don't you think? And the husband ate it as his wife gave him some. The fact that men have a weak spot for women remain the same in all times and places.

What was it like up to that point? Adam said "This is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh. She is my very own." The relationship where they could truly understand each other, trust each other. If they lose one another, they would lose themselves, they would no longer be who they are. There was a rich love between them.

But when sin entered them, they lost love. Their relationship has changed. They started to shift the blame onto one another, and accuse each other.

They ignored God's word. They denied God's word and started to live relying on their own ideas. They started to decide by themselves what is good and what is evil instead of God. That is, they put themselves in the position of God. That is the core of sin. They have no right to complain, even if they become unhappy, because they selfishly betrayed God and sinned against Him.

But God loves his church as his own body. So he didn't abandon human beings who suffer in their sins. Instead of judging humans, he gave himself up on the cross, and opened the way of salvation, reconciliation with him and restoration of the image of God in them.

The church was not the coming up of the gathering of people who responded to the gospel message. Rather, the church was already in the heart of God, even before the creation of the world. "For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight" (Eph 1:4).

Eph 5:25-27

Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her ²⁶ to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, ²⁷ and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.

Christ poured out his love on the church freely, unsparingly to make her alive and beautiful. Each of us are the part of Christ's body nourished by Christ's love, whether man or woman, husband or wife, single or married, old or young.

As we are loved by God like that, we submit ourselves to Him. It's our response to His love. We will be imitators of God, as dearly loved children. We walk in love with the submission of the bride.

3. The lost submission

22-24

Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. ²³ For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. ²⁴ Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.

It takes great courage for me to speak from this passage. Because some ladies may complain. They might claim, "It says 'submit to one another' right before that passage. So actually husbands also need to submit to his wife. It is not fair only wives are told to submit."

As a pastor, sometimes I talk to couples about “marriage”. And I’ve been leading couples retreat. Interestingly, as far as I remember, husbands never complained that the Bible says “Submit to one another.” Anyhow, I can see that husbands try to practice this word. It still remains the same since the first man, Adam. Adam ate the fruit which God had told him not to, as it was given by Eve, his wife (Gen 3:6). What a submission to his wife!

What we need to think here is why women, why wives show resistance against v.22. As I told before, this is spoken to Jesus’ believers. It is spoken to godly wives who love and follow Christ to submit to godly husbands who love and follow Christ. And it is about your husband. Why do ladies, wives show resistance against v.22? What is the problem?

There may be many different reasons. I think what you thought of in your mind right now are all reasonable.

I think it is because wives have fear in submitting to their husbands. I think they feel insecure about submitting to men. Of course, there may be other reasons as well. It cannot be the only reason. But if we don’t deal with this “fear and insecurity” how can wives, or ladies submit in peace?

Col. 3:19

Husbands, love your wives and do not be harsh with them.

1 Pet. 3:7 NASB

You husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way, as with someone weaker, since she is a woman; and show her honor as a fellow heir of the grace of life.

We can see in those days, even in Christian families, some husbands treated their wives harshly, and some even left them with selfish reasons, or made light of them. If women grew up witnessing and hearing of those incidents, of course they would feel fear in submitting to their husbands, feel insecure about submitting to men. Deep down their hearts are preoccupied with fear and insecurity. It has been passing by generation to generation.

God never leaves those wives in fear, God never ignores those women who suffer in insecurity. God wants them to experience that they are dearly loved

children. He wants them to experience his love, the father's love, and make them the ones who reflect his love, and imitate Him. He wants them to walk in love, not in fear. They can submit themselves as their response to love, because they are loved.

God wants to restore the image of Him in wives, in women. Of course in men, too.

God of the Bible is the God of Trinity: God the Father, Jesus the Son and the Holy Spirit. They always respect each other, and serve one another. No one tries to show off himself. On the contrary, they submit to one another. The Father has entrusted all judgment to his son Jesus (John 5:22). Jesus did the will of his father (John 5:19; 6:38). Jesus laid down his life to glorify his father (John 17:1). The Holy Spirit brought glory to Jesus (John 16:14).

"Be imitators of God, as dearly loved children" (Eph 5:1-2). This is the lamentation of God for the lost submission of the bride. And it is also the groaning of God as he tries to restore it in his love.

4. Restoration of submission

25-30

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her ²⁶ to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, ²⁷ and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. ²⁸ In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. ²⁹ After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church— ³⁰ for we are members of his body.

The Bride at the wedding is the symbol of perfect beauty. Here says the church is full of stains of sin and wrinkles of dirt. But Christ will cleanse her by the washing with the word, make her holy and blameless, and transform her into a glorious, radiant church. But if the church doesn't listen to his word and submit her to him, what happens? The church cannot be transformed.

Christ expects his church to be submissive. The church is to surrender herself to Christ, and entrust herself to his work of love. Why can Christ expect the church to be submissive? It is because Christ loves the church.

Christ is the head of the church (v.23). What it means is that Christ nourishes the church and gives nutrition necessary for her to grow and mature (Eph 2:21-22). He removes the church's stains and wrinkles. He cleanses the church. He takes her back from the hand of Satan, and sets her free from the rule of sin. He will remove impurities from her love for him. He will protect her so that other things won't mix into her love for him.

Here think about removing stains and wrinkles from us.

Without knowing it, we inherited many things from our parents or our care takers who brought us up. We learned from our parents what husband and wife should be like, what family should be like. And they also received that value from their parents: the role of father, the role of mother, how to listen to others and how to respond, when problem happens who will deal with it in what way, how to express our feelings and how to receive others feelings, and so on.

Some of those ideas are valuable, of course. But some of them look down on wives, women, or some of them make them afraid. Unconsciously we accept those values, and act according to them. We accept the concept: a family is like that, the society is like that, a man is like that, a woman is like that.

Moreover, bad habits and addictions can be inherited as well. For example, violence and wasteful habits. And usually the weak, children and women will be victims of that. We will become adults with those influences since childhood, and end up practicing it.

So the Bible says this: "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh" (v.31).

To leave his father and mother. To leave here has a strong meaning like "break up with." The relationship between husband and wife is the one even their parents cannot force their way into. The relationship between husband and wife must be separated from negative, un-godly influence of their family inheritance. As its head, the husband must lead and protect his new family in this way (v.23).

God joined a man and woman together, made them a married couple. As a couple he will restore God's design in each other. For this, it is essential for us to be separated from our father and mother, because we have inherited negative legacy from our parents. We must break up with it. We must not bring them into this new family, the relationship between of husband and wife. In order to do this, we must identify it and separate it.

God searches our heart with His word, and shows us what is there (Heb 4:1). And he will wash us and cleanse us with his word, even deeper place in our soul (Eph 5:26). With his word, he will nourish us, grow us and mature us (1 Pet 2:2). "My comfort in my suffering is this: Your promise preserves my life" (Ps 119:50).

Love has power to transform us.

Christ poured out his love on the church unsparingly to make it alive and glorious before him. Each of us are the part of Christ's body nourished by Christ's love, whether man or woman, husband or wife, single or married, old or young.

As we remain in God's love, and respond to his Word, we will become lively and mature gloriously.

Christ loved his church as his own body. He devoted himself to grow her, nourish her and make her beautiful. He even gave his life for her.

Christ' love is the model of husband's love for his wife. Husbands are to follow Christ's example on a daily basis to "Be imitators of God, as dearly loved children." This love can be tangibly expressed through words and actions, rather than just by thinking about it or talking about it. It is only possible when we give up ourselves, respect and care for the other, rather than waiting for the other to change.

It's easy to say, but it's a real challenge to do it.

As some of you have known that my wife, Yumi had struggled with wart on her sole of her left foot. Now she is fine. Thank you for your prayers. She took minor surgery two times last year. But they didn't help much. In January the wart spread on her left foot and became bigger and bigger. She was struggling with the pain so much. She couldn't sleep. In the bad she often moved and said "It's so painful." So, I also couldn't sleep well.

One night, she was murmuring "It's so painful" in the bed. I was so tired of hearing like that. I said "Why don't you cut off your foot. Then, you don't feel pain any longer." She said "No, I don't want to" and became kind of quiet.

I don't remember it was in my dream or I was still awake. Anyway, I thought like this. "When she returns from the operation, what can I say to her? Perhaps, I would say 'You still have two arms. You can play the sax. I can help you to move around. I can go to the market for grocery. I can go to take out the garbage. So, don't worry. We can make it.'"

I really regretted what I said. Since then, I've been trying to be supportive to her. I've been helping her, imagining what I would do if she had lost her foot. Of course, I asked for her forgiveness. She accepted my apology. She still loves me.

My friends, dear husbands, we need to learn from God our Father what it mean to love ourselves. We need to learn from Christ how to love our wives as our body. We need to have the Holy Spirit restore the image of God in us and in our wives.

Our lovely wives. It will be big support for us if you show your acknowledgment and respect about our try to be a better husband

Love is not to look into the stains and wrinkles of others, nor criticize sins or mistakes of others. Love covers over a multitude of sins (1 Pet 4:8). Love gently covers the immature, weak and wounded part of the person and protects and cares for the person until he or she get healed and strengthened. Love protects, encourages, and nurtures. Love finds beauty and excellence in the person, walks with the person in hope, trust, encourage and strengthen the person.

A husband has the responsibility to nurture his own body as well as that of his wife. A wife receives her husband's love and care, and she remains and rests in his love peacefully, joyfully. That is what it means for a wife to submit to her husband. It is not a command. It is a natural way of life for those who were made new by Christ's love. It is the original relationship man used to have before sin came into. God is trying to restore that relationship.

Since the first humans, Adam and Eve betrayed God, God has kept calling us, "Where are you?" (Gen 3:9). This is God's mysterious election.

"It is being included in the eternal life of God that heals all wounds and allows us to stop demanding satisfaction. What really matters, of a personal nature, once it is clear that you are included? You have been chosen. God chose you."¹ We are his bride.

God is now speaking to each one of us, "How can I give you up, Israel? How can I hand you over? My heart stirs within me; my compassion also fans into flame" (Hosea 11:8). "I'll provide abundance for those who are weary, and fill all who are faint. I will refresh the weary and satisfy the faint" (Jer 31:25).

¹ Darrell Johnson, *Experiencing the Trinity*, Regent College Publishing, 2002, p.69

The submission of the bride. It can be done because she is loved. Through various experiences, the submission was lost. The Lord is inviting us into his love and restore the submission of the bride. The Lord himself will cleanse us with his word, and make us holy, blameless and radiant church, without stains, wrinkles and any other blemish.

For Lifenet groups and personal reflection:

- 1) List up the love of Christ which you have felt in your spouse or family members. How does this list encourage you?
- 2) The love of Christ for church is the model for husbands to love their wives. How can we apply this into other relationships? Practice one of the applications each day this week.
- 3) You may ask the Holy Spirit to show what negative legacy from your parents you have inherited. Take time to listen to him and list them up. Ask the Spirit to wash and cleanse your soul with his word.