

of willing submission will not only enhance their marriage and bring joy and contentment in true companionship, but will also glorify her Savior Yeshua, for in her submitting to the leadership of her husband, she will be modeling the very thing that characterizes the true *ekklēsia* which Yeshua Himself purchased with His own blood.

25–27 Husbands, love your wives, just as Messiah also loved the *ekklēsia* and gave Himself up for her, so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that He might present to Himself the *ekklēsia* in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless.

Continuing to expand on the general command in v. 21, “be subject to one another in the fear of Messiah,” Paul directs his exhortations to husbands. Since the primary example of submission is that of Yeshua Who submitted to the will of the Father in giving Himself to redeem His *ekklēsia*, and since the *ekklēsia* is viewed as the “bride of Messiah” (cf. 2Cor 11:2; Rev 19:7; 21:2, 9), it is understandable why Paul begins his exhortation to the wife first, for in the same way that the *ekklēsia* submits to the headship of Messiah Yeshua, so as the wife submits to the leadership of her husband, she gives a clear picture and example of what it means for believers to willingly submit to Yeshua.

The exhortation to husbands is to “love your wives” (ἀγαπάτε τὰς γυναῖκας). The plural “wives” agrees with the plural “husbands,” so that the clear meaning is that each husband is to love his own wife. That “wives” (τὰς γυναῖκας, *tas gunaikas*) is in the plural, caused some scribes to sense an ambiguity in Paul’s words, and thus in some manuscripts “your” (ὑμῶν, *humōn*)¹ or “his own” (ἐαυτῶν, *eautōn*)² is inserted to emphasize that the command is for a husband to love his own wife. But such additions (mostly in the later manuscripts) are not needed, for Paul’s words clearly indicated a one-to-one relationship between a husband and a wife, and cannot be read to approve polygamy.

Paul has used the verb ἀγαπάω (*agapaō*), “to love” four times in the previous contexts, to denote the Father’s love for Yeshua (1:6), God’s love for His people (1:4; 2:4) and Messiah’s love for the *ekklēsia* (5:2). With these as the backdrop, he now exhorts husbands to exercise love to their wives as patterned after the very love of Yeshua for His own.

1 F G it vg^{cl.ww} sy.

2 D Ψ 0278 **ⲙ** (cf. P 629. 1739. 1881. 2464); Cl^{pt}.

The use of the verb ἀγαπάω (*agapaō*) itself emphasizes that the core character of this kind of love is that of giving oneself for the good of the one loved. Thus, the greatest demonstration of such love is that of Yeshua's love for His own "bride," i.e., the *ekklesia*, for he "gave Himself up for her," that is, He gave His life to redeem those He would save from the penalty of their sin, uniting them together as one with Him. For the *ekklesia* is the "body" of which He is the "head," which sets the background for the "one flesh" aspect of God's gift of marriage.

What is more, Paul has cast the imperative "love" in the present tense, emphasizing that such love is ongoing and is to be the very character of love that a godly and obedient husband must have for his wife.

Obviously, the high watermark of such love is the love demonstrated by Yeshua in giving His own life to secure the salvation of His chosen bride, and this is emphasized when Paul exhorts husbands to love their wives "just as (καθώς, *kathōs*) Messiah also loved the *ekklesia*." The verbal phrase *ἑαυτὸν παρέδωκεν* (*eauton paredōken*), translated "gave Himself up," gives the primary aspect of what Paul is admonishing husbands to do, for it means "to give up or hand over to someone else that which one possesses and which is held as very important."¹ This means that husbands who desire to be obedient to their Lord and Savior must diligently strive to give of themselves for the good their wives. They must put as a priority the meeting of the needs of one's wife by giving of their time, abilities, resources, i.e., giving of themselves. In order to do this, the husband must be attentive to his wife's needs, which can only happen when a loving relationship is fostered allowing open communication and sharing of all aspects of life together.

so that He might sanctify her... – The goal and purpose of such love is likewise perfectly demonstrated by Yeshua's love for His bride, the *ekklesia*. He loves us, not for His own benefit, but that we as His people might be "set apart" to Him and from the world. Yet as we are set apart or sanctified unto Him, we have the ability to honor Him for Who He truly is and in doing so, we find great fulfillment and joy and our needs are met in far greater ways than we might have even imagined.

The sweeping nature of the demand placed on the wife (that she should be subject to her husband in everything v. 23) is therefore matched by an equally sweeping demand on the husband. Like Christ, the husband is to love (ἀγαπάω, *agapaō*)

1 Cf. BDAG, "παραδίωμι," p. 761.

his wife by the sacrifice of his own life on his wife's behalf.¹

The analogy between Messiah and the *ekklesia*, and the godly husband and wife, is obvious. When we as believers in Yeshua submit to Him in everything, and are more and more set apart unto Him, our lives are fulfilled and strengthened even when confronted with the woes of this fallen world. So it is when a husband is joyfully putting the needs of his wife ahead of his own needs and wants, and his wife is joyfully submitting to his leadership, the marriage relationship grows stronger and closer bringing lasting joy and contentment in the divine gift of oneness.

The theological truth of this analogy between Messiah and the *ekklesia*, and husband and wife, should likewise be emphasized. The love of Yeshua as the “husband” and the *ekklesia* as His “bride” results in the “sanctification” of the *ekklesia*. When there are those who confess Yeshua to be their Lord and Savior, but whose lives evidence little or no true sanctification, i.e., being set apart unto Yeshua and from the ways of the world, they portray the spiritual posture of an unfaithful wife who has abandoned the loving efforts of her husband. The point is this: those whom Yeshua loves He sanctifies and thus the growing sanctification of those who confess Him to be their Lord and Savior is a true witness to the world of His loving them and His ability to meet their needs.

having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word – The Greek word translated “cleansed” is καθάρισμα (*katharizō*). The term is often used in the Lxx of ritual cleansing, i.e., achieving the ceremonial status of “clean” in order to offer sacrifices, enter the court yard of the Tabernacle or Temple, etc.,² a picture of being cleansed from sin in order to enter sacred space, and thus picturing relationship with God. Such “washing” is also used in the Scriptures as a metaphor for forgiveness of one's sins.

Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. (Ps 51:2)

Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God. (2Cor 7:1)

1 Thielman, *Ephesians*, p. 381.

2 E.g., 1 Sam 20:26; Neh 12:30.

Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded. (James 4:8)

let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. (Heb 10:22)

It is not uncommon to read commentators and expositors who understand “the washing of water with the word” to refer to baptism. They point to the fact that the Greek has the definite article, “the washing of water” which is interpreted to mean a specific washing, i.e., baptism.¹ Others who take the view that Paul is here referring to “baptism,” note that the noun *λουτρόν* (*loutron*), here translated as “washing,” can refer to “bathing” or the place where one bathes. But *loutron* can also carry the sense of “washing.”² Note that this noun is found only one other place in the Apostolic Scriptures, i.e., Titus 3:5.

He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit.... (Titus 3:5)

Given the fact that Paul’s subject in this context is that of marriage, it seems likely that regarding the phrase “washing of water” he is using the “bridal *mikveh*” as a metaphor, for it was apparently common among the Jewish community that a bride would undergo a *mikveh* prior to the wedding ceremony to assure her ritual purity.³ Since in our text Paul views the *ekklesia* as the bride of Yeshua, the cleansing of sin which enables union together with Yeshua, is the “washing,” i.e., the redemptive work of Yeshua applied to the believer who has received the Gospel and exercised saving faith.

Note similar language used by Paul in 1Corinthians.

Such were some of you; but you were washed (*ἀπολούω*, *apoulouō*) but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Yeshua Messiah and in the Spirit of our God. (1Cor 6:11)

1 E.g., Lincoln, *Ephesians*, p. 375; Best, *Ephesians*, p. 543; Abbott, *Ephesians*, p. 169; Hendriksen, p. 251.

2 BDAG, “λούω,” p. 603.

3 See Thielman, *Ephesians*, pp. 383-84 and the sources listed there; Liddle, Scott, Jones, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, p. 1061.

While employing a different word (*apolouō*) than what we find in our Ephesians text, the metaphor is the same.

One further note in understanding the phrase “washing of water with the word” is that the Greek translated “word” is *ῥήμα* (*rēma*) when we might expect *λόγος* (*logos*) if by “with the word” Paul is referring to the Gospel. But *rēma* carries primarily the sense of the “spoken word” and thus may well, in our context, refer to the Gospel as it was announced to Paul’s readers by himself or other believers who were spreading the good news of Yeshua. Further “with the word” (*ἐν ῥήματι, en hrēmati*) is best understood as meaning “by means of *the* word.”

Paul is therefore referring to the message of the Gospel which came to those to whom he is addressing and which they received by faith, and thus were given the gift of salvation purchased by the very life of Yeshua. In Paul’s metaphor of marriage in which Yeshua is the husband and the *ekklesia* is His wife, we see clearly how His giving of Himself as the model “husband” sanctified the *ekklesia*, His wife, unto Himself forming an unbreakable, eternal union together with Him.

that He might present to Himself the ekklesia in all her glory – Here the metaphor of the bride preparing herself for a wedding ceremony by bathing is turned, for it is the Groom Who has cleansed her and made her beautiful for Himself. She is clothed in His glory and it is His love that makes her truly beautiful. It seems nearly certain that Paul has Ezek 16:8–14 in mind as he gives us this picture, for in the prophet’s prophetic description of Israel she is pictured as a young woman ready for marriage but who is unadorned, impoverished, even naked. So God covers her, makes covenant with her, bathes, washes, and anoints her with oil, and adorns her with beautiful clothes and jewels, even with a crown on her head so that she comes forth as royalty.

Thus you were adorned with gold and silver, and your dress was of fine linen, silk and embroidered cloth. You ate fine flour, honey and oil; so you were exceedingly beautiful and advanced to royalty. (Ezek 16:13)

Thus, Paul, in line with his “olive tree” metaphor of Romans 11, sees the *ekklesia* as the faithful remnant of Israel enlarged by the elect of the nations who are grafted into the believing remnant, and ultimately comprise the whole people of God in fulfillment of the Abrahamic promise. Once impoverished by the debt of sin and clothed in the rags of ungodly worldliness, she now has been given new life, clothed in the righteousness of Messiah Himself, and taken as a wife for the King.

having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless. – Thus, the “glory” of the bride, the *ekklesia*, is the result of Yeshua’s work making her beautiful in righteousness, without any defect which could render her unworthy. To be “holy” is to have been given the status of “righteous,” i.e., not guilty of any sin, which is what the word “saints” (ἅγιοι, *hagioi*) portrays.¹ This is what it means to be “justified,” declared righteous by God Himself, for all the debt of sin has been paid by Yeshua and we are clothed in His righteousness.

Moreover, we are “blameless.” Nothing remains that could separate us from the love of God in our Messiah, Yeshua (Rom 8:35–39). Here we have the supreme picture of the sanctified love that is to exist between husband and wife, for each is to be sanctified unto the other and to no one else. This truth is first presented at the opening of Ephesians when Paul writes:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Yeshua Messiah, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Messiah, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him in love. (Eph 1:3–4)

28–30 So husbands ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies; He who loves his own wife loves himself; for no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Messiah also does the *ekklesia*, because we are members of His body.

The opening “So” translates the Greek οὕτως (*houtōs*) meaning “in the same way or manner,” which seems surely to refer to the previous context, thus, “in the same way that Yeshua Messiah demonstrated His love for the *ekklesia* by giving Himself for her salvation and sanctification, so husbands are to give themselves for the betterment of their wives.”

Once again, the infinitive “to love” (ἀγαπᾶν, *agapan*) in our text is in the present tense, indicating that such love ought to be the normal, consistent action on the part of the husband. In stating that husbands are “to love their own wives as their own body,” it seems most likely that Paul has a well known phrase from Lev 19:18 in mind: “but you shall love your neighbor as yourself.” One might question whether “neigh-

1 The word “saints” (ἅγιος, *hagios*) is found 9 times in Ephesians: 1:1, 15, 18; 2:19; 3:8, 18; 4:12; 5:3; 6:18.

bor” could fittingly refer to one’s wife, but it is interesting to note that in the Song of Solomon when the “lover” refers to “my darling,” the Hebrew has רַיְתִי (ra’yiti) “my neighbor” which the Lxx translates with the word found in Lev 19:18, i.e., πλησίον (plēsion), “neighbor.”¹ Thus, it is very possible that Paul links together the concept of Lev 19:18, i.e., loving one’s neighbor as oneself, with the intimate relationship that exists between husband and wife, for husband and wife, in this sense, are the closest of “neighbors.”

He who loves his own wife loves himself; The parallel to Lev 19:18, that one is to “love his neighbor as himself,” makes the phrase “loves himself” understandable. The husband is to care for his wife and her needs with the same attention and urgency that he would care for his own needs. And the parallel to the language of the “body of Messiah” is obvious. Even as the *ekklesia* is the “body of Messiah,” and thus Yeshua loves and cares for the *ekklesia* as being His very own body, so husbands are to love their wives as their own bodies. The import of this analogy is obvious: whenever someone is hurt physically, that injury or hurt becomes an immediate priority for one’s attention and actions. For a husband to love his wife as his own body is to give to his wife the same priority that he would have when dealing with his own physical hurt or injury. And this carries over to all manner of needs, not only physical injury or hurts but also emotional, spiritual, and other physical needs.

From the positive aspect of this teaching, it is clear that as a husband puts the needs of his wife as a priority and thus helps her to prosper, the husband likewise prospers himself.

for no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it – When Paul writes that “no one ever hated his own flesh,” it is obvious that he is describing the normal aspect of human existence, not the exception, for “self hatred is a pathology.”² His point is that no one in their right mind purposefully injures himself or herself. To “hate” (μισέω, *miseō*) one’s flesh means to act in a most inhumane manner, which is clearly not the norm. The norm is that a person seeks to attend to his or her own needs as best they are able.

Paul uses the terms “nourishes” (ἐκτρέφω, *ektrepō*) and “cherishes” (θάλλω, *thalpō*) to describe how people generally attend to their own needs. The word *ektrepō* “to nourish” is found only here and in 6:1 in the Apostolic Scriptures. In 6:1 it obviously carries the sense of nurturing a child by “bringing them up in the discipline and instruction

1 Cf. Song 1:9, 15; 2:2, 10, 13; 4:1, 7; 5:2, 16; 6:4.

2 Klein, *Ephesians*, p. 153.

of the Lord." It therefore has the picture of a "helping hand," or "supplying what is needed." Paul's point is that we do this regularly for ourselves. The word *thalpō* "to cherish" is found only here and in Paul's first epistle to the Thessalonians.

But we proved to be gentle among you, as a nursing mother tenderly (*thalpō*) cares for her own children. (1Thess 2:7)

The meaning is obvious as to why Paul chose this word to describe how we care for ourselves if we sustain an injury. We are very careful and diligent not to cause further pain but to do all in our power to lessen the pain and to help the wound heal. Moreover, we do what is necessary to bring about healing of the wound even if it requires something that might be, for the short-term, uncomfortable.

just as Messiah also does the ekklesia, because we are members of His body—This is the clear and obvious manner in which Yeshua shows His unflinching and abundant love for the *ekklesia*, for as Paul writes the Philippians:

And my God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Messiah Yeshua. (Phil 4:19)

Note also his words in his second epistle to the Corinthians:

And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that always having all sufficiency in everything, you may have an abundance for every good deed; (2Cor 9:8)

Surely the love of Yeshua for His bride, His body, the *ekklesia* is the high standard which husbands are to have before them and seek to emulate as each one loves his wife according to the ways of Yeshua. For surely Yeshua has given His life for the *ekklesia* and always lives to maintain us, to nurture and cherish us for Himself.

There is never a moment that Christ does not tenderly watch over his body, the *ekklesia*. We are under his constant surveillance. His eyes are constantly upon us, from the beginning of the year even to the end of the year (cf. Deut. 11:12). Therefore we cast all our anxiety upon him, convinced that we are his personal concern (1 Peter 5:7), the objects of his very special providence.¹

1 Hendricksen, *Ephesians*, p. 255.