

CHRIST AND THE CHURCH: A MODEL FOR CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE

Ephesians 5:22-33

Interpretive Translation

With the understanding that we as believers are to willingly submit to one another out of a reverential awe of Christ, Paul exhorts wives to likewise submit willingly to their husbands as their husbands are the head of the family just as Christ is the head of the church, the Savior of the body. Just as the church is to be in complete submission to Christ, so too should wives be to their husbands. Husbands are called to love their wives as Christ sacrificially loved the church. He gave Himself up on her behalf in order that His self-sacrifice might sanctify her by means of cleansing her with water so that she may not have any blemish but instead be holy and blameless. Christ did all of this so that He might present the church to Himself in all her glory. The purpose of Christ's love for the church is for her ultimate good, which should be the goal of a husband's love for his wife. Husbands are called to love their wives both unconditionally and intimately, just as they would their own bodies, in the same way that Christ loved His body, the church. No one would ever harm their own body, this is why husbands are exhorted to nourish and cherish their wives as their own bodies, just as Christ does for the church because we are all members of His body. It is for this reason that a husband leaves his father and mother and is joined to and cherishes his wife, and the two become "one flesh". Paul says that this unity between Christ and the church is a profound mystery. Nevertheless, just as Christ loves the church, each of you husbands ought to love your own wives even as yourselves, and wives you ought to respect your husbands.

Exegetical Central Idea

In willing submission to one another, out of reverential awe of Christ, husbands are called to love their wives in the way Christ loved the church, and wives are called to submit to and follow the leadership of their husbands.

Exegetical Sentence Outline

- I. Wives ought to submit to and follow the leadership of their husbands on the basis of his headship over the marriage just as the church submits to Christ based on His headship over the church. [22-24]
 - A. Wives ought to submit themselves to their husbands. [22a]
 1. Using their submission to Christ as an example, wives ought to submit to husbands in like fashion. [22b]
 - B. The author identifies the basis for which husbands have headship in marriage. [23]
 1. The reason husbands have headship in marriage is because Christ is the head of the church. [23b]

2. The reason Christ is the Savior of the body is because He rescued the church from eternal separation from God. [23c]
- C. The normal disposition of the church toward Christ and a wife toward her husband should be one of submission. [24a]
 1. Since the church, which is the body, submits to Christ due to His headship, in like fashion wives ought to submit to their husbands due to his headship. [24b]
- II. Husbands ought to love their wives in the same way that Christ sacrificially loved the church with the goal of keeping her pure and blameless. [25-27]
 - A. Husbands are called to love their wives. [25]
 1. The love of a husband for his wife ought to reflect that of Christ's sacrificial love for the church. [25d]
 - B. The purpose of Christ's love for the church is to sanctify her holy and present her to Himself in splendor. [26-27]
 1. The instrument by which Christ sanctified the church was by the washing of water with the word. [26b]
 2. The result of Christ sanctifying the church was the she would be holy and blameless. [27f]
- III. Since they are one flesh, husbands ought to love their wives as themselves in a nourishing and caring way just as Christ did for the church, which is a profound mystery. [28-32]
 - A. Husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies just as Christ loved his body, the church. [28a-b]
 1. The manner in which husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies is that of how Christ loved His body, the church. [28a-b]
 - B. The husband who loves his wife loves himself. [28c]
 1. The reason the husband who loves his wife loves himself is because he does not hate his own body rather he nourishes and cares for it. [29a-b]
 - C. Christ nourishes and cares for His body. [29c]
 1. The reason Christ nourishes and cares for His body, the church, is because we are all members of His body. [30]
 - D. Husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies because they are united in one flesh. [31]
 1. Husbands will leave their father and mother and be joined to their wife and the two will become one flesh. [31]
 - E. The way Christ nourishes and takes care of the church is a profound mystery. [32]
 1. The author affirms that the profound mystery he is referring to is that of Christ and the church. [32]
- IV. Husbands and wives are reminded of their marital responsibilities. [33]
 - A. Husbands are reminded of their primary marital responsibility. [33a]
 1. Husbands are reminded to love their wives as themselves. [33a]
 - B. Wives are reminded of their primary marital responsibility. [33b]
 1. Wives are reminded that they are to respect their husbands. [33b]

Commentary

Paul begins this section of Ephesians (5:22-33) on the heels of the prior section whereby he exhorts the Ephesian church to willingly submit to one another out of reverential awe of Christ (5:21). He continues this exhortation of submission in this section by providing the model of Christ and the church and how the marital relationship should mirror that model. It is by this model of Christ's sacrificial love for the church and her complete submission to Him, that Paul instructs husbands to love their wives and wives to submit and respect their husbands, thus revealing a blueprint for a harmonious marriage.

I. Submission and Headship (5:22-24)

Paul opens this section still addressing the idea of submission (ὑποτάσσω)¹ that he began in the prior verse but more specifically what submission looks like in the marital relationship of husband and wife. While both parties are to look to Christ as their example of how they should perform in their marital relationship, this section solely deals with the responsibilities of wives. His instruction begins by telling wives they ought to look to Christ and their submission to Him as an example of how they ought to completely submit to their husbands and gives the basis for why the husband has headship over the marital relationship.

A. Wives' Submission to their Husbands (22)

1. Christ as the Example (22a)

While the textual reading of this verse does not include the verb (υποτάσσομενοι), it is implied that the phrase αἱ γυναῖκες [υποτάσσομενοι] τοῖς ἰδίοις ἀνδράσιν² is an imperative to wives to submit to their husbands. It is this author's opinion that the textual reading, which omits the verb in this verse, is more likely the original.³ The lack of an explicit verb, however, is not unimportant. It tightens the connection between 5:21 and 5:22 and shows that Paul is describing here in 5:22 how wives can live out the instructions on submission that in 5:21 he gave to everyone. Believers should submit to one another, he says, and wives, for their part, should submit to their husbands.⁴

Paul also clarifies this instruction in that wives are to be in submission to their "own" (ἰδίοις)⁵ husbands and not simply to men in general or even husbands in general. Thielman states, "there is nothing here about the natural inferiority of women to men and the appropriateness, then, of men ruling over women. There is certainly no hint that all women should submit to all men."⁶

The phrase "as to the Lord" (ὡς τῷ κυρίῳ)⁷ is in reference to the manner and motivation in which the wife should submit to her husband, not the degree to which she

¹ BDAG, 1042.

² Kurt Aland et al., *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 28th Edition. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2012), Eph 5:22.

³ Appendix A: Textual Criticism Problem #1

⁴ Frank Thielman, *Ephesians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2010), 375.

⁵ BDAG, 466.

⁶ Frank Thielman, *Ephesians*, 375.

⁷ Kurt Aland et al., *Novum Testamentum Graece*, Eph 5:22.

submits nor her submittal to her husband because he is a “lord” (κυρίῳ is not plural corresponding to ἀνδράσιν). In agreement with 5:21 whereby we are all called to willingly submit to one another in reverential awe of Christ, wives are called to submit to their husbands and in doing so submit to Christ. The implication here is that Christian wives’ submission to their husbands is one aspect of their obedience to the Lord.⁸

B. The Basis for Headship (23)

1. Christ: Head of the Church (23b)

If the motivation of wives submitting to their husbands is out of obedience to Christ, then the rationale, and foundation for the exhortation which is introduced by the causal conjunction ὅτι⁹, is that husbands have headship over the marital relationship just as Christ has headship over the church. It is this model of Christ and the church that Paul will refer to time and again within these passages. If the rationale of why wives submit to their husbands is that the husband is the “head” (κεφαλή)¹⁰ of the marital relationship and by proxy the wife, it is imperative that we get a handle on what exactly Paul means by headship. In the NT the term “head” often meant a physical person’s head but in the case of this passage in Ephesians, the term refers to an elevated position in status in regards to hierarchy, or authority.¹¹ Indeed, Paul uses the metaphor of a “head” and body to illustrate the relationship and authority between the head (Christ/husband) and the body (the church/wife). For the marital relationship to function in harmony it requires a hierarchical structure, one with headship and the other in submission.

2. Christ: Savior of the Body (23c)

Husbands look to Christ to qualify their headship over their wives and we see in this verse how Christ qualifies as headship over the church. As if to be sure that no one among his readers should miss this unusual element in Christ’s exercise of his position of authority, Paul restates it in terms that are both emphatic and explicit: “He himself [αὐτός, *autos*] is Savior of the body [σώματος, *sōmatos*].”¹² This clause does not refer to both Christ and husbands because the personal pronoun αὐτός in apposition to ὁ Χριστός is emphatic by its presence and its position. It must refer only to that which immediately precedes (ὁ Χριστός) and cannot also refer to the husband (ἀνὴρ) in the preceding clause. This personal pronoun emphasizes Christ’s exclusive work as the savior of the body, the church.¹³

Therefore, because Christ is the savior of the body, He has headship or loving authority over the church and in light of this, husbands too have loving authority over their wives.

C. Manner and Motivation of Submission (24)

⁸ F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1984), 384.

⁹ BDAG, 731.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 541.

¹¹ Appendix C: Synchronic Word Study #2

¹² Frank Thielman, *Ephesians*, 378.

¹³ Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002), 742.

1. Wives and the Church: Submission (24b-c)

This verse concludes this paragraph and the idea of the basis for headship. Paul begins with the logical contrastive conjunction “but” (ἀλλά)¹⁴ and while many scholars debate whether this conjunction has adversative force, the purpose of this “but” is to draw the reader’s attention back to the matter at hand, *as the church is subject to Christ, so also wives ought to be to their husbands in everything* (ὡς ἡ ἐκκλησία ὑποτάσσεται τῷ Χριστῷ, οὕτως καὶ αἱ γυναῖκες τοῖς ἀνδράσιν ἐν παντί.)¹⁵. No longer should the reader be engaging in the differences between the headship of Christ and that of husbands, but should refocus on the motivation found in submission. A structure of “since this, then that” is suggested when interpreting this verse. Since the church submits to Christ, then wives ought to submit to their husbands. The inclusion of the phrase “in everything” (ἐν παντί)¹⁶ denotes the manner in which the submission happens. While this is can often be seen as something which happens voluntarily, and it should, the connotation here revolves more around the completeness or whole-heartedness of the submission. ‘As the Church wholeheartedly devotes herself to Christ, so the wife wholeheartedly accepts her place in the family and devotes herself without reserve to fulfil her function as wife and mother.’ (Allan)¹⁷ It is from the outpouring of the church’s and wives’ love for Christ that both voluntarily and completely submit, the church to Christ and the wives to their husbands.

II. Husbands: Love Your Wives (5:25-27)

Shifting gears from wives and their submission to their husbands, Paul focuses the next 116 words squarely on husbands as they are exhorted to love their wives, but here the self-sacrificing love of Christ for the church is set forth as the pattern for the husband’s love for his wife¹⁸

A. The Love of a Husband for His Wife (25)

1. Christ’s Sacrificial Love as an Example (25d)

After concluding an entire section which involved wives’ submission to their husbands, one would have expected the exhortation to husbands to be one about their authority over their wives, but instead we find love. Not only are husbands commanded to “love” (ἀγαπάω)¹⁹ their wives but Paul further refines how that love should look like in their marital relationship. This love that husbands ought to have for their wives is much more than romantic love or basic caring of her needs, but it should resemble the unconditional self-sacrificing love Christ had for the church. The extent of Christ’s love for the church is expressed in his action of giving his life for the church. This does not mean it will be necessary for every husband to die for his wife, but it most assuredly

¹⁴ BDAG, 44.

¹⁵ Kurt Aland et al., *Novum Testamentum Graece*, Eph 5:24.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, Eph 5:24c

¹⁷ Francis Foulkes, *Ephesians: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 10, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1989), 162.

¹⁸ F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, 386.

¹⁹ BDAG, 5.

means that every husband must deny himself of time, resources, and self-gratification to express his love for his wife.²⁰

B. Christ's Love for the Church (26-27)

1. Sanctified by the Washing of Water (26d)

Paul provides in this verse the purpose of why Christ sacrificially gave Himself up for the church and it is two pronged: to sanctify the church and present it to Himself holy and blameless. Each of these purpose clauses are identified by use of the ἵνα clauses plus the subjunctive use of ἀγιάζω “to sanctify” and παρίστημι (“to present”). First, Paul states why Christ gave himself for the church. He did this to “sanctify” (ἀγιάζω, *hagiazō*) the church, or to set it apart. This consecration of the church as the people of God was accomplished “by means of cleansing” (καθαρίσας) the church.²¹ What exactly was the instrument of this cleansing? Well, the inclusion of the phrase τῷ λουτρῷ τοῦ ὕδατος ἐν ῥήματι²² “washing of water with the word” has led to much debate as to what Paul is referring to. While the use of the term “water” (ὕδατος)²³ has the connotation of a water baptism and term “word” (ῥῆμα)²⁴ has the connotation of Word of God, it is this author’s opinion that while Paul might have alluded to an ancient Jewish bridal bath tradition, whereby the bride is cleansed and prepared for her groom, what he is saying is that, as well as being cleansed through baptism, the Church is cleansed through the purifying word of the gospel.²⁵

2. The Church Made Holy and Blameless (27f)

That He might present to Himself the church in all her glory. (ἵνα παραστήσῃ αὐτὸς ἑαυτῷ ἕνδοξον τὴν ἐκκλησίαν)²⁶ This is the second of three ἵνα clauses whereby Paul shares another reason why Christ gave Himself over to death for the church. The first concern here is to what the conjunction ἵνα refers. It could be parallel to the first ἵνα, that is, the first purpose for which Christ gave himself for the church was to sanctify her, now the second purpose is to present her to himself a glorious church. However, this is not likely because there is no coordinating conjunction to indicate this. Rather, it seems that this purpose is subordinate to or built on the first ἵνα, that is, the purpose for which Christ sanctified the church was in order that he might present to himself a glorious church.²⁷ If the imagery of a bridal bath lies somewhere in the background in 5:26, which seems likely (*pace* Robinson 1904: 207), then it continues here as the church is pictured as a young bride of dazzling beauty. Her youth is evident from her unwrinkled skin, and her skin is unblemished as a result both of her youth and of the bridal bath she has just

²⁰ Clinton E. Arnold, *Ephesians*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 383.

²¹ Frank Thielman, *Ephesians*, 383.

²² Kurt Aland et al., *Novum Testamentum Graece*, Eph 5:26.

²³ BDAG, 1023.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 905.

²⁵ Appendix D: Validation Problem #1

²⁶ Kurt Aland et al., *Novum Testamentum Graece*, Eph 5:27.

²⁷ Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary*, 757.

pace in respectful disagreement with

taken.²⁸ Paul concludes this section by contrasting two sets of terms “blemish and wrinkle” with “holy and blameless”. In 5:27c-d the bride is described as having no physical imperfection and in 5:27f the bride is shown to be morally pure. Physical perfection is a metaphorical way of describing moral perfection. Paul states that the church in her gloriousness does not have any imperfection whatsoever in order that she might be morally holy and blameless.²⁹ We see this use of “holy and blameless” earlier in this epistle³⁰, where Paul states that Christ chose us before the foundations of the world to be holy and blameless before God in love.

III. Husbands: Caring for Your Wives (5:28-32)

With a clearer picture of Christ’s love for the church, how He sacrificially gave Himself over to death for her in order to sanctify her, we see an illustration of the necessary depth of love husbands should demonstrate toward their wives. The purpose of Christ’s love for the church was for her ultimate good, which should be the goal of a husband’s love³¹ The next verses cover how husbands ought to care for their wives.

A. Caring for Your Wife as Your Own Body (28a-b)

1. Christ Cares for His Body (28a-b)

The author is beginning a new thought by renewing his exhortation to husbands which began in 5:25 as this can be seen by the use of the adverbial conjunction οὕτως “so”. Just as Christ loved the church extravagantly, giving Himself over to her, you too ought to love your wives. This new thought from Paul however comes with an additionally call to husbands – love your wives like your own bodies. The word “body,” which occurs nine times in Ephesians, is used metaphorically in all the instances except here where it refers to the literal physical body. This example is mundane but easily understood. Husbands are to love their wives in the same way that they are concerned about their own bodies.³² Paul’s use of the comparative conjunction ὡς³³ renders this addition as “husbands love your wives in a similar fashion that you would love yourself.” It is possible that the readers of this epistle would be familiar with Gen 2:24, understanding that husband and wife are united together in one flesh, and therefore have clarity around this addition.

B. Nourish and Care for Your Wife Like Yourself (28c-29b)

1. Husband Who Loves His Wife Loves Himself (29a-b)

In line with his adoption of the Gen 2 perspective, where husbands and wives can be seen as a single entity, one person, the writer continues his argument by asserting that he who loves his wife loves himself. Again, he combines this thought with a more mundane

²⁸ Frank Thielman, *Ephesians*, 385.

²⁹ Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary*, 760.

³⁰ New American Standard Bible: 1995 Update. (Eph 1:4) La Habra, CA: The Lockman Foundation, 1995.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 762.

³² *Ibid.*, 764.

³³ BDAG, 1103.

observation. Everyday experience should show, he claims, that ordinarily no man hates himself, that is, his own flesh (the change to *σάρξ* is now in preparation for the citation in v 31). On the contrary, he nourishes and cherishes it.³⁴ It natural for one to take care of their own body and here Paul makes the assertion that a husband's natural inclination, his normal disposition should be that of caring for his own wife.

C. Christ Nourishes and Cares for His Body (29c-30)

1. We Are All Members of His Body (30)

Paul's main concern isn't with actual bodies and how people nourish them. Rather, he is using the general truth about bodily self-care to reveal something significant about Christ in that He feeds and cares for the church because "we are members of his body". He accomplishes by feeding us the truth of His word and cares for us through the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Christ is the source of the church's growth, as each member of the church does its part to build up the body in love.³⁵ Paul attests that Christ loves and cares for the church, His body, and since as members of that body, He loves and cares for us too. There is a textual problem in 5:30 that concerns the omission of the phrase *ἐκ τῆς σαρκὸς αὐτοῦ καὶ ἐκ τῶν ὀστέων* in the textual reading, which could affect the interpretation in that if the phrase is included, it alludes to Gen 2:23, in that we as member of the body originate from Christ, just as Eve originated from Adam. It this author's opinion that the shorter, more concise textual reading is more likely the original. In the latter portion of chapter five, Paul is exhorting the husbands and wives in Ephesus to look to Christ and how He cares for the His body, the church. Paul continues in saying that spiritual bond between Christ and the church is a profound mystery. It makes little sense why Paul would interject a reference to physical elements of a body, bones, when he is speaking of spiritual things. It is for this reason this author believes a scribe, at some point, who missed the meaning of what Paul was referring to, added the phrase thinking they were clarifying the meaning.³⁶

D. Care for Your Wife Because She Is Part of You (31)

1. Two Flesh Become One (31)

We have seen Paul allude to "flesh and bone" from Gen 2:23, and now at last comes the quotation of Genesis 2:24 that has been influencing all the apostle's thought. What has been said thus far about the unity of husband and wife is now reinforced by this OT quotation. This statement from the creation story is the most profound and fundamental statement in the whole of Scripture concerning God's plan for marriage.³⁷ Just as Paul has argued that husbands are to love their wives as their own bodies just as Christ loves the church because we are members of his body, he concludes by quoting Gen 2:24 to demonstrate that in marriage man and woman are one flesh. In other words, as Gen 2:24 was a fitting conclusion to 2:23, Paul utilized Gen 2:24 in Eph 5:31 as a fitting conclusion to 5:28–30. This reinforces the concept that the husband is compelled to love

³⁴ Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, vol. 42, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1990), 379.

³⁵ Eph 4:15-16 (NASB)

³⁶ Appendix A: Textual Criticism Problem #2

³⁷ Francis Foulkes, *Ephesians: An Introduction and Commentary*, 166.

his wife because they are one flesh and no one hates his own flesh but rather nurtures and takes tender care of it in the same way that Christ loves his body, the church.³⁸

E. It Is A Profound Mystery (32)

1. Christ and the Church, His bride (32)

So here, Gen. 2:24, which on the surface explains why a man will leave his parents' home and live with his wife, is taken to convey a deeper, hidden meaning, a "mystery," which could not be understood until Christ, who loved his people from eternity, gave himself up for them in the fullness of time. In the light of his saving work, the hidden meaning of Gen. 2:24 now begins to appear: his people constitute his bride, united to him in "one body." The formation of Eve to be Adam's companion is seen to prefigure the creation of the church to be the bride of Christ. This seems to be the deep "mystery" contained in the text, which remains a mystery no longer to those who have received its interpretation.³⁹ ALFORD identifies the mystery as that of "the spiritual union of Christ with our humanity, typified by the close conjunction of the marriage state," alluded to in 5:31.⁴⁰ This author's agrees with F.F. Bruce in that it was indeed a profound mystery, only revealed and understood until Christ, who loved us so completely that He gave himself up for us in the fullness of time that we might see a glimpse of that kind of love within our marital relationship.

IV. Recap: Marital Responsibilities (5:33)

The logical contrastive conjunction *πλὴν* can be translated "In any case" and in using it Paul draws this section of the family code to a conclusion providing a brief review of the responsibilities for both the husband and the wife. We see in 5:32 Paul says that the profound mystery is that of Christ and the church and implies that mystery is sacrificial love He has for the church, one that ought to be model by in the marital relationship. It is with this Christ centered approach that husband and wife should approach their marital responsibilities.

A. A Husband's Marital Responsibility (33a)

1. Reminder to Love Your Wife as Yourself (33a)

Leaving aside now the analogy to which he has been led, he sums up, *let each one of you love his wife as himself. Love, pure and simple, but transcendent, the truly Christian love (ἀγαπάω)* that embraces what is pure in every other love, is the husband's duty.⁴¹ The injunction to husbands to love their wives as themselves not only summarizes the line of argument from v 28 in terms of loving wives as their own bodies but also incorporates the argument from v 25 about loving wives as Christ loved the Church.⁴² The writer has now shown explicitly in 5:31-32 that Christ's love for the Church involves the Church's becoming one body with him, so that Christ can be seen as loving the

³⁸ Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary*, 772.

³⁹ F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, 394–395.

⁴⁰ John Peter Lange et al., *A Commentary on the Holy Scriptures* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2008), 203–204.

⁴¹ Francis Foulkes, *Ephesians: An Introduction and Commentary*, 167.

⁴² Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 384.

Church as himself. He can conclude therefore by telling the husband to love his wife as himself.⁴³

B. A Wife's Marital Responsibility (33b)

1. Reminder to Be in Reverential Awe of Your Husband (33b)

Just as Paul reminds husbands of their call to love their wives as themselves, he reminds wives of their newfound responsibility of how they are to interact with their husbands. This newfound responsibility is to be modeled after how the church interacts in regards to Christ, out of reverential awe (φοβέω)⁴⁴. Much ink has been spilled about the rendering of this term as “fear” and the connotations it brings up for wives. In response, many have chosen to consider this term to mean “respect”, which it does, however it does not fully encompass the meaning of φοβέω. The better understanding of this term would be one of reverential awe for who Christ is and what He has done. Wives are to model their behavior with their husband after that of the church and Christ. The church is surely in reverential awe of who Christ is, the head and savior of the body, and his loving sanctification of the church.

The summarizing exhortations in v 33 indicate the high status this writer accords to marriage. Through the love, on the one hand, and the fear, on the other, which marriage involves, husband and wife are to mirror the great mystery itself, the union between Christ and his Church⁴⁵

Conclusion

In conclusion, this passage outlines the responsibilities of wives and husbands. Wives ought to submit to their husbands, who are the head of their wives, as an act of submission to Christ, just as the church submits Christ, who is the head of the church. Husbands are to sacrificially love their wives, putting their wives above themselves, as Christ loves the church, giving Himself up for her.

Applications

When we think of this passage in Ephesians as it pertains to modern culture, the issue of “submission” comes to mind. In modern times this term has taken on a negative connotation and both husbands and wives need to be reeducated as to the value of biblical submission if we are to find effective applications. While the meaning of submission does have roots in authority and power, personally I find more value in understanding it in regards to hierarchy, priority which ultimately produces harmony. Paul exhorts us in verse 21 to submit to one another as believers and we do so as an act of voluntary submission in reverential awe of our Lord, Jesus Christ. This submission is one of totality, in all things, which begins with the submission of our will. Submitting of ourselves to Christ is paramount and without doing so, we cannot begin to submit to one another as believers and surely, we cannot love our wives nor submit to our husbands as Paul exhorts us in this passage. So, if I were to counsel a married couple I would begin by

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ BDAG, 1060.

⁴⁵ Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 385.

emphasizing the importance of submission to Christ first and then I would move into the biblically mandated responsibilities of each spouse to one another. While we do not particularly see it in this passage, I feel it would be appropriate to point out the primary benefit of biblical submission and love in their marriage, which is harmony within the relationship. As Paul has laid out this blueprint for marriage with Christ and the church as the model, he does so in order to highlight the fact that in their obedient submission to Christ, a husband's sacrificial love for his wife and her submission to him produces a relationship of harmony. All couples attending marriage counselling will benefit from more harmony in their relationship.

The second application comes from the second half of the passage where Paul details the loving, intimate, and sacrificial relation between Christ and the church. We are told in verse 28 that we ought to love our wives as our own body just as Christ loved His body, the church. How did Christ accomplish this? By sacrificing Himself for the church. As husbands we are called to love our wives unconditionally just as Christ loved the church. This sacrificial love means not only are we to place the needs of our wives above our own, but that the very love we should have for ourselves should be derived from loving our wives. Putting this into practice is no easy task but can be accomplished by the grace of God. Looking to Christ and how He sacrificed Himself for the church provides husbands an example to follow and husbands work best when we have an example to follow! In the same manner, wives can look to the church for an example on how to submit to their husbands as the church, which is the body, submits to Christ, who is the head of the body. Just like their husbands, who are in obedient love, putting aside their own needs for that of their wives, wives too, out of their obedient submission to Christ, ought to submit to and follow the leadership of their husbands. In doing so, just as Christ has designed it to be, both husband and wife are able to fulfill and be fulfilled, love and be loved, and live together in harmony.

Appendix A. Textual Criticism Problems

Textual Criticism Problem #1: Ephesians 5:22 – Submission (ὑποτασσόμενοι)

The textual problem in Ephesians 5:22 concerns the omission of the term ὑποτάσσω in the textual reading, which affects the interpretation in that it requires the reader to imply that wives ought to submit to their husbands. Since it is fairly easy to identify that Paul is carrying this idea through from the prior verse, the omission in the textual reading does not present a theological issue. There are two alternate readings: the third person imperative, *υποτασσεσθωσαν* and the other in the second person imperative, *υποτασσεσθε*.

External Evidence

Manuscripts in favor of the textual reading (omission) include \mathfrak{B}^{46} (200), B (IV), and C1 (215). These readings, from the Alexandrian text type, are usually shorter readings overall.

Manuscripts in favor of the first variant reading (inclusion of *υποτασσεσθωσαν*) include κ (IV), A (V), I (V), ψ (9/10), 0278 (IX), 6 (XIII), 33 (IX), 81 (AD1044), 104 (AD1087), 365 (XII), 1175 (X), 1241 (XII), 1505 (XII), 1739 (X), 1881 (XIV), and 2464 (IX).

Manuscripts in favor of the second variant reading (inclusion of υποτασσεσθε) include D (VI), F (IX), G (IX), K (IX), L (IX), 630 (XII/XIII), Byz (XI).

Date and Character:

The textual reading has the most ancient evidence, albeit not much, with a couple of manuscripts from the 2nd (P⁴⁶) and 4th (B) centuries and are strong in the Alexandrian text-type. The first variant reading has some ancient evidence in the 4th century from the Aleph manuscript and some in the 5th century from manuscripts A and I. While this reading has a fair amount of evidence, most of it stretches from the 9th century through the 14th century. The second variant reading is the least preferred with evidence from the 6th century and later.

Geographical Distribution:

The textual reading has early witnesses in P⁴⁶ (2nd century) and B (4th century), both of the Alexandrian text-type. Likewise, the first variant reading has early witnesses Aleph (4th century), and A/I (5th century), which are both of the Alexandrian text-type. The second variant reading has a slightly wider distribution with witnesses D (5th century) and F/G (9th century) which are supported by the Western text-type and K/L which are supported by the Byzantine text-type (9th century). While the second variant has the wider geographic distribution, it's the author's opinion that the textual reading still has the earlier and stronger witnesses.

Genealogical Solidarity:

The textual reading is solid within the Alexandrian text-type due to having two major witnesses (P⁴⁶ and B).

Based upon what I've looked at so far in external evidence, I would say that the textual reading and not either of the variants in Ephesians 5:22 is more likely to be original, giving it a rating of A, because it has the most ancient evidence (P⁴⁶ and B both from the 4th century), and while it does not have as great a geographical distribution as some of the variants, and the textual reading is solid within the Alexandrian text-type due to having two major witnesses.

Internal Evidence

Transcriptional Probability:

It is more likely that a scribe would have added either form of the verb to the textual reading to clarify the meaning of the passage. Scribes are far more likely to add text than remove it, and seeing that the previous verse dealt with submission, it is more natural that a scribe would have added a similar form of the verb especially since this is the beginning of a new section of the text, and in doing so it could clarify that this new section continued the idea of submission, speaking to the wife's submission to her husband.

Intrinsic Probability:

Within the context of Paul's epistle to the church in Ephesus, especially in this portion of the fifth chapter where we see him admonishing the reader in regards their relationship within the family structure, and it is this author's opinion that the omission of the word is preferred as this shortened style allows the reader to pick up on the implied verbal nuance, sometimes subtly used in Paul's writing style.

In conclusion, based on all of the evidence, I believe the textual reading is closer to the original due in large part to its more ancient Alexandrian witnesses, and hence I rate it an A. Coupled with the fact that the textual reading is the shorter more difficult reading which lends to a greater possibility that a scribe added the word into subsequent copies for clarification purposes.

Textual Criticism Problem #2: Ephesians 5:30 – Of his flesh and of his bones (εκ της σαρκος αυτου και εκ των οστων αυτου)

The textual problem in Ephesians 5:30 concerns the omission of the phrase εκ της σαρκος αυτου και εκ των οστων in the textual reading, which affects the interpretation in that if the phrase is included, alludes to Gen 2:23, in that we as member of the body originate from Christ, just as Eve originated from Adam.

External evidence

Manuscripts in favor of the textual reading (omission) include \mathfrak{B}^{46} (200), κ^* (IV), A (V), B (IV), 048 (V), 6 (XIII), 33 (IX), 81 (AD1044), 1739 (X), 1881 (XIV), and 2464 (IX). These readings, from the Alexandrian text type, are usually shorter readings overall.

Manuscripts in favor of the variant reading (inclusion) include Aleph² (IV), D (VI), F (IX), G (IX), K (IX), L (IX), Ψ (IX/X), 0278 (IX), 0285 (V), 104 (AD1087), 365 (XII), 630 (XII/XIII), 1175 (X), 1241 (XII), 1505 (XII), 1739 (X), and Byz.

Date and Character:

The textual reading has early witnesses in \mathfrak{B}^{46} (2nd century) and the second corrector of κ and B (both 4th century), as well as being of the Alexandrian text-type coupled with several Sec. Alexandrian minuscules. The variant reading has a witness in Aleph (4th) and a few in the 6th century (D and 0285) but most much older spanning into the 13th century. Like the textual reading, the variant is supposed by several Sec. Alexandrian minuscules as well as several "other" minuscules.

Geographical Distribution:

The textual reading has early first order witnesses in P₄₆ (2nd century) and κ (4th century), both of the Alexandrian text-type. The variant reading has a slightly wider distribution with a couple of witnesses F/G (9th century) which are supported by the Western text-type and κ which is supported by the Alexandrian text-type (4th century). While the variant has the wider geographic distribution, because these witnesses are much later, it's the author's opinion that the textual reading still has the earlier and stronger witnesses.

Genealogical Solidarity:

The textual reading is solid within the Alexandrian text-type due to having two major witnesses (P₄₆ and κ).

Based upon what I've looked at so far in external evidence, I would say that the textual reading and not the variant in Ephesians 5:30 is more likely to be original, giving it a rating of B, because it has the most ancient evidence (P₄₆ and κ), and while the variant does have a much wider geographic distribution, the textual reading is solid within the Alexandrian text-type and hence the shorter reading is preferred.

Internal evidence

Transcriptional Probability:

Hoener believes that it is possible that in the textual reading the phrase was, “omitted by homoeoteleuton (αὐτοῦ ... αὐτοῦ)”.⁴⁶ While this author can attest to a possible scenario whereby a scribe saw the term αὐτοῦ and mistakenly thought they had already written down, it is more plausible that a scribe added the phrase in the variant reading to amplify the metaphor Paul was using with the body by referencing Genesis 2:23.

Intrinsic Probability:

It is this author's opinion that the shorter, more concise textual reading is more likely the original. In the latter portion of chapter five, Paul is exhorting the husbands and wives in Ephesus to look to Christ and how He cares for the His body, the church. Paul continues in saying that spiritual bond between Christ and the church is a profound mystery. It makes little sense why Paul would interject a reference to physical elements of a body, bones, when he is speaking of spiritual things. It is for this reason this author believes a scribe, at some point, who missed the meaning of what Paul was referring to, added the phrase thinking they were clarifying the meaning.

In conclusion, based on all of the evidence, I believe the textual reading is closer to the original due in large part to its more ancient Alexandrian witnesses, and hence I rate it an A. Coupled with the fact that the textual reading is the shorter reading which lends to a greater possibility that a scribe added the word into subsequent copies for clarification purposes.

Appendix B. Structural Layout of Greek Clauses

²² αἱ γυναῖκες (Υποτασσόμενοι) τοῖς ἰδίοις ἀνδράσιν

ὡς τῷ κυρίῳ,

²³ ὅτι ἀνὴρ ἐστὶν κεφαλὴ τῆς γυναικὸς

ὡς καὶ ὁ Χριστὸς κεφαλὴ τῆς ἐκκλησίας, αὐτὸς σωτὴρ τοῦ σώματος·

⁴⁶ Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary*, 769–770.

24 ἀλλὰ ὡς ἡ ἐκκλησία ὑποτάσσεται τῷ Χριστῷ,
οὕτως καὶ αἱ γυναῖκες τοῖς ἀνδράσιν ἐν παντί.

25 Οἱ ἄνδρες, ἀγαπᾶτε τὰς γυναῖκας,
καθὼς καὶ ὁ Χριστὸς ἠγάπησεν τὴν ἐκκλησίαν
καὶ ἑαυτὸν παρέδωκεν ὑπὲρ αὐτῆς,

26 ἵνα αὐτὴν ἀγιάσῃ
καθαρίσας τῷ λουτρῷ τοῦ ὕδατος ἐν ῥήματι,

27 ἵνα παραστήσῃ αὐτὸς ἑαυτῷ ἕνδοξον τὴν ἐκκλησίαν, μὴ ἔχουσαν σπίλον ἢ
ρύτιδα ἢ τι τῶν τοιούτων,
ἀλλ' ἵνα ἡ ἀγία καὶ ἄμωμος.

28 οὕτως ὀφείλουσιν [καὶ] οἱ ἄνδρες ἀγαπᾶν τὰς ἑαυτῶν γυναῖκας
ὡς τὰ ἑαυτῶν σώματα.

ὁ ἀγαπῶν τὴν ἑαυτοῦ γυναῖκα ἑαυτὸν ἀγαπᾷ.

29 Οὐδεὶς γάρ ποτε τὴν ἑαυτοῦ σάρκα ἐμίσησεν
ἀλλὰ ἐκτρέφει καὶ θάλπει αὐτήν,
καθὼς καὶ ὁ Χριστὸς τὴν ἐκκλησίαν,
30 ὅτι μέλη ἐσμὲν τοῦ σώματος αὐτοῦ.

31 ἀντὶ τούτου καταλείψει ἄνθρωπος [τὸν] πατέρα καὶ [τὴν] μητέρα
καὶ προσκολληθήσεται πρὸς τὴν γυναῖκα αὐτοῦ,
καὶ ἔσονται οἱ δύο εἰς σάρκα μίαν.

32 τὸ μυστήριον τοῦτο μέγα ἐστίν·
ἐγὼ δὲ λέγω εἰς Χριστὸν καὶ εἰς τὴν ἐκκλησίαν.

33 πλὴν καὶ ὑμεῖς οἱ καθ' ἓνα, ἕκαστος τὴν ἑαυτοῦ γυναῖκα οὕτως
ἀγαπάτω
ὡς ἑαυτόν,
ἢ δὲ γυνὴ ἵνα φοβῆται τὸν ἄνδρα.

Appendix C. Synchronic Word Studies

Synchronic Word Study #1: Ephesians 5:22 – To submit to (ὑποτάσσω)

I. Classical (Prior to 300 BC)

1. The sense of the term in this period is “to place or arrange under, to subject” that is, to put in position of hierarchy.
2. Examples:⁴⁷
 - Nicias, Plu.Nic.23 (4th Cent BC): ὑπέταξε τὰς φυσικὰς ἀνάγκας, “subjected the natural compulsions.”

Summary of Classical usage: ὑποτάσσω is a term that is used in this period as something that has “subjected” itself to something else. It speaks to that of position or hierarchy.

II. LXX (300 BC to 100 BC)

⁴⁷ Note that these examples are drawn from Perseus Digital Library. Ed. Gregory R. Crane. Tufts University. <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu> (accessed August 3, 2018).

1. The sense of the term in this period is to cause to something or someone to be in a submissive relationship, to subject, or to subordinate.
2. Examples⁴⁸:
 - Eph 1:22. καὶ πάντα ὑπέταξεν ὑπὸ τοὺς πόδας αὐτοῦ, “And He put all things in subjection under His feet”.
 - Rom 8:20. τῇ γὰρ ματαιότητι ἡ κτίσις ὑπετάγη, “For the creation was subjected to futility”.

Summary of LXX usage: The term ὑποτάσσω in the LXX, whether passive or active, still means to put in subjection to, which is in keeping with the Classical usage.

III. Koine (300 BC to AD 100)

1. The term in this period means to submit to a higher authority.
2. Examples:
 - Polybius, *Histories*, Plb.3.36.7 (2nd Cent BC): τόπους ὑποτάττοντες καὶ φέροντες
 - Onasander, *Strategicus*, Onos.1.17 (1st Cent AD): ἀσχάλλει τὸ πλῆθος ὑποταττόμενον, “to submit oneself to the whole”
 - *Orientalis Graeci Inscriptiones Selectae*, OGIS 654. (1st Cent BC): σύμπασαν τὴν Θηβαΐδα μὴ ὑποταγεῖσαν τοῖς βασιλεῦσι[ν], ὑποτάξας.⁴⁹, “they have submitted to the king.”

Summary of Koine usage: The common meaning of “submitting to” or to be “subordinate to” shows up in the Koine regularly according to MM. This is in keeping with usage in the Classical period and in the LXX.

IV. New Testament

- A. In the NT but outside the particular author under consideration.
 1. Examples:
 - Luke 2:51. καὶ ἦν ὑποτασσόμενος αὐτοῖς, “and He continued in subjection to them”
 - Jas 4:7. ὑποτάγητε οὖν τῷ θεῷ, “Submit therefore to God”
 - 1 Peter 2:13. Ὑποτάγητε ἰπάσῃ ἄνθρωπίνῃ κτίσει διὰ τὸν κύριον, “Submit yourselves for the Lord’s sake to every human institution”
 - Heb 2:5. Οὐ γὰρ ἀγγέλοις ὑπέταξεν τὴν οἰκουμένην, “For he did not subject the angels the world”
- B. Elsewhere in the author but outside the particular book under consideration.
 1. Examples:
 - Rom 8:7. τῷ γὰρ νόμῳ τοῦ θεοῦ οὐχ ὑποτάσσεται, “for it does not subject itself to the law of God”
 - Phil 3:21. καὶ ὑποτάξαι ἑαυτῷ τὰ πάντα, “even to subject all things to Himself.”

⁴⁸ Note that these examples in Greek are drawn from Aland, Kurt, Barbara Aland, Johannes Karavidopoulos, Carlo M. Martini, and Bruce M. Metzger. *Novum Testamentum Graece*. 28th Edition. Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2012, and their respective English translations are drawn *New American Standard Bible: 1995 Update* (La Habra, CA: The Lockman Foundation, 1995).

⁴⁹ James Hope Moulton and George Milligan, *The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1930), 660.

- 1 Cor 14:32. καὶ πνεύματα προφητῶν προφήταις ὑποτάσσεται, “and the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets”
 - Col 3:18. Αἱ γυναῖκες, ὑποτάσσεσθε τοῖς ἀνδράσιν, “Wives, be subject to your husbands”
- C. In the same book but outside the verse under consideration.
1. Examples:
 - Eph 1:22, 5:24. In 1:22, καὶ πάντα ὑπέταξεν ὑπὸ τοὺς πόδας αὐτοῦ, “And He put all things in subjection under His feet”, and in 5:24, ὡς ἡ ἐκκλησία ὑποτάσσεται τῷ Χριστῷ, “as the church is subject to Christ”
- D. In the particular verse under consideration.
- In Eph 5:22 Paul uses this term to describe how a wife should, as an act of obedient submission to Christ, using the church’s submittal to Christ as an example, submit to her husband.

Summary of NT usage: The NT usage shows varying degrees and methods of submitting, submitting to God, subjection under the law, spirits or prophets subjecting to prophets, and wives submitting themselves to their husbands.

Significance for Exegesis in Ephesians 5:22: In the same way that the church, as the body, lovingly submits to Christ, who is the head, wives, as a sign of their obedient submission to Christ, are instructed to lovingly submit to their husbands.

Synchronic Word Study #2: Ephesians 5:23 – Head (κεφαλή)

I. Classical (Prior to 300 BC)

1. The sense of the term in this period is either the actual head of a man or best or the noblest part of something.
2. Examples:⁵⁰
 - Sophocles, Ajax. Soph. Aj. 238. (4th Cent BC): “he caught up two white-footed rams and sheared off the head of one.”
 - Herodotus, The Histories, Hdt. 3.35. (4th Cent BC): ἐπὶ κεφαλὴν κατώρυξε, “To bury them head down.”
 - Homer, Odyssey, Hom. Od. 1.343. (3rd Cent BC): τοίην γὰρ κεφαλὴν ποθέω μνημένην αἰεὶ, “the noblest part”

Summary of Classical usage: κεφαλή is a term that is primarily used in this period as the actual head of a man or a beast.

II. LXX (300 BC to 100BC)

1. The sense of the term in this period is that it refers primarily to the physical head of a person, however there are some instance where it refers to a person’s elevated position in status.

⁵⁰ Note that these examples are drawn from Perseus Digital Library. Ed. Gregory R. Crane. Tufts University. <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu> (accessed August 3, 2018).

2. Examples⁵¹:

- Exo 16:16. κατὰ κεφαλὴν κατὰ ἀριθμὸν⁵², “By head and number”.
- Mk 6:24. τὴν κεφαλὴν Ἰωάννου τοῦ βαπτίζοντος, “the head of John the Baptist”.
- Jgs 11:11. καὶ κατέστησαν αὐτὸν ἐπ’ αὐτῶν εἰς κεφαλὴν εἰς ἡγούμενον⁵³, “and the people made him head and chief over them”

Summary of LXX usage: The term κεφαλή in the LXX primarily refers to the physical head of a person, which is in keeping with the Classical usage.

III. Koine (300 BC to AD 100)

1. The term in this period means either the literal head of a person, the whole amount in relationship to land or the extremity of a plot of land.

2. Examples:

- P.Oxy II.273 (95 AD): κεφαλή is used of the “whole amount” of land that was being ceded⁵⁴
- PFlor.50.83 (iii AD): κεφαλή is used as the extremity of a plot of land.
- P.Lond 47 (ii AD): κεφαλὴν is used in the literal sense of the human head.⁵⁵

Summary of Koine usage: The common meaning of κεφαλὴν has three meanings that shows up in the Koine. Two of the three meanings deal in terms of land, either the extremity of a plot or the whole amount of land. The last meaning is the shows up the more frequently in MM, and that is the literal meaning of a person’s physical head. This is in keeping with usage in the Classical period and in the LXX.

IV. New Testament

A. In the NT but outside the particular author under consideration.

1. Examples:

- Mt 6:37. μήτε ἐν τῇ κεφαλῇ σου ὁμόσης, “nor shall you make an oath with your head”
- Mk 6:28. καὶ ἤνεγκεν τὴν κεφαλὴν αὐτοῦ ἐπὶ πίνακι, “and brought his head on a platter”
- Lk 7:46. ἐλαίῳ τὴν κεφαλὴν μου οὐκ ἤλειψας, “you did not anoint my head with oil”
- Rev 12:1. καὶ ἐπὶ τῆς κεφαλῆς αὐτῆς στέφανος ἀστέρων δώδεκα, “and on her head a crown of twelve stars”

B. Elsewhere in the author but outside the particular book under consideration

1. Examples:

- Rom 12:20. τοῦτο γὰρ ποιῶν ἄνθρακας πυρὸς σωρεύσεις ἐπὶ τὴν κεφαλὴν αὐτοῦ, “for in doing so you will heap burning coals on his head”

⁵¹ Note that these examples in Greek are drawn from Aland, Kurt, Barbara Aland, Johannes Karavidopoulos, Carlo M. Martini, and Bruce M. Metzger. *Novum Testamentum Graece*. 28th Edition. Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2012, and their respective English translations are drawn *New American Standard Bible: 1995 Update* (La Habra, CA: The Lockman Foundation, 1995).

⁵² Alfred Rahlfs and Robert Hanhart, eds., *Septuaginta: SESB Edition* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2006), Ex 16:16.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, Jdg 11:11.

⁵⁴ James Hope Moulton and George Milligan, *The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament*, 342.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 342.

- Acts 21:24. ξυρήσονται τὴν κεφαλὴν, “shave their heads.”
- 1 Cor 11:3. Θέλω δὲ ὑμᾶς εἰδέναι ὅτι παντὸς ἀνδρὸς ἡ κεφαλὴ ὁ Χριστὸς ἐστίν, “But I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man”
- Col 1:8. καὶ αὐτὸς ἐστίν ἡ κεφαλὴ τοῦ σώματος τῆς ἐκκλησίας, “He is also head of the body, the church”

C. In the same book but outside the verse under consideration.

1. Examples:

- Eph 1:22, 4:15. In 1:22, καὶ αὐτὸν ἔδωκεν κεφαλὴν ὑπὲρ πάντα τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ, “and gave Him as head over all things to the church”, and in 4:15, ὅς ἐστιν ἡ κεφαλὴ, Χριστὸς, “who is the head, even Christ”

D. In the particular verse under consideration

In Eph 5:23 Paul uses the literal term of “head” to paint a picture for his readers whereby he uses the metaphor of the church being the “body” and Christ being the “head” of the body and correlates this to the husband’s headship over the wife, just as Christ is the head of the church.

Summary of NT usage: The NT usage shows that out of 75 instances of the term κεφαλὴ, the vast majority refer to the physical head but there are instances where it refers to a person’s elevated status.

Significance for Exegesis in Ephesians 5:23: In the same way that the church, as the body, lovingly submits to Christ, who is the head, wives, as a sign of their obedient submission to Christ, are instructed to lovingly submit to their husbands as they have headship over the marriage.

Appendix D. Problem-Solving and Validation

Validation Problem #1: Ephesians 5:26 – The washing of water with the word

The problem in Ephesians 5:26 is the identification of τῷ λουτρῷ τοῦ ὕδατος ἐν ῥήματι (“the washing of water with the word”). It is a theological issue and it has some syntactical challenges. The syntactical challenges are in relation to how the genitive τοῦ ὕδατος is used as well as the preposition ἐν ῥήματι. To which word or words in the verse does the phrase ἐν ῥήματι relate to and to what does it refer? Theologically it is important to define the nature of what it meant by the use of this phrase as it affects the meaning of the passage in that it could refer simply to water baptism after salvation, a 1st century bridal bath tradition, or more generally the reception of the gospel message.

Presentation of the Views

There are three views to resolve this issue. They are “baptism by water after salvation”, “Metaphor for a 1st century bridal bath tradition”, and “the proclamation/reception of the gospel”.

Baptism by water after salvation

View 1 answers the issue in the passage by defining the phrase τῷ λουτρῷ τοῦ ὕδατος ἐν ῥήματι as an act of water baptism whereby a person is baptized on the basis of their profession of faith in Jesus Christ.

Pro evidence:

1. The church in Ephesus had already professed their faith in Christ⁵⁶
2. Baptism by water was common⁵⁷
3. Bathing or washing with water was a common form of OT purification for priests and people (e.g., Exod 19:19–21; Lev 5:5–11; Heb 9:10)⁵⁸

Con evidence:

1. The Holy Spirit is not mentioned⁵⁹
2. Paul is not referring to a literal form of ritual cleansing involving the use of water (as under the old covenant). Rather, he is referring to an inward form of cleansing that has been applied by the Holy Spirit (and will continue to be applied through the process of sanctification). This cleansing is truly effective for the forgiveness of sins.⁶⁰
3. This is reading patristic and modern liturgy into the first century, and, moreover, there is nothing in the present context or in Titus 3:5 to indicate that this has reference to a baptismal rite.⁶¹

Metaphor for a 1st century bridal bath tradition

View 2 answers the issue in the passage by defining the phrase τῷ λουτρῷ τοῦ ὕδατος ἐν ῥήματι as a metaphor for a 1st century Jewish bridal bath tradition whereby the bride is cleansed by water, removing any impurities, in preparation for her groom.

Pro evidence:

1. Here there may be an implied reference to the ceremonial bath taken by a bride before marriage. There is also a Jewish custom that may go back even to those days, by which, at the giving of the ring, the bridegroom said, 'Behold, thou art sanctified to me'.⁶²
2. The context of Eph. 5:22-33 is that of the relationship between husband and wife, so a metaphor for a bridal bath makes sense

Con evidence:

1. 1st century Jewish bridal bath tradition perhaps not common knowledge among the non-Jewish Ephesians.
2. The bridal bath was a singular event however the use of the aorist suggests this could be an on-going process of cleansing and sanctification.

The proclamation/reception of the gospel

⁵⁶ Eph 1:7-8 (NASB)

⁵⁷ Ibid, Lk 3:16, Mk 1:4-5, Acts 8:36-38, Mt 3:11

⁵⁸ S. M. Baugh, *Ephesians: Evangelical Exegetical Commentary*, ed. Wayne H. House, Hall W. Harris III, and Andrew W. Pitts, Evangelical Exegetical Commentary (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2015), 487.

⁵⁹ Tit 3:5 (NASB)

⁶⁰ Clinton E. Arnold, *Ephesians*, 388.

⁶¹ Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary*, 753.

⁶² Francis Foulkes, *Ephesians: An Introduction and Commentary*, 164.

View 2 answers the issue in the passage by defining the phrase τῷ λουτρῷ τοῦ ὕδατος ἐν ῥήματι as an act of either proclaiming or receiving the gospel message which cleanses and purifies.

Pro evidence:

1. This is the way the term is employed elsewhere in Ephesians in 6:17, where it is the preached word of the gospel that the Spirit uses as his sword⁶³
2. Thus, *the word*, preached and received, is the conditional element of purification, —the real water of spiritual baptism; —that wherein and whereby alone the efficiency of baptism is conveyed”⁶⁴
3. As John 15:3 and 17:17 express it, the word received cleanses and sanctifies.⁶⁵

Con evidence:

1. The meaning of the term ῥῆμα (*rhēma*) here is not clear. In the singular it can refer to an utterance, to a verbally describable event, or in early Christianity, to the teaching of God or the gospel (BDAG 905), or liturgical phrase uttered at baptism, or the names of the Trinity, or Jesus, or it could refer to the gospel. The meaning is ambiguous.⁶⁶
2. ῥῆμα could refer to the candidate’s own baptismal confession, e.g. ‘Jesus is Lord’ (Mitton)⁶⁷

Conclusion

I believe the view “the proclamation/reception of the gospel” is best because there is sufficient evidence that while Paul might have been drawing on the metaphor of bridal bath, whereby the bride is cleansed and prepared for her groom, and early believers may have immediately thought of water baptism when they heard the words “washing” and “cleansing,” what he is saying is that, as well as being cleansed through baptism, the Church is cleansed through the purifying word of the gospel.⁶⁸

Validation Problem #2: Ephesians 5:27 – That he might present to himself the glorious church not having a spot or wrinkle or any such thing but that she might be holy and blameless.

The problem in Ephesians 5:27 is not the translation of ἵνα παραστήσῃ αὐτὸς ἑαυτῷ ἔνδοξον τὴν ἐκκλησίαν, μὴ ἔχουσαν σπῖλον ἢ ῥυτίδα ἢ τι τῶν τοιούτων, ἀλλ’ ἵνα ᾦ ἁγία καὶ ἄμωμος (That he might present to himself the glorious church not having a spot or wrinkle or any such thing but that she might be holy and blameless), but rather when this event occurs. It is a theological issue that can be addressed by looking at both NT texts as well as other Pauline

⁶³ Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 376.

⁶⁴ John Peter Lange et al., *A Commentary on the Holy Scriptures* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2008), 200.

⁶⁵ Francis Foulkes, *Ephesians: An Introduction and Commentary*, 164.

BDAG *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, by W. Bauer, F. W. Danker, W. F. Arndt, and F. W. Gingrich, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000)

⁶⁶ Frank Thielman, *Ephesians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2010), 384.

⁶⁷ Ernest Best, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Ephesians*, International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T&T Clark International, 1998), 543.

⁶⁸ Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 376.

epistles so that we can understand whether or not the church today can be considered holy and blameless or if this is a future event.

Presentation of the Views

There are two views to resolve this issue. They are “the church is presently holy and blameless”, and “the church will be (future) holy and blameless”.

The church is presently holy and blameless

View 1 answers the issue in the passage by understanding the church’s present state and whether or not this constitutes holiness or blamelessness.

Pro evidence:

4. In this passage the church is referred to as the body and not the bride. Presently, the church is seen as the body of Christ but in the future, she becomes the bride of Christ.⁶⁹
5. Nothing indicates when the marriage took place; since the church as bride is described as without fault it may be surmised that it took place at the time of the crucifixion for it is through Christ’s death that believers are made free of fault and stain.⁷⁰

Con evidence:

4. Sanctification will be completed in the future, but presently we are in a state of progressive sanctification and not completely holy and blameless.
5. The church on earth is always imperfect it is only at the End that she could be described as glorious and without fault.⁷¹

The church will be (future) holy and blameless

View 2 answers the issue in the passage by looking to the church’s future state and how other NT texts corroborate its status of being holy and blameless.

Pro evidence:

4. The grammar suggests a progressive sequence that culminates in the future. Christ dies on the cross; his death enables him to sanctify the church as his bride, whom he cleanses by his blood and by his ongoing purifying work throughout the present age; then he will present his bride to himself when he sums up all things (1:10)⁷²
5. Whenever the presentation of the bride (i.e., the marriage) is pictured, it always speaks of the future (e.g., Matt 22:1–10; 25:1–13; Rev 19:7–10; 21:9)⁷³

Con evidence:

3. This state of things for the Church is not attained in this life (RUDELBACH), while at the same time we may say with BENGEL: (*id valet suo modo jam de hac vita*). The vital process in the individual and in the whole is indeed that of a development from seed to harvest, is not complete at one stroke, has its stadia and phases.⁷⁴

⁶⁹ Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary*, 761.

⁷⁰ Ernest Best, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Ephesians*, 545.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 545.

⁷² Clinton E. Arnold, *Ephesians*, 389.

⁷³ Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary*, 761.

⁷⁴ John Peter Lange et al., *A Commentary on the Holy Scriptures*, 200.

4. The election of believers as holy and blameless is seen as a past event. Such holiness and blamelessness are seen as the purpose of God's election of believers from before the foundation of the world.⁷⁵

Conclusion

I believe the view “the church will be (future) holy and blameless” is best because there is sufficient evidence that points to the present state of the church, while being positionally sanctified⁷⁶, is still in process of becoming more Christlike so that in the end its practical holiness aligns with its positional holiness when the church is face to face with Christ in glory.

⁷⁵ Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 377.

⁷⁶ Eph 1:4 (NASB)

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