**Wives, submit to your husbands as…**

Ephesians 5; 22, “*Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord.*”

In Ephesians, Paul speaks about 3 important human relationships: wives and husbands, children and parents, and slaves and masters. Regarding the marriage relationship, Paul speaks first and with the greatest detail. In 5:31, Paul quotes the biblical foundation of marriage from Genesis 2: 24: “*For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh*.” From this, we know that marriage is an exclusive union between a man and a woman. It seems very simple. Yet most married people can testify that marriage is a mystery and one of the hardest things to do well. I have only been married 9 months and I feel this way. So, it is worth asking, what is marriage and why is it so important? Paul gives a big clue in the following verse (32): “*This is a profound mystery – but I am talking about Christ and the church.*” How is it that Paul never married and yet he understood the mystery of marriage so well that he could even counsel married people? It’s because the mystery of marriage is not actually about marriage itself. Marriage is merely a reflection of a more fundamental union between us and God. In other words, marriage is about the gospel. A right view of marriage and my spouse begins with right view of the gospel and God.

I was asked to prepare a testimonial message on the wife’s role in marriage based on Ephesians 5: 22, “Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord.” I believe it is an important practical imperative. But I’d first like to briefly discuss chapters 1-4 to understand the context of Paul’s direction to wives.

The premise is that Paul is talking to born-again Christians. They are those who believed the gospel of salvation and dedicated their lives to following Jesus. But even in a community of believers, there can be conflicts and problems. So, Paul reminds them of the solution, the love of God. In the original text, the word “agape”, is repeated 22 times in this book. Agape love is the highest form of love – absolutely sacrificial and seeks the other’s true good. This is exactly God the Father’s love for us. The first time this word agape appears is in chapter 1 when Paul speaks about all the spiritual blessings we have in Christ: “*In LOVE, he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will.”* It brings God great pleasure and it is his good will to create this family in which he is the father and we are his children. Chapter 2 talks about how this adoption was made possible. We were once dead in our transgressions and sins, slaves to our own desires and thoughts. We were totally against God, objects of his wrath. There is no reason at all that God should want to adopt us as his children. But “*because of his great LOVE for us*, *God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ….it is by grace [we] have been saved*.” We are saved purely because of his one-sided love. His love is a completely merciful, forgiving, and redeeming love for undeserved sinners. It is 100% by his grace that we should be forgiven and called children of God.

Interestingly, whenever Paul spoke of God’s love, he described it as a power. God’s love is not selfish like ours, that destroys or drains us with demands and conditions. No. God’s love is a life-giving power constantly at work within his children, changing us to know him better and eventually to be completely one with him. His power works against all barriers, fundamentally the barrier of sin and hostility, and reconciles all things into perfect unity with himself through Christ. In 3: 16-19, Paul says,“*I pray that you, being rooted and established in LOVE, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ and to know this love that surpasses knowledge – that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God*.” In all things and through all things, God’s ultimate intention for us is that we might know the love of Christ until we are totally filled with the fullness of God. Paul mentions this will of God again in 4: 14: “*until 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.”*

This love of God is the basis of the practical imperatives Paul gives in chapters 4-6 of how to live as his holy children. Our fundamental identity, before we are a husband or a wife, is that we are children of God. Paul begins chapter 5, the wives and husbands chapter, saying: “*Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of LOVE, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.*”We have no power to just follow the “how-to’s” of a holy life. We need the working power of God’s love inside us. Our struggle to imitate God and live a life of love is to first believe that we are dearly loved children for whom Christ gave himself up completely. We must believe that our identity is fundamentally different because of God’s love for us. Only then can we obey the imperatives of abstaining from false, angry, impure, obscene, unwholesome and foolish talk. Such speech comes from the old self, totally proud and self-centred. Rather, in the love of Christ, I have the power to be humble and gentle and speak words that build others up, kind, compassion, forgiving, thankful, with hymns, psalms, and spiritual songs. If we truly revere Christ as the Lord who died for me and for my brother, we can submit to one another out of submission to the Lord, our head. This is the most basic attitude we must have as children of God and as the body of Christ.

Finally, we arrive at Paul’s imperative to house churches. Each house church is established by God as a microcosm of the bigger church and the best model to practice the love of Christ. In marriage, God’s love cannot remain theoretical. True faith in the agape love of God is tested daily, with every exposure of our sinful nature. Two fully grown adults who have their own way of thinking, character, preferences, lifestyles, expressions, and of course sins, joins and shares every aspect of life together. It seems impossible that such two could ever become one. But God demonstrated that he is able to make the two one, even bringing sinners near to a holy God.

Paul’s imperative to the wife and the husband are slightly different. Though both are fundamentally children of God, their emphatic roles are distinct in the context of marriage. What is the imperative to wives? Let’s see verse 22:24: “*Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord.*” And to husbands? “*Husbands, love your wives just as Christ love the church*.” The first thing to note is that each one’s role is to be carried out before the Lord, regardless of the other side. This means wives are not to point to their husbands and criticize them for failing to love them and husbands are not to point to wives and say they are failing to submit to them or respect them. Each must accept their role and live “as to the Lord”. The other’s failure to do their part does not excuse me from doing mine before God. In this way, marriage becomes centred on and reactionary to God and not to one another. And in this way, each can mature to the full measure of God’s unconditional and sanctifying love.

Let’s see verse 22 again: “*Wives submit to your husbands as to the Lord.*”Submission is not easy for anyone, especially women. In our sinful nature, we cannot submit, particularly when we see the other’s flaws. Our natural reaction is to judge, thinking we are better and fix the other. This is when criticizing, disrespectful, and bitter words can come out, totally bringing down the husband and breaking the relationship. So, how can wives submit to their husbands? Let’s see verses 23-24: “*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. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything”* and verse 33b, “*the wife must respect the husband”*.

Paul is not saying that we should submit to the husband on condition – for example, only when we think he is right or agreeable. At the same time, I believe Paul is not endorsing blind or fatalistic submission to, for example, a direction that is obviously against God. The assumption is that both are children of God who strive to grow in holiness. Instead, he is speaking about the fundamental view that wives are to have towards the husband. Regardless of the husband’s flaws and mistakes, wives are to recognize the God-ordained position of the husband as the head of the family. The head is not necessarily better than or more valuable than the body. But it directs and provides for the body, just as Christ does the church. The focus, thus, is not actually the husband’s merits or lack of, but God’s sovereignty and love, which is perfect. Such submission requires full faith and hope in God the Father. Such submission prays and surrenders all things to God. I believe in this way God molds wives to become mature, godly, wise, and steadfast, knowing how to submit in a God-pleasing way at each moment. True submission is to support the husband to grow in the headship of Christ. Humility and wisdom is necessary to do so, especially what and when to speak, to speak the truth in love.

It is indeed a profound mystery that as each spouse focuses on his or her part before God and through his power, it is God who works in the housechurch to make two one in every way. Through marriage with Joshua, God has been teaching me faith in his love and sovereignty very deeply. To be honest, I did not expect marriage to be so difficult. I thought that since we are both believers, everything will be smooth and we won’t have many conflicts. In reality, however, I found that we disagreed on almost everything. Many times, I could not understand the way Joshua thought or expressed himself. I am quite a meditative and cerebral person who needs to have meaningful and deep conversations to feel connected. Joshua also is a deep thinker too but he does not normally express himself through deep conversation but through action. He also grew up among brothers and emotionally inexpressive parents so his words can sound abrasive and insensitive to me. In my heart, I also sometimes criticized him for being prideful and falling short of my spiritual expectations. I blamed him for my inability to submit to or respect him. With this heart, I, too, hurt him with accusatory and doubting words. We fought many times with mutual pain and disappointment. In my own hopelessness and weakness, God humbled me deeply to learn prayer.

Through the struggle of prayer, I grew in trust in Jesus as the perfect Lord of my life and marriage. Before, I got stressed and anxious when I looked only at myself and Joshua. I really had no answers. But as I came to the Lord as I was, he turned all my questions and worries into a deep reliance on the grace and power of Jesus’s grace to me, once again. Remembering God’s mercy to me, my complaints and criticisms were silenced and my hurts healed. I saw how far my love and humility is from the love of God demonstrated to me. I was once an object of God’s wrath because I refused to believe in Jesus as the truth. I suffered with depression and meaninglessness for a long time. But in his great mercy, he brought me near to himself through the cross. By his grace, he opened my eyes to see the glory and truth of Jesus and humbled my heart to accept him as my Lord and Saviour. He gave me an eternal identity and an eternal hope. I see that Satan tries very hard to take this grace away from me, wanting to make me a slave to doubts, fears, condemnation, and hopelessness once again. But God’s words are final and by faith in his love and sovereignty at each moment, God gives me victory and changes me little by little.

In this struggle, I could deeply renew the faith that God sovereignly ordained my marriage with Joshua. Despite our struggles, God gives me peace in the assurance that he is leading even though his way is not as I expected. In all things, God’s ultimate purpose for me is that I might know Christ better, the depth of his love, and mature into his fullness, being totally one with him. Practically, God is teaching me what it means to trust, love, respect, and submit to Joshua out of my trust and submission to Jesus. When fights arise, God nudges me not to speak emotional and senseless words that but be quiet and pray first. Many times, I still fail and fall weak to my pride and emotions. But through my weakness, I am reminded again of God’s mercy and love for me, the love that patiently waits, bears, forgives, and redeems. His love alone has the power to change a sinner like me to be humble and unconditionally loving. My job is not to control my marriage or my husband, not even to change my self. My aim and focus must be to be daily rooted in the love of Christ and simply believe in the power of God’s love that works in all things to make it one and whole in him.

Frankly, I am not sure if I’ve changed much or if Joshua changed, but what I experience is that God is giving me deep peace in the assurance that he is near me and above us. By faith in God’s perfect way, I can genuinely respect Joshua as the head of our family, as one dearly loved by the Lord, one who also dearly loves the Lord and me. God is also growing me in the heart and devotion to pray for Joshua with love, faith, and hope, and to speak kind and compassionate words that encourage rather than criticize. Finally, God is giving me the patience to entrust what I cannot understand and to wait on him. From my marriage so far, I can really testify that the solution, always, is Jesus. He is the Lord and he is able to immeasurably more than we ask. He is able to break down any dividing barriers and bring perfect unity in the church and house church by the power of his love.

I am thankful that through the gift of marriage, God is showing me the depth of his love and maturing me into his image. He promises to grow me as a truly God-fearing, humble, submissive, and respecting wife that builds up the housechurch towards the headship of Christ, to his glory. May God lead Joshua and I to grow in the fullness of Christ that we might mightily declare the praises of him who called us out of darkness into his wonderful light according to our marriage key verse, 1 Peter 2: 9.“*But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God that you might declare forth the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light*.” Amen.

One Word: Wives, Submit to your husbands as to the Lord.

**Husbands, Love your Wives as….**

Ephesians 5: 25, “*Husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the church*.”

We all experience the most distinct and intense problems in our relationships. Although we are children of God, many times we cannot accept or even bear our neighbors and we just wait until they change. Is it possible to solve all these problems with a single solution? According to this letter of Ephesians, yes, and this solution is the knowledge and practice of the love of Jesus Christ; a deep love that covers over a multitude of sins and faults. I pray that through this word we may open our hearts to accept the love of Christ again, and we may decide to love our neighbor as Jesus loved us. Amen.

 The church of Ephesus was young; Paul had begun the ministry about 10 years ago. Ephesus was a very rich and important city in Asia, but full of idolatry and immorality, being known worldwide for the orgies and prostitution in the temple of the goddess Diana. This young church suffered with several problems. There was disagreement in the church, contamination of human doctrines and disputes between Gentiles and Jews. The believing families were attacked by Satan, with immorality and humanism, causing division and even the destruction of the most important institution established by God. With the collapse of the house church, the church of Ephesus could not remain. In face of these problems, Paul helps the believers teaching God's purpose for the church of Christ. What is this purpose? The purpose of God is the complete and perfect union between Him and His church, and this is only possible through Jesus Christ, who is the head of the church. The members of the church could achieve true and holy unity among them and with God when they accepted deeply and practiced the love of Jesus Christ. And for this reason, Paul says that he was kneeling before the Father in prayer so that the believers in Ephesus would know more deeply this love of Jesus. He said, \*\*\* "*And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge - that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God*.”.

 Before instructing the house church, in verses 1-20, Paul clarifies what identity and conduct the believers of Ephesus should have. They no longer lived in sin. Because of Jesus, they became dearly loved children of God and now they should live following the example of Jesus Christ. As a holy people of God, they had to live without any sign of immorality, impurity or greed. They should expose and fight against sin, striving to be filled with the Spirit. Verses 8-10 say: \*\*\*“*For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light (for the fruit of the light consist in all goodness, righteousness and truth) and find out what pleases the Lord*.”.

 Why does Paul emphasize this new identity and the new life before instructing the believing family? Because the house church is not a relationship created by human emotion and desire. It’s the first institution established by God. Christians should understand that this was something totally different from any experience they had before.

 In Brazil and Latin America, we greet people with a kiss on the cheek, even we get introduced to a stranger. If I do this in Korea or even here in Toronto, I believe I will have big problems. Especially during this pandemic, I could even be arrested as a “crazy latino asian risking other people’s lives”. The truth is that I must be humble and recognize that I am in another country and in another reality. And so, I must seek to learn the new tradition and culture, ignoring my previous experience in my country.

 In the same way, Christians, who start a believing family, must recognize that they are in a new environment, a new holy and spiritual institution, created, blessed and maintained by God. They also must recognize their identity: they are not united with a simple husband or wife, but in a holy union of dearly loved children of God. They could not practice the same culture and conduct based on the experiences they had in the world inside the house church, or they would have serious problems. What would this worldly culture be? This is the thinking and the corrupted mindset by sin that reigns in this world and contaminates man and the society. The value system that respects the oppressor and despises the servant. The culture that prefers to receive than to give, that sees power in authority, but weakness in love and submission. For this reason, Paul recalls: \*\*\*“*Follow God’s example, therefore, as dearly loved children and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.*” (1-2). We must follow the example of our Lord Jesus, who taught and showed us that it is better to give than to receive, that the greatest is the one who serves and that there is no greater power than sacrificial love. Jesus said in Luke 22:24-27: \*\*\* “*The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who exercise authority over them call themselves benefactors. But you are not to be like that. Instead, the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves. For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who is at the table? But I am among you as one who serves*.” As children of God, we need to purify ourselves from the world culture and thinking and follow God’s example and walk in the way of love, just as our Lord Jesus Christ loved us. Amen.

 Having cleared this, Paul starts the instruction: \*\*\* "*Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ*.” (21). It is important to emphasize that this submission has no focus to please the husband or wife, the son or father, the servant or the master, but it is in reverence for Christ. We choose to submit ourselves to our neighbors, because we love Christ and follow His example, who became the smallest, poorest and willingly died for us. Jesus is at the center of the house church.

 So, what is Paul's instruction for husbands? Let us look at verse 25-27, \*\*\*"*Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for it. To make it holy, purifying it by washing it with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless*.”

 In the original Greek version, this love is specified as agape. This is the love that does not seek its own interest, but its constant and that bears the difficulties and challenges with the same heart. This is not simply a feeling or emotion, but a voluntary decision of sacrifice and submission. This is the love of Christ for us, who seeks our holiness, purity and salvation. In one word, this is His unconditional love, that doesn’t look at the condition or weakness. Romans 5:8 says, \*\*\* "*But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us*.”.

 Let us look at verses 28-31. Paul says that the house church is one body and the husband and wife are members of this body. This means that the husband and wife are closely connected and united spiritually. If one suffers, both will suffer. If the wife is happy, the husband will also rejoice sincerely. Paul said, "*He who loves his wife loves himself*.” But the way the husband loves his wife is not only a sign of how he loves himself, but also how he loves God. When Adam sinned, he blamed Eve, who God had given him and who was originated from his own body. His relationship with his wife was a reflection of how he was unthankful, rebellious and disobedient against God and how he did not love himself. But in this same way that we reflect our sins in our relationships, we also can practice and demonstrate our gratitude, respect and commitment to God by practicing Jesus' unconditional love to our neighbor.

 Certainly, this is not easy to practice.

 I feel that I can guess pretty accurate what Paulina wants or thinks in various situations. Generally, it is the opposite of what I have in mind. It amazes me how different we are: I am intense, she is chill. She is a thinker; I am a person of action. For me, it's all or nothing; Paulina is cautious. With time, small differences and opinions become problems. Sometimes I say I love you and she does not speak back to me and suddenly, all that love is gone. Sometimes, when I am washing the dishes of our meal, she just leaves me alone and go to the room. This makes me wonder if this selfish person even met Jesus personally.

When I am working, the assistant, the secretary and the patient are ready to listen and to do exactly what I say by answering, "Yes, doctor Joshua.”. But sometimes when I would call Paulina after work I listened: no, i don't agree or i don't want to. My brain bugged.

In our relationship, we face many challenges. We fight and we also hurt each other. Sometimes my heart gets tired, angry and aggressive. But when I remember the grace of Jesus Christ in my life and how unconditionally He loved a sinner like me and died for me, my heart empties and my knees and ego kneel before my Savior and my King. Thus, I can truly love Paulina. Not with human love, but with the true love of Jesus Christ. When I meditate on the love of Jesus Christ, I can also feel and see Paulina's unconditional love for me. My past is so shameful and the weight of my sins was so great that I couldn’t open my mouth or raise my head to pray. But Paulina, God's beloved daughter, accepted me and committed herself to be my wife. She is a gift and a physical proof that the love of Jesus is unconditional and in fact, totally forgives my sins, having great hope in the new life based on my new identity as God's dearly loved child. I am eternally grateful that God sends me His Son to be my Lord, Best Friend and Savior. I also thank Paulina who accepts me, prays for me and loves me. I am grateful to God for giving me Paulina, my beautiful and loving wife to live according to our promise: \*\*\* “*But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.*” But above all, I’m thankful that through marriage, I can experience even more the love of Jesus and understand more deeply the heart of God in various events, day by day. I will give you 2 examples.

 The process of my marriage was full of difficulties, challenges, ups and downs that could easily turn into a k-drama script. When a problem was solved, a worse one appeared. Above all, it was a process when I prayed a lot. I have never fought so hard in prayer in my life. My prayer struggle was not for Paulina, but to listen and obey God's will. When all this process of almost 2 years came to an end, my heart was filled with great gratitude and joy. Not for Paulina, but for the joy of knowing more deeply my God and having firm conviction of who He is. At the end of this process, my heart and soul, every cell of my body could confess that God exists and is with me. I felt the presence of God to such a point that I began to remember and repent of many moments in which I did not trust God and that I ignored His existence in many decisions of my life.

 Three months ago, when I said goodbye to Paulina at the airport when she was returning to Canada, my heart ripped apart and was filled with sadness. But during the following days, God touched my heart and made me understand that this is the heart of Jesus and the true disciples that are waiting anxiously for the day when they will be together with Christ in the kingdom of God. This is the broken heart that waits for the most intense love that ever existed; the love that it’s worth waiting for and to die for. It is the heart of the disciples who have accepted death to meet Jesus and it’s with this heart that John ends Revelation: "*He who testifies to these things says, “Yes I am coming soon.” Amen. Come, Lord Jesus*". I could repent of my busy heart that is occupied with the world and that does not wait for Jesus. This event helped me to awake my soul and to seek Jesus more.

 When I see the grace, and transforming power of Jesus Christ's love in my life, I confess that Jesus is the truth and His love is the solution to all our problems we face in our relationships. Through this love, that truly transforms and saves, we can experience a perfect and divine unity. And this is the great mystery that Paul refers, because when the church and God becomes one through this love, we will certainly enjoy the holy, true and indescribable communion with God. By the power of the blood of Jesus Christ, the church will become holy and a representation of the glorious kingdom of God on this earth, full of joy and hope; a single body, a holy communion where the sinner can find forgiveness and salvation. In this way, the house church can also enjoy this heavenly joy and divine unity.

How could the church of Ephesus solve all its problems and divisions? How can husbands love your wives unconditionally? Only with the love of Jesus Christ, following His example.

Actually, Jesus pointed out what this church lacked in Revelation 2:4: “*Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken the love you had at first.*”. We need to repent, accept and practice the love that saved us. Let’s pray for one another to know Jesus deeper and practice His love with or wives and neighbours. In this way, grace, joy and hope for the kingdom of God will dwell in us, in our homes and in our church. Amen.

One Word: “*Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her*”.