

Ephesians Chapter 5

A Deep Expository Study: Imitators of God -- Light, Wisdom, the Spirit-Filled Life, and the Mystery of Marriage as the Gospel Made Visible

Introduction to Ephesians Chapter 5

The Chapter Where Imitation Becomes the Standard, Light Becomes the Identity, and Marriage Becomes a Theological Statement

Ephesians chapter 5 is one of the most wide-ranging chapters in Paul's letters. It moves from the heights of the call to imitate God Himself, through the darkness of a comprehensive warning against sexual immorality and covetousness, into the luminous identity of those who are light in the Lord, through the practical wisdom of Spirit-filled community life, and finally into what many scholars consider the most theologically profound treatment of marriage in the entire Bible. The chapter covers more ground than almost any other single chapter in the New Testament -- and it holds all of it together with a single, unifying thread: the new life that belongs to those who are in Christ is not a set of rules imposed from outside but a nature expressed from within, and that nature -- characterized by love, light, wisdom, and Spirit-fullness -- finds its most comprehensive and most demanding expression in the intimate covenant of marriage.

The chapter does not permit comfortable reading. The call to imitate God is the most audacious standard ever placed before a human being. The exposure of sexual immorality and greed as forms of idolatry cuts against some of the most deeply rooted patterns of human desire. The identity of 'light in the Lord' carries both extraordinary privilege and extraordinary responsibility. And the teaching on marriage -- however carefully it is read -- demands everything of both husband and wife in ways that cannot be softened without distorting the text. But the chapter is also one of the most glorious in Ephesians. Imitation of God is possible because God has made us His children. The darkness is not the final word. The Spirit-filled life is not a burden of religious performance but the overflow of a heart being continuously filled by God. And the mystery of marriage is grounded in the most beautiful and most costly love story ever told.

The Structure of Chapter 5

The chapter moves through five major sections. First, the foundational call to imitate God as beloved children, specifically through love that reflects Christ's self-giving sacrifice (vv. 1-2). Second, a comprehensive warning against sexual immorality, impurity, and covetousness -- with particular emphasis on the incompatibility of these

with kingdom inheritance and the danger of being deceived by empty words (vv. 3-7). Third, the identity and calling of those who are 'light in the Lord' -- with the call to expose the deeds of darkness and the astonishing quotation that may be an early Christian hymn about awakening from death (vv. 8-14). Fourth, the call to walk in wisdom -- making the most of the time, understanding the Lord's will, and above all being filled with the Spirit, whose fullness expresses itself in worship, gratitude, and mutual submission (vv. 15-21). Fifth, the great teaching on marriage -- wives and husbands, the church and Christ, the mystery Paul names as the deepest ground of everything he is saying about the marriage covenant (vv. 22-33).

Opening Prayer

Heavenly Father, we come to Ephesians chapter 5 knowing that we are about to be called to a standard that exceeds anything we can reach by our own effort. Imitate God. Be light. Walk in wisdom. Be filled with the Spirit. Love your wife as Christ loved the church. Respect your husband. Lord, these are not modest instructions. They are the calling of people who have been filled with the fullness of God, sealed by His Spirit, and placed in Christ at the right hand of the Father. Give us what we need to receive this chapter not as a list of impossible demands but as the description of a life that the Spirit is genuinely producing in those who yield to Him.

And as we come to the teaching on marriage, Lord, protect us from the culture wars that have made this passage a battleground and prevented it from being a source of grace. Let us see what Paul sees -- the mystery of Christ and the church, the most beautiful love story in the universe, taking visible, tangible, daily form in the covenant of husband and wife. Let that vision elevate our marriages and our understanding of the church, and let it produce in us a deeper wonder at the love of Christ who gave Himself for us. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Ephesians 5:1-2 -- Imitate God: The Audacity and the Ground of the Highest Standard

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.

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Here is the standard Paul sets: imitate God. Be a copy of your Father. And the ground he gives for this astonishing call is simple -- you are His dearly loved children. Children naturally imitate their parents. This is not a strain; it is what relationship produces. And here is the specific shape of the imitation: walk in love. But not a vague, sentimental love. Love defined by what Christ did -- He loved us and gave Himself up for us. Completely. Voluntarily. At total personal cost. That self-giving was a fragrant offering to God, a sacrifice that pleased Him fully. That is the pattern you are called to embody.

"Follow God's Example"

The opening command of chapter 5 is, by any measure, the most audacious ethical standard ever placed before a human being. 'Follow God's example' -- literally, 'be imitators of God' (Greek: mimeisthai ton theon). This is not a call to admire God from a distance, to aspire toward God's character in some vague and aspirational sense, or to approximate some divine quality in a modest, human-scaled way. It is a call to imitation -- the same word from which we get 'mimic.' Be a copy. Reproduce what you see in the original. In the ancient world, imitation of the gods was generally understood as beyond the capacity of ordinary mortals. The gods were in a different category. What Paul does here is simultaneously affirm the impossibility of the standard and ground it in a reality that makes it genuinely possible: 'as dearly loved children.'

"As Dearly Loved Children"

The ground of the call to imitate God is not moral achievement or spiritual advancement -- it is the relationship of beloved children to their Father. Children imitate their parents. This is not an obligation imposed from outside -- it is the natural expression of relationship. A child who has been deeply formed by a loving father will naturally, without straining, reproduce the father's gestures, language, and habits of heart. The Ephesians are 'dearly loved children' -- the word (agapetos) is the same word used of Jesus at His baptism when the Father declared 'This is my dearly loved Son' (Matthew 3:17). You do not imitate God to become His child. You imitate God because you already are His child. The imperative rests on the indicative. The ethical demand rests on the relational reality.

"Walk in the Way of Love -- as Christ Loved Us"

The specific content of the imitation is named immediately: walk in the way of love. The love that believers are called to imitate and embody is not defined abstractly or philosophically. It is defined Christologically -- by the specific, historical, self-giving love of Christ: 'just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.' The phrase 'gave himself up' is the language of the cross -- the deliberate, costly, total self-surrender of Christ in His death. He did not merely do something kind. He gave Himself -- His life, His freedom, His dignity, everything -- up for us. The description of Christ's death as 'a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God' echoes the Old Testament sacrificial system. Paul is saying that the death of Christ was a perfect, pleasing, fully acceptable sacrifice -- the ultimate fulfillment of everything the Old Testament sacrificial system pointed toward. And it is this sacrifice that defines what love looks like for the people who bear Christ's name.

Key Observations

- **The call to imitate God is the highest ethical standard ever placed before a human being** -- and it is grounded in relationship, not achievement.
- **'Dearly loved children' establishes the indicative on which the imperative rests** -- imitation flows from relationship, not toward it.

- **The definition of love is Christological and cross-shaped** -- not sentiment or affection but costly, deliberate, total self-giving.
- **Christ's death is described as a fragrant offering** -- acceptable to God, the fulfillment of the sacrificial system, the pattern of all Christian love.

Ephesians 5:3-7 -- The Incompatibility of Immorality and Greed with the Kingdom

But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people. Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving. For you can be sure of this: No immoral, impure or greedy person -- such a person is an idolater -- has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God's wrath comes on those who are disobedient. Therefore do not be partners with them.

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Among you as God's people, sexual immorality must not even come up as something you do. No impurity. No greed. These things are just wrong for people who bear God's name -- they do not fit. And the same goes for your speech: no shameful talk, no morally empty chatter, no cleverly edged humor that winks at what ought to be refused. Instead, let your default be thanksgiving. Because here is something you need to know for certain: no sexually immoral person, no impure person, no greedy person -- and understand, greed is the same as idolatry -- has any place in the kingdom of Christ and God. Do not let anyone talk you out of this with sophisticated-sounding arguments, because God's wrath is what comes on people who live in disobedience to these things. Do not get entangled with them.

"Not Even a Hint"

The standard Paul establishes in verse 3 is deliberately extreme: 'among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity or of greed.' Not a reduced presence. Not a more moderate level. Not even a hint -- the Greek (onomatazesthō -- literally, 'not even be named') suggests that these things should be so foreign to the community of faith that they do not even come up as named topics in the context of the community's own practice. The three categories are comprehensive: sexual immorality (porneia -- all sexual activity outside the covenant of marriage), impurity (akatharsia -- moral uncleanness generally), and greed (pleonexia -- the insatiable desire for more). These are named together because they share a common root: the self turned in on its own desires, using others and the world as instruments for

its own gratification. The reason given for the prohibition is identity: 'because these are improper for God's holy people.' These things do not fit who you are.

Idolatry -- the Root of Immorality and Greed

Verse 5 contains one of Paul's most penetrating theological diagnoses: 'No immoral, impure or greedy person -- such a person is an idolater -- has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.' The identification of greed as idolatry is particularly striking and particularly important. Greed is not merely a financial vice. It is a spiritual orientation -- the worship of the self's desires as the governing value of life, the treatment of things or pleasures or status as the ultimate good that life is organized around acquiring and protecting. Sexual immorality is similarly an idolatry -- the worship of sexual experience and pleasure as the ultimate value. Paul is saying that underneath every form of sexual sin and every form of greed is the same fundamental spiritual disorder: the displacement of God from the center of life and the installation of the self's desires in His place.

"Let No One Deceive You with Empty Words"

Verse 6 introduces a warning that is as urgently relevant in the twenty-first century as it was in the first: 'let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God's wrath comes on those who are disobedient.' The 'empty words' are the rationalizations, the theologies of accommodation, the sophisticated arguments that minimize the seriousness of the sins just named. Every generation has its version of the empty words -- the cultural sophistication that reframes sexual immorality as healthy self-expression, the prosperity gospel that reframes greed as evidence of divine blessing, the cheap grace theology that reframes repentance as unnecessary for those who have prayed a prayer. Paul names all of these, before they are named, as empty -- hollow, without substance, incapable of bearing the weight of the reality they are trying to explain away.

Key Observations

- **'Not even a hint' sets a standard that flows from identity** -- these things do not fit who God's holy people are.
 - **Coarse joking is the most subtle of the speech sins** -- it normalizes what should be resisted under the cover of humor.
 - **Greed is idolatry** -- the displacement of God by the self's appetites as the governing value of life.
 - **'Empty words' are the rationalizations of every era that minimize the seriousness of these sins** -- Paul names them hollow before they are spoken.
 - **The wrath of God is real** -- the standard is not cultural acceptability but the kingdom of Christ.
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Ephesians 5:8-14 -- Light in the Lord: Identity, Fruit, and the Exposure of Darkness

For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) and find out what pleases the Lord. Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them. It is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret. But everything exposed by the light becomes visible -- and everything that is visible is itself light. This is why it is said: 'Wake up, sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.'

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Here is your before and after: you were darkness -- not just in darkness, but darkness itself. And now you are light -- not just in the light, but light itself. In the Lord. So live like who you are: live as children of light. The fruit that light produces is goodness, righteousness, and truth. And keep actively discerning what pleases the Lord. Stay away from the empty, fruitless things that darkness does -- and instead, expose them. You do not need to repeat in detail what people do in secret in the dark; the point is that when light shines on it, it is exposed for what it is. And here is the stunning thing: everything that gets exposed by the light can itself become light. The old hymn says it: wake up, sleeper. Rise from the dead. And Christ will shine on you.

"You Were Once Darkness -- Now You Are Light"

Verse 8 makes one of the sharpest identity declarations in the chapter: 'For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord.' Two things about this statement demand attention. First, the completeness of the contrast. Paul does not say the Ephesians were once in darkness. He says they were darkness -- the condition was not circumstantial but ontological, definitional. Their very nature, apart from Christ, was darkness. And correspondingly, they are not now in light -- they are light. The nature has changed. The identity has been transformed. Second, the qualifier: 'in the Lord.' The light they now are is not their own. It is not generated by their moral improvement or their spiritual discipline. It is the light they are in the Lord -- because they are in Christ, who is the light of the world (John 8:12). Their light is derived, not self-generated. This prevents both pride and despair.

"Find Out What Pleases the Lord"

The phrase 'find out what pleases the Lord' (verse 10) is a call to moral discernment -- to an active, ongoing, Spirit-assisted investigation of what honors God in every situation. This is not the mechanical application of a rulebook. Rules cannot cover every situation. Discernment -- the practiced, Spirit-informed ability to assess what, in this specific situation, with these specific people, in this specific moment, is pleasing to the Lord -- is the skill of the spiritually mature. It requires the renewal of the mind described in 4:23, the wisdom called for in verse 15, and the Spirit-filling described in verse 18.

"Have Nothing to Do with Darkness -- Expose It"

The relationship of the light-living community to the darkness around it is described in two complementary commands. 'Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness' -- the word for fruitless (akarpos) means literally unfruitful, bearing no genuine good fruit, producing nothing of lasting value. But the community is not merely to avoid the deeds of darkness -- it is to expose them. This is perhaps the most surprising and most important word in the section. The exposure (elencho -- to reprove, to bring to light, to reveal for what it truly is) is not primarily the work of moral condemnation or cultural confrontation. It is the work of the light simply being what it is. Light does not fight darkness. It simply shines -- and darkness is exposed by the shining. The community that is genuinely living as light in the Lord is, by the quality of its life, exposing the emptiness and futility of the surrounding darkness.

Everything Exposed Can Become Light

Verse 13 contains one of the most paradoxically hopeful statements in the chapter: 'everything that is visible is itself light.' The principle is this: when the light of the gospel shines on something in darkness -- an individual, a community, a culture -- what happens is not merely exposure. What happens is the possibility of transformation. The person who is brought into the light -- whose darkness has been exposed by the gospel -- can themselves become light. The exposure is not merely judgment. It is opportunity. It is the first step toward transformation. And the hymn of verse 14 issues the call: 'Wake up, sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.' The call is issued not as a threat but as an invitation -- the light is available, the awakening is possible, the transformation from darkness to light is exactly what the gospel offers to everyone who will receive it.

Key Observations

- **The identity change from darkness to light is ontological, not merely behavioral** -- the nature itself has changed, in the Lord.
 - **The fruit of the light (goodness, righteousness, truth) is the comprehensive moral and relational integrity** of a life aligned with God's character.
 - **'Find out what pleases the Lord' is a call to ongoing discernment** -- the skill of the mature, not a simple rule to be applied mechanically.
 - **The exposure of darkness is accomplished primarily by the quality of the light-community's life**, not primarily by condemnation or cultural warfare.
 - **Everything exposed by the light can become light** -- exposure is not merely judgment but the first step toward transformation and inclusion.
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Ephesians 5:15-21 -- Walk in Wisdom: Time, Understanding, the Spirit's Fullness, and Mutual Submission

Be very careful, then, how you live -- not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is. Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit. Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.

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Pay close attention to how you live -- not carelessly, like a person who has not thought about what matters, but wisely. Grab the opportunities that come your way, because the days are evil and you cannot afford to drift. Stop being foolish -- actually engage with what God's will is. Do not get drunk on wine; that path leads to destruction. Instead, be filled with the Spirit -- that is the real alternative to being controlled by something outside yourself. And here is what a Spirit-filled community looks like: you talk to each other through psalms and hymns and spiritual songs. You sing to God from your heart. You give thanks to God the Father for everything -- always, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. And you yield to one another, out of reverence for Christ.

"Be Very Careful How You Live"

The call to careful, watchful, deliberate living in verse 15 uses the Greek word *akribes* -- precisely, exactly, with careful attention to detail. Paul is not merely calling for generally good behavior. He is calling for a quality of attentiveness to the way of life -- a mindfulness about the implications of every choice, every word, every relationship, every use of time -- that reflects the wisdom of those who understand the era they are living in. Wisdom in the biblical sense is not primarily intellectual sophistication. It is practical, lived alignment with the way things actually are -- with who God is, what He requires, and what genuinely matters in the light of eternity.

"Making the Most of Every Opportunity"

The phrase 'making the most of every opportunity' (literally, 'redeeming the time,' *exagorazomenoi ton kairon*) is one of Paul's most distinctive exhortations. The word for time here is *kairos* -- not *chronos* (the ongoing flow of time in hours and minutes) but *kairos* (the significant moment, the opportunity, the pregnant point in time when something important is possible). Paul is calling the Ephesians to seize the significant moments -- the opportunities for gospel proclamation, for acts of love, for the exercise of wisdom -- that God places in their path. 'Because the days are evil' gives the urgency. The present era is characterized by the opposition of spiritual powers, the presence of

the ruler of the air (2:2), the constant pull of the surrounding darkness. This is not a time for casual, drift-along living.

"Do Not Get Drunk -- Instead, Be Filled with the Spirit"

The contrast in verse 18 is one of the most structurally important in the chapter: 'Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit.' The two contrasting states -- intoxication and Spirit-filling -- are analogous in form but opposite in content and direction. Intoxication by wine is a state in which an external substance takes over the governing of the person's behavior, lowering inhibitions, distorting judgment, and ultimately leading to debauchery (asotia -- unrestrained, dissipated behavior). Spirit-filling is also a state of being governed by something beyond the self. But it is governance by the Spirit of God -- the renewal and direction of the whole person by the living, holy, wise, loving Spirit of the risen Christ. The grammar of 'be filled' is important: it is a present imperative passive -- meaning be being filled, continuously, as an ongoing state, by a power outside yourself. Not a one-time experience but a continuous orientation of the whole person toward the Spirit's governance.

The Fruit of the Spirit's Fullness: Worship, Gratitude, and Mutual Submission

Verses 19-21 describe what a Spirit-filled community looks and sounds like. The description is communal -- these are the characteristics of a body of people living under the Spirit's governance together. 'Speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit' -- The Spirit-filled community is a singing community. Corporate worship is not merely the performance of music for God. It is the mutual edification of the community -- speaking truth and praise to one another through the medium of music. 'Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord' -- The music that the Spirit produces is not performed from the surface of religious duty. It arises from the deep interior of a heart genuinely moved by the Spirit's presence and the gospel's truth. 'Always giving thanks to God the Father for everything' -- The scope of Spirit-produced thanksgiving is total: always and for everything. And 'submit to one another out of reverence for Christ' -- Mutual submission is the definitive social expression of the Spirit-filled life, and the introduction to all the specific relationship instructions that follow.

Key Observations

- **Careful, watchful living is the call of those who understand the era they are living in** -- not anxious but attentive.
- **'Redeeming the time' is the seizure of kairos moments** -- significant opportunities for the exercise of wisdom and love.
- **The drunk/Spirit-filled contrast describes two modes of being governed by something beyond the self** -- one leading to destruction, the other to worship and community.
- **'Be filled' is a continuous passive imperative** -- an ongoing orientation toward the Spirit's governance, not a one-time experience.

- **The Spirit-filled community sings, gives thanks always for everything, and submits to one another** -- these are not separate requirements but the single outflow of a community under the Spirit's governance.
- **Mutual submission is the social grammar of the Spirit-filled life** -- and the introduction to all the specific relationship instructions that follow.

Ephesians 5:22-33 -- The Mystery of Marriage: Christ and the Church Made Visible

Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord. 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. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing 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 this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. After all, no one ever hated their own body, but they feed and care for their body, just as Christ does the church -- for we are members of his body. 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.' This is a profound mystery -- but I am talking about Christ and the church. However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.

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Wives, place yourselves under your own husbands' leadership, the same way you yield to the Lord. Because the husband's role in the marriage is the same kind of role Christ has toward the church -- He is the head, and He proved it by becoming the Savior. So wives support and follow their husbands' leadership, as the church does with Christ. Now husbands -- and here is where the greater weight falls -- love your wives the way Christ loved the church. He gave Himself up for her. Everything. His purpose was to make her holy, to cleanse her, to present her to Himself eventually as a radiant bride -- spotless, without a blemish, holy and blameless. That is what your love is supposed to be working toward in your wife's life. Love her like your own body -- because she is, in the most real sense, one flesh with you. You nourish and care for yourself; do the same for her, just as Christ does for the church. And remember: the reason a man leaves his parents and is joined to his wife, and the two become one flesh -- that whole picture is a profound mystery. What Paul is actually talking about is Christ and the church. So husbands, love your wives as yourselves. And wives, respect your husbands.

The Context and the Stakes

This passage is one of the most discussed, debated, and frequently misread sections in the entire New Testament. It has been used to oppress women and to justify domineering husbands. It has been dismissed as culturally conditioned and no longer binding. All of these readings miss what Paul is actually doing -- which is something far more beautiful and far more demanding than any of them. What Paul is doing in this passage is using the marriage relationship as the living, visible, daily embodiment of the mystery of Christ and the church. Marriage, in Paul's understanding, is not primarily a human institution for companionship, reproduction, or social organization -- though it is all of those things. It is a sign -- a living parable, enacted in the daily life of husband and wife -- of the most fundamental relationship in the universe: the relationship between Christ and the community He has redeemed.

"Wives, Submit to Your Own Husbands as to the Lord"

The submission Paul calls for is voluntary and relational -- it is the wife's own free, Spirit-prompted yielding to the leadership of her own husband. The word (hypotasso) means to arrange under, to willingly place oneself in a supporting role. It is the same word used of Christ's submission to the Father in 1 Corinthians 15:28, of citizens' submission to governing authorities in Romans 13:1, and of believers' mutual submission to one another in verse 21 of this same chapter. In none of these contexts does submission imply inferiority of nature or dignity. It describes a relational posture chosen freely for the sake of right ordering and the welfare of the whole. The qualifier 'as to the Lord' sets both the motivation and the limit of the submission. A wife is not called to submit to abuse, to sin, or to the abandonment of her own conscience before God. She is called to a voluntary, loving, Spirit-prompted relational posture toward her husband that reflects the church's posture toward Christ.

"Husbands, Love Your Wives as Christ Loved the Church"

The instruction to husbands is dramatically longer and dramatically more demanding than the instruction to wives. Where the wife is called to submit, the husband is called to love -- and the love is immediately defined by the cross. 'Just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.' This is not a gentle, romantic, feeling-based love. It is the cross-shaped, self-emptying, total self-surrender love that Paul described in verse 2 as the pattern of all Christian love. The extent and purpose of Christ's love for the church are described in breathtaking terms: to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing 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. The goal of Christ's love is the church's perfect presentation. The husband who loves his wife as Christ loves the church is investing himself in her long-term flourishing -- not her usefulness to him, but her glory before God.

"A Profound Mystery -- I Am Talking About Christ and the Church"

Verse 31 quotes Genesis 2:24 -- the foundational statement of marriage in Scripture -- and then Paul makes a statement that recontextualizes the entire passage and the entire institution of marriage: 'This is a profound mystery -- but I am talking about Christ and

the church.' The mystery Paul names is the same mystery he has been developing throughout chapters 1 through 3. The point he is making is that the Genesis text about marriage was always pointing toward something beyond itself -- toward the union of Christ and the church, the ultimate marriage between the divine Bridegroom and the redeemed community He loves. This means that marriage is not merely a human institution that happens to provide an illustration of spiritual truth. Marriage is a sign -- a divinely designed, sacramentally rich, embodied participation in the reality of Christ's relationship to the church. Every faithful Christian marriage is a living parable of the gospel. This elevates marriage to the highest possible dignity. It also places the highest possible demands on those who enter it.

Key Observations

- **Marriage in Paul's understanding is not primarily a human institution** but a divinely designed sign of Christ's relationship to the church.
- **The wife's submission is voluntary, relational, Spirit-prompted, and 'as to the Lord'** -- its limit and motivation are Christ, not the husband's authority.
- **The husband's headship is defined by Christ's headship** -- which is defined by sacrifice and salvation, not by command and compliance.
- **The instruction to husbands is dramatically longer and more demanding** -- they are called to the cross-shaped love that transforms, nourishes, cherishes, and presents the beloved in holiness.
- **The mystery of Genesis 2:24 was always pointing toward Christ and the church** -- marriage is a sacramental sign of the gospel.
- **The two specific callings (love for husbands, respect for wives)** address the specific temptations of each role within the covenant.

What This Chapter Means for Us Today

1. The Standard Is Christ -- and Christ Is in You

The call to imitate God and to walk in the love of Christ is not a call to achieve something beyond you. It is a call to express what is already within you -- the life of Christ formed in you by the Spirit, the new self created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness. The reason Paul can set such an audacious standard is that he knows what he has already said in chapters 1 through 3. The power that raised Christ from the dead is at work in you. The Spirit of the Son cries 'Abba, Father' in your heart. You are sealed, adopted, indwelt. The standard is Christ, and Christ is in you. The call is not to ascend to a level you cannot reach -- it is to allow what is already in you to express itself outward through the quality of your daily life.

2. Sexual Purity Is a Gospel Issue, Not Just a Moral Issue

The emphasis Paul places on sexual immorality and impurity in this chapter -- 'not even a hint,' identified as idolatry, incompatible with kingdom inheritance -- refuses to let the church treat sexual ethics as a secondary or peripheral concern. In a culture saturated with sexual content and characterized by the normalizing of every form of sexual expression, the church that takes this chapter seriously will be genuinely countercultural. Not puritanical or shaming -- but clearly, confidently, lovingly committed to the vision of human sexuality that reflects the design of the Creator and the dignity of the image-bearers involved.

3. Be Filled With the Spirit -- Daily, Continuously, as the Primary Orientation of Your Life

The Spirit-filling Paul calls for is not a dramatic, occasional experience. It is a continuous, daily, moment-by-moment orientation of the whole person toward the Spirit's governance. This requires the deliberate choosing, again and again, of what feeds the Spirit's presence -- the Word, prayer, worship, honest community, the practice of gratitude -- and the deliberate refusal of what quenches or grieves the Spirit. The Spirit-filled life is not a higher tier of Christianity reserved for the especially devout. It is the baseline calling of every believer -- and the source from which all the other commands of the chapter flow.

4. Let Your Marriage Tell the True Story

For those who are married, Ephesians 5 places the highest possible calling and the highest possible dignity on the marriage covenant. Your marriage is a parable of the gospel. The daily, concrete, imperfect but genuine expression of cross-shaped love from a husband toward his wife -- and the daily, concrete, imperfect but genuine expression of respect and support from a wife toward her husband -- is a witness to the watching world about the love of Christ. Take it seriously. Invest in it. Seek help when it is broken. Fight for it when it is threatened. It is not merely a personal relationship between two people. It is a cosmic statement about the love of the One who gave Himself up for His bride.

5. Walk in Wisdom -- Redeem the Time

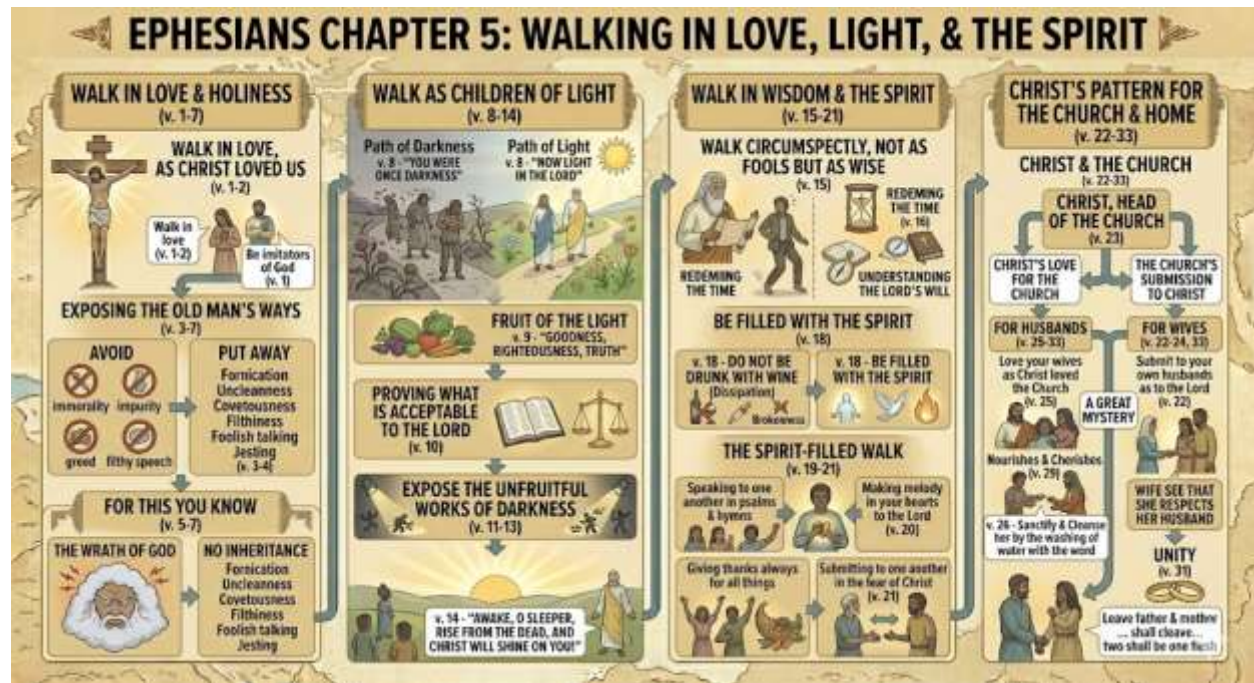
The brevity and the weight of the present moment are constant themes in Paul's letters, and Ephesians 5 presses this with particular urgency. The days are evil. The opportunities are specific and time-limited. The kairos moments -- the pregnant moments of opportunity for love, for gospel proclamation, for wisdom, for acts of grace that will outlast the moment -- must be seized. The Spirit-filled life is a life characterized by this kind of intentional, attentive, opportunity-seizing engagement with the world. Not passive. Not drift. Not the sleepy accommodation to the surrounding culture. Wide awake, attentive, ready -- making the most of every opportunity because the days are evil and the time is short.

How This Chapter Relates to Today

Ephesians 5 speaks into a contemporary culture that is simultaneously desperate for genuine love and deeply confused about what love is, hungry for authentic community and deeply suspicious of authority, longing for lasting marriage and deeply uncertain about what marriage is for. Into all of these hungers and confusions, Paul's chapter offers something that neither the cultural right nor the cultural left has -- a vision of love, community, sexuality, and marriage grounded in the character of God and the work of Christ, embodied in a community filled by His Spirit, and aimed at the display of His glory to the watching world.

The call to imitate God in costly, self-giving love is the most countercultural thing imaginable in a culture of self-assertion and self-promotion. The call to be light in the Lord -- not just to avoid darkness but to expose it by the quality of the community's life - is the church's truest form of cultural engagement. The call to be continuously filled with the Spirit and to overflow in worship, gratitude, and mutual submission is the antithesis of the consumer Christianity that mistakes comfort for the Spirit's presence. And the teaching on marriage -- husband loving as Christ, wife respecting and supporting -- is the most beautiful and most demanding vision of covenant love available to a culture that has largely reduced marriage to a mutual benefit arrangement.

Ephesians 5 does not merely offer a better version of the surrounding culture's values. It offers a completely different set of values, rooted in a completely different reality -- the reality of the gospel, the mystery of Christ and the church, the life of those who have been raised from death and filled with light and indwelt by the Spirit of the living God. The church that lives this chapter will be both the most countercultural community in its context and the most compelling demonstration of what the gospel produces when it is genuinely received and genuinely lived.



Closing Prayer

Heavenly Father, we come to the close of Ephesians chapter 5 with a deeper awareness of both the beauty and the cost of the life You have called us to. Imitate God. Walk in love as Christ loved. Be light in the Lord. Make the most of every opportunity. Be filled with Your Spirit. Love your wife as Christ loved the church. Respect your husband. These are not small instructions. They are the full, demanding, glorious shape of a life lived in the gospel.

Lord, we confess that we have loved less than Christ loved -- more cautiously, more conditionally, more self-protectively. We have tolerated hints of immorality and greed that we were told not even to name. We have been dimmer lights than we were called to be. We have drifted through days that should have been redeemed. We have grieved Your Spirit. Forgive us -- in Christ, as You always forgive, freely and completely.

And then fill us again. Fill us with Your Spirit -- continuously, daily, moment by moment. Let the overflow of that filling be worship from the heart, gratitude for everything, and the mutual submission that makes every relationship in the community an expression of the Spirit's governance.

And for those who are married -- Lord, let their marriages tell the true story. Let husbands love with the costly, transforming, self-giving love of Christ. Let wives respond with the trusting, honoring, supportive respect that reflects the church's relationship to her Lord. Let every Christian home be a parable of the gospel -- imperfect, being sanctified, moving toward the final presentation when the church is presented to Christ without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, holy and blameless.

Wake us, Lord. Shine on us. Let us be light -- genuinely, visibly, compellingly -- in the Lord. To You be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus, now and forever. Amen.

