

**Ephesians 5:1 – 6:9**

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It was at my sister's wedding that I first realised just how dangerous preaching on Ephesians 5 could be. I was brought up in one of the most rural parts of the South West of England. My sister asked me to speak at her wedding on Ephesians 5 - submission and headship in marriage. At the end of the service I was approached by a substantial farmer's wife.

By which I mean, the substantial wife of a substantial farmer.

Those of us from rural settings across the world will know that the sight of a substantial farmer's wife approaching is enough to strike fear into even the most courageous.

As she drew near announced, at the top of her voice (and I shall only give you an edited version of what she said): *nice sermon, William, but 'bother' the submission.*

So, I have to admit, when I received the invitation from the Gafcon primates, to speak on this text, at this occasion, it was with some hesitation that I replied: *it will be a great privilege to speak on Ephesians 5, thank you so much for inviting me.*

Chapter 5 verse 3 to chapter 6 verse 9 is, of course, a continuation of Paul's explanation of what it looks like to *walk* or *live* in a manner worthy of the Lord.

Already Paul has already explained to the Ephesians that they are *God's workmanship, created by God for good works which God prepared in advance for them to walk in.* (2:10).

In chapter 4 verse 1 Paul has urged the Ephesians *therefore* to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord.

In chapter 4 verse 17 he has commanded them *not to walk as the Gentiles do.*

In chapter 5 verse 2 he has insisted that they walk in love.

So, if in the first half of the letter Paul has spelled out the **mighty eternal plan** of God to *bring to unity all things in heaven and on earth under Christ.*

*And if this plan to unite all things under Christ ... is ... to be made known to rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms through the church.*

**Now**, in this second half of the letter, Paul is spelling out what it will look like in practise for us, in our local congregations, to work out God's plan and purpose as we walk under the rule of Christ in the good works in which He has prepared for us to walk.

Chris Green, in his excellent book on the Church (IVP Bible Speaks Today Doctrine series) has this most helpful phrase:

*Christ's cosmic victory erupts in visible expression in the local meeting of Christians.*

It is as we *walk in a manner worthy of the Lord* that we display the cosmic victory of Christ and God's eternal plan to bring all things under His rule.

Many years ago now I served in the British Army as an Infantry Officer. We were frequently stationed alongside or near Americans. It always struck me that whenever one entered an American base one entered a little piece of the United States of America. Wherever you are in the world, when you came across an American Army base the experience is the same. You go in through the closely guarded gates –

there are the ‘Stars and Stripes’. Progress further, there are the ‘Golden Arches’. Yet further and there is a man clutching a can of ‘Coke’ in one hand and a base-ball bat in the other! And then, without fail, you are treated to the lavish generosity and kindness for which our American friends so famous.

Each American base, wherever one is in the world, *an eruption* of what it means to be part of the United States of America.

The local church, in its life lived out, is to be *an eruption of the cosmic victory of Christ*.

And of course, in Ephesus, so dominated as Ephesus was by fear of demonic powers, of witchcraft and sorcery and, indeed, by the dogma and doctrine of the all-pervasive feminist goddess Artemis, this demonstration of the victory of Christ in the local gathering of His redeemed people was a demonstration of the power of Christ over all the things that were feared most in pagan Ephesus.

What does it look like to see the Cosmic Victory of Christ on display in every day life?

We are to walk in good works, prepared in advance by God for us to walk in.

We are to walk worthy of the calling we have received.

We are to walk, no longer as Gentiles.

We are to walk in love.

And today, in **chapter 5 verse 8** we are to *walk or live as children of light*; and **chapter 5 verse 15** *we are to be very careful how we walk or live, not as unwise but as wise.*

We are to walk in Wisdom!

I wonder if you grasp what is at stake in the life and conduct of the local gathering of Christians?

**First, then, Walk, or Live as Children of the Light Verses 3 – 14.**

We are going to see here that this walking in the light will impact our **lifestyle and our language – verse 3 – 5; and this walking in the light will impact our partnerships and productivity verse 6 – 14.**

**Our lifestyle and language.**

**Verse 3 – 4:** *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.*

The word **sexual immorality** is the word *porneia* from which we get pornography.

It refers to any form of sexual stimulation outside that of a marital relationship between one man and one woman.

If we are in any doubt about this then the “*all impurity*” of verse 3 ensures that Paul is speaking about every form of sexual stimulation outside of a publicly recognised, permanent, exclusive relationship between one man and one woman.

Greed is, of course, the inner spring out of which sexual immorality and all impurity flows.

Yes, of course, in the pre-Christian Gentile days of Paul's Ephesian audience they knew no self-control.

They were like the beasts of the field.

Why should they exercise restraint and self-control?

If it feels good, do it!

But now they are **God's holy people – verse 3.**

**Literally: *saints*.**

And it is simply not fitting that God's holy people mention, even in jest, that which is out of place.

There is to be no *obscenity; no foolish talk; no coarse joking*.

**In verse 5** Paul moves from the language to lifestyle.

*'for of this you can be sure: no immoral, impure or greedy person – such a person is an idolater – has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ.'*

Sexual impurity, immorality, is a form of greed. I must get what I want. And the desire to get what I want, and to get it now, is in effect idolatry – the giving of myself to something other than the One True God.

And those whose worship is given to something other than the One True God have no place in God's Kingdom.

Here then, is what it looks like to **walk as children of light**.

Notice **how the Apostle pastors us**.

Biblical Ethics never works simply with the preacher wielding a stick and beating a congregation over the head with a stick like a herd of cattle.

The engine that drives this passage is all of the theology of the first half of the letter.

God has made us alive with Christ.

God has raised us up with Christ.

God has seated us with Christ in the heavenly realms.

God has prepared in advance good works for us to walk in.

God has adopted us as His children for son-ship as His heirs.

As children of light, God has made us His saints.

He has given us an inheritance in the Kingdom of Christ.

He has removed us from the realm of wrath.



We no longer follow the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air. We are not sons of disobedience.

It is by grace we have been saved.

Paul pastors us, then, by urging us to **be** what we have *already become* by God's grace.

As children of light, then, there must not be *even a hint* of sexual immorality.

May I pause at this point and speak to us as a gathering of Christians.

Archbishops, bishops, senior lay leaders, clergy we may be, but first and foremost, before any of these things, we are Christian.

This teaching, then, applies to us as much as to any Christian.

*We are not to walk as the Gentiles do.*

How easy to begin to allow oneself to grow close to someone who is not your wife.

The confidential glance, the loaded compliment, the shared intimacy, lingering at the end of a long meeting.

I always say, when speaking to men on marriage, that once every 5 years someone comes along to whom one could equally easily have been married had circumstances been different. There is a certain chemistry ...

*'Among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, nor any kind of impurity.'*

I make it my personal practise never to meet, in ministry, with someone of the opposite sex behind closed doors. All of our office doors at St Helen's have windows in them for that reason.

I am told that in a conference such as this one, it is highly likely that a number will already be in the habit of making frequent access to internet pornography.

*Among you there must not even be a hint of sexual immorality, nor any kind of impurity.*

May I speak a word to our single brothers and sisters here, many of you heterosexual, seeking to live out a life of purity as God's holy people; others, who struggle in a personal battle with homosexual temptation as you seek to live out a life of purity. We honour you in your battle. We applaud you. We thank God for you.

*Among you there must not even be a hint of sexual immorality, nor any kind of impurity.*

**At the same time as speaking of our language and lifestyle Paul speaks of our Partnerships and productivity.**

In verse 6 – 14 we see the ideas of Chapter 2 verse 1 - 10 coming fully to the fore.

*We are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works which God prepared in advance for us to walk in.*

Our new identity will, inevitably mean a disassociation from those who would seek to deceive us.

**Verse 6 – 14:** *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. For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light (for the fruit of 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 illuminated becomes a light. This is why it is said: 'Wake up sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine upon you.'*

The word partnership in verse 7 is a very strong word. It speaks of active energetic involvement.

Think of a football team – all striving together towards the same goal.

The idea here is not that we withdraw absolutely from the world. Rather that we have no active allegiance with the world in the works of darkness.

Why?

Verse 8 tells us: ***For*** you ***were once*** darkness, ***but now*** you are *children of light*.

The World will always seek validation for its godless activity through co-opting the church.

There will always be voices from the world urging the church to conform to the world.

“You are so puritanical.”

“You must move with the times.”

“Your understanding of marriage is stuck in the dark ages.”

We have a senior and very popular politician in London whose personal life has been pock-marked by one after another sexual scandal.

In the same sex marriage debate he accused those who stood against Gay Marriage as quote *‘going back to the stone age’*.

It was, of course, an **absurd nonsense**.

Going back to the stone age is going back to the sexual immorality, impurity, greed, obscenity and coarse joking of a pagan Gentile lifestyle.

It is the Christian faith that has produced the societal stability and the incalculable benefits of care, and social provision that flow from Christian marriage.

But nothing would suit a sexually promiscuous politician better than to have the church giving the thumbs up to his compromised sexual ethics.

So there will always be *siren voices* seeking to lure the church into giving the ‘thumbs up’ to the sexual ethics of the pagan world.

What does the Apostle Paul say to us about them?

Verse 7: *do not be partners with them.*

But the people of **verse 6 and 7** with whom we are *not to partner* need not only be limited to the pagan world.

Look closely at **verse 6** and you will see that Paul is concerned with those who are speaking ‘*empty words*’ in order to ‘*deceive*’.

We are not to associate or partner **either** with those Pagan Gentiles, **or** with those whose *empty words* suggests that sexual immorality of any kind is somehow legitimate for God's Holy people.

This has the strongest possible application for those of us here who come from the West where our denomination is now riddled with such deception.

Of course the pagan world will see no issue with consecrating a Bishop who has divorced his wife and subsequently entered a relationship with his gay lover.

They want the church to baptise their pagan practice.

What does Paul have to say to us about them:

*do not be partners with them.*

But where the church has so departed from the Gospel of Jesus that it sees no problem with consecrating a Bishop who has divorced his wife and subsequently entered into a relationship with his gay lover the Apostle Paul says: *do not be partners with them.*

And where a Province, such as the Porvoo Province (which incidentally the Archbishop of Canterbury has been visiting this week whilst we have been here at Gafcon) has consecrated a practising lesbian bishop and is seeking to bless ‘genderless marriages’, the Apostle Paul says:

*do not be partners with them.*

*Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness.*

*Expose them.*

I woke in the middle of last night, as one often does before preaching at an occasion such as this one, and as I lay awake I wondered to myself what a video greeting, sent by the Apostle Paul by way of a greeting to Gafcon 2013 might have looked like.

(I know that in the first century they didn’t have video cameras, nor did they allow videos into the prison cells – but I wondered nonetheless ...).

No doubt the Apostle would have smiled warmly and issued a greeting expressing his love for us and his great regret at being unable to be with us.



No doubt he would have acknowledged that ‘our contexts are different’ ... and ‘that we are all striving for purity’. And no doubt he would have urged us to be ‘united with genuine gospel men and women around the world’.

But, we can be sure, that from his prison cell, the Apostle would have insisted to us, that where churches, or bishops, or dioceses or provinces are seeking to deceive us with empty words into the shameful behaviour of disobedience – *do not be partners with them.*

Notice again, before we move on, the **engine** that drives Paul’s appeal.

*Let no-one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God’s wrath comes on those who are disobedient.*

He is appealing to the eternal reality of God’s judgement.

How can we possibly demonstrate the cosmic victory of Christ, if, whilst we are seeking to live out a life of purity as the holy people of God, at the same time we are engaged in communion with those

whose empty talk is leading people towards the judgement and wrath of God?

*We are children of light. Walk as children of light.*

*The fruit of light consists of goodness, righteousness, truth.*

*Find out what pleases the Lord.*

And that explains Paul's use of Isaiah 60 in verse 14.

On at least 3 occasions God appeals to Israel in Isaiah 51 – 60.

WAKE UP!

WAKE UP!

WAKE UP!

Paul modifies the quote to focus our gaze on its fulfilment in Jesus.

So, then, Christian brother, sister, wherever you find yourself WAKE UP!

May I say, on behalf of the British delegates how thankful we are to you Christian brothers and sisters of the Global South that you have been AWAKE whilst so many in the United Kingdom have been asleep.

You have been awake stood openly against the relentless tide of empty words in the Western Liberal churches.

You have been awake and refused to partner with Anglican Bishops and Archbishops who have refused to exercise godly discipline in the Anglican Communion.

You have been awake as so many in the Western denominations have, at best, fallen asleep; and at worse been deceived by empty talk and sought to deceive others.

Peter Akinola; Archbishop Kolini were awake; Henry Orombi was awake; Young Ping Choung was awake. We thank God for them.

We plead with you, even as we continue to stand in our compromised denomination – stay awake!

**First, then, we are to walk as children of light!**

**Secondly as we seek to demonstrate the cosmic victory of Christ, we are to walk in wisdom.**

Paul's final appeal for us to walk is there **in verse 15:**

*Be very careful, then, how you walk – not as unwise, but as wise, making the most of every opportunity.*

You can see from verse 17 – 18 that we are to *understand what the Lord's will is*, as we are *filled with the Spirit*.

Dr Peter O'Brien very helpfully points out that in his commentary on Ephesians that to be '*filled with the Spirit*' would better, be translated '*filled by the Spirit*' and that in Ephesians the Christian is *filled with the fullness of Christ /God*. (1:23; 4:10)

So that Chapter 5:18 would read better: *do not get drunk on wine but be filled **by the Spirit** (with all the fullness of Christ)*.

But what does it actually look like to be filled by the Spirit with all the fullness of Christ? Paul spells this out for us in detail from verse 18 of chapter 5 to chapter 6 verse 9.

**It will look like: word, worship and submission (verse 15 – 21)**

**It will look like: submission in marriage, in the family and at work (22 – 6:9)**

If we had the Greek text in front of us we would notice that there are four ‘*doing*’ words in verse 19 to 21.

The NIV section heading most unhelpfully cuts right across the third and fourth.

Look at the text and let me show them to you. *Speaking; singing; giving thanks; submitting.*

Being filled by the Spirit with all the fullness of Christ looks like, in practise:

***Speaking to one another with psalms hymns and songs from the Spirit. (verse 19).***

There will be Word ministry as we are filled by the Spirit with all the fullness of Christ.

We will be speaking to one another with Psalms, hymns and songs given by the Spirit.

This speaks of the horizontal life of the church.

We will be building one another up in love through the spoken word.

Being filled by the Holy Spirit with all the fullness of Christ, looks like in practise:

*Singing and making music in our hearts to the Lord.*

*Always giving thanks to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ for everything. (Verse 19 – 20).*

This horizontal activity of Word ministry to one another is matched, then, by a vertical attitude of Worship to God.

*The Greek has an always and a for everything.*

Here Paul spells out the worship of those who walk in wisdom.

Those who walk in wisdom will not only speak the word of God horizontally to one another.

Our Worship is not simply confined to the two or three hours we spend together.

Worship is, rightly understood, the whole of life.

There are 168 hours of the week.

Unless one is at GAFCON one would usually spend 40 to 50 of them asleep.

We are to be engaged in every waking moment in worship to God – at work, at play, in the home, at church.

But what will this Word-fuelled, Life embracing worship actually look like?

Being filled by the Holy Spirit with all the fullness of Christ looks like in practise:

*Submitting to one another out of reverence to Christ – wives submitting to husbands, children obeying parents, slaves obeying earthly masters in the Lord. (Verse 21ff)*

Most modern translations most unhelpfully put a division either between verse 20 and verse 21, or between verse 21 and verse 22.

Verse 21 reads (literally) *submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ*. It is the fourth participle defining what it looks like to be filled by the Spirit with the fullness of Christ.

So then, the man or woman, filled by the Spirit of God with all the fullness of Christ will be a man or woman of submission.

Of course ...

... because Christ Himself, gladly, willingly, deliberately, submitted Himself to His Father.

This is the very essence of the Character of Christ.

He is the **servant King**.

Of course the World, and particularly the World in the West, finds this concept of voluntary submission impossible to understand.

It is anathema to them.



I was, two weeks ago, accused of ‘coming close to teaching heresy’ by a senior Churchman in London Diocese for suggesting that Jesus might have willingly submitted Himself to His Father.

He accused me of ‘Arian Subordinationism’.

Once I’d worked out what that meant ... I was really rather offended!

But, willing submission of God the Son, out of loving obedience to God the Father, is of the very essence of the second person of the Trinity. Isn’t that why they put in the Creed the phrase: *eternally begotten of the Father*? And isn’t that why Augustine wrote as he did of the second person of the Trinity?

And the reason God *exalted Jesus to His right hand and gave Him the name that is above every other name* was because *He did not consider His equality with God something to be exploited for His own ends but took the form of a Slave ... becoming obedient even unto death.*

So then, the very essence of Christ-like-godliness that displays to the watching world the cosmic victory of Christ, is that we deliberately,

willingly, gladly, submit ourselves to the authority structures God has set up under the rule of Christ in His new redeemed order.

This is how we witness God's cosmic victory in the local assembly of God's people.

And the very essence of pagan sin is rebellion, usurping authority, enthroning self, insisting on my rights, and taking and using my position for my own personal gain.

But it is not to be so amongst us as we **walk in wisdom**.

Filled by the Spirit of Christ, fuelled by the word of God, overflowing 24/7 with worship, we are to live a life of willing submission as we walk, not as unwise but as wise.

But what does this look like?

Submitting out of reverence for Christ will impact the **marriage**; the **family**; and the **workplace**.

In marriage it will look like: wives submitting to husbands and husbands loving wives.

In the family it will look like:

Children obeying their parents.

Fathers not provoking their children, but bringing them up to fear the Lord.

At work it will look like:

Workers obeying their masters in the Lord.

And Masters not threatening their workers.

Now we come to the issue of headship and of submission in marriage and to '*bother the submission*'.

**Submission in marriage, family and workplace.**

*Wives submit to your husbands.*

Some have suggested that the mutual submission of **verse 21** must so govern the *husband's headship and the wife's submission* of verse 22 as to remove any sense of a *order* or of *authority* from these verses.

We are all to submit to one another, they say, therefore 'wives submit to your husbands', has no real weight.

This plainly cannot stand.

The child is to obey the Father as he or she '*submits to one another out of reverence for Christ*'. There is order and authority here.

The worker is to obey his or her master as he or she '*submits out of reverence for Christ*'.

There is order and authority here.

The husband is to be head of his wife.

The wife is to submit to her husband.

These relationships, then, even as we submit to one another out of reverence for Christ, are ASYMETRIC.

So then, the argument that submission in verse 21 removes all thought of a God given order or of authority in verse 22 – 33 cannot stand.

**Others** have suggested that the word *headship* or *head* in verse 23 does not carry any sense of authority because it does not necessarily mean ‘*head*’.

A reference located in classical Greek literature was used to suggest that the Greek word Kephale meant *source* as in the origin of a river, rather than *head*.

This research is by no means conclusive and the most recent and extensive research rejects the view.

But even if this research did show that on occasion in classical Greek the word kephale did mean source, – the context of Ephesians **demand**s here that the word kephale, in this instance, carries a sense of authority.

Paul speak in the parallel passage at the start of the letter of Christ having been seated *far above all rule and authority and power and*

*dominion ... God has put all things under His feet and given Christ as Kephale – head – over all things to the church.*

In this context the word kephale cannot mean anything other than a position of authority in the new redeemed hierarchical order that God has established as He has worked out His plan to bring all things under the one head, even Christ.

One would have to engage in a most remarkable exercise of exegetical conjuring to come out with anything else.

It looks like authority; it sounds like authority; but it is, really .... ‘*a rabbit*’!!

So let’s put aside the protests of Western liberals, which, we might observe, have done precisely the reverse of bringing marital stability and societal cohesion, and let’s turn again with an open mind, to Ephesians 5.

What it is that Paul means as he speaks to husbands and wives?

Paul speaks here both of a **heavenly relationship; and of a human relationship.**

We cannot miss the **heavenly relationship** – all the way through the passage we find that husbands are to love their wives *as Christ loved the church*; and wives are to *submit* to their husbands *as the church submits to Christ*.

All the way through the passage the husband's love of the wife is to be modelled on and is to mirror Christ's love for the church.

Verse 23 – *the husband is head of the wife, as Christ is head of the church.*

Verse 25 – *husbands love your wives, just as Christ loved the church.*

Verse 29 - *no one ever hated their own body, they feed it and care for it, just as Christ does the church*

And all the way through this passage, the wife's submission to the husband is to be modelled on and a mirror of the church's submission to Christ.

Verse 24 – *now as the church submits to Christ, so also the wives should submit to their husbands in everything.*

Paul's focus on **marriage as a picture of this heavenly relationship** finds its high point in **verse 31 and 32**.

*'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.*

So then, God set in creation, way back in Genesis 2, His institution of marriage, and He ordered it to be modelled upon and to mirror to the watching world the **relationship for which He created every one of us**.

He made man and woman.

Male and female He created them.

The woman was created as a like-opposite. She is a complementary helper in the work of filling the garden and subduing it.

God brought these *equal, but different* human beings **a man** and **a woman** in public permanent exclusive physical union in order to mirror to the watching world the Heavenly relationship for which we all were created.



Notice – in creation - a man and a woman. This not only *rules against polygamy*, it also makes same sex relationships a distortion of God's plan and purpose.

Two of the *same*, male and male, cannot mirror the complementary relationship between Christ and His church.

Notice – in creation – a **publicly recognised relationship**. A secret agreement in co-habitation does not rightly represent the public commitment of Christ to His church.

Notice – in creation – a **permanent** relationship. Divorce, or a succession of relationships does not mirror to the watching world the faithful commitment of Christ to His church.

Notice – in creation – a **physical relationship** – this is the only place for physical, emotional and psychological exposure involved in sexually activity.

Same sex marriage, therefore, not only vandalises the natural order of creation, it also vandalises the whole point and purpose of marriage in

creation which is to mirror to a watching world the **heavenly relationship for which we were made.**

Shortly after his appointment in 2002 I rang the former Archbishop of Canterbury to tell him that I was withdrawing from being paid by the Church of England in order to make public my rejection of his teaching on same sex relationships.

*‘Do not be partners with them’.*

We discussed his teaching for some time.

He explained that he thought that if we could see in the relationship of one man with one man some expression of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, and self-control, then might not God the Holy Spirit be saying a new thing to the church about His institution of marriage?

After a while I asked him: ‘what, then, would this do to your Ecclesiology’?

‘How, could a man and a man; or indeed, a woman and a woman; model and mirror to the watching world the **heavenly relationship** for which we were created?’

There was a long pause. After which he answered:

*‘Do you know, I don’t think I had ever thought of that.’*

But ... I responded ... I am most surprised at that, for when I put your teaching to our staff team it was one of our young secretaries who asked the first question.

She said: *what does that do for this man’s understanding of **Christ and His Church?***

She had rightly understood not only the teaching of Genesis 2 and Ephesians 5, but also the introductory preamble to the Anglican marriage service.

So, you see, the Feminist who argues that there should be no female submission and no male headship in the church; and the same sex lobbyist, who argues for the churches blessing on same sex unions are, in effect, standing on very similar territory as they undermine God’s purpose to display to the watching world and all the powers and authorities the cosmic victory of Christ.

These are not second order issues.

They go right to the heart of our ecclesiology and Christology.

As we close may I speak to us again as Christian men and women.

You will notice that the love of Christ has a **past, a future and a present expression.**

How did Christ love His church?

He loved the church in the **past** by giving Himself up for her.

At the cross, while we were still sinners, He took the initiative.

He loved the church selflessly, sacrificially, willingly, and with a servant heart.

*He gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word.*

How did Jesus love the church?

He loved the church with a **future** purpose.

*Verse 27: to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.*

The spot and blemish here has nothing to do with physical perfection.

Paul is not speaking about plastic surgery or make up

How does Jesus love the church?

He loves His church in the **present**.

*Verse 29: he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church.*

He nourishes His church.

He tends for and cares for His church.

In five weeks' time I shall be speaking at a wedding in our church to which I am really very much looking forward.

A Nigerian man will be marrying his Nigerian bride.

I fully expect it to be one of the most colourful and enjoyable weddings ever held at St Helen's!

But in the sermon I am planning to turn to the groom and to say these words:

*Take your eyes for one moment off the bride.*

*Forget your speech.*

*Forget the reception and the champagne.*

*Forget, if you can, for one instant, your honeymoon.*

*And think of Jesus.*

*How did Jesus love you?*

He loved you in the past. At the cross

He loved you for the future.

He loves you in the present.

*How then are you to love your bride?*

*You are to love her selflessly.*

*Your love is to be sacrificial.*

*You are to love her in a way which costs you.*

*Your love of is to mirror to the watching world on which it is modelled – the cosmic, victorious love of Christ which is selfless, sacrificial and servant-hearted.*

*You are responsible for her spiritual well-being and development.*

*You are to seek to present her to Christ on the last day, in Him.*

*You are to nourish and care for her in the present.*

The groom is a highly qualified, extraordinarily competent, widely respected man.

He has a fine PhD in Hydraulic fracturing.

I shall say to him:

*from today, your primary responsibility is your new wife.*

*She is to come ahead of your career.*

*She is your first congregation.*

*She is to come ahead of every other relationship and hobby and individual.*

*There is to be no place for forced submission.*

*Or unreasonable demands.*

Sometimes we come across marriages where submission is ground out by force. Some here may have come from families (thankfully I do

not) where verbal bullying, or worse still, physical abuse has been the norm.

There is absolutely no place for such things in a home where the human relationship is modelled on the heavenly relationship between Christ and His church.

And then I plan to turn to the bride.

I shall say this to her:

*Think of your own submission to the Lord Jesus.*

*Has it been limiting ... 'no'!*

*Has it been frustrating ... 'no'!*

*Has it been enslaving ... 'no'!*

*Has it been liberating, has it freed to you to be who He made you to be, has it been a joy and filled with thanksgiving? Of course it has. How can the selfless, sacrificial love of Christ not be all of these things?*



*So then, your submission to your husband as he loves you as Christ loved the church is to be modelled on and to mirror the churches submission to Christ.*

So then, within the Christian family at the heart of the church, we are to find in the redeemed society, a restoration of the rightly ordered relationships which we found back in Genesis 2.

Then I shall turn to the congregation.

I shall say to them: *we may not all of us have been that clear on what it means to be in relationship with the God who loved us through the death of His Son, Jesus.*

*I want us now to press the 'fast forward' button and to think ahead to 50 years' time and to the golden wedding of this couple before us. It is hard to imagine the bride with wrinkles! Or the groom on a Zimmer! But, in 50 years' time, December 2063, we should be able to say – I may not have understood the selfless, sacrificial love of Christ in December 2013. But as I have watched the love of this man for this woman, and the way this woman has willingly given herself to this man – so I have seen mirrored to me the love of Christ in this Christian home.*

We are now to **walk in wisdom.**

**We are to walk in the Light.**

Our lifestyle and language *not even a hint of sexual immorality*

Our partnerships and productivity: *do not partner with them.*

We are to walk in wisdom.

Filled by the spirit - are to exercise word ministry.

Filled by the Spirit – we are to engage in worship 24/7

Filled by the Spirit – we are to submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.

And as we do so, we will be, in our local gatherings, eruptions of the Cosmic Victory of Christ, displayed to the watching world.