

24 But as the [assembly] is subject to Messiah, so also the wives *ought to be* to their husbands in everything. **25** Husbands, love your wives, just as Messiah also loved the [assembly] and gave Himself up for her, **26** so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, **27** that He might present to Himself the [assembly] in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless.

5:24 The submissiveness, that husband and wife are to show to one another in marriage, is to be a demonstration of the kind of relationship that the Messiah has to the assembly. Paul says, “Now as the [assembly] submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything” (NIV). Just as all Believers are to stand in submission to the King of Kings, so are the wives to be submissive to their husbands. The wife’s willingness to submit herself to her husband’s instruction and correction has been typified by the *ekklēsia*’s need to submit itself to the Messiah’s example for life.

A reemphasis of what has been stated in v. 22, v. 24 can be interpreted as meaning that Paul expects wives to blindly follow their husbands in all things. This is a poor interpretation of what he is saying, because the very reason that Yeshua as the head or source of the assembly deserves to be submitted to—is because He is the One who has died for fallen humanity. A husband who is a Believer in Messiah, living the kind of life that He did, should be submitted to by his wife in a similar way—if he is indeed the source of his wife and treating his wife the same as he would treat himself (v. 28). The submission of the wife toward her husband is to take place when we truly find that the husband is striving to emulate Yeshua the Messiah. The wife should not be submissive to her husband when He has failed to follow the example of his Lord.

The main issue in vs. 24, 28-29 is not really the wife submitting to her husband, but is really the issue of *why* a wife should submit to her husband. **It requires that the husband live like Yeshua.** If Yeshua is “the Savior of the body” (v. 23), then what kind of actions is the husband to perform, which indicate that he is actually *in submission to His wife*, meriting the wife’s willful submission of herself toward him? As Believers we all follow Yeshua because we love Yeshua as a result of the work He has accomplished for us and the salvation He provides. In a similar way, as Wood describes, “Paul regards the husband, even if to an infinitely lesser degree, as the protector of his wife,”¹⁴⁴ and the wife should submit to her husband because he is acting like her “savior,” looking out for her well being and defense.

V. 24 is abused only when it is applied in the sense of wives having to submit to their husbands in every matter, even when their husbands are in extreme error. Traditionalists like O’Brien remind us, “it goes without saying that wives are not to be subordinate in matters that are sinful or contrary to God’s commands (cf. Acts 5:29).”¹⁴⁵

The very reason a wife is to submit to her husband is because he is to be living like the Lord Yeshua! Bruce comments, “That wives should be submissive to their husbands ‘in everything’ follows from the undoubted fact—too undoubted to call for specific mention—

¹⁴⁴ Wood, in *EXP*, 11:76.

¹⁴⁵ O’Brien, 418.

that the church is submissive to Christ in everything,”¹⁴⁶ and the reason that the assembly is clearly submissive to the Messiah is because of His atoning work for us. A wife by no means is to be submissive to a husband who beats her, demeans her, is disloyal to her, or fails to show her anything but his complete attention and love. As Lincoln summarizes, widely reflecting a complementarian position, “the wife’s subordination to her husband...presupposes that it is part of a relationship in which the husband has her welfare constantly in view. As the following verses will make explicit, full and complete commitment of the husband to his particular role of loving is also required.”¹⁴⁷

Egalitarians recognize that wives are to submit to their husbands, but this assumes, of course, that a husband is a godly man who submits to his wife by evidencing the specific actions detailed by Paul in vs. 25, 28-29. These are the same husbands who make up the assembly which submits to Yeshua, and so within that submission to the Lord he has learned how to emulate the Lord in proper submission toward his wife. (And likewise, it also goes without saying, if the husband truly loves and values his wife, she will play a major role in *all* of his undertakings in life, with her voice being heard.) While much attention and debate is often given to the role that wives are to play in marriage in vs. 22-24, in vs. 25, 28-29 it cannot be avoided that a huge responsibility is placed upon husbands, **as husbands actually receive more instruction from Paul than wives.**

5:25 Husbands are required to show submissiveness to their wives via some very specific things, evidencing love, honor, and dignity toward them. Paul by no means expects wives to be treated as just some kind of sexual property, for either male pleasure or reproduction. O’Brien, a complementarian, points out, “Paul does not here, or anywhere else for that matter, exhort husbands to rule over their wives. They are nowhere told, ‘Exercise your headship!’ Instead, they are urged repeatedly to love their wives (vv. 25, 28, and 33).”¹⁴⁸ Paul’s first piece of instruction to the husbands in Asia Minor is, “Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the assembly and gave Himself up on its behalf” (LITV). Husbands are to follow the love command (Leviticus 19:18; Mathew 5:43; 19:19). As Lincoln explains, “Husbands are asked to exercise the self-giving love that has as its goal only their wives’ good and that will care for their wives without the expectation of reward.”¹⁴⁹ This kind of an emphasis—for a husband to actually love his wife—is scarcely seen in the Rabbinic tradition, but it can be found:

*“Our rabbis have taught on Tannaite authority: He who loves his wife as he loves himself, he who honors her more than he honors himself, he who raises up his sons and daughters in the right path, and he who marries them off close to the time of their puberty—of such a one, Scripture says, ‘And you shall know that your tabernacle shall be in peace and you shall visit your habitation and you shall not sin’ (Job. 5:24)” (b.Yevamot 62b).*¹⁵⁰

One can certainly see similar sentiments expressed by the Apostle Paul in vs. 24-29, but he goes a step further to be sure. Husbands are to act for their wives as Yeshua acted for all

¹⁴⁶ Bruce, 386.

¹⁴⁷ Lincoln, 373.

¹⁴⁸ O’Brien, 419.

¹⁴⁹ Lincoln, 374.

¹⁵⁰ *The Babylonian Talmud: A Translation and Commentary.*

Believers. **Yeshua died for the assembly** (John 10:11, 15, 17-18; Galatians 1:4; Hebrews 9:14). Speaking of Yeshua's atoning work, Paul can say "the love of Messiah controls us, having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died" (2 Corinthians 5:14). Believers "die" to the penalties of sin because their Lord has taken the penalty for them. When the love of Messiah controls a person, we can see the embodiment of His teaching in John 15:13 manifest itself: "Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends." How much more so would this relate to a husband who loves his wife? Payne excellently details,

"[Paul's] description of Christ's relationship to his body, the church, states nothing about Christ's authority...but says that Christ loved and gave himself for the church (Eph 5:25), to make her holy, cleansed without stain, and blameless (5:26-27), feeding and caring for her (5:29). These are his actions as savior, the source of life and nourishment of his body, the church. Paul calls the husband to imitate Christ's actions in relations with his wife (5:28-31, 33), not to assume authority over her."¹⁵¹

Husbands should be willing to die in defense of their wives if necessary (v. 2), the ultimate manifestation of not only *agapē* love—but also that they stand submitted to their wives. This is not only the view of egalitarians who believe in a mutual husband-wife submission as equals, but also the view of complementarians. Traditionalists such as Hohener rightly conclude, "A wife's submission in no way hints that a husband may lord it over his spouse, as a despot commanding a slave. The 'submit-love' relationship is a beautiful mixture of harmonious partnership in marriage."¹⁵² Viewing himself as *kephalē*/source, though, Payne expresses how "Wives depended on their husbands as the source of food, clothing, shelter, the physical source of her children, and her emotional source of love."¹⁵³

5:26-27 Paul now takes a short detour, detailing the purpose of the Messiah giving Himself up for the *ekklēsia*. Paul says that the purpose of the Messiah giving Himself up for the assembly was "that he might sanctify it, having cleansed *it* with the bathing of the water in the saying" (v. 26, YLT). One can easily find parallels in the Apostolic Scriptures concurrent with this concept. Hebrews 10:22 explains how Believers have "our hearts sprinkled *clean* from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water" (cf. 1 Corinthians 6:11). As a direct result of Yeshua's sacrifice, born again Believers have been cleansed by the word.

Whether you are aware of this or not, the question of "Which word?" does need to be asked. Many of us automatically assume that the cleansing of which Paul speaks comes about by submitting ourselves to the Scriptures. This is certainly true, as a diligent study of the Bible will make God's people effective servants (2 Timothy 2:15). But a very specific term, *rhēma* (ῥῆμα), is employed in v. 26, meaning "that which is said or spoken, a word, saying" (LS).¹⁵⁴ While it may sound somewhat odd to hear "so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the *spoken* word [*rhēma*]," as opposed to being sanctified by the written Scriptures, this is exactly what is meant in v. 26. While the written Scriptures are

¹⁵¹ Payne, 284.

¹⁵² Hoehner, in *BKCNT*, 641.

¹⁵³ Payne, 288.

¹⁵⁴ *LS*, 717.

never demeaned by Paul, and indeed are imperative to know for any mature Believer to be sanctified, the preached word or the gospel is instead what is mainly in view in v. 26 (and elsewhere: 6:17; Romans 10:8, 17; 1 Peter 1:25). As Yeshua Himself says, “You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you” (John 15:3).

Many commentators conclude that the washing (Grk. *loutron*, λουτρόν) of which Paul speaks here would be akin to a bride’s traditional *mikveh* (מִקְוֵה, Salkinson-Ginsberg) immersion prior to marriage.¹⁵⁵ Also in view could be the Prophet Ezekiel’s analogy of God’s cleansing Israel as His bride: “I bathed you with water, washed off your blood from you and anointed you with oil...you were exceedingly beautiful and advanced to royalty. Then your fame went forth among the nations on account of your beauty, for it was perfect because of My splendor which I bestowed on you,’ declares the Lord GOD” (Ezekiel 16:9, 13b-14). While we need to be careful with how far we push the “bride” analogies, as Paul himself asked the Corinthians “bear with me in a little foolishness,” he still says “I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy; for I betrothed you to one husband, so that to Messiah I might present you as a pure virgin” (2 Corinthians 11:1, 2). Messiah’s self-sacrifice for the assembly is so that the assembly can undergo a purification via the gospel that will enable them to fully enter into God’s purpose—much like a bride undergoing purification rituals in preparation for her wedding and forthcoming new life in marriage.

If immersion/baptism for Believers is the issue here in v. 26, as many believe,¹⁵⁶ then the *rhēma* or spoken word that cleanses is probably not just the gospel, but more specifically a public declaration of faith made by a new Believer at the time of his or her immersion (Acts 22:16). The declaration in view is stated by Paul in Romans 10:9: “if you confess with your mouth Yeshua as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.” Such a declaration of faith at one’s immersion/baptism should result in a new Believer being filled with the Holy Spirit (Titus 3:5). And perhaps more than anything else, if a spoken declaration of faith—where one proclaims Yeshua as Lord—is what cleanses a person when he or she goes through immersion, then it should enable us to no longer be confused about 1 Peter 3:21: “baptism now saves you...[it being] an appeal to God for a good conscience—through the resurrection of Yeshua the Messiah.” Here, it is not the immersion in water that redeems a person, but rather the spoken word of declaring Yeshua as resurrected Savior.

The result of being cleansed by the spoken word of the gospel is so that Yeshua “might present the [assembly] to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish” (RSV). Song of Songs 4:7 says, “You are altogether beautiful, my darling, and there is no blemish in you.” Yeshua as Savior is responsible for the well being of the assembly, making sure that He has a pure *ekklēsia* (2 Corinthians 11:2), as our salvation is secured *dia pisteōs Iēsou Christou* (διὰ πίστεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ), “through the faithfulness of Yeshua the Messiah” (Romans 3:22, CJB). In the Messiah’s submission, as it were, to His people, He has sacrificed Himself for us. Now we, as His people, are responsible to submit to Him and emulate Him in our actions toward one another.

¹⁵⁵ Bruce, 387; Stern, 592; O’Brien, 422; Witherington, pp 330-331.

¹⁵⁶ Cf. Lincoln, 375.

When applied within the context of a First Century Mediterranean marriage, where traditionally the husband was not only the so-called head of the household, but where the wife did not have a position of great prominence, how would this have changed such attitudes? Just as his Lord has sacrificed Himself for the assembly, intending to bring it to a state of purity, so must a husband too demonstrate a similar attitude in protecting his wife. A husband must be willing to pay the ultimate price because of the love he has for his wife. Just as Yeshua's actions of faithfulness toward us enable us to be redeemed, so must a husband also take some responsibility for the spiritual well being of his wife and demonstrate an active interest in her life. The kind of love and attitudes that a husband is to display are exemplified in vs. 28-30, and ran entirely contrary to the cultural norms of the period. And surely, if a husband acts properly toward his wife in submission to her via actions of self-sacrifice, then she will willingly submit herself to him and respect him (v. 33).

28 So husbands ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself; 29 for no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Messiah also *does* the [assembly], 30 because we are members of His body.

5:28 The significant requirement that the Apostle Paul places on the husbands in Asia Minor is, "husbands ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself; for no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it." While one can certainly see a reaffirmation of one loving his neighbor as himself,¹⁵⁷ loving one's neighbor is not as specific as husbands loving their wives *hōs ta heautōn sōmata* (ὡς τὰ ἑαυτῶν σώματα)—"as their own bodies." Presumably, the same careful attention and respect that a husband shows his own body is the same kind of attention that he should now show toward his wife. As Paul has said it previously in 1 Corinthians 7:4, "The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband *does*; and likewise also the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife *does*." The mutual responsibility does not just relate to spirituality or personal attitudes, but what a man or woman does with the human body God has framed, as the Psalmist declares "for I am fearfully and wonderfully made" (Psalm 139:14).

The responsibility placed upon the male gender in the Torah was actually quite severe. Consider the fact that circumcision was originally given as a sign of God's unconditional covenant between Abraham and Himself to multiply Abraham's descendants and bless them (Genesis 17:10-11). While this is what circumcision was supposed to mean—in a quite positive sense—it is notable that the command to love one's neighbor in Leviticus 19:18 is preceded by a chapter in Leviticus 18 that details gross sexual sins. While circumcision is a sign that men are connected to the Patriarch, John Goldingay is right to remind us, "it does draw attention to the need for their sexual activity to be disciplined and dedicated to God....Men [often] fail in this realm of their lives" and thus "The covenant sign becomes the

¹⁵⁷ Leviticus 19:18; Matthew 19:19; 22:39; Mark 12:31; Luke 10:27; Romans 13:9; Galatians 5:14; James 2:8.

covenant indictment and the covenant shame upon men. It is a mark of failure as much as a mark of status.”¹⁵⁸ It is up to the man to determine whether the *ot b’rit* (אוֹת בְּרִית) is a sign of honor or dishonor upon him.

Paul’s admonition for husbands to treat their wives the same as their own bodies would have made a significant impact *primarily* on the non-Jewish members of his audience, and to a lesser extent the Jewish members of his audience. When we place this word within the common Greco-Roman and Jewish views of women present in the First Century, such a view is thoroughly intensified by the “source” language given previously in v. 23. It would seem natural that if man came from woman, that a husband should highly value his wife. The intention of the husband treating his wife as his own body is, as Witherington explains, so that they can be “a third entity—a couple...Only those who are united in a one-flesh union become the head and body of each other.”¹⁵⁹

Today in the Twenty-First Century West, the vast majority of men recognize the need to show women great respect. They know that rape, wife beating, spousal abuse, and treating women as being less than human are absolutely wrong and unacceptable. And while in much of Second Temple Judaism, the Jewish view of women was not as high as it is today, it was undoubtedly much higher than the common Greco-Roman view of women. Jewish members of Ephesians’ audience knew the Torah’s admonitions regarding proper sexuality, its commandments protecting women, and words like Proverbs 29:15, “a child who gets his own way brings shame to his mother.” But what many of the non-Jewish members of Ephesians’ audience would have been trained up with or heard from their youth is another story.

Consider the stark contrast between v. 28 and some of the views of treating women that were present in the Greco-Roman world. Plato once spoke of how “all the women should be common to all the men; similarly, children should be held in common, and no parent should know its child, or child its parent” (*Republic* 456e, 457d).¹⁶⁰ In his ideal society, Plato argued “if we’re to have a real pedigree herd, mate the best of our men with the best of our women as often as possible, and the inferior men with the inferior women as seldom as possible...any defective offspring of the others, will be quietly and secretly disposed of” (*Republic* 459e, 460c).¹⁶¹ A letter from the First Century C.E. around the time of Yeshua, written by a man named Hilarion to his wife, attests, “I urge and entreat you to be careful of the child, and if I receive a present soon I will send it up to you. If (Apollonarion?) bears offspring, if it is a male let it be, if a female expose it” (*Oxyrhynchus Papyri* 4.744).¹⁶²

These sentiments about common sexual property, eliminating defective children from the gene pool, and most significantly a husband instructing his wife to expose a female infant—**should absolutely inflame us as Believers**. Female children, even if physically fit, faced exposure far more frequently than male children. Such disrespect for the human person was common in the Greek world. You can clearly see how radical Paul’s words “husbands

¹⁵⁸ Goldingay, pp 202, 203.

¹⁵⁹ Witherington, 331.

¹⁶⁰ Plato, *Republic*, pp 167, 168.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, pp 171-172.

¹⁶² Bernard P. Grenfell and Arthur S. Hunt, eds., *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri*, Part IV (London: Oxford, 1904), 244. Accessible online at <<http://www.archive.org/details/oxyrhynchuspapyr04gren>>.

ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies” could truly be, when set against a society that had a very low view of females.

Most of the treatment that Paul would have been speaking against here did not relate that much to infant exposure, as much as it would have related to the husband being loyal to his wife. Demosthenes, an Athenian statesman from the Fourth Century B.C.E., once said, “Mistresses we keep for the sake of pleasure, concubines for the daily care of our persons, but wives to bear us legitimate children and to be faithful guardians of our households” (*Speeches* 59.122).¹⁶³ Cato the Elder, a Roman senator from the Second Century B.C.E., exclaimed, “If you should take your wife in adultery, you may with impunity put her to death without a trial; but if you should commit adultery or indecency, she must not presume to lay a finger on you, nor does the law allow it” (Gellius *Attic Nights* 10.23).¹⁶⁴ This stood in stark contrast to the command seen in Leviticus 20:10, notably given a millennium earlier: “If *there is* a man who commits adultery with another man's wife, one who commits adultery with his friend's wife, **the adulterer and the adulteress** shall surely be put to death.”

Although the Greco-Roman period is dominated by a great deal of chauvinism, we should not be led to think that all had overly-negative views of the female gender. Hamilton points out how the Romans, when contrasted to the Greeks, “were always guided by practical results,” and thus in giving women a few more rights compared to them asks, “Who wouldn't appear more tolerant when compared to [the Greeks]?”¹⁶⁵ But this was not all that common. About a century before Yeshua, Cicero expressed some dangers that would come were freedom extended to diverse parts of society: “slaves behave with excess freedom, wives enjoy the same rights as their husbands, and in this all-pervading freedom dogs and horses and even asses charge around so freely that one has to stand aside for them in the street.” He notes his view that if given freedom, citizens “begin to ignore the laws too; and the final outcome is total anarchy” (*The Republic* 1.67).¹⁶⁶ It is often believed, even today among religious people, that unless men have the final say of what goes on—allowing women to take some responsibility—then anarchy will ensue. Even in today's West, Plutarch's ancient view from Greece still will prevail:

“So is it with women also; if they subordinate themselves to their husbands, they are commended, but if they want to have control, they cut a sorrier figure than the subjects of their control” (*Advice to the Bride and Groom* 142e).¹⁶⁷

We can certainly see how Paul's words on husbands treating their wives the same as their own bodies would affect non-Jewish Believers in Asia Minor—forcing them to steer away from the views present in Greco-Roman society. Yet at the same time, many of those

¹⁶³ Demosthenes: *Demosthenes with an English translation*, eds. Norman W. DeWitt and Norman J. DeWitt (Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1949). Accessible online at <<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/cgi-bin/ptext?lookup=Dem.+59+1>>.

¹⁶⁴ A. Cornelius Gellius: *Attic Nights*, ed. J.C. Rolfe, Loeb Classical Library edition (1927). Accessible online at <<http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Gellius/home.html>>.

¹⁶⁵ Cunningham and Hamilton, 91.

¹⁶⁶ Cicero: *The Republic and the Laws*, trans. Niall Rudd (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 31.

¹⁶⁷ Plutarch: *Advice to the Bride and Groom*. Accessible online at <http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Plutarch/Moralia/Coniugalia_praecepta*.html>.

same Greco-Roman views had affected how Jewish men treated Jewish women. Hamilton describes how, “Using Greek philosophy in one hand and his reinterpretation of Scripture in the other, [Philo] poured contempt on all women.”¹⁶⁸ While the Jewish philosopher Philo might have represented a popular philosophy present in much of the First Century Jewish world (and it is with this in mind that commentators often consult his works), it is not difficult to see that his view of the female gender was not very high or very Biblical.

Philo blamed the Fall of humankind squarely on the woman, saying “God did not condescend to put any question to the woman at all, looking upon her as the cause of the evil which had occurred, and as the guide to her husband to a life of shame” (*Questions and Answers on Genesis* 1.45; cf. Sirach 25:24; 42:12-14).¹⁶⁹ The deception of Eve was something entirely resultant of her own stupidity, “for the minds of women are, in some degree, weaker than those of men, and are not so well able to comprehend a thing which is appreciable only by the intellect” (*Embassy to Gaius* 319).¹⁷⁰ Philo was not hesitant to say, “the woman was more accustomed to be deceived than the man” (*Questions and Answers on Genesis* 1.33).¹⁷¹

Perhaps one of the most eclectic interpretations of the Tanach one will find is how Philo interpreted Genesis 18:11, “it ceased to be with Sarah after the manner of women” (KJV).¹⁷² He actually said,

“God wills in the first place to render the mind, which is filled with virtue, like to the male sex rather than to the female, thinking it suited to its character to be active, not passive. In the second place both do generate, both the virtuous mind and the wicked one: but they generate in a different manner, and they produce contrary offspring, the virtuous mind producing good and useful things, but the depraved or wicked mind producing base and useless things” (*Questions and Answers on Genesis* 3.18).¹⁷³

As Hamilton concludes, Philo believed “Sarah was virtuous because after menopause *she had inwardly become a man!*”¹⁷⁴ So even though we might be appalled by the Greco-Roman practice of infant exposure of females, or husbands being allowed to kill their wives indiscriminately for adultery—the view that the woman’s body was inferior to the man’s is also seen in Jewish works from the First Century period. Paul’s emphasis on husbands treating their wives the same as their own bodies would have likewise affected any Jewish members of Ephesians’ audience to get away from such attitudes.

Sadly, negative views of women also made their way into the Rabbinic era. While not as bad as the Greek husband advising his wife to expose a female infant, one view present in the Mishnah is: “The man takes precedence over the woman in the matter of the saving of life” (*m.Horayot* 3:7).¹⁷⁵ Rabbi Aqiba declared women unclean “Because women are gluttonous”

¹⁶⁸ Cunningham and Hamilton, pp 107-108.

¹⁶⁹ *The Works of Philo: Complete and Unabridged*, 800.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 786.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 798.

¹⁷² Heb. *chadal l'heyot l'Sarah orah k'nashim* (חָדַל לְהֵיּוֹת לְשָׂרָה אֲרָח כְּנָשִׁים).

¹⁷³ *The Works of Philo: Complete and Unabridged*, 848.

¹⁷⁴ Cunningham and Hamilton, 108.

¹⁷⁵ Neusner, *Mishnah*, 695.

(m.*Teharot* 7:9).¹⁷⁶ It is attested in the Talmud, “*rabbis have also made the same statement* [as appears in Ben Sira]: ‘The world cannot exist without males and without females. Happy is he whose children are males, and woe is him whose children are females’” (b.*Sanhedrin* 100b).¹⁷⁷ The view of a Rabbi Sheshet was actually, “whoever looks even at the little finger of a woman is as if he stared at her sexual parts” (b.*Berachot* 24a).¹⁷⁸ And as it directly affects our interpretation of Ephesians 2:14-15, it was the Rabbinical authorities who erected the dividing wall within the Temple that not only kept the nations seeking the God of Israel away, but also women (m.*Kelim* 1:8-9).

If one is prone to have a negative view of women, and keep them excluded from the daily affairs of God’s people, then this will also significantly affect their education (cf. 1 Timothy 2:11)—to which men were largely given preference in the Jewish world. Is this the reason why it is said, “Happy is the one who grows in knowledge of Torah, whose labor is in Torah, who thereby brings pleasure to his Creator” (b.*Berachot* 17a)?¹⁷⁹ Is this just a statement where the masculine pronoun serves to represent both genders, or a statement where men indeed are preferred over women for a Torah education? To one like a Rabbi Eliezer, “Whoever teaches Torah to his daughter is as if he teaches her sexual gratification” (m.*Sotah* 3:4-5).¹⁸⁰ Hamilton summarizes,

“Most rabbis would not think of teaching the Torah to a woman. Rabbis such as Gamaliel, Paul’s mentor, who taught his daughter, were the rare exception. Every young boy was required to study the Law. It was a primary way to gain merit before God, but the Tosefta said that women were ‘not obligated’ [t.*Berachot* 2:12]. This clearly communicated to women that they had no real value. The rabbis taught that to be in right relationship with God, you had to observe the Law He gave to Moses at Sinai. Yet that law was binding only on free adult males. Therefore, no children, no slaves, and no women could serve God fully.”¹⁸¹

Of course, that the Torah was only applicable to males was an interpretation of the Rabbis, and not necessarily the thrust of the Torah itself (Deuteronomy 31:12). Rabbi Gamaliel, who trained the Apostle Paul, actually had a rather favorable view of women respecting the Law (m.*Rosh HaShanah* 2:5; m.*Yevamot* 16:7; m.*Gittin* 4:2). In the estimation of Payne, “The surviving sayings of Rabban Gamaliel I indicate a favorable attitude toward women in sharp contrast to the rabbinic tradition as a whole.”¹⁸² The more moderate branches of Judaism today recognize this reality, as they extend many opportunities, including rabbinic ordination, to women. Yet, the Orthodox Jewish tradition probably has more of a sway on current Messianic opinions than it should, and is something rather unhealthy for our long term development.

By far, one of the absolute worst Rabbinic views in the Talmud is the thoughts of a Rabbi Yohanan:

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., 1052.

¹⁷⁷ *The Babylonian Talmud: A Translation and Commentary*.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

¹⁸⁰ Neusner, *Mishnah*, 452.

¹⁸¹ Cunningham and Hamilton, 106; cf. Payne, pp 37-40.

¹⁸² Payne, 36.

“Whatever someone wants to do with his wife in sexual relations he should do. The matter may be compared to meat that comes from the slaughterhouse [which is permitted for eating]. If one wants to eat it salted, he eats it that way; roasted, he eats it that way; boiled, he eats it that way; seethed, he eats it that way; so, too, fish from the fish store” (b.*Nedarim* 20b).¹⁸³

In no uncertain terms a man’s wife is indeed compared to “a piece of meat” here.

While such views post-dated Paul’s composition of Ephesians, it is not at all impossible that similar ideas could have been present among the Jewish members of his audience. Moving ahead to today, while the Messianic movement values literature like the Mishnah, Tosefta, and the Talmud to consider in its Biblical interpretation, we need not find ourselves *ever* embracing some of the Rabbinical views that devalue women. The invitation that God is extending in this hour for His people to adopt a lifestyle of obedience to His Torah is not only to men, but also to women. And with that obedience may come a reevaluation of commandments that have traditionally been interpreted as applying exclusively to men, but now can apply to women given the new status Yeshua has inaugurated. Considering some of the views of the Conservative or Reform Synagogue could aid us as we seek to establish a more versatile *halachah* for all in our faith community, as well as the Reformed and Wesleyan traditions within evangelicalism, which have both highly valued the Old Testament as a guide for ethics and morality.

The most difficult aspect of the kind of submission, that Paul wanted, was that of the husband to his wife. It was unheard of given the cultural circumstances of his day. While it is something that is heard in much of evangelical Christianity today, it is not something that is heard in much of today’s Messianic movement. It will, however, be changing in the days ahead as our Biblical Studies improve, and with it a moderation of our approach to some of the issues that currently drag us down. Hearing that husbands are to treat their wives the same way as they should treat their own bodies is something that we need to hear in a time when there are some who want to revive aberrant practices like polygamy. While most Messianics *do not* believe in polygamy, many *are* complementarian and believe in putting women in their proverbial “place,” meaning that their voice is largely silent. We do not tend to place a great deal of value on women, and we usually place our fingers in our ears when confronted with startling facts such as these, compiled by Loren Cunningham (working from late 1990s statistics):

- More than 100,000 women will be raped this year in the USA.
- [A]pproximately one in every three girls is sexually abused before she grows to maturity.
- [M]ore than 800,000 women will be beaten by their husbands or boyfriends in America this year. More than 1,000 will not survive.
- 450 million women are physically impaired due to childhood malnutrition. In many societies, girls and their mothers eat only after the men and boys are fed.

¹⁸³ *The Babylonian Talmud: A Translation and Commentary.*

- Women make up half the world's population but own just 1 percent of its wealth. Seventy percent of the 1.3 billion living in poverty are women.
- A girl is twice as likely not to be educated as a boy.
- Two million girls, mostly in Africa and the Middle East, are mutilated through female circumcision to diminish their sexual desire. Little girls who survive the procedure grow up to face painful sex, possible infertility, and a greater chance of dying during childbirth.
- In Brazil, it is justifiable homicide to kill an unfaithful wife.
- In Russia, a woman's office job can include having to sleep with the boss.
- In India, a husband and his parents sometimes conspire to kill his young bride after they have collected her dowry, freeing the young man to marry again and get another dowry. There are six thousand cases of this a year, and growing.
- Many millions of these missing girls are from India or China, where mothers routinely have abortions when they learn they are carrying a girl.
- [A significant reason] for the 100 million missing girls is death by neglect. In many countries of the developing world, if a son gets sick, the family does everything possible to get medical help. If a little girl gets sick, she is often allowed to die.¹⁸⁴

Cunningham is very clear to state, "It is only the countries with limited Christian heritage that are slaughtering so many young babies because of their gender,"¹⁸⁵ as most of these attitudes are constrained to non-Christian areas. Christian missionaries and organizations have been at the forefront of fighting these kinds of gross injustices toward women. Likewise to be considered is how the Jewish community has also stood at the forefront of coming against such heinous crimes against females (especially since the Holocaust). Even today in much of the world, Paul's word, "husbands ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies," remains relevant. I think we are all in agreement that the attitudes which lead to the sins above need to be stopped at all costs!

An egalitarian ideal of men and women being equals in the Lord stops any degradation of the female dead in its tracks, and not only protects the female as having great value in the eyes of God, but also helps the male to consider (or even reconsider) his own value in the eyes of God. For as v. 28 concludes, "He who loves his own wife loves himself." Is the historical degradation of females as seen in Ancient Greece, Ancient Rome, and even some of Ancient Judaism—a reflection on how men really do not place a high value on themselves, or think they are not worth that much in the eyes of their Creator? How many people who live today *really do hate themselves*? Self-hatred often manifests itself in abusive behavior toward others.

5:29-30 Paul's own conclusion is that "no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Messiah also *does* the [assembly]." As a new person in the Lord, filled with the Holy Spirit (v. 18), and the head/source of his wife—a husband should be able to recognize that his wife is "bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh" (Genesis 2:23). He is to place great value on his wife as a special treasure (Proverbs 12:4; 18:22), just as Yeshua the

¹⁸⁴ Cunningham and Hamilton, pp 17, 18, 20, 21.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 21.

Messiah as the head/source of the assembly (4:15-16) “feeds and cares for it” (NIV). Bruce describes,

“That it is natural to love oneself is evident from the way in which most people care for themselves, and especially for their bodies. They feed their bodies, clothe their bodies, and do what they can for their comfort. To the statement that ‘no one ever hated his own flesh’ it might be replied that some people have practiced severity to their bodies, starving them, subjecting them to all sorts of discomfort, flagellating them, and so forth. But such ‘severity to the body’ is unnatural...It is natural conduct that is in view in the present context...Christ is invoked as the prime exemplar: he makes every provision for the church.”¹⁸⁶

And why does Paul instruct the husbands in Asia Minor to do all of this? Is it because he is to be a benevolent leader, as Aristotle (*Politics* 1.1259a), Philo (*Hypothetica* 7.3), and Josephus (*Against Apion* 2.201) would have expected? No. A reemphasis of the general remark made in v. 21 is instead seen: *hoti melē esmen tou sōmatos autou* (ὅτι μέλη ἐσμεν τοῦ σώματος αὐτοῦ), “because we are members of His body” (v. 30).¹⁸⁷ The mutual relationship of all Believers toward one another—and most especially husbands and wives—is seen. “The head-body analogy of 5:23 here becomes an image of unity rather than one of authority” (*IVPBBC*).¹⁸⁸ Any one of us who is a Bible teacher has a responsibility to encourage this kind of unity among men and women, be they married or not, who come to us for instruction. If we do not do this, especially in light of the data provided on common Greco-Roman and Jewish views of women from ancient times, then will “we...incur a stricter judgment” (James 3:1)?

31 FOR THIS REASON A MAN SHALL LEAVE HIS FATHER AND MOTHER AND SHALL BE JOINED TO HIS WIFE, AND THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH [Genesis 2:24]. 32 This mystery is great; but I am speaking with reference to Messiah and the [assembly]. 33 Nevertheless, each individual among you also is to love his own wife even as himself, and the wife must see to it that she respects her husband.

5:31 Why is the institution of marriage so important to Paul? It is because it teaches men and women significant things about the work that Yeshua has performed for the assembly. Just as the wife is to submit to her husband, and the husband submits to his wife via His great love for her—so is the assembly to follow the example of Yeshua, and more than anything else Yeshua has laid down His life for the assembly.

The oneness that husband and wife are to have is affirmed by Paul in his quotation of Genesis 2:24, where the ideal marriage is laid forth as being between one man and one woman. In Genesis 2:24 a man is to leave his parents, join to his wife, and become entirely identified with her. *This stands in contrast to any Greco-Roman, or even Jewish views, of wives being a husband's property.* Wood says, “what is basically a divine ordinance is graciously

¹⁸⁶ Bruce, 391.

¹⁸⁷ The later reading present in the Textus Receptus extends this as, “For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones” (KJV).

¹⁸⁸ Keener, *IVPBBC*, 552.

designed for mutual satisfaction and delight,”¹⁸⁹ as opposed to marriage only benefitting the husband.¹⁹⁰

One way that Genesis 2:24 can be translated from the Hebrew is “Therefore a man forsakes his father and mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh.”¹⁹¹ This could be taken, as Victor P. Hamilton notes, “to leave father and mother and cling to one’s wife means to sever one loyalty and commence another.”¹⁹² Surely while sons are to be loyal and respectful to their parents (6:1-3; cf. Exodus 20:12; Deuteronomy 5:16), in the marriage relationship a husband’s primary loyalty and duty is now to the wife. The relationship of husband and wife is different than those of parents toward children (6:1-4) or masters toward slaves (6:5-9). While all are to be submissive to one another in the Lord (v. 21), a husband and wife in submissiveness toward one another is unique.

Genesis 2:24 is a piece of the narration designed to call those reading or hearing back to an important principle established at Creation. It is introduced by the words *al-ken* (עַל־כֵּן), “Therefore” (RSV), “For this reason” (NASU), or “This is why” (CJB, HCSB). Sarna explains, “*al ken*...introduces an etiological observation on the part of the Narrator; that is, the origin of an existing custom or institution assigned to some specific event in the past. In this case, some interrelated and fundamental aspects of the marital relationship are traced to God’s original creative act and seen as part of the divinely ordained natural order.”¹⁹³ Indeed, in Genesis 2:21-24 marriage is most definitely *not defined* as being between two people of the *same* gender joined in a homosexual relationship.¹⁹⁴ But also, marriage is presented as being a relationship between *one man* and *one woman*—as opposed to one man and multiple women. This is a teaching upheld by Yeshua the Messiah (Mathew 19:5; Mark 10:7-8). The Jewish and Christian theological traditions have both looked to Genesis 2:24 as presenting the ideal for a monogamous marriage relationship, and Genesis 2:24 is often quoted in the liturgy of most Jewish and Christian weddings, joined with the Messiah’s word “What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate” (Matthew 19:6; cf. Mark 10:9).

The fact that the husband and wife are to be one flesh—something that no human being should be able to separate—is also significant for Paul to assert in instructing husbands to treat their wives the same as their own bodies (v. 28). One of the rulings of the Jerusalem Council was for the non-Jewish Believers coming to faith to immediately “abstain...from fornication” (Acts 15:20). Here, the Torah instructions of Leviticus 18:6-23 are in view, which prohibit a variety of sexual sins. Also in mind would be the immediate cessation of any consultations with prostitutes (Leviticus 19:29). The sexual act was intended by God to be

¹⁸⁹ Wood, in *EXP*, 11:79.

¹⁹⁰ And yes, this would mean that a husband has to be sensitive to not only his wife’s personal needs and opinions, but also her feelings regarding their sexual relationship.

¹⁹¹ Victor P. Hamilton, *New International Commentary on the Old Testament: The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1-17* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 177.

This is realized by the verb *azav* (אַזַּב), appearing in the Qal stem (simple action, active voice), meaning “leave, forsake, loose” (*BDB*, 736).

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, 181.

¹⁹³ Sarna,, 23.

¹⁹⁴ Consult the FAQ, “Romans 1:26-27.”

something very special and accessible by a husband and a wife only within marriage, hence the author of Hebrews' word, "Marriage *is to be held* in honor among all, and the *marriage bed is to be undefiled*; for fornicators and adulterers God will judge" (Hebrews 13:4). Paul's words about husbands treating their wives as their own bodies had direct application regarding sexual intercourse in marriage, as he has said in 1 Corinthians 6:15-17,

"Do you not know that your bodies are members of Messiah? Shall I then take away the members of Messiah and make them members of a prostitute? May it never be! Or do you not know that the one who joins himself to a prostitute is one body *with her*? For He says, 'THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH [Genesis 2:24].' But the one who joins himself to the Lord is one spirit *with Him*. Flee immorality. Every *other* sin that a man commits is outside the body, but the immoral man sins against his own body."

A godly man who is filled with the Holy Spirit (v. 18) is not to be joined to a prostitute; he is only to be joined with his wife. He is a man who values his wife and her input into his life, as her wise counsel can help him be all the things the Lord has called him to be.

5:32 The bond we see between a man and woman in marriage is considered to be more significant than a parent and a child, so whereas a hierarchy of man dominating the woman should not be seen in marriage, in contrast we would expect parents to exercise authority over younger children. The type of unity that is to occur within the marriage relationship is to be a manifestation of the kind of relationship that Yeshua has with the *ekklēsia*: "This is a great mystery, but it is an illustration of the way Christ and the [assembly] are one" (NLT). Marriage may be considered an echo of the kind of relationship that the Lord has with His people. Just as Yeshua desired that a marriage bond between husband and wife never be torn apart—even more so does the Lord desire that the relationship He has with us as Believers never be torn apart! In Paul's instruction for husbands, he expects the husband to act toward his wife the way that his Lord has acted toward him.

5:33 Paul explains, "each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband" (NIV). Truly, if the husband loves his wife and submits to her via proper actions, then the wife will surely respect her husband. A healthy respect of a godly wife toward her husband who cares for her, is a natural extension of her love for Yeshua. **Paul nowhere encourages wives to fear their husbands.** On the contrary, all members of the Body of Messiah are to submit one to another out of fear for Him (v. 21)! Paul's vision of marriage in Ephesians 5:21-33 is not one of forced submission of wives to their husbands, but one of cooperation where husbands in Asia Minor had to retire many of their prejudices toward females. Knowing what these ancient prejudices were, and not only how it is changing evangelical Christian theology today—but Messianic theology in the future—is an important step toward returning to the equality experienced by Adam and Eve in Eden. It has been a greatly overlooked part of "the restoration of all things" (Acts 3:21) that is preparing to come forth. Such mutual submission (v. 21) will mark a Commonwealth of Israel (2:11-12) empowered for God's fullness (4:13)!