

**The Letter of St. Paul to the Ephesians**  
**Ephesians 5:21 – 33**  
**Quotes from the Fathers**  
**April 9, 2008**

**Ephesians 5:21:**

**St. Jerome (AD 347 – 420):**

Let bishops hear this, let priests hear, let every rank of learning get this clear: In the Church, leaders are servants. Let them imitate the apostle. . . .The difference between secular rulers and Christian leaders is that the former love to boss their subordinates whereas the latter serve them. We are that much greater if we are considered least of all. (Epistle to the Ephesians 3.5.21)

**Theodore (AD 392 – 457):**

We must not be submissive to those who command us to act unlawfully. But to those who call us to live with piety, we must be subject to one another. Having laid down this general law of obedience, Paul next advises the Ephesians in detail on their duties to another. (Epistle to the Ephesians 5.21)

**Ephesians 5:22:**

**St. Jerome (AD 347 – 420):**

The union of Christ and the Church is holy. So is the proper union of husband and wife holy. Just as a congregation of heretics, however, cannot rightly be called the Church of Christ and cannot have Christ as its head, so it is that a union between husband and wife cannot be truly called holy if there is a disregard for the way of life taught by Christ.  
(Epistle to the Ephesians 3.5.22-23)

**Ephesians 5:23:**

**St. John Chrysostom (AD 349 – 407):**

When they are in harmony, and their children are being reared well and their household is in good order, their neighbors will smell the sweet fragrance of harmony, along with all their

friends and relatives. But if the contrary is true, everything is overturned and thrown into confusion. (Homily on Ephesians 20.5.22-24)

**St. Jerome (AD 347 – 420):**

Note that the Church is never called the flesh but always the body of Christ. Whatever lives according to the flesh must necessarily be embodied. That is true. But it is not true that whatever is body is consequently living according to the flesh. (Epistle to the Ephesians 3.5.22-23)

**Theodore (AD 392 – 457):**

The apostle has been very constrained in setting forth this analogy [of the husband as the head of the wife, as Christ is the head of the Church, his body]. Its purpose is to encourage women to respect men and to implant in men an affection for their Wives. (Epistle to the Ephesians 5.22-23)

**Ephesians 5:24:**

**Ambrosiaster [pseudo-Ambrose] (about A.D. 370):**

Here is Paul's analogy: As the Church takes its beginning from Christ and therefore is subject to him, so too does woman take hers from the man and is subject to him (see 1 Timothy 2:13).

There is a crucial difference, however, between Christ and the Church as opposed to man and woman. The essential difference is that the woman is of the same nature as the man. The Church, on the other hand, can participate in Christ in name but not in nature. (Epistle to the Ephesians 5.24)

**Theodore (AD 392 – 457):**

As one who is giving instruction to the pious, Paul here adds the words subject in all things. It is evident from this analogy that he is speaking essentially to the pious, to those well trained in religious life. None of those reared in piety would think of putting their own affairs before God. (Epistle to the Ephesians 5.24)

**Ephesians 5:25:**

**St. Cyprian, Bishop of Carthage (AD 200 - 258):**

There is only one Church that Christ loves. It is this Church alone that is being cleansed by his washing. (Letter 69.2.3)

**St. John Chrysostom (AD 349 – 407):**

Have you noted the measure of obedience? Pay attention to love's high standard. If you take the premise that your wife should submit to you, as the Church submits to Christ, then you should also take the same kind of careful, sacrificial thought for her that Christ takes for the Church. Even if you must offer your own life for her, you must not refuse. Even if you must undergo countless struggles on her behalf and have all kinds of things to endure and suffer, you must not refuse. Even if you suffer all this, you have still done not as much as Christ has for the Church. For you are already married when you act this way, whereas Christ is acting for one who has rejected and hated him. So just as he, when she was rejecting, hating, spurning and nagging him, brought her to trust him by his great solicitude, not by threatening, lording it over her or intimidating her or anything like that, so must you also act toward your wife. Even if you see her looking down on you, nagging and despising you, you will be able to win her over with your great love and affection for her. (Homily on Ephesians 20.5.25)

**Ephesians 5:26:**

**Caius Marius Victorinus (AD 300 – aft. 362):**

Here we take the Church to mean every believer and everyone who has received baptism. The believer is brought to faith by the washing in water and the invocation of the Word. But how is this applied to a husband's conduct toward his wife? This is not entirely clear. One possible view is that the mystery of baptism is being rehearsed in this metaphor. On the other hand, if we refer this to the endurance of the husband, which entails his giving himself for the wife and bearing and suffering all that is hers, even sharing in all that she endures, she is being cleansed with water and the Word, that is, she is being purified in the Lord's sight when he renders her pure and by his endurance makes her ready to be sanctified by washing and the Word. (Epistle to the Ephesians 2.5.25-26)

**Ephesians 5:27:**

**Caius Marius Victorinus (AD 300 – aft. 362):**

What Christ is accomplishing [in baptism] is that the Church should be holy and spotless. It is holy in that it has been cleansed by the washing of water by the Word. It is spotless in that it is without spot or wrinkle. (Epistle to the Ephesians 2.5.27)

**St. John Chrysostom (AD 349 – 407):**

By what word is she washed? “In the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (St. Matthew 28:19). He did not simply bathe her; he adorned her, making her glorious, having no spot or wrinkle or anything lacking. Let us too seek that sort of beauty, and grace will make us able to refract it. The husband does not seek from the wife something she does not have to give. For you see the pattern: the Church has received everything from Christ. (Homily on Ephesians 20.5.27)

**St. Augustine of Hippo (AD 354-430):**

By the same bath of regeneration (see Titus 3:5) and water of sanctification all sins of the redeemed are cleansed and healed, not only those which are pardoned at this time in baptism but also those that are subsequently contracted by human infirmity or ignorance. (On Marriage and Concupiscence 1.38)

**Ephesians 5:28:**

**St. John Chrysostom (AD 349 – 407):**

Has he moved on to a greater image and a more vivid illustration? No, but to something more homely and plainer, with a different justification. Now he takes up the argument from a moral point of view, saying ought husbands love their wives. (Homily on Ephesians 20.5.28)

**St. Augustine of Hippo (AD 354-430):**

The example proceeds to wives from the Church and to husbands from Christ,... He urges the husbands on the basis of something inferior, namely, their own body, not only from the superior, that is, their Lord. (On Continence 23)

**Ephesians 5:29:**

**Tertullian (AD 155 – 230):**

No one, he says, hates his own flesh, excepting only Marcion, obviously, but he nourishes and cherishes it, as Christ does the Church. But you [Marcion] are the only one who hates it, since you deprive it of resurrection. So you also hate the Church. But Christ loved the flesh, as seen in his love for the Church. The point is that as no man hates his own flesh so he does not hate his own wife but indeed acts to preserve, honor and crown her. (Against Marcion 5.18.9)

**Didymus of Alexandria [the Blind] (AD 313 – 398):**

When the apostle asks whoever hated his own flesh? what is meant by flesh? Flesh is to be taken care of, nourished and fostered. Flesh here refers to the body yoked to the rational soul, as is clear [from the previous verse]. (On Zechariah 1.169)

**St. John Chrysostom (AD 349 – 407):**

It is all too evident that our bodies have many defects. One is lame, one has crooked feet, another a withered hand, each a weakness in a different member. Nevertheless the person does not complain or cut off the defect. Rather he often treats it better than the other members, and all this quite reasonably, since it is his own. (Homily on Ephesians 20.5.31)

**Ephesians 5:30:**

**Theodoret (AD 392 – 457):**

Just as Eve was fashioned from Adam, so were we from Christ the Lord (see Genesis 2:21-23). We are buried with him in baptism. We rise with him. We eat his body and drink his blood [in the Eucharist]. (Epistle to the Ephesians 5.30)

**Ephesians 5:31a:**

**St. Jerome (AD 347 – 420):**

The same allegorical interpretation applies both to Christ and to the Church, that Adam is to prefigure Christ and Eve the Church. For “the last Adam was made a life-giving spirit” (1 Corinthians 15:45). Just as the whole human race is born from Adam and his wife, so the whole multitude of believers has been born of Christ and the Church. (Epistle to the Ephesians 3.5.31)

**St. Augustine of Hippo (AD 354-430):**

If Christ cleaved to the Church so that they became one flesh, in what way did he leave his Father? In what way did he leave his mother? He left his Father in the sense that, when he was in the form of God he...emptied himself, assuming the form of a slave" (Philippians 2:6-8) . . . That means that he left the Father, not by deserting him or withdrawing from him but by coming to humanity in a lowly form in which he temporarily divested his glory with the Father. (Tractate on the Gospel of John 9.10)

### **Ephesians 5:31b:**

#### **Theodore of Mopsuestia (AD 350 – 428):**

You are to respect the first law [of creation], he says in effect, which was laid down along with the fashioning of the woman and implanted in human nature.... This is the fruit of marriage: One child comes of two partners. The apostle, having recalled the holy requirement of marriage [that the two shall become one flesh], shows that this is illustrated also in the spiritual marriage. He not only demonstrates it but virtually shouts it out. (Epistle to the Ephesians 5.31)

### **Ephesians 5:32a:**

#### **Didymus of Alexandria [the Blind] (AD 313 – 398):**

We find frequently in the writings of the blessed Paul principles conducive to a higher (anagogic) interpretation. This is evident when he writes “This mystery is a profound one, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and his Church.” (On Genesis 102)

#### **St. Jerome (AD 347 – 420):**

Gregory of Nazianzus, a very eloquent man and outstandingly versed in the Scriptures, used to say while discussing this passage with me: See how great the promise in this passage is! The apostle, interpreting it as an analogy of Christ and the Church, does not himself even profess to have expounded it as the dignity of the idea demanded. He is in effect saying: "I know that this analogy is full of ineffable promises. It requires a divine heart in its interpretation. But in the weakness of my understanding I can only say that in the meantime it should be interpreted as Christ in relation to the Church. Nothing is greater than Christ and the Church. Even all that is said of Adam and Eve is to be interpreted with reference to Christ and the Church." (Epistle to the Ephesians 3.5.32)

#### **St. Fulgentius (AD 468 – 533):**

Any soul that cleaves faithfully to Christ is like a wife living faithfully with her husband. Even in chaste wedlock she may grieve the mind of her husband. But she preserves the faith of the marriage bed with chaste purity. Prudently and temperately she orders the husband's household. Even while she falls short of meeting his needs she lives chastely and faithfully with him. Though human infirmity often causes her to transgress against him, conjugal chastity makes her cleave with pleasure to her husband. (On the Incarnation 41)

## **Ephesians 5:32b:**

### **Tertullian (AD 155 – 230):**

Small in the eyes of heretics (who belittled the body) but great in the eyes of the apostles are the Creator's works. Of just such a great mystery the apostle speaks when he says: "But I speak of Christ and the Church." He says this to confirm the mystery, not to undermine it. He shows us that the mystery was prefigured beforehand by the One who is the author of the mystery. (Against Marcion 5.18.10)

### **St. Methodius of Olympus (martyred AD 311):**

The apostle's aim was not amiss when he compared the first condition of Adam with that of Christ. It is a perfectly accurate analogy: the Church is generated from Adam's bones and flesh (see Genesis 2:23). For her sake the Word left his Father in heaven. He came down to be bonded with this woman, the Church. Then he fell into the sleep of his passion. He willingly died for her.... He did this to make her ready for the blessed seed which he himself sows secretly in her, which she cherishes in the depth of her soul. The seed is sown that the Church might receive it and fashion it like a woman, to bring forth and foster excellence. (Symposium 3.8.71)

### **St. Augustine of Hippo (AD 354-430):**

The apostle speaks of a great mystery in the relation of Christ and the Church. That which is great in respect of Christ and the Church may seem less auspicious in the relation between husbands and wives. But in marriage it still represents the mystery of an inseparable bond. (On Marriage and Concupiscence 1.23)

## **Ephesians 5:33a:**

### **Caius Marius Victorinus (AD 300 – aft. 362):**

Already he has given instructions generally to men concerning their wives and to women concerning their husbands. He now applies the same principles specifically to the Ephesians....He has added the connecting word however. This shows that even as Christ and the Church are one body, so are husband and wife one flesh. The husband's maxim is to love his wife as if she were his own flesh. (Epistle to the Ephesians 2.5.33)

**Ephesians 5:33b:**

**St. John Chrysostom (AD 349 – 407):**

How, one may say, is there to be love when there is reverence? Love is most powerfully present when accompanied by reverence. For what she loves she also reveres, and what she reveres she also loves. She reveres him as the head and loves him as a member of the whole body. God's purpose in ordering marriage is peace. One takes the husband's role, one takes the wife's role, one in guiding, one in supporting. If both had the very same roles, there would be no peace. The house is not rightly governed when all have precisely the same roles. There must be a differentiation of roles under a single head.<sup>26</sup> (Homily on Ephesians 20.5.33)