Washing of the water with the word

• Not a reference to water-baptism

It is generally thought that 'the washing of the water with the word' in Ephesians 5:26 refers to water-baptism, but
(i) Ezekiel 16 surely does not refer to water-baptism, and the imagery is taken from there.
(ii) This is a washing of the whole church; Paul does not usually think of water- baptism as a washing in which Christ washes the **whole** church in a single ceremony using water.
(iii) It is difficult to see exactly how in practical terms baptismal-water sanctifies the church. Is it that my getting baptised when I first believed in Jesus is now having a sanctifying effect on me? Certainly my **faith** still plays a part, but does the water? Or did some sprinkling of water on a child actually show itself in a sanctified life? It must be 'invisible grace'! Is water-baptism a ceremony which sanctifies the whole church in one act – all water-baptisms being viewed as one? An interpretation which cannot be translated into practical terms for the Christian – without extreme superstition – is by that very fact unlikely. The Christian lives by realities, not impractical theories!

• The word of the entire gospel message washes

To say the water-baptism 'represents' something is true in itself, but it is not the language used here. Here in Ephesians 5 the use of the term 'water' is imagery and metaphor – picture language. Christ died on the cross in order to make it possible for Him to consecrate the church to Himself and – as a process throughout the history of the church – 'wash' the church from her sinful ways. The phrase 'through the word' explains what the metaphor means and what the 'washing' consists of. As elsewhere in Scripture, God 'washes' us by the use of His word – the entire gospel message 📖[1]. The truth makes us free 📖[2].

📖[1] see John 17:17
📖[2] see John 8:31–32

• The husband is to be concerned about his wife's future

There was a further purpose in Christ's love for the church. Christ loved the church and gave Himself . . . cleansing her ... '*in order that He might present the church to Himself as a glorious church, without spot or wrinkle or anything of that nature but that she might be holy and blameless*' 📖[1]. Paul is speaking of Christ's future plans for His bride. He intends to bring her to a high level of purity. The gates of hell will not defeat Christ's church. She will succeed in being ready for Jesus' coming. In Ezekiel 16:10–14 the Lord's bride is beautiful. Jesus' church will have reached a high level of maturity before Jesus comes. Paul uses all this as a model for the husband; the husband is to be concerned about his wife's future.

📖[1] 5:27

A husband 's love for his wife is like love of his own flesh

• One flesh

A husband's love for his wife is like love of his own flesh. Paul goes on. '*In the same way husbands also should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself* 📖[1], *for no one ever hated his own flesh, but he nourishes it and cherishes it as Christ does the church* 📖[2], *for we are members of his body*' 📖[3]. (The words 'of his flesh and of his bones' – compare the King James version of 1611 – are found in some manuscripts but were added by scribes; they are not original.) A man likes to look after himself. He protects himself, he feeds himself. He takes care of himself. Paul says, 'Your wife is part of you. You have become one flesh. You cannot damage her without damaging yourself.' Christ feels the same way about His church. He protects and cares for His church from the heavenly throne.

📖[1] 5:28
📖[2] 5:29
📖[3] 5:30

A husband's love for his wife is above that of his wider family	**A husband's love for his wife is above that of his wider family**. '"*For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh*" 📖[1]. *This mystery is great, but I am speaking about Christ and about the church*' 📖[2]. The husband must not live in the old way once he is married. He 'leaves his father and his mother'. His old priorities no longer apply. He puts his wife above anything that was in his old life.

📖[1] 5:31
📖[2] 5:32

• *Marriage is a tough testing ground*	Paul gives us a hint that these topics need careful meditation – much greater than can be given here. Marriage is a profound mystery. Let everyone ponder it long and hard. He or she will learn great lessons of wisdom and sanctification. It is the hardest and toughest environment in which to work out godliness! It brings the greatest joys and if it goes wrong it brings the greatest sufferings. It is easy to be nice to people you don't see so often; marriage is a tougher testing ground.

• *Marriage is the most illuminating way to understand the gospel*	The theme of marriage is also the most illuminating way of understanding the gospel. It is not surprising that there is a whole book of the Bible about romance and marriage (the Song of Songs). It is the greatest parable ever of the Christian life. '*This mystery is great, but I am speaking about Christ and about the church*' 📖[1]. If you begin to see into the mystery, you begin to see what it means for Christ to have love us and for Him to go on loving us. You begin to see how precious the church is to Jesus.

📖[1] 5:32

• *A two point summary: the husband's love and the wife's submission*	Paul closes with a two-point summary. '*To summarise: let each one of you also so love his wife as he loves himself, and let the wife respect her husband*' 📖[1]. It might seem surprising that he has only two things to say: love and submission, one point for the husbands, one for the wives. Why does he not have a fuller number of pieces of advice? Why does he not tell wives to love their husbands? His two points are the key to all other matters. If the wife is a woman who allows her husband to be the leader and 'chairman', if husband is a man of love, all be well. There may be a thousand things to be attended to, but they have a starting point. But if either of these matters is disobeyed, they have no starting-point for recovery.

📖[1] 5:33