



FIRST PREZ HONOLULU
SERMON TEXT

“WALK IN THE WAY OF LOVE”

Ephesians 5:21 - Ephesians 6:4

by Jenny Sung

Sunday, January 18, 2026

Good morning, church family.

My name is Jenny Sung. I'm one of the pastors here, serving in the Hub of Healing ministries and at The Vine campus in Kaka 'ako.

Today's passage is all about relationships, and the one about marriage—especially husbands and wives and submission—has long been controversial. Too often, it has caused division and harm rather than unity and love. So you can imagine my pause, even my hesitation, when I saw a message from Pastor Chris Pan on October 9th at 6:15 p.m. It read:

“Do you want to preach on Ephesians 5:21–33? I'd like a woman to preach on it, and if not you, who would you suggest?”

You see, Pastor Chris is a strong proponent of women preaching

I'd regularly see him walking around, this tall man with a low voice, wearing a shirt with a very large bold print that said, “Listen to Women Preach.” At one point I finally asked, “Where did you get that shirt?”

He said, “I got it at the ECO annual conference! You should get one!”



Our denomination, ECO—the Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians—affirms egalitarian ministry, or what we call the unleashing of the gifts of ministry in men, women, and every ethnic group. ECO does not hold to gender distinctions for roles within the church.

ECO's Constitution includes what we call the Essential Tenets, which describe our foundational convictions. One of them says this:

- We affirm that men and women alike are called to all the ministries of the Church, and that every member is called to share in all of Christ's offices within the world beyond the church.
- Every Christian is called to a prophetic life, proclaiming the good news to the world and enacting that good news.
- Every Christian is called to extend the lordship of Christ to every corner of the world.
- And every Christian is called to participate in Christ's priestly, mediatorial work—sharing in the suffering of the world in ways that extend God's blessing and offering intercession on behalf of the world. (Essential Tenets III.D)

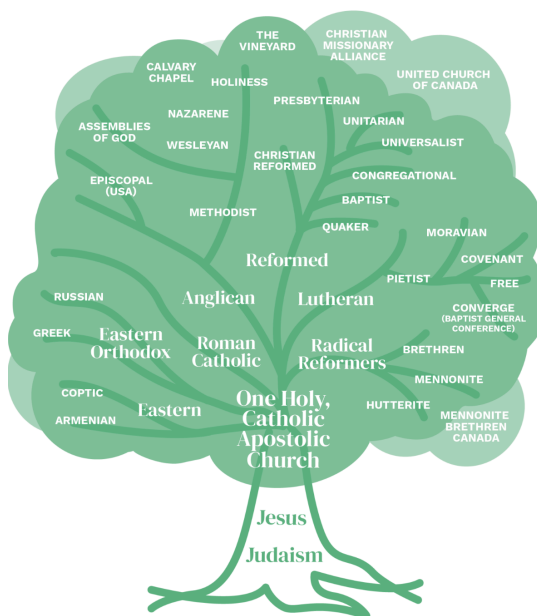
Recently, I attended, for the very first time, our ECO's Women Pastors' Retreat.



More than 50 ordained ECO pastors and ordination candidates gathered to teach, provide spiritual direction, worship, and pray together. I met women who are leading, teaching, and planting churches in urban and rural communities across our country. One senior pastor was leading a congregation in a rural farming community where people drove to church in tractors. Another woman planted a church in a café and was a solo pastor to many unchurched families in the area. Lots of middle schoolers, so they formed classes around that and invited parents to Bible studies.

As we shared stories and learned from one another, I was inspired, encouraged, and my vision was enlarged. I was reminded that each of us—together—are part of God's mission in the world, something far bigger than ourselves. It's like our mission statement, "Joining Jesus to restore and transform one another and the world."

As Christians, we are all unique yet profoundly connected by our faith. We are part of the invisible Church—the body of Christ.



If you imagine a tree of church history, it stretches from Jesus and the early Christian church, the Catholic Church, through the Protestant Reformation with leaders like Martin Luther, then John Calvin and John Knox, and into the many denominations we see today. While there are differences in governance, sacraments, leadership, and structure, there are also deep similarities—the essential truths of the Christian faith:

- Belief in one God
- The Trinity—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit
- The full deity and full humanity of Jesus Christ
- The Virgin Birth and Resurrection
- Humanity's need for salvation
- Salvation by grace through faith in Christ
- The second coming of Christ
- Scripture as the Word of God

These are the essentials.

And then there are differences:

- Forms of church government
- Views on infant vs. adult baptism
- Worship styles (contemporary, hymns, no instruments)
- Preaching approaches (topical, expository, seeker sensitive)
- Views on spiritual gifts (charismatic gifts for today—healing, miracles, tongues)
- Complementarian vs. egalitarian views on women in ministry

These are the non-essentials.

As we hold fast to God's Word and submit our lives to Christ, let us lean in closer to God and to one another. Let us walk in love and hold tightly to the essentials that unite us more than the differences that divide us. Let's lean into our values, have courage—to not dismiss or shut each other out, but be open, listen and be curious, be prayerful, and be led by the Spirit into the truth and grace found in Jesus Christ.

In a moment, Elder Nate Nastase will read our Scripture. Nate is an elder here, a leader in our men's ministry, and a retired Marine Colonel. I'm grateful for his faithful service, humility, and kindness.

Let's welcome Nate as he reads.

Ephesians 5:18b–6:4 (NIV)

^{18b}Instead, be filled with the Spirit, ¹⁹speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit. Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord, ²⁰always giving thanks to God the Father

for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. ²¹Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.

²²Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord. ²³For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. ²⁴Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.

²⁵Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her ²⁶to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, ²⁷and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. ²⁸In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. ²⁹After all, no one ever hated their own body, but they feed and care for their body, just as Christ does the church— ³⁰for we are members of his body. ³¹“For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.” ³²This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church. ³³However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.

¹Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. ²“Honor your father and mother”—which is the first commandment with a promise— ³“so that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth.” ⁴Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.

This is the Word of the Lord.
Thanks be to God!

Today's passage is all about relationships, specifically three that were central in Paul's day: 1) husbands and wives, 2) parents and children, and 3) masters and slaves (Pastor Chris will actually address more about masters and slaves next Sunday).

Today's passage invites us into one of the most intimate and challenging places, because relationships are where we experience the deepest love and the deepest wounds. Many of us have carried pain in these very relationships.

Some of us experienced marriages marked by abuse, resentment, control, or neglect.

Some of us have known parenting that wounded us, tore down and diminished our identity rather than nurtured and provided security.

Some have heard words in our passage today used to justify control and abuse instead of love and caring for one another as imitators of God.

But our passage today is not about power. It's all about the overflow of a Spirit-filled life.

An overflow not of bad things, but of good things.

I live in a condominium. We had a leak on one of the floors—a corroded water tank that leaked—and there was an overflow of water from one floor to the next and to the next, damaging a lot of other units. In a condo, an overflow of water is a bad thing. You want to contain water in the water tank and not have it leak to floors below you.

The apostle Paul was not talking about the bad overflow of our sinful nature. Remember, he says, put away bitterness and wrath and anger, but be imitators of God, walking in the light of God's love.

Paul is talking about an overflow of the Holy Spirit in our lives. In relationships, it was not about power or control—but Christlikeness. It's not about hierarchy—but Spirit-filled maturity and mutuality. It's about the Spirit forming us into a people who reflect the self-giving love of Jesus into all of our relationships. The overflow of the Holy Spirit.

You can see the connection between the filling of the Spirit and relationships in the text. The original text in Greek for this passage actually flows from verse 18 straight through verse 22. From “Be filled with the Spirit” in verse 18, the words “submit to” or “be subject” in verse 21 are not a new sentence or a main verb, but another participle that connects from verse 18. And verse 22 (“Wives, submit to your husbands”) has no verb in the original text. It's simply, “Wives to your own husbands.”

So the flow is: “Be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord in your heart, always and for everything giving thanks in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God the Father, submitting to each other out of reverence for Christ, wives to your own husbands as to the Lord.”

So the ongoing overflow of a Spirit-filled life is:

- Worship flowing from our hearts
- Gratitude shaping our perspective
- And mutual submission out of reverence for Christ.

This passage points toward a Spirit-empowered, Christ-shaped love expressed in our closest relationships.

Paul is not offering a list of rules; rather, he is describing what life looks like when it is shaped by the Holy Spirit and centered on Jesus Christ.

Paul's words were not diminishing women; they were radically elevating them. Mutual submission between husband and wife would have shocked first-century hearers.

Let's take a broader look at the cultural norms Paul was speaking into at the time. In the first century, household codes always enforced male dominance. In a deeply patriarchal culture, women had little legal or social standing. A woman was never an independent person; instead, she was always under the authority of her father, her eldest brother, or her husband.

The idea of mutual submission suggested in verse 21—that a husband and wife should be subject to each other—would have been shocking to the men who heard it. To model Christ's sacrificial example, “just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her,” meant that a husband holds back nothing—not even his very life. This would have been radically different from the views of male leadership in the first century.

Likewise, children were not free, bound to their parents even into adulthood. Sons were subject to their fathers until the father's death, and daughters until marriage. In a culture where fathers had absolute authority, the instruction to fathers to “not exasperate your children,” to nurture them in the ways of the Lord, was radical to hear.

Paul speaks into this typical ancient pattern of inferior/superior hierarchy and transforms it with the Gospel. Paul is echoing the way of Christ.

Jesus worked in ways that were deeply countercultural. Jesus welcomed women as disciples, teaching in Martha and Mary's home. He stopped at a well and spoke at length with a Samaritan woman—someone others avoided. He revealed Himself to her, and then He sent her to tell others. She became the first evangelist in John's Gospel.

In a culture where women's testimony was not considered legally reliable, Jesus appeared first to women after His resurrection—first to Mary Magdalene.

This is the Jesus Paul points to in Ephesians. Through Christ, everything is possible.

Our relationships with one another are now different (2:11–22). Our relationships with our spouses can be different (5:22–33). Our relationships with our children can be different (6:1–4). And our relationship with this world is different (6:10–24). We can walk more and more in the way of love, shaped by the Spirit, submitting to one another in love, for the glory of God and the healing of the world.

There are some of us here today who are thinking change is impossible. Some who are deeply struggling with the pain of broken relationships—wounds so deep it's hard to breathe at times. There are patterns of brokenness that have been handed down for generations. Relationships that feel stuck or broken.

And even in the darkest valley, the One who experienced deep pain knows our struggle. God steps into our pain. He understands and loves us deeply and offers us healing. A different way to be,

to think, to be shaped into something new more and more—even when we've made a mess.

He does not waste our pain or even our mistakes. It may look like a terrible mess to us, not making sense, but the Spirit is still at work.

This is one of the clips from the Alpha Course, from the session *How Does God Guide Us?* It's a story of our brokenness and discord, and how God transforms it into something beautiful.

Let's watch this together. Click [here](#) to watch the video,

Will you pray with me:

Gracious and loving God,
We come before You just as we are—
with open hands, tender hearts, and deep need of You.

You see our relationships.
You know the wounds we carry
and the broken places in relationships.

Holy Spirit, we ask that You would fill us again. We want the ongoing overflow of a Spirit-filled life.
Will You bring healing, transformation, truth, and freedom.

Help us to walk humbly with one another,
submitting to one another in love,
for Your glory and the healing of the world.

We place ourselves and one another into Your loving hands.

In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.