



When Paul exhorts his readers to be filled with the Spirit, he speaks of an ongoing infilling, not a once-for-all event. In verse 19 he links this growing experience of the Spirit with communal, interactive worship.

*Q. 2. Do you find communal worship the place where the Spirit seems most real/active in our life? How could we make our Sunday worship more Spirit-filled? Do vv 19-20 give a picture of your regular worship?*

Although most modern translations make verse 21 the beginning of a new section dealing with marriage Paul did not do this. Verses 21-33 on marriage actually follows on from what Paul says in 5:15ff. For Paul a transformed marriage should be part of walking in the light and being continually filled with the Spirit.

Verse 21. 'Be subordinate to one another.' These words sum up the distinctly Christian understanding of inter personal relationships. They say in other words what Jesus made central to the ethic he gave his disciples, "Love one another.' Again the Greek is agape. We are to be loving and this kind of love always puts others first.

*Q. 3. How can we in actual practice subordinate ourselves to others? Is this something very difficult to do? Does this go against the grain of how our hierarchical society and workplace is organised?*

Now Paul takes marriage as his first example of such self-subordination done in the power of the Spirit. After this he will take children to parents and slaves to masters as other examples where subordination is a virtue (Eph. 6:1-9).

Paul begins by addressing wives in just three short verses (verses 22-24). What he says to them was what was expected. Be subject to your husband because he is your head/master/boss just as Christ is head/master/boss of the church, his body. No one in the first century on hearing these words would have raised an eyebrow. Paul was enunciating the taken-for-granted understanding of marriage.

*Q. 4. Most of the many sermons I have heard on Eph. 5:21-33 given by male ministers spend most time on these three verses. Why do you think this might be so?*

Next in verses 25-33 Paul addresses husbands. He has the most to say to them. This section comprises eight verses.

*Q. 5. List the things Paul demands of Christian husbands in verses 25, 28, 33.*

*Q. 6. Give some examples of a man putting into practice agape-love for his wife.*

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beginning. So we speak of the source or beginning of a river as its 'head.' In this passage Paul is not saying men are 'head over women'. He endorses them leading in worship. His point is that unlike the man who is made from the dust, woman is made 'from' the man. She is made of the same 'stuff' as he is and is thus his 'partner' who can lead in church alongside him.

In the second instance where Paul uses the word 'head' of the man-woman relationship in Eph. 5:23 the context shows it carries the sense boss/master, another common metaphorical meaning of the word 'head', again both in Greek and English. Paul's argument is that just as Christ as the ascended and reigning Lord is 'head over' the church, so the husband is 'head over' his wife. However, Paul then goes on to subvert the idea that in marriage the husband's leadership means being the boss. In contrast, he argues the husband's role is to 'lead' by serving his wife even to the point of giving his life for her. Instead of depicting the husband as the master over his wife, he depicts him as the servant to his wife. His model of leadership is the incarnate Christ who lays aside his divine prerogatives, taking the form of a servant for our salvation (Phil. 2:4-8). Nowhere in Eph. 5 does Paul say anything at all about who makes the major decisions in the home or who has the casting vote. These questions are excluded by what Paul actually says. It is not the role of servants to make decisions. Their role is to serve.

If you have time you might discuss the next two questions.

*Q. 12. Today, a number of contemporary responses to Paul's assertion that the man is the head of his wife are made. Which of the following would you endorse and why? Discuss the answers given.*

- Paul meant what he said. The man is 'head over' his wife. He should make all the important decisions.
- Yes, Paul said the man is the head of his wife but then he turned what he said on its head, making the husband the servant of his wife. Male 'headship' demands sacrificial loving service by the husband for his wife, nothing else.
- Paul speaks helpfully to a patriarchal context where men ruled the home but in our age and culture all ideas of the man being the 'head over his wife must be rejected.

*Q. 13. What have you learned from this passage? A number of people in the group may like to respond to this question.*

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