

## Relationships by the BOOK

Principle 7: *The heart of the problem is the problem of the heart!*

Is it possible to build a healthy family from the inside-out and prevent devastating problems? Yes! In the next lessons, we'll not offer formulas for Christian relationships or a "how-to" manual, instead we'll look at the state of our hearts. Happiness in any relationship begins with "an inside job" as I look within. It is about hearts; it is about examining the state-of-heart in me to help build healthy relationships.

**Ephesians 5:22-33** seems the most quoted passage by those trying to know God's plan for marriage. But it is necessary to include verses 18-21 to get at the heart of God's marriage plan. *At first glance*, it seems 18-21 (verses about being filled with the Spirit) are entirely different from the teaching in verses 22-23.

Paul begins the teaching on family relationships with the command to "be filled with the Spirit." And the reason he did so is because of how deeply the curse infiltrates husband-wife, parent-child relationships. Husbands try to get filled from their wives, wives try to get filled from their husbands, and even parents try to get filled from the behavior and "success" of their children. Again, this is the curse in operation. Paul is reminding Christians to turn to the Holy Spirit as their Source of filling.

He is telling us this "filling" comes from God as our Source. Paul says, "And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit" (Ephesians 5:18). The contrast between drunk and filled is significant. Let's consider what Paul is not saying. "Filled," here, *is not a word* denoting quantity; Paul is not talking about how much of the Spirit we have. He is not saying, "You are only half full (like a glass of water), and you need to be completely filled." Romans 8:9 indicates that if you belong to Jesus, you have the entire Holy Spirit dwelling in you. Neither is Paul saying, "*Remember how you used to get drunk with wine? Well, now, instead of getting drunk with wine, get drunk with the Spirit.*"

### FILLED WITH THE SPIRIT!

"Filled" is the Greek word *pleroma*, which has a couple of meanings that apply here. First, it could mean permeated. Permeated is what happens to a glass of water when you drop an Alka-Seltzer into it. It becomes permeated. There is no part of the glass of water that doesn't have Alka-Seltzer in it. *Pleroma* is also the word that would be used to describe a sail when it is full of wind. A filled sail is what empowers or propels a sailboat. It is not the wind in the sail that propels the boat. The wind creates a negative pressure—a vacuum—in front of the sail. This vacuum is the force that moves the boat forward. So being filled with the Spirit does not mean being power-driven through the Christian life, as if the Holy Spirit were a locomotive-wind behind us. Rather, it means being drawn into godly living by the Holy Spirit, who is in front of us, focusing us on God.

The Greek word *plemora* – "be filled" is in the present, passive, imperative form. Each of those aspects simply enrich the meaning. An imperative is a command. The one commanding assumes that you have the power to carry through in your own power. But this command is given in a passive voice, which means it is not something you can do, but something that must be done to you or for you. Paul did not write, "Get (yourself) filled," or, "Fill yourself," which is an active imperative. Instead, he wrote, "Allow yourself to be filled," which is a passive imperative. The easiest way to understand the present tense is

to simply think of the phrase “whenever it is now.” Thus, one literal rendering of “be filled with the Spirit” is this: “Allow yourself to be continuously filled with the Spirit.” Get your life from God.

### **REVERSING THE CURSE**

When we depend on God to meet our needs, it sends ripples through every relationship we have: “Speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord; always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father; and be subject to one another in the fear of Christ” (vv. 19-21).

The only imperative in this text is, “Be filled with the Spirit.” All of these other things are what result when we allow ourselves to be filled by God. Even the “be subject to one another” is best read in the original language as the result of this filling from God. Here, for the sake of our understanding of marriage, I want to pay special attention to the phrase “be subject to one another.” The word translated “being subject” is the Greek word *hupotasso*. It means “to arrange yourself underneath.” It is a strong word having military overtones, as an infantry person would submit to the command of a general. As we’ve seen, “being subject” is a result. And what a result! Remember the dynamics of the curse, as described in Genesis 3:16. Two people wind up locked in a power struggle. Both are over the other, and both are under the other, because both are trying to rule.

### **BEING “SUBJECT”**

In this passage of Ephesians, then, Paul is presenting a major concept that empowers us to live the Christian life, and then illustrating how it works within several kinds of relationships: wife/husband (5:22-23); parent/child (6:1-4); and slave/master (6:5-9). In every instance he talks about what it means for two people to place themselves under one another in subjection. If husbands are not to be submissive to their wives too, then there is no “being subject to one another.”

Remember the dynamics of the curse, as described in Genesis 3:16. Two people wind up locked in a power struggle. Both are over the other, and both are under the other because both are trying to rule. What Paul tells us in Ephesians is how to reverse and escape the curse.

So, husbands, if you are reminding your wife that you are the boss, then you are not the head of your wife as Christ is the head of the church. Ultimately, what Paul has described here is a relationship of grace, freedom, and blessing—one that confronts the curse-full relationship described in Genesis 3. If you took a filled-with-the-Spirit, mutually submissive husband and wife and put them in Ephesus, their witness would confront every relationship in that city. And if you place this kind of marriage today in view of that part of the feminist movement that encourages women to have power by taking power, it will be a confrontation.

### **Discussion Questions**

1. Describe what Paul means when he says to be filled with the Spirit.
2. Why do you think the verses about being filled with the Spirit (Ephesians 5:18-21) precede the verses about submission in marriage (Ephesians 5:22-23)?
3. After hearing this message, explain what true submission in marriage is, both for the wife and for the husband.
4. How are other relationships changed by submission to one another (parent/child; servant/master)?

(Source: Jeff VanVonderen: *The Subtle Power of Spiritual Abuse* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1991).