

Home Group Leaders Discussion Guide

Ephesians 5:21-33

While this week's passage begins in 5:21...the governing idea/command actually begins in 5:18...*"be filled with the Spirit"*.

Primary evidence of being filled with the Spirit is submitting to one another (5:21). If we are not filled with the Spirit, then what are we filled with? The Self. But when we are filled with Self, we can bank on relationships being filled with strife.

Without God, human relationships devolve into nothing more than a struggle for power. And as with all such struggles, the goal becomes winning. Other people become simply a means for us to get what we want, or an obstacle to us getting what we want. (This occurs on the micro level of interpersonal relationships, as well as on the macro level of societies and nations.)

The point Paul makes throughout Ephesians is that we are "in Christ". In Him we've already won; we have everything we need. We do not need to strive for power in our relationships with other people, such as our spouse, our parents or children, our employees or employers. We simply need to focus on being filled with the Spirit.

Submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ demonstrates that we trust God has provided for our needs (we don't have to "get ours"); that we understand that our value, worth, and significance comes from God (so we don't need to strive with other people for power, position, status, in anyone's eyes); that getting our way isn't the goal of life (God is working on something far big and grander than that, and we get to participate with Him); that we understand and desire to walk in the footsteps of Jesus who humbled Himself. Submitting to others naturally takes humility that's bred in security...which we have by being "in Christ".

What Paul does in 5:22-6:9 is take familiar, common, everyday relationships—relationships with an understood power dynamic—and turns them on their ear by applying a kingdom "power ethic"...i.e. he draws a picture of what it looks like for people who are in Christ, filled with the Spirit (people who are living in the present reality of the Kingdom of God) to live out these familiar, common, everyday relationships.

As was mentioned in the sermon, these illustrations—husbands and wives, parents and children, masters and slaves (or employer and employee in more contemporary times)—formed the outline of "household codes" (cultural understandings/expectations) for many ancient near east peoples/cultures. It is easy for us to miss how truly radical and revolutionary Paul was being. What Paul said to wives, to children, to slaves was par for the course. BUT, what Paul said to husbands, parents, and masters (i.e. the people in the power position) was truly innovative and groundbreaking. NO ONE, up to this point in history (as far as we know) had ever suggested such a thing. The point is, the power dynamics within the Kingdom of God are radically different than that of the world. Sadly, the church has rarely lived consistently with this Kingdom power ethic...which is to say, the Church has rarely followed our Lord's example in

this area. To this day, we still have an infatuation with worldly power, thinking it can be a means to Kingdom ends. This is because we don't really believe that humble, sacrificial, suffering service, as exemplified and taught by Jesus, is actually the best way to be/live.

But, again, we must recognize that we can't live into the proper Kingdom ethic of power/authority unless we are filled with the Spirit. But let's not miss this: everything Paul mentioned earlier in chapter 5—about being a holy people (5:3) and being children of light (5:8)—has A LOT to do with a proper understanding and living out of power and authority. For us to proclaim and embody the gospel of the Kingdom, it is imperative that we get this right.

Let me briefly paraphrase what Paul was saying to wives and husbands in 5:22-33 (We'll call this the CPV—the Croyts Paraphrased Version☺)

“Spouses, when you find yourself in a power struggle with your spouse—which will inevitably occur—recognize that in that moment you are not being filled with the Spirit, you're not walking in the way of Jesus, you're not living in love. Step back and figure out what it will take to humbly submit yourself to your spouse in this situation. Take a moment to consider Jesus. Consider all that He has done for you; consider how much He loves you. Focus on emptying yourself and being willed with His Spirit; concentrate on YOUR need to do this, not on whether your spouse is doing this. Remember Jesus's words, “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.” Live out the reality of the Kingdom in your marriage and trust the King.”

Now this brings up some interesting and important points/questions:

-What is the purpose of marriage in the first place? (Answer: to make us holy, more like Jesus...not to make us “happy”. Quick aside: what is the purpose of singleness? Answer: To make us holy, more like Jesus. Neither marriage nor singleness is better or worse than the other...despite popular opinion to the contrary.)

-What if one spouse is a believer and the other isn't? (Answer: the believing spouse is to submit out of reverence for Christ. We begin to see why Paul says that people should be “equally yoked”. So, if you aren't married but considering it, choose a spouse who lives a life that demonstrates submission to Christ and being filled with the Spirit. We need to remember that the goal isn't to get what we want, but to follow the example of Jesus. Our identity comes from Him not our spouse.)

-The moment we start thinking in terms of “winning” or getting our “rights” or what we “deserve”, we can be sure that we're not being filled with the Spirit, but rather with the Self.

Q. For those of you who are married, if you're willing to share, what was the last argument, fight, spat you had with your spouse about?

Q. For those of you who are married, as you consider the various tensions you have with your spouse, how much of them would you consider “power struggles”? (Of those that

aren't power struggles, how would you classify them? Breakdowns in communications? Unmet expectations? Misunderstandings? Etc.)

- Q. For those of you who are single, what thoughts/feeling do you experience when you read this passage? Men, what are your thoughts/feelings when you read this? Ladies, what are your thoughts/feelings?
- Q. Paul offers 3 illustrations of submitting to one another: marriage, family, and work relationships. This is an illustrative list, not an exhaustive one. What other relationships can you identify that have a natural power dynamic involved? How would Paul's instructions speak into those? Even the relationships that don't have an inherent power structure, what are ways in which people try to leverage power?
- Q. Although this was asked last week, it's worth asking again: what practices, habits, disciplines do you engage in to help you to be filled with the Spirit?
- Q. Tensions will always arise in relationships. When (not if) they do, we have the opportunity to live out our faith in Jesus. It's an opportunity to draw our (and other's) attention to Jesus. The tendency is to make the tension go away. Practically speaking, how can we use relational tension to build our faith and witness to the reality of King Jesus?
- Q. Who is the best example of marriage that you know? What makes their marriage so good?
- Q. What are some examples of how our cultural distorts the idea of marriage and/or cultivates wrong/unrealistic ideas of marriage?
- Q. We can either be filled with the Spirit or filled with Self. It is also possible to be self-deceived into thinking that we are filled with the Spirit, when in fact we are filled with Self. What are some ways in which we can avoid this deception?
- Q. When fears and/or desires rule our life, we are filled with Self. How do we go about submitting our fears and desires to Christ, so He can rule us as opposed to our fears/desires/Self? How does that become a way of life for us? What role does the community of Christ play in that?
- Q. What do you think/feel about the idea of the husband being the "spiritual leader" in the home? (Note to HG leaders: if someone has a problem with this or takes exception to it, that's fine. Do not feel the need to convince them otherwise. Allow your HG to be a safe place for dissenting opinions.)

Q. React to the statement made at the outset: Primary evidence of being filled with the Spirit is submitting to one another. If you agree...why? If you disagree...why? If you would rephrase it, do so.