

STUDY GUIDE 14 Ephesians 5:1-21

Review your memory verses: Ephesians 1:3, 2:8-9, 3:20-21, 4:32.

Read Ephesians 5:1-21 two times. __ __

Read verses 1-6 again.

1. What are we instructed to do in verse 1?

How do Ephesians 4:32 and 5:2 help us to understand what it might mean for us to follow the instruction in Ephesians 5:1?

2. From verses 3-4 list everything that is not appropriate.

What do you think greed is, and how are immorality and impurity related to greed?

3. In verse 4 Paul instructs us to replace those negative characteristics with "thanksgiving". Why is "giving of thanks" so important in the context of our sexuality? That is, why is it seen as the antidote for the sins listed?

It is important to realize here that sex is not bad. God thought up the idea of sex. He originated it, and He understands it. Sex is good; however, it is only good if it is expressed in its appropriate context - within heterosexual monogamous marriage. Sex in any other context (premarital sex, extramarital sex [adultery], homosexuality, incest) is considered immorality or fornication. Paul instructs us to put aside an improper use of sex, and rather to give thanks. We are not to complain and look for a sinful way out of God's will regarding our sexuality, but rather to give thanks to God for His choices for us, whether marriage, singleness, or difficult faithfulness.

4. What do verses 5-6 tell us?

In what sense is an immoral, impure, or greedy person an "idolater"?

5. Verse 6 tells us not to be deceived with empty words. In our society today, where do the "empty words" which deceive come from? What are some examples?

By contrast, where are the full, powerful words?

The word "idolater" is important here. These verses are not referring to the Christian who occasionally sins in one of these areas, but rather to a person who has chosen this as a way of life. An idol is something a person organizes his or her life around, just as a Christian organizes his life around God. Thus, Paul is talking about people whose idol is more important to them than God is, and who therefore habitually serve that idol and not God. They have no inheritance in the kingdom of God.

Read verses 7-14.

6. Verse 7 is kind of a summary statement of verses 1-6. What instruction does this verse give us?

What do you think this means? (As you answer this question, think about Jesus and how He responded to/interacted with prostitutes, adulterers, immoral and covetous people.)

7. Verse 8 tells us that we are now "children of light". What do verses 9-10 teach us about how children of light walk?

8. Verse 11 tells us not to participate in deeds of darkness, but instead to expose them. In what way do you think we are to "expose" deeds of darkness? (Verses 13-14)

There is a delicate balance necessary here. As we walk with the Lord, as children of light, the light of our lives will expose darkness, sin. This is fine if God uses our lives to expose sin in others. However, that is not our job. It is the job of the Holy Spirit to convict people of their sin. It is very easy (and wrong) for Christians to step in with a self-righteous, judgmental attitude toward others. We need to strive to walk a life of purity, to be imitators of God, but not to go finger-pointing at others. We must remember that we too are vulnerable to stumbling (Galatians 6:1). We need to respond to those who are living in darkness the same way Jesus did - while never compromising truth in His own life, He continued to befriend, teach, love, and forgive those who were in darkness. Jesus wasn't embarrassed to hang out with prostitutes, tax gatherers, gluttons, drunkards, and

sinner. It gave Him a bad reputation, but He didn't care. He had come to seek and save the lost, and in order to do that, He had to walk among the lost. His separation from people was never spatial, or geographic, but rather moral.

Read verses 15-21.

9. In your own words, summarize what you think verses 15-17 are saying.

Why are evil days still days of opportunity for Christians?

10. Verse 18 tells us not to get drunk with wine, but rather to be filled with the Spirit. In verses 19-21 Paul mentions four results of being filled with the Spirit. What are they?

11. What do you think is the purpose of "speaking to one another in psalms and hymns"?

12. Why do you think Paul mentions "giving thanks" again?

13. Rewrite verse 21 in your own words, explaining what you think it means to be subject to one another (or to submit to one another).

Why do you think Paul tells us to be subject to one another out of "reverence for Christ"?

14. Write down a few things you have learned from this study, and how you might apply these truths to your life this week.

☞ Laura Gamble

Thoughts in the Margins – Study Guide 14

- I. Think for a moment about all we have studied thus far in Ephesians. In chapters 1-3 we reviewed how God has provided for us [every spiritual blessing!] and how He has positioned us [*in Christ!*] Everything has worked according to His eternal purpose and it is no longer a mystery! Beginning in chapter 4 we are called to walk in a manner worthy of our provision and position. Now in chapter 5 we are called to imitate our *Father*, and to walk just as Christ did. How does reflecting on these truths shape your esteem for your salvation and the gospel?
- II. The refrain in Ephesians 5:14 is a conglomeration of a few concepts from the book of Isaiah and Paul's earlier writings. He may also be borrowing from Luke 1:78-80 (which references Malachi and Isaiah.) Who is the *sleeper* in verse 14 – is it an unbeliever engaged in "unfruitful deeds of darkness" or an unengaged believer? Looking at the context before and after may help. The cross references that Paul may be thinking of to support his point are provided. (Commentators hold different views – you can too!)

☞ Mary Ann Porter

Additional Scripture for Study Guide 14

☐ Galatians 6:1

Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; *each one* looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted.

Cross references for Ephesians 5:14

Awake

☐ Isaiah 26:19

Your dead will live;
Their corpses will rise.
You who lie in the dust, awake and shout for joy,
For your dew *is as* the dew of the dawn,
And the earth will give birth to the departed spirits.

☐ Isaiah 51:17

Rouse yourself! Rouse yourself! Arise, O Jerusalem,
You who have drunk from the LORD'S hand the cup
of His anger;
The chalice of reeling you have drained to the dregs.

☐ Isaiah 52:1

Awake, awake,
Clothe yourself in your strength, O Zion;
Clothe yourself in your beautiful garments,
O Jerusalem, the holy city;
For the uncircumcised and the unclean
Will no longer come into you.

☐ Isaiah 60:1

“Arise, shine; for your light has come,
And the glory of the LORD has risen upon you.

☐ Romans 13:11

Do this, knowing the time, that it is already the hour for you to awaken from sleep; for now salvation is nearer to us than when we believed.

will shine

☐ Luke 1:78-80

⁷⁸ Because of the tender mercy of our God,
With which the Sunrise from on high will visit us,
⁷⁹ TO SHINE UPON THOSE WHO SIT IN DARKNESS AND THE SHADOW OF DEATH,
To guide our feet into the way of peace.”

⁸⁰ And the child continued to grow and to become strong in spirit, and he lived in the deserts until the day of his public appearance to Israel.

☐ Malachi 4:2

²“But for you who fear My name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings; and you will go forth and skip about like calves from the stall.



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STUDY GUIDE 15

Ephesians 5:21-33

Read Ephesians 5:21-33 two times ____ .

Read verse 21 again. This is a crucial verse in this section of Ephesians. Grammatically, it is linked to the previous verses (5:18-20), and also to the following section (5:22-6:9). Verse 21 is basically the topic sentence or title page for what is to follow in 5:22-6:9. In fact, the verb (to submit, or subject) is not even present in verse 22, but it is implied or understood, because it is in verse 21. Ephesians 5:22-6:9 is an explanation and application of verse 21.

In this lesson, we will focus on 5:21-33. This section gives an explanation of how verse 21 is to be practically applied to married people. To those of you who are not married, this material is not irrelevant. It is also important for you. This material is important for you if you consider getting married. These principles are also crucial for you to understand so that you are able to teach others about God's idea for marriage, and also to counsel your married friends. At the time that Paul wrote this, he was probably not married. And Jesus was never married, and yet both Paul and Jesus taught about marriage. Whether single or married, we all can learn something from this passage.

1. Who is verse 21 addressed to? That is, who is to obey verse 21? How can this help to alleviate concerns or anxieties we may experience about this issue?

The form of the verb to subject oneself or to submit here shows that this is to be a voluntary action on our part. How can understanding and applying that prevent misunderstanding of this issue?

Practically speaking, what do you think it means to submit to one another?

7. Jesus, as the Son of God, was called to submit to God the Father. We can learn a great deal from His example, from how He approached submission. Think about Jesus in the garden before He went to die on the cross, about how He interacted with God the Father. (Matthew 26:36-44) What practical things can we learn about submission from Jesus' example?

8. What do you think it means that Christ is the head of the church? From that, what can we learn about what it means that the husband is the head of the wife?

Look at Galatians 3:26-28. How do these verses help us to understand the issue of submission?

9. Ephesians 5:24 says wives are to be subject to their husbands "in everything." Are there any limits to this? If so, what are they?

10. When we follow what Paul tells us to do here, who are we truly obeying? How can knowing this help us?

Read verses 25-32.

11. To whom are these verses directed? Why is it important to remember this?

12. Husbands are told to love their wives as Christ loved the church. How did Christ love the church?

In what way(s) did Christ "give Himself up" for the church?

13. How can husbands, practically speaking, give themselves up for their wives? How can we all give ourselves up for one another?

14. Husbands are told some other ways in which they are to love their wives. According to verses 28 and 33, what are they? What might that look like, practically speaking?

15. Name a few important principles we can learn about marriage from verse 31.
16. How is verse 33 a good summary for this whole section (verses 21-33)?
17. If you are married, name one specific area which you can improve on, or one thing you can do to be more loving, or respectful to your spouse. If you are not married, list one specific area in which you can improve in regards to submitting (be it to God or to another person) as verse 21 instructs us to.

"The giving of oneself to anybody is a recognition of the worth of the other self. For if I give myself up, it can only be because I value the other person so highly that I want to sacrifice myself for his or her self, in order that he may develop his selfhood, or she hers, more fully. Now to lose oneself that the other may find his or her self -- that is the essence of the gospel of Christ."

-- John R.W. Stott

✪ Laura Gamble

Thoughts in the Margins – Study Guide 15

- I. If Christian marriage is a picture of the relationship of Christ to His church, how does that help your understanding of Ephesians 5:21-33?
- II. John Piper¹ explains it well:
Think about this for a moment in relation to what we have seen so far in this series. I tried to show from Genesis 1–3 that the when sin entered the world, it ruined the harmony of marriage *not* because it brought headship and submission into existence, but because it twisted man's humble, loving headship into hostile domination in some men and lazy indifference in others. And it twisted woman's intelligent, willing submission into manipulative obsequiousness in some women and brazen

insubordination in others. Sin didn't create headship and submission; it ruined them and distorted them and made them ugly and destructive.

Now if this is true, then the redemption we anticipate with the coming of Christ is not the dismantling of the original, created order of loving headship and willing submission but a recovery of it from the ravages of sin. And that's just what we find in Ephesians 5:21–33. Wives, let your fallen submission be redeemed by modeling it after God's intention for the church! Husbands, let your fallen headship be redeemed by modeling it after God's intention for Christ!

Therefore, headship is not a right to command and control. It's a responsibility to love like Christ: to lay down your life for your wife in servant leadership. And submission is not slavish or coerced or cowering. That's not the way Christ wants the church to respond to his leadership: he wants it to be free and willing and glad and refining and strengthening.

In other words what this passage of Scripture does is two things: it guards against the abuses of headship by telling husbands to love like Jesus, and it guards against the debasing of submission by telling wives to respond the way the church does to Christ.

✧ Mary Ann Porter

Additional Scripture for Study Guide 15

□ Philippians 2:5-11

⁵ Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷ but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, *and* being made in the likeness of men. ⁸ Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. ⁹ For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, ¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

□ 1 Peter 3:1

In the same way, you wives, be submissive to your own husbands so that even if any *of them* are disobedient to the word, they may be won without a word by the behavior of their wives,

□ **1 Peter 2:21-25**

²¹ For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps, ²² who committed no sin, nor was any deceit found in His mouth; ²³ and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting *Himself* to Him who judges righteously; ²⁴ and He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed. ²⁵ For you were continually straying like sheep, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Guardian of your souls.

□ **Matthew 26:36-44**

³⁶ Then Jesus *came with them to a place called Gethsemane, and *said to His disciples, "Sit here while I go over there and pray." ³⁷ And He took with Him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be grieved and distressed. ³⁸ Then He *said to them, "My soul is deeply grieved, to the point of death; remain here and keep watch with Me."

³⁹ And He went a little beyond *them*, and fell on His face and prayed, saying, "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; yet not as I will, but as You will." ⁴⁰ And He *came to the disciples and *found them sleeping, and *said to Peter, "So, you *men* could not keep watch with Me for one hour? ⁴¹ Keep watching and praying that you may not enter into temptation; the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak."

⁴² He went away again a second time and prayed, saying, "My Father, if this cannot pass away unless I drink it, Your will be done." ⁴³ Again He came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were heavy. ⁴⁴ And He left them again, and went away and prayed a third time, saying the same thing once more.

□ **Galatians 3:26-28**

²⁶ For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. ²⁷ For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. ²⁸ There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

References

¹ Piper, John. "Husbands Who Love Like Christ and the Wives Who Submit to Them." *Desiring God*, 11 Jun. 1989, www.desiringgod.org/messages/husbands-who-love-like-christ-and-the-wives-who-submit-to-them. Accessed 1 Apr. 2026.



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b. John 15:9

c. John 15:12-15

d. 2 Corinthians 5:21

e. Philippians 2:6, 7

f. Matthew 20:25-28

Read Ephesians 5:15-18 once more.

4. In Ephesians 5:16, *making the most of*, is Strong's G1805 – *exagorazō* in the Middle Voice. Vines Expository Dictionary highlights that this means to “buy up for oneself.” It would be used of a trip to the market, where discovering a good buy required action – the deal wouldn't last forever. How does this help your understanding of Paul's instruction about our time?

In verse 18, we are told to be *filled with the Spirit*. The word for *filled* here is Strong's G4137, *plēroō*. John MacArthur¹ had an interesting insight about *plēroō* and being *filled with the Spirit*:

Pleroo has three shades of meaning that are helpful in illustrating the scriptural meaning of *Spirit-filled*. The first carries the idea of **pressure**. It is used to describe wind billowing the sails on a ship, providing the impetus to move the vessel across the water. In the spiritual realm, this concept depicts the Holy Spirit providing the thrust to move the believer down the pathway of obedience. A Spirit-filled Christian isn't motivated by his own desires or will to progress. Instead, he allows the Holy Spirit to carry him in the proper directions. Another helpful example of this first meaning is a small stick floating in a stream. Most of us have tossed a stick into a creek and then run downstream to see the twig come floating by, propelled only by the force of the water. To be filled with the Spirit means to be carried along by the gracious pressure of the Holy Spirit.

Pleroo can also convey the idea of **permeation**. The well-known pain reliever Alka Seltzer illustrates this principle quite effectively. When you drop one or two tablets into a glass of water, they instantly begin to fizzle and dissolve. Soon the tablets are transformed into clear bubbles throughout the glass, and the water is permeated with the distinct flavor of the Alka Seltzer. In a similar sense, God wants the Holy Spirit to permeate and flavor our lives so when we're around others they will know for certain we possess the pervasive savor of the Spirit.

There is a third meaning of *pleroo*, actually the primary one in the New Testament, which conveys the sense of **domination** or total control. It is used by the Gospel writers to indicate that people were dominated by a certain emotion. In Luke 5:26, after Jesus rebuked the Pharisees and healed the paralytic, the people were astonished and "filled with fear." In Luke 6:11, when Jesus restored a man's hand on the Sabbath, the scribes and Pharisees "were filled with rage." When our Lord told the disciples that He would soon be leaving them, He told of their reaction: "sorrow has filled your heart" (John 16:6). Each of those uses reveals an emotion so

overwhelming within the people that it dominated their thoughts and excluded every other emotion.

Most people are able to balance their emotions from day to day. But there are times when the emotional balance is tipped to one extreme or another. Such occasions might include a wedding, the death of a close family member, or an extreme emergency or trial. When someone is totally dominated by a particular emotional reaction in secular contexts, it can be foolish, sinful, a waste of time, or even frightening and physically harmful. But in our spiritual lives we are commanded to yield to the total control of the Holy Spirit, so every emotion, thought, and act of the will is under His direction. That kind of complete spiritual control is for our benefit and totally in line with God's will.

A directly parallel passage to Ephesians 5:18 is Colossians 3:16, which explains in a slightly different way the meaning of the command "be filled with the Spirit." The Apostle Paul says, "Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you." One can be filled with the Spirit only when controlled by the Word. It is knowing truth and obeying it.

So if being filled with the Spirit means being pressured, permeated, and dominated by the Spirit and God's Word, what can you expect to happen in your life as a direct result?

5. What is your answer to the question MacArthur poses at the end of the article excerpt above?

Read Ephesians 5:21-33 once more.

6. How are these verses settling with you now that you have studied them last week and have had some more time in Ephesians 5?

Thoughts in the Margins – Study Guide 16

- I. How does a believer, as it says in Ephesians 5:12, *understand the will of the Lord*?
- II. How might Paul's outline of the marriage relationship in Ephesians 5 help single people choose a spouse?

☞ Mary Ann Porter

Additional Scripture for Study Guide 16

John 10:11

"I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep.

John 15:9

⁹ Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you; abide in My love.

John 15:12-15

¹² "This is My commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you. ¹³ Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends. ¹⁴ You are My friends if you do what I command you. ¹⁵ No longer do I call you slaves, for the slave does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I have heard from My Father I have made known to you.

2 Corinthians 5:21

He made Him who knew no sin *to be* sin in our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

Philippians 2:6, 7

⁶ who, as He *already* existed in the form of God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, ⁷ but emptied Himself *by* taking the form of a bond-servant *and* being born in the likeness of men.

Matthew 20:25-28

²⁵ But Jesus called them to Himself and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and *their* great men exercise authority over them. ²⁶ It is not this way among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant, ²⁷ and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave; ²⁸ just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."

□ **Galatians 5:26-28**

²⁶ For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.

²⁷ For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. ²⁸ There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

References

¹MacArthur, J. F. (2003). *What Does It Mean to Be Filled with the Spirit?* Retrieved February 12, 26, from <https://www.gty.org/articles/45FILLED/what-does-it-mean-to-be-filled-with-the-spirit-booklet>

