

The Doctrines that Guide a Spirit-Filled Marriage
Selected Scriptures from Ephesians
By Susan J. Heck

When we ask ourselves the question, “What does a Spirit-filled marriage look like?” thankfully, we don’t have to sort through human ideas for an answer, because God has already given us the answer in Ephesians 5:21-33. Let’s consider this passage together as we examine God’s design for a Spirit-filled marriage.

Ephesians 5:21-33

submitting to one another in the fear of God.²²Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord.²³For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body.²⁴Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything.²⁵Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her,²⁶that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word,²⁷that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish.²⁸So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself.²⁹For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church.³⁰For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones.³¹“For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.”³²This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church.³³Nevertheless let each one of you in particular so love his own wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.

There is no way any husband and wife can live out these verses until they are first living out Ephesians 1-4. It is impossible to have a Spirit-filled marriage or, for that matter, a spirit-controlled walk, if one’s own spiritual foundation isn’t solid. If we don’t understand the preciousness of being chosen before the foundation of the world and the joy of being adopted into the family of God; if we don’t understand that Christ chose us to be holy and for good works and that this should be the norm of our lives, then indeed having a Spirit-filled marriage will be difficult. The foundation for a Spirit-filled marriage must be a core commitment to the Lordship of Christ and a commitment to follow Him in obedience in everything, including marriage. When my husband and I do pre-marital counseling, he often reminds the couples we’re counseling that

their marriage will be good *if they will walk in the Spirit*. If a couple will pursue the Lord their God with all their heart, mind, soul, and strength, and if they will not fulfill the lusts of their flesh, then they can have a marriage that honors God. We are reminded that Paul says in Galatians 5:16, “walk in the Spirit and you will not fulfill the lusts of the flesh.”

Let us consider the 13 Doctrines that should Guide a Spirit-Filled Marriage found throughout the pages of Ephesians.

1 — *Humility*

2 — *Holiness*

3 — *Forgiveness*

4 — *Generosity*

5 — *Supernatural Living*

6 — *Peace*

7 — *Prayer*

8 — *Unity*

9 — *God-Given Grace*

10 — *Speaking the Truth in Love*

11 — *Putting Off the Former Man*

12 — *Walking in Love*

13 — *A Man and a Woman Filled by the Holy Spirit*

EXAMINE:

If these doctrinal truths are not guiding your marriage, then, perhaps, before you get into the details that grow a Spirit-filled marriage, you should return to some fundamental, foundational principles regarding what it means to be a genuine child of God who is living by the Spirit. Self-examination in each of these areas might be a pain-staking exercise for you, but it will most certainly prove to be profitable spiritually. Ask yourself honestly, are you humble, holy, forgiving, generous, living by the power of the indwelling Spirit, peaceful, prayerful, walking in unity, living by the grace of God, speaking the truth in love, putting off the old man, walking in love, being controlled by the Spirit, and giving thanks?

The Details that Grow a Spirit-Filled Marriage

Ephesians 5:21-33

By Susan J. Heck

There are four Details that Grow a Spirit-Filled Marriage found specifically in Ephesians 5:21-33. We must keep in mind that **doctrine dictates duty**; that is, **what we believe dictates how we behave. Right thinking is necessary for right living.**

Paul gives us those specific details as he answers the following four questions in Ephesians 5:21-33:

1 — *What does a Spirit-filled person look like?*

submitting to one another in the fear of God. (Ephesians 5:21)

2 — *What does a Spirit-filled wife look like?*

Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. (Ephesians 5:22);

Wayne Grudem offers us some help in understanding what biblical submission is not. In his immensely helpful book, *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, Dr. Grudem offers the following directions to wives, clarifying what submission does not mean.

1. Submission does not mean putting husband in the place of Christ.
2. Submission does not mean giving up independent thought.
3. Submission does not mean a wife should give up efforts to influence and guide her husband.
4. Submission does not mean a wife should give in to every demand of her husband.
5. Submission is not based on lesser intelligence or competence.
6. Submission does not mean being fearful or timid.
7. Submission is not inconsistent with equality with in Christ.¹

A Spirit-filled wife, then, is a wife who is submissive to her own husband with a voluntary attitude, in everything, unless it violates the Word of God.

3 — *What does a Spirit-filled husband look like?*

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her
(Ephesians 5:25)

¹ Wayne Grudem and John Piper, *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1991), 194-195.

In the same way that Wayne Grudem helped to clarify our understanding of a wife's submission, he also offers to us some helpful clarification regarding what a husband's leadership is not. In his directions to husbands, he writes specifically regarding what considerate leadership is not:

1. Considerate leadership does not mean harsh or domineering use of authority.
2. Considerate leadership does not imply equal sharing of leadership in the family.
3. Considerate leadership does not imply lesser importance for a wife.
4. Considerate leadership does not mean always giving in to a wife's wishes.
5. Considerate leadership is not optional for husbands.²

4 — *What does a Spirit-filled marriage look like?*

Nevertheless let each one of you in particular so love his own wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband. (Ephesians 5:33)

² Ibid, 208-209.

The issue of respect is sorely lacking among Christian women today. Using the acronym R-E-S-P-E-C-T; let's consider some ways in which a wife can and should show him respect.

- *Respect his Role:*
- *Respect his Employment:*
- *Respect his Speech:*
- *Respect his Privacy:*
- *Respect his Eats:*
- *Respect his Convictions:*
- *Respect his Time:*

A marriage whose aim is to be Spirit-filled must first have two individuals whose hearts have been cleansed by the blood of Jesus Christ and who are endeavoring to be controlled by His Spirit. Not only that, but a Spirit-filled marriage will also be growing in these areas; the wife will be submitting more today than last year, and the husband will be loving his wife more today than he did a year ago. A Spirit-filled marriage grows in these areas; it does not become stagnant because at its foundation is the living Holy Spirit abiding in each spouse's heart.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

- Is my life characterized by humility, holiness, forgiveness, generosity, living by the power of the indwelling spirit, peace, prayer, waking in unity, living by the grace of God, speaking the truth in love, putting off the old woman, walking in love, being controlled by the Spirit, and giving thanks?
- Do these things describe my marriage?
- Am I, as a wife, doing my part to obey God even if my husband is not, and am I doing my part with a joyful heart?
- Is my submission a sign to others of my growing sanctification?
- Would my husband rather dwell on our rooftop than in the house with me because I am continually nagging him?
- Do I want my marriage to look like Christ and the church?
- Do I want my marriage to be an example to the lost world of Christ's love for His church?
- Do I want my marriage to be an example of the gospel?