



## **Mutual submission, mutual respect: Reciprocal *enkanyit* in Ephesians 5 in the Maasai context**

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### **Abstract**

In Ephesians 5:21, Paul enjoins all Christians to live in mutual submission to each other out of reverence for Christ. In the verses that follow, Paul describes what this mutual submission should look like in practice. Some interpreters neglect the intimate connection which Eph 5:22–6:9 shares with the preceding verses in chapter 5. Indeed, the mutual submission of verse 21 is not only the conclusion of the 5:1–21 but is the foundation and title of 5:21–6:9. Failure to recognize this has led some to mock the very idea of mutual submission between husbands and wives. In the real world, this too often serves to justify unjust oppression and silencing of women within the Church. This article attempts to correct these errors. It also examines these issues in the context of Maasai culture and the traditional Maasai value of *enkanyit* (honour, mutual respect). A more careful exegesis of Ephesians 5 demonstrates that mutual submission provides the way for relational harmony between husbands and wives.

### **Keywords**

*mutual submission, mutual respect, Ephesians 5:22, gender, Maasai*

I have been blessed by the opportunity to assist The Bible Society of Kenya with its recent revision of the Maa Bible translation (henceforth BSM-1991 for the first edition and BSM-2018 for the corrected edition); Maa is the Nilotic language of the Maasai people of Kenya and Tanzania. As I was checking Ephesians 5 in BSM-1991, I was struck by how the translation of 5:22 follows the English RSV rather than Paul's Greek. "*Wives, submit! obey! be subject! be subordinate!*" sounds authoritarian and oppressive, whereas Paul's words in context are part of a liberating text full of hope. Traditionally, Maasai elders hold *enkitoria* (ruling authority) regarding

societal and family issues, but Maasai women retain *enkitoria* within the house. Thus, while a woman will incline her head as a sign of *enkanyit* (respect, honour) to all men of her husband's age and older, traditionally a degree of mutual *enkanyit* was shared between husbands and wives. During the colonial period, much of that egalitarian mutuality came to be replaced with harsher forms of patriarchy. This reading of *submit! obey! be subject!* serves to further oppress women, contrary to Paul's purposes. The disjunction between the Greek text and the translations led me to devote time to careful exegetical examination of Ephesians 5:15–33. In my reading, I have discovered *irorei oo lomom supati* ("words of good news") for Maasai believers, and especially for Maasai wives and husbands. I offer this study to further develop this exegesis for the benefit of the Maasai churches.

### Setting the scene, focusing the scope, and hermeneutical methodology

We (i.e., contemporary readers of and listeners to Scripture) typically understand the NT vice and virtue lists as *prescriptive*. Carousing, debauchery, sexual immorality? No! Don't do those things! Love, joy, peace, patience? Yes! Practice those things! But I propose that these lists are primarily *descriptive*. Carousing, debauchery, sexual immorality? No, that's not what life in Jesus looks like. Don't act that way because it is incompatible with godliness and your faith in Christ. Kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, self-control? Now that's what a Spirit-filled life looks like! The more closely we walk in/with/by the Spirit, the more the virtue lists will become descriptions of our own lives. In other words, the virtue lists propose the form of behaviour which should be (or at least which should become) normative for those who follow Christ – whether for the first recipients of the NT texts or later followers of Jesus down through the centuries.

Wives, be subject to your husbands, as to the Lord (RSV).

Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord (ESV).

Wake wawatii waume zao kama kumtii Bwana (Swahili)<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> The main verb in the Swahili is *kama* ("obey").

Na kituaak, entoning ilpayiani linyi, anaa eninkoko Olaitoriani.  
(Maa, BSM-1991).

Ephesians 5:22 proves a source of contention among contemporary Christians. Grammatically in these translations it seems that wives are commanded, prescriptively, to submit to their husbands in this verse. But this is not the case in the Greek text, as we shall see below. Woodenly, the Maa in BSM-1991 back translates as “O wives, obey” (second person plural imperative) “your husbands just as in the manner in which you would the Lord.” Thus BSM-2018’s rendering – *Nakituaak, entoning ilpayiani linyi anaa enining’ining’i Olaitoriani* (O wives, obey your husbands just as you obey the Lord) – represents a regression rather than a correction, adding the verb for “obey” in the imperative, emphasising (unlike Paul) the required subjugation of wives.<sup>2</sup> All believers, starting in 5:15, are commanded to carefully examine how they live, to not be unwise, to understand the Lord’s will, to not get drunk with wine, and to be filled with the Spirit. Verses 19 and following are descriptive: they are delineating the appearance of a Spirit-filled life. If we are Spirit-filled, then we will be speaking to each other, singing, and psalming in our collective heart (singular), always giving thanks, and submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ. So what does this verse mean? Moreover, how should its meaning be appropriated by Christians today? That is, what should Christians do as a result of understanding this text?

Editors, translators, and commentators often disagree where paragraph divisions should be made in biblical texts. But there is a broad scholarly consensus that oŵv in Ephesians 5:1 marks a new section as readers are exhorted to “be imitators of God” and to “walk in love,” with a series of specific descriptions starting in verse three which parse out just what that should look like in practice. Likewise, there is general agreement that 5:15 begins a new section of a more general exhortation.<sup>3</sup> Scholarship and

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2 Unfortunately, the exegesis represented in this paper failed to sway those members of the translation committee which held veto power (church hierarchies of two influential denominations).

3 E.g. Ernest Best, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Ephesians*, International Critical Commentary (London: T & T Clark, 1998), 501; F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 378. Andrew T. Lincoln comments

traditions are divided as to whether 5:21 – ὑποτασσόμενοι ἀλλήλοις ἐν φόβῳ Χριστοῦ – marks the end of this section, the beginning of the *Haustafeln* that continues through 6:9, or serves both functions simultaneously, linking the two sections together and providing the *Haustafeln* with its overarching context. BSM-1991 and BSM-2018 each treat 5:21–33 as a unit, providing the standard Bible Society-provided editorial subheading of “Inkituaak o lpayiani lenye” (Wives and their husbands). I find that the grammar indicates that verses 21–22 are the continuation of the prior, longer sentence. Ephesians 5:22–6:9 is composed of illustrations of what mutual submission should look like in the Church – within a marriage, between parents and children, and between slaves and masters.<sup>4</sup> I will limit my focus primarily to the verses discussing spousal relationships, but the grammar of the passage demands that I address some questions throughout 5:18–33, with occasional reference to the broader context.

“There is no such thing as a neutral reading of the text ...”<sup>5</sup>

We must always be on our guard against eisegesis. It is all too easy to read into the text the meanings which we wish to find there and then develop elaborate systems to “prove from the Bible” that our conclusions – which are frequently our presumptions – are correct. In our contemporary time and contexts, it is impossible to avoid a number of gaps between us and the biblical texts – chronological, cultural, geographic, and linguistic. The careful use of grammar and semantics together with an understanding of these four areas of distance between ourselves and the original audiences of the biblical texts can help us to bridge these gaps. As a caveat to myself, I here recall my favourite patristic phrase – ὡς ἐφικτὸν (insofar as possible); these tools are helpful, but their use is fallible. Moreover, these gaps cannot be bridged completely. Because my primary ministry context being in East Africa among the Maasai, it is fitting that I attempt to use “methods that

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on 5:15–20 as a pericope, noting its beginning marked “by yet another use of the verb περιπατεῖν ... in the opening exhortation” and designates verses 21–33 as the next unit. *Ephesians*, World Biblical Commentary 42 (Dallas, Texas: Word, 1990), 338, 351–352. S. M. Baugh entitles his chapter dealing with Ephesians 5.15–21 “A Summarizing Exhortation to the Whole Church,” *Ephesians*, Evangelical Exegetical Commentary (Bellingham, Washington: Lexham Press, 2016), 442ff.

4 Cp. Baugh, *Ephesians*, 446.

5 Elizabeth Mburu, *African Hermeneutics* (Nairobi: HippoBooks, 2019), 212.

are culturally informed and yet faithful to biblical tradition.”<sup>6</sup> Inspired by Justin Ukpong,<sup>7</sup> as an insider-outsider I make use of a “traditional” exegetical method, being especially concerned with the text itself and its original context, but I will also try to listen with intercultural sensitivity to “ordinary readers”, with a concern for contextual appropriation for the Maasai of East Africa. Like Zephania Shila Nkesela,<sup>8</sup> I combine the “reading with” hermeneutic of Gerald O. West and Musa Dube<sup>9</sup> with the more transformational approach of Sarojini Nadar<sup>10</sup> due to my commitment to promote “life-promoting” rather than “life-denying” interpretations of Scripture.<sup>11</sup>

### The epistolary context of Ephesians 5:21–6:9

There is a uniform consensus that this section is a *Haustafeln* for the churches of Ephesus. These household codes were well-known in the Roman and Hellenistic worlds and would have been familiar to Paul’s readers. (I shall refer to the author of Ephesians as “Paul;” a discussion of questions of authorship are beyond the scope of this article.<sup>12</sup>) But why

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6 U. C. Manus, *Intercultural Hermeneutics in Africa*, (Nairobi: Acton Publishers, 2003), 2.

7 E.g., Justin S. Ukpong, “Rereading the Bible with African Eyes: Inculturation and Hermeneutics,” *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 91 (1995): 3–14.

8 Zephania Shila Nkesela, *A Maasai Encounter with the Bible: Nomadic Lifestyle as a Hermeneutic Question*, *Bible and Theology in Africa* 30 (New York: Peter Lang, 2020), 50–57.

9 E.g., Gerald O. West, “Locating ‘Contextual Bible Study’ within biblical liberation hermeneutics and intercultural biblical hermeneutics,” *HTS Theologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 70/1 (2014): Article #2641, 10 pages; Gerald O. West, “African Biblical Scholarship as Post-Colonial, Tri-Polar, and a Site-of-Struggle,” in *Present and Future of Biblical Studies: Celebrating 25 Years of Brill’s Biblical Interpretation*, edited by Tat-siong Benny Liew, 240–273 (Leiden: Brill, 2018); Musa W. Dube, “Current Issues in Biblical Interpretation,” Chapter 3 in *Theological Education in Contemporary Africa*, edited by Grant LeMarquand and Joseph D. Galago (Limuru, Kenya: Zapf Chancery Publishers Africa, 2004), 39–61.

10 E.g., Sarojini Nadar, “Beyond the ‘ordinary reader’ and the ‘invisible intellectual’: Shifting Contextual Bible Study from Liberation Discourse to Liberation Pedagogy,” *Old Testament Essays* 2, no.2 (2009): 384–403.

11 *Ibid.*, 392.

12 For a variety of reasons, many modern scholars have concluded that Ephesians cannot have been written by Paul. Lynn H. Cohick notes that the concerns which lead to Pauline authorship being questioned – e.g., questions of grammar, terminology, ecclesiology,

did Paul include this *Haustafeln* in Ephesians? In Ephesians 1–2, Paul has explicated important theological truths about the nature of salvation in Christ.<sup>13</sup> In chapters 3 and 4, his burden “is to help believers live out their salvation. He begins in the church, explaining the importance of gifts for building up the community. Next, he contrasts the Gentile way of life, the life of debauchery, idolatry, greed, and selfishness witnessed in the marketplace and the temples, with the godly life in the Spirit.”<sup>14</sup> Andrew F. Walls speaks of the tripartite nature of Christian conversion, the turning to Christ of the believer in social life, family life, and intellectual life.<sup>15</sup> Ephesians 1 and 2 deal with the conversion of intellectual life. Chapters 3 and 4 deal with the conversion of social life. In chapter 5, Paul takes up the conversion of family life, in the context of Roman and Hellenistic households. Paul writes in a context where patriarchalism,<sup>16</sup> not mere

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soteriology, etc., in comparison with the undisputed Pauline corpus – “should not be dismissed lightly,” and I heartily agree; Cohick, *Ephesians*, 5. Nonetheless, she goes on to conclude that such legitimate concerns “are capable of interpretation in a way that holds to Pauline authorship. Moreover, postulating a deutero-Pauline status for Ephesians does not solve all problems; indeed, it can create new ones .... In the end, I suggest the balance of the evidence weighs on the side of Pauline authorship ....” Ibid. See also the lengthy discussion concluding in favour of Pauline authorship on “Authorship of Ephesians” in Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 2–61, with which Craig S. Keener concurs in “Slaves and slaveholders – Ephesians 6:5–9,” Bible Background: Research and Commentary by Dr. Craig Keener, 17 October 2013, accessed 5 June 2019, <http://www.craigkeener.com/slaves-and-slaveholders-ephesians-65-9/>. Finding the arguments of Cohick, Hoehner, and Keener to be cogent, although I acknowledge the lack of scholarly consensus, I will proceed under the assumption that Ephesians is authentically Pauline.

13 For convenience, I am following commentators who consider chapters 1–2 and 3–4 as literary and semantic units. Many commentators, however, divide this epistle into two primary sections, 1:3–3:21 and 4:1–6:20. E.g., see Bruce, *The Epistles*, 247–248. This question is, however, peripheral to my focus on 5:18–33.

14 Lynn H. Cohick, *Ephesians, A New Covenant Commentary* (Cambridge: The Lutterworth Press, 2013), 127–128.

15 Andrew F. Walls, “New Testament Background of Conversion” (PhD seminar, Word Christianity 970: Culture and Conversion, Centre for World Christianity, Nairobi Evangelical Graduate School of Theology, Africa International University 12 March 2018). See also his essay “Worldviews and Christian Conversion,” chapter 3 in *Crossing Cultural Frontiers: Studies in the History of World Christianity*, edited by Mark R. Gornik, 35–48 (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2017). An earlier version of this essay appeared as chapter 11 in *Mission in Context: Explorations Inspired by J. Andrew Kirk*, edited by John Corrie and Cathy Ross (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2012).

16 The more common term *patriarchal* means simply “having to do with patriarchy.” This could simply refer to the biblical idea of a husband and father serving as head (κεφαλῆ) of his family. (Note that I say *servicing* and not *lording*; issues of interpreting

patriarchy, is assumed. Here in Ephesians 5, Paul is “concerned that the Ephesians do not assimilate or mimic the surrounding culture, but rather implicitly critique it by living out the demands of the gospel. He configures the argument to make obvious that a Spirit-led life is not bound to the social constructions established in this present age.”<sup>17</sup> Importantly, “Paul frames” this *Haustafeln* “with mutual submission in 5:21 and 6:29”<sup>18</sup> – all 6:9 of Paul’s instructions here take place in the context of mutual submission. This is all highly subversive and strongly challenges the status quo.

## Background: The Biblical witness for gender relationships

God created humankind<sup>19</sup> in his own image, in the image of God he created them, male and female he created them. (Gen 1:27, NET).

Likewise, Paul stresses that *there is neither male nor female in Christ Jesus* (Galatians 3:28). Male humans and female humans are equally made in God’s image; in spite of occasional claims to the contrary it is wrong to claim that men were made in God’s image, but women were merely made in man’s image. For example, Augustine of Hippo misinterprets 1 Corinthians 11:7 to mean that “not the woman but the man is the image of God” – later repeating that apart from man “she is not the image of God.”<sup>20</sup>

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κεφαλή will be briefly discussed below.) I have chosen to use patriarchy to refer to a particular type of patriarchy which objectifies, devalues, and discriminates against females; *patriarchalistic* is the adjective. Such patriarchy is inherently abusive and unbiblical.

17 Cohick, *Ephesians*, 128.

18 Craig S. Keener, “Mutual Submission Frames the Household Codes,” *Priscilla Papers* 35, no. 3 (2021): 10.

19 “Humankind” here translates the Hebrew אָדָם, which refers not to the individual first male human, Adam, but to “Man” or “Mankind” in the old gender-inclusive sense; currently those terms are no longer understood as inclusive.

20 Augustine of Hippo, *On the Trinity* 12.7.10, trans. Arthur West Haddan, NPNF, 1st Series, ed. Philip Schaff, vol. 3, 17–228 (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1956). Discussing Augustine’s exegesis of *imagine Dei* in Genesis 1 and 2, Kathlyn A. Breazeale explores how when Augustine tried to “reconcile the conflict between Genesis 1:27 (simultaneous creation of male and female) and Genesis 2:7 (Adam created first)” he ultimately concluded that women are naturally inferior to men from eternity (*Mutual Empowerment: A Theology of Marriage, Intimacy, and Redemption* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Fortress Press, 2008), Kindle locations 585–601), citing Augustine, *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, in *Ancient Christian Writers*, vol. 42, ed. Johannes Quasten, Walter J. Burghardt, and Thomas Comerford Lawler, trans. John

But Paul's reference to men *existing in the state of* (ὑπάρχων) God's image does not exclude women: both men and women exist in the state of bearing God's image. Paul does ruminate that Man reflects God's glory whereas Woman reflects Man's glory. This could mean that men (and not women) reflect God's glory OR that men reflect God's glory and women reflect both God's glory AND man's glory. Regardless, Paul is not refuting the plain statement of Genesis 1:26.

Andrew Walls stresses the importance of “the Ephesians moment” in World Christianity, in which the “dividing wall of hostility” (Ephesians 2:14) between different ethno-cultural and linguistic groups is broken down within the Church.<sup>21</sup> Moving from chapter two to chapter five, it is appropriate to speak of another “Ephesian's moment” specifically related to gender relations. Most English translations render Ephesians 5:22 as “Wives, submit to your husbands” where “submit” is imperatival, a command. Some really love this verse (not infrequently men who want to be domineering over women) while others really hate this verse (sometimes those who know that men should *not* be domineering and sometimes people who dislike the language of the husband being “head”). But both groups misunderstand this verse because this whole passage is frequently mistranslated. In Ephesians 5:22 wives are not commanded, prescriptively, to submit or to be subordinated to their husbands. All believers are commanded to carefully examine how they live and not be unwise (verse 15), to understand the Lord's will (verse 17), to not get drunk with wine (verse 18a), and to be filled with the Spirit (verse 18b). Verses 19 and following are descriptive: they describe what a Spirit-filled life looks like.

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Hammond Taylor (New York: Newman, 1982), VI, 182–85 and IX, 75. Augustine was admittedly brilliant, but this is a gross (and convoluted) eisegesis, possibly attributable either to his accepting Greek philosophical premises as a given or to a residual influence of his former Manichaean dualism.

21 “The Ephesians Moment,” chapter 4 in *The Cross-Cultural Process in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission and Appropriation of Faith*, 72–84 (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002); “The Ephesians Moment in Worldwide Worship: A Meditation on Revelation 21 and Ephesians 2,” in *Christian Worship Worldwide: Expanding Horizons, Deepening Practices*, edited by Charles E. Farhadian (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2007).



## Ephesians 5:21–22: Textual concerns

(21) ὑποτασσόμενοι ἀλλήλοις ἐν φόβῳ Χριστοῦ,

(22) αἱ γυναῖκες τοῖς ἰδίοις ἀνδράσιν ὡς τῷ κυρίῳ,

There are two things to note immediately. Let us begin with the second. Verse 22 does not contain a verb at all but is dependent on the participle in verse 21. Thus, a literally wooden rendering reads “submitting to one another in fear of Christ, wives to their own husbands as to the Lord.” Most English translations supply a verb here for clarity, whether “submit” or “be subject” or “be subordinate;” in this they follow the Latin Vulgate which reads “mulieres viris suis subditae” (*let women be subject to their husbands*). A majority of manuscripts add a form of ὑποτάσσω to v. 22 but are not at all consistent. The best manuscripts here lack a verb, as Nestle-Aland’s critical apparatus indicates.<sup>22</sup> As we will see, the lack of a direct imperative in this verse, taken together with the lack of any form of ὑποτάσσω being directly and specifically applied to wives, can only be deliberate and is quite significant.

Now let us return to the first thing that stands out in the quoted text – whereas NA28 places a period at the end of 5:20 and capitalizes Ὑποτασσόμενοι, I place a comma and have ὑποτασσόμενοι in lower case. NA28’s choice places 5:21 as the heading of the *Haustafeln* which follows. This does serve to bolster the claim that verse 22 is a specific example of what ὑποτασσόμενοι looks like for wives and delimits whatever ὑποτάσσω means here to the context of ὑποτασσόμενοι *to one another*. But it makes it easy for exegetes to divorce verse 21 from its preceding context, as is often done. This is particularly troubling because the participle ὑποτασσόμενοι is dependent on a main verb, the imperative πληροῦσθε in verse 18. While some exegetes take the αἱ γυναῖκες (a nominative of address rather than a

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22 *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 28th Revised Edition, ed. Barbara and Kurt Aland, Johannes Karavidopoulos, Carlo M. Martini, and Bruce M. Metzger in cooperation with the Institute for New Testament Textual Research, Münster/Westphalia (Stuttgart, Germany: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2012); frequently abbreviated as *Nestle-Aland* or NA28. Most critical commentaries include a discussion on this point. The “translators’ notes” for this verse in the NET (New English Translation) are particularly clear while remaining thorough and cogent. Given the broad scholarly consensus on this point, there is no need for me to repeat the arguments here.

vocative form) in 5:22 as indicating the beginning of a new paragraph,<sup>23</sup> I join a number of scholars in identifying 5:21 as the head of the following *Haustafeln* pericope.<sup>24</sup> The strongest resistance to this reading may come from the editors of popular English translations. Craig S. Keener notes that

Sometimes 5:21 is translated as if it begins a new section only incidentally related to the preceding section: “Submit to one another.” But it is more likely that the Greek phrase “submitting to one another” retains here its usual force in the context of the parallel phrases that precede it: a subordinate participial clause dependent on the preceding imperative. [Thus] the submission of 5:21, like the worship of 5:19–20, flows from being filled with God’s Spirit (v. 18).<sup>25</sup>

This verse is transitional, equally related “both to the exhortation to be filled with the Spirit and to the Household Code”<sup>26</sup> which follows. Thus verse 21 links “writer’s appeal to the whole community and his advice to specific groups within it. If believers are filled with the Spirit, this should manifest itself in their mutual submission.”<sup>27</sup>

### Ephesians 5:18–22: Textual concerns

(18) καὶ μὴ μεθύσκεσθε οἴνῳ, ἐν ᾧ ἐστὶν ἀσωτία, ἀλλὰ πληροῦσθε ἐν πνεύματι,

(19) λαλοῦντες ἑαυτοῖς [ἐν] ψαλμοῖς καὶ ὕμνοις καὶ ᾠδαῖς πνευματικαῖς, ᾄδοντες καὶ ψάλλοντες τῇ καρδίᾳ ὑμῶν τῷ κυρίῳ,

23 E.g., Benjamin L. Merkle, *Ephesians*, The Exegetical Guide to the New Testament, edited by Andreas J. Köstenberger and Robert W. Yarbrough (Nashville, Tennessee: B&H Academic, 2016), 181–182; Paul J. Sampley, *And the Two Shall Become One Flesh: A Study of Traditions in Ephesians 5:21–33* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971).

24 Alan G. Padgett, *As Christ Submits to the Church: A Biblical Understanding of Leadership and Mutual Submission* (Grand Rapids, Baker Academic: 2011), 60–62.

25 Craig S. Keener, *Paul, Women and Wives: Marriage and Women’s Ministry in the Letters of Paul* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012), Kindle locations 2570–2575.

26 Thomas R. Yoder Neufeld, *Ephesians*, Believers Church Bible Commentary, ed. Elmer A. Martens and Willard M. Swartley (Waterloo, Ontario: Herald Press, 2002), 243.

27 Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 365.

(20) εὐχαριστοῦντες πάντοτε ὑπὲρ πάντων ἐν ὀνόματι τοῦ κυρίου  
ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ τῷ θεῷ καὶ πατρί,

(21) ὑποτασσόμενοι ἀλλήλοις ἐν φόβῳ Χριστοῦ,

(22) αἱ γυναῖκες τοῖς ἰδίοις ἀνδράσιν ὡς τῷ κυρίῳ,

Other than the interpretive issue of punctuation in 5:21 and the textual critical note on 5:22, this is fairly straightforward. Verse 18 contains two contrasting imperatives – μὴ μεθύσκεσθε οἴνω (“don’t be/get drunk with wine”) and ἀλλὰ πληροῦσθε ἐν πνεύματι (“but rather be filled in/by [the] Spirit”). “Be filled in/by the Spirit” is, grammatically, the ruling verb for 5:18b–21. There follow a series of five participles which provide a paraenetic description of what “being filled in/by the Spirit” looks like: “speaking” (λαλοῦντες), “singing” (ᾄδοντες), and “psalming” (ψάλλοντες) in verse 19; “giving thanks” (εὐχαριστοῦντες) in verse 20, and “submitting to one another” (ὑποτασσόμενοι ἀλλήλοις) in verse 21. Each participle carries an imperatival sense, but they are ruled by the imperative “be filled in/by the Spirit.” Verses 19 through 21 “are grammatically dependent upon the imperative” πληροῦσθε ἐν πνεύματι in verse 18.<sup>28</sup> This is equally true, however, of verse 22, which in Greek is clearly continuation of the prior sentence. The five masculine plural participles are plainly directed to all readers and listeners. While only wives are addressed in verse 22, their instruction is a subset of “submit to one another.” Verse 21 is thus “a transitional verse directed to all members of the audience, as is shown by the use of the masculine participle *hypotassomenoi*,”<sup>29</sup> which connects

28 Yoder Neufeld, *Ephesians*, 227 and 240. See also Lisa Baumert, “Biblical Interpretation and the Epistle to the Ephesians,” *Priscilla Papers* 25/2 (2011), 24; Gordon D. Fee, “Male and Female in the New Creation: Galatians 3:26–29,” in *Discovering Biblical Equality: Complementarity without Hierarchy*, ed. Ronald W. Pierce and Rebecca Merrill Groothuis (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004), 175; Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 729; Keener, *Paul, Women and Wives*, Kindle locations 2570–2575; Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 365; I. Howard Marshall, “Mutual Love and Submission in Marriage: Colossians 3:18–19 and Ephesians 5:21–33,” in *Discovering Biblical Equality*, 196; Stephen Francis Miletic, “One Flesh”: *Eph. 5.22–24, 5.31: Marriage and the New Creation*, *Analeta Biblica* 115 (Rome: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1988), 120; Philip B. Payne, “What about Headship? From Hierarchy to Equality,” chapter 7 in *Mutual by Design: A Better Model of Christian Marriage*, ed. Elizabeth Beyer (Minneapolis, MN: CBE International, 2017), 143–144.

29 Ben Witherington, III, *The Letters to Philemon, the Colossians, and the Ephesians: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on the Captivity Epistles* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans,

what follows – instructions to household members in the *Haustafeln* – with what comes before. The lack of a verb in verse 22 makes this plain.

### Being filled with the Spirit: Ephesians 5:18–21

The command to be filled with the Spirit in verse 18 appears in antithetical parallelism to the command to not be drunk with wine. As the readers and listeners of the letter have already been instructed “to walk ... as wise” (5:15) and to not “be foolish” (v. 16), “being filled with the Spirit is linked with wisdom” and recalls OT wisdom teachings on how the wise will “walk.”<sup>30</sup> Again, this command – “be filled with the Spirit” – is the ruling imperative of this entire passage. Earlier in chapter 5, Paul has instructed us to “walk as children of the light” (verse 8) and to “take no part in ... works of darkness.” “Making the most of every opportunity,” believers are to “walk wisely”

by understanding the will of the Lord by means of being filled by the Spirit. The resultant characteristics of this filling are described by the five participles, the last of which is submission to one another in the fear of Christ (5:21).<sup>31</sup>

Thus “Spirit-filled nonconformity finds expression in worship, in mutual instruction, in the praise and thanksgiving of God, and in mutual subordination (5:19–21).”<sup>32</sup> What is meant by this mutual submission (or mutual subordination)? How should such mutual submission be lived out?

### Mutual submission: Ephesians 5:21–22

(21) ὑποτασσόμενοι ἀλλήλοις ἐν φόβῳ Χριστοῦ,

(22) αἱ γυναῖκες τοῖς ἰδίοις ἀνδράσιν ὡς τῷ κυρίῳ,

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2007), 316.

30 Andre as J. Köstenberger, “What Does It Mean to Be Filled with the Spirit? A Biblical Investigation,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 40, no.2 (1997): 232. An examination of these intertextual connections, however, remain beyond the scope of this paper.

31 Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 729.

32 Yoder Neufeld, *Ephesians*, 227.

If we are Spirit-filled, we will be speaking to each other, singing and “psalming” in our collective heart (singular), always giving thanks, and submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ. What does such submission look like? It includes the observation that wives will be submitting to their own husbands just as they would to the Lord. (It is important to reiterate that this is not telling *all* women to submit to *all* men – rather, each wife is assumed to be submitting to her own husband, not to other men to whom she is not married.) But all of these verbs, participial in form, describe what happens when the command to be filled with the Spirit is kept. Wives are not given another command, “submit to your husbands.” Biblical scholar Richard B. Hays comments on Ephesians 5:21:

The emphasis here on mutuality is striking. In contrast to a patriarchal culture that would assume a one-way hierarchical ordering of the husband’s authority over the wife, Paul carefully prescribes *mutual submission*.<sup>33</sup>

Not only is the verb descriptive rather than imperative, grammatically, but also it is directed to wives implicitly rather than explicitly. A verb for “submit” nowhere occurs in the imperative in this passage. Though participles can carry an imperatival sense, this distinction matters. Thus, the traditional English translation of 5:22 – “Wives, submit to your husbands” – can be questioned. Certainly patriarchalist interpretations of the verse should be questioned.

Confronted with this, some patriarchalists dismiss “the oxymoronic fallacy of mutual submission” and insist that “the word for ‘submission’ is hierarchical and by definition excludes mutual” as they eisegetically go to great lengths to explain away the phrase “to one another”<sup>34</sup> – it must

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33 Richard B. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: Community, Cross, New Creation: A Contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethic* (New York: HarperCollins, 1996), 49–50; emphasis those of Hays.

34 So Jack Cottrell, personal remarks, August 2018. Cottrell was Professor of Theology at Cincinnati Christian University from 1967–2015. A member of the US-based complementarian organization Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood, he is fervently (even vitriolically) opposed to feminism and postmodernism, e.g., see *Gender Roles and the Bible: Creation, the Fall, and Redemption: A Critique of Feminist Biblical Interpretation* (Joplin, Missouri: College Press, 1994) and *Headship, Submission, and the Bible: Gender Roles in the Home* (Joplin, Missouri: College Press, 2008). Professor

mean something else, for the hierarchy must be protected! I jest, but ὑποτασσόμενοι ἀλλήλοις cannot be ignored. Countering the arguments of Grudem and Piper, Dawes explains that “the idea of ‘mutual subordination’ is no more contradictory than the demand of Phil. 2:3 that Christians should ‘in humility regard others (also ἀλλήλους) as better’ than themselves.”<sup>35</sup> Hays notes that “Paul offers a paradigm-shattering vision of marriage as a relationship in which the partners are bonded together in submission to one another.”<sup>36</sup> Whatever is meant by ὑποτάσσω here, it is clear that the action is mutual, that when believers are filled with the Spirit, they are ὑποτασσόμενοι specifically to each other (ἀλλήλοις). Paul’s consistent use of ἀλλήλους in Ephesians 4 (vv. 2, 25, 32) clearly establishes “a presumption in favor of its use here for church members in general.”<sup>37</sup> It is also clear that what ὑποτασσόμενοι means in verse 21, it also means in verse 22 – “it is not a gender-specific activity.”<sup>38</sup> In Ephesians 5:21, the result of believers being filled ἐν the Holy Spirit “is mutual submission.”<sup>39</sup> This

call to mutual subordination in verse 21 is usually taken to be part of the following section on the Household Code, as it should be. However, 5:21 depends grammatically on the command to be filled with the Spirit in 5:18. This means that the call to mutual subordination is premised upon divine empowerment. In this context mutual subordination is an essential part of the intoxicating worship that results from being “drunk” with the Spirit of God (5:18) and should thus be treated also as part of this section of text.<sup>40</sup>

Arnold recognizes that this “mutual submission is not just the result of Spirit-filling; it is the prerequisite to the reception of grace from the Spirit-

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Cottrell and I had a lengthy exchange in a forum composed of preachers/pastors, professors, and missionaries.

35 Gregory W. Dawes, *The Body in Question: Metaphor and Meaning in the Interpretation of Ephesians 5:21–33*, Biblical Interpretation Series 30, ed. R. Alan Culpepper and Rolf Rendtorff (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 213–214.

36 Payne, “What about Headship?,” 146, with reference to Richard B. Hays.

37 Marshall, “Mutual Love and Submission,” 197.

38 Witherington, *The Letters to Philemon, the Colossians, and the Ephesians*, 317.

39 Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 717. Similarly, Lynn Cohick notes that “Paul connects through the use of participles his insistence on life in the Spirit with his discussion about submission” (*Ephesians*, 136).

40 Yoder Neufeld, *Ephesians*, 227.

endowed members of the body.”<sup>41</sup> Tellingly, he first discusses “Ephesians 5.15–21” and then discusses “Ephesians 5.18, 21–33,” recognizing that verses 22–33 are dependent upon verse 18 and that verse 21 is the linchpin between the two subsections.<sup>42</sup>

We can recognize “an inherent irony in being subordinate to each other. If everyone is a slave of the other, then everyone is also a master. It is this irony that the choice of vocabulary exploits.”<sup>43</sup> While ὑποτάσσω etymologically denotes “to order under,” it can mean “to subject” in the sense of “to vanquish” in the indicative and

in the middle form, likely here, it means “to place oneself under the other” ... In Hellenistic culture, such servility [was] generally not ... a virtue. ... mutuality saves this call to *subordination* from idealizing servility and self-denigration and from locking in place a rigid hierarchy of power and status. Such subordination is envisioned as a corporate experience: *Place yourselves under each other* ...<sup>44</sup>

While the participle ὑποτασσόμενοι can be taken as either in the middle or passive voices, the context makes the middle voice, *subordinate yourselves* or “submit yourselves,” preferable.<sup>45</sup> As “subordination” can imply inferiority, perhaps “submission” is a better term and its application in mutual submission to one another would imply that one is willing to submit to those who have authority, whether it be in the home, church, or in society.”<sup>46</sup>

Importantly, this instruction to submit is not absolute. First, as we have seen, all believers are to submit to each other. Secondly, this mutual submission takes place in the delimited context of ἐν φόβῳ Χριστοῦ. This φόβος does not here mean “fear” in the sense of being afraid – like an antelope fears a

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41 Clinton E. Arnold, *Ephesians*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament 10 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 335.

42 Ibid., 341–410.

43 Yoder Neufeld, *Ephesians*, 244.

44 Ibid., 243–244.

45 So Arnold, *Ephesians*, 357; Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 717; and Cohick, 136–137. Against this view, Dawes finds it best to read as a passive participle – “be subordinated” (*The Body in Question*, 207–208).

46 Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 717.

lion – but refers to deep reverential respect. Mutual submission is a sign of mutual respect. This respect is not the fear that an inferior has of a superior but is rather based on the reverence which is due all Christians to Christ our Lord. In the context of the mutuality of this shared respect for Christ, perhaps the intended “sense of ὑποτάσσεσθαι is that of surrendering one’s own will in regard to the other.”<sup>47</sup> This seems to be John Chrysostom’s understanding when he asks,

What kind of marriage can there be when the wife is afraid of her husband? What sort of satisfaction could a husband have, if he lives with his wife as if she were a slave, and not a woman by her own free will? Suffer anything for her sake, but never disgrace her for Christ never did this with the church.<sup>48</sup>

Failure to mutually submit to each other is not only contrary to being filled with the Spirit but is also failure to give reverential respect to Christ.

It is important to note the foundational context of this call for mutual submission. The first occurrence of the verb ὑποτάσσω in Ephesians comes in 1:22. Paul first reminds his readers that Christ has been raised from the dead (1:20) by the Father (1:17). Next, he states that God then placed all things in submission under the feet (πάντα ὑπέταξεν ὑπὸ τοὺς πόδας) of Christ and gave Christ to the Church as head (κεφαλή) over all things (1:22). It is only in this context of all being placed in submission to Christ that the description of those who “walk in the Spirit” is given: the expected behaviour of mutual submission to one another.

### **Maasai mutuality: Ephesians 5:21–22**

Verse 22 is a specific case of what mutual submission of all believers to each other in fear of Christ, male and female, husbands, and wives, means for

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<sup>47</sup> Dawes, *The Body in Question*, 225.

<sup>48</sup> John Chrysostom, “Homily 20 on Ephesians 5:22–33,” in *On Marriage and Family Life*, trans. Catherine P. Roth and David Anderson (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1986), 47. Qtd. in Kelvin F. Mutter, “Ephesians 5:21–33 as Christian Alternative Discourse,” *Trinity Journal* 39, no.1 (2018): 18.



wives with respect to their husbands.<sup>49</sup> In the Maasai context, the words of verse 22 are particularly striking. It is amazing enough that *all* are to submit to each other (verse 21) – regardless of age set or social status or sex – in reverential respect of Christ. But note that the description for women specifies “the wives τοῖς ἰδίοις ἀνδράσιν (to *their own* husbands) as to the Lord.” Within the culture of the Maasai, all women are expected to submit to all men, often even to those the age of their own sons. If a woman is found to be shirking her work, any man who comes along is in the right to beat her. Once a boy has been circumcised, usually between the ages of 13 and 17 but occasionally as early as 9, he will no longer bow his head in respect to his mother – he is now her superior! These small words – τοῖς ἰδίοις – place a revolutionary restriction on the exercise of authority in the relationship of Maasai men and women, at least for Christians. A wife should respect her husband; this is a given. But she need not be subordinate to all men everywhere.<sup>50</sup> Paul’s observation that Spirit-filled people will engage in mutual submission toward one another is even more revolutionary. Verse 21 teaches that “submission and obedience to Christ should govern all our relationships and responsibilities at home and at work” and are the context for what follows through verse 6:9.<sup>51</sup> This is a liberating word. It is liberating because being filled with the Spirit brings “a power which frees the wife and husband from the dehumanizing power struggle of the ‘ruler/ruled’ and ‘stronger/weaker’ patriarchal and androcentric social dynamics.”<sup>52</sup> It

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49 Craig S. Keener notes: “when Paul calls on wives to submit in Ephesians 5:22, he presents this as a particular example of the submission of all believers to one another in 5:21;” *Paul, Women, and Wives*, Kindle Locations 2559–2560.

50 This is my own exegesis, but it is confirmed by a number of commentators. E.g., Merkle, *Ephesians*, 183. Baugh states that Paul does not “tell women to be in submission to *men* – but *wives* to their own *husbands* only. Believers of both sexes are equally created in God’s image (Gen 1:26–28) and are heirs of eternal life together by faith in Christ (Gal 3:28–29) as “fellow heirs, fellow body members, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel” (3:6). This comes out clearly from 5:18–19, where women are included in the new-covenant priesthood who also make up the NT choir for song and praise to God.” Baugh, *Ephesians*, 478.

51 Yusufu Turaki, “Ephesians,” in *Africa Bible Commentary: A One-Volume Commentary Written by 70 African Scholars*, edited by Tokunboh Adeyemo et al., 1423–1438 (Nairobi: Word Alive Publishers, 2006; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 1436.

52 Miletic, *One Flesh*, 120.

restores the traditional *enkanyit* (“mutual respect”), so important in Maa culture, to relationships between men and women, husbands, and wives.<sup>53</sup>

### Spirit-filled mutual submission: Ephesians 5:23–25, 28–29, 33<sup>54</sup>

(23) ὅτι ἀνὴρ ἐστὶν κεφαλὴ τῆς γυναικὸς  
ὡς καὶ ὁ Χριστὸς κεφαλὴ τῆς ἐκκλησίας,  
αὐτὸς σωτὴρ τοῦ σώματος·

(24) ἀλλ’ ὡς ἡ ἐκκλησία ὑποτάσσεται τῷ Χριστῷ,  
οὕτως καὶ αἱ γυναῖκες τοῖς ἀνδράσιν ἐν παντί.

(25) Οἱ ἄνδρες, ἀγαπᾶτε τὰς γυναῖκας,  
καθὼς καὶ ὁ Χριστὸς ἠγάπησεν τὴν ἐκκλησίαν  
καὶ ἑαυτὸν παρέδωκεν ὑπὲρ αὐτῆς, ...

(28) οὕτως ὀφείλουσιν [καὶ] οἱ ἄνδρες ἀγαπᾶν τὰς ἑαυτῶν γυναῖκας  
ὡς τὰ ἑαυτῶν σώματα. ὁ ἀγαπῶν τὴν ἑαυτοῦ γυναῖκα ἑαυτὸν ἀγαπᾷ.

(29) Οὐδεὶς γάρ ποτε τὴν ἑαυτοῦ σάρκα ἐμίσησεν ἀλλ’ ἐκτρέφει καὶ  
θάλπει αὐτήν, καθὼς καὶ ὁ Χριστὸς τὴν ἐκκλησίαν, ...

(33) πλὴν καὶ ὑμεῖς οἱ καθ’ ἓνα, ἕκαστος τὴν ἑαυτοῦ γυναῖκα οὕτως  
ἀγαπάτω ὡς ἑαυτόν, ἡ δὲ γυνὴ ἵνα φοβῆται τὸν ἄνδρα.

Starting in 5:23, Paul explains why each wife must have a submissive posture toward her husband in the context of the imperative *be filled with the Spirit* in verse 18,<sup>55</sup> based on the husband being κεφαλὴ of his wife just as Christ is κεφαλὴ of the Church. What does this mean? What are the real-life implications and consequences of that meaning? Patriarchalists and radical feminists alike interpret this to mean that men are the head and therefore superior and women are the tail and therefore inferior. Most complementarian and patriarchalist commentators take κεφαλὴ as a term primarily indicative of authority, such that those who are not the “head”

53 Dorothy L. Hodgson, *Once Intrepid Warriors: Gender, Ethnicity, and the Cultural Politics of Maasai Development* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), 26.

54 For reasons of scope and length, I will not examine verses 26–27 and 30–32.

55 This is abundantly clear from the context. Cp. Payne, “What about Headship?,” 143–144.

– that is, women – are inherently subservient.<sup>56</sup> Others, including many egalitarians, argue that κεφαλή has the sense of “source.”<sup>57</sup> Richard S. Cervin argues that Paul, throughout his corpus, intends κεφαλή as a literal “head;” where a κεφαλή passage contains notions of authority or prominence or pre-eminence, those ideas are based on context rather than ontology, concluding that “neither ‘authority’ nor ‘source’ is the primary meaning of the κεφαλή metaphor throughout Paul’s writings.”<sup>58</sup> Regardless, the metaphor of κεφαλή is not promoting “some sort of ontological hierarchy” because “authority is not what [Paul’s] body metaphors explain.”<sup>59</sup>

While a husband’s headship with relation to his wife is assumed, Paul’s discussion of the nature of that headship is astounding. While it is often argued that in 5:21–33 “Paul provides . . . a theological justification for male leadership,” nonetheless “the paradigm” by which such leadership “should be carried out in Christian marriage” is startlingly “counter to prevailing Roman cultural practices.”<sup>60</sup> Within a Spirit-filled household, the head is not protected and served at all costs. The wife is not told to sacrifice everything for her husband as her head, but rather the reverse! Just as Christ gave up his life for the Church, so a husband must be willing to give up his life for

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56 E.g., Wayne A. Grudem, “The Meaning of Κεφαλη (‘head’): An Evaluation of New Evidence, Real and Alleged,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 44, no.1 (2001): 25–65. Also see Grudem’s “The Meaning of *Kephalē* (Head): A response to Recent Studies,” Appendix 1 in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism*, ed. Wayne Grudem and John Piper (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 1991, 2006), 425–468.

57 E.g., Cynthia Long Westfall, “‘This Is a Great Metaphor!’ Reciprocity in the Ephesians Household Code,” in *Christian Origins and Greco-Roman Culture: Social and Literary Contexts for the New Testament*, 561–597, ed. Stanley E. Porter and Andrew W. Pitts, vol. 1 of *Early Christianity in Its Hellenistic Context*, Texts and Editions for New Testament Study 9, ed. Stanley E. Porter and Wendy Porter (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 579–588; Payne, “What about Headship?,” 146–160; Gordon D. Fee, “Praying and Prophesying in the Assemblies,” chapter 8 in *Discovering Biblical Equality: Complementarity without Hierarchy*, 142–185, ed. Roland W. Pierce and Rebecca Merrill Groothuis, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2005), 350–351; Baumert, “Biblical Interpretation,” 24.

58 Richard S. Cervin, “On the Significance of Κεφαλή (Head): A Study of the Abuse of One Greek Word,” *Missing Voices: Broadening the discussion on men, women, and ministry* (2014), 13.

59 Christy Hemphill, “*Kephalē* is a Body Part: Unified Interdependence in Relationship in Ephesians 5,” *Priscilla Papers* 35, no.2 (2021), 9 and 8.

60 Arnold, *Ephesians*, 409–410.

his wife. This is shocking, for Roman and Greek society expected husbands to rule as master, wives to submit as servants. In asking husbands rather than wives “to love and sacrifice, this reversal would be shocking in light of traditional status conventions because he tells the most honoured part, the head, to perform the duties of the less honoured member.”<sup>61</sup>

As we saw above, Paul mentions the required mutual deference which wives should give their husbands almost as an aside. In Ephesians 5:24, he does reiterate that “as the church submits to Christ, in the same way the wives to their own husbands in everything.” To repeat, the verb ὑποτάσσω nowhere occurs in the imperative in this passage but is always in the indicative. Moreover, it is only ever applied, grammatically speaking, indirectly to wives.

Both men and women in the Church are commanded to

1. *Look carefully* at (or *examine*) how you live (v. 15)
2. *Do not be unwise* (v. 17a), but
3. *understand* (or *perceive*) what the will of the Lord is (v. 17b);
4. And *do not get drunk* with wine (v. 18a)
5. But *be filled* with the Spirit (v. 18b)

Again, women are not given any other command. Both men and women are told that the Spirit-filled life is characterized by submission to Christ. Notably

Paul does not give any command here that applies only to husbands or only to wives. Early church fathers also insisted that submission in the body of Christ is truly mutual, applying to all, even bishops. Origen, Jerome, and Chrysostom confirmed that the wife’s submission is one facet of mutual submission. Mutual submission between husband and wife is both putting themselves at the disposal

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<sup>61</sup> Michelle Lee-Barnes, “Turning Κεφαλή on Its Head: The Rhetoric of Reversal in Ephesians 5:21–33,” in *Christian Origins and Greco-Roman Culture*, 610; also see 608–610.

of the other. It is, according to the most reliable Greek lexicon, mutual “voluntary yielding in love.”<sup>62</sup>

Married women are told that the Spirit-filled life is characterized by submission to their own husbands. But they are not given a “single formal command” of any type in this passage,<sup>63</sup> and furthermore no form of ὑποτάσσω is directly applied to wives, but only indirectly. This may seem minor, but it is an important distinction. On the other hand, men are given an extra command. This command, for each man to love his wife, is given in the context of what it means to be filled with the Spirit. But here Paul switches from using a participial form to using the imperative. Not only that, but Paul even repeats the command a second time (in verse 33). Clearly, this is significant. Moreover, this command, for each man to love his wife is so important that Paul writes several verses to explain that he means “love your wife” just as also Christ loved the Church and gave himself for her. Likewise in verse 28, Paul says that each husband is in fact “obligated” (ὀφείλουσιν) to love his wife.

Many men become upset because they feel that their wife does not respect and honour them.<sup>64</sup> But in this passage we can see that as a natural result each man who keeps this commandment to love his wife will find that now his wife is respecting him. Grammatically, verse 33 tells each man to love (a command) his wife so that (ἵνα) she might then respect him. Paul’s focus here on the responsibilities of husbands is striking. This

focus on the husband is created by emphatically individualizing the third person command for each husband to love his wife as himself and introducing the wife’s obligation as a dependent ἵνα clause of purpose, which makes the wife’s submission dependent on the husband’s behaviour, at least from the husband’s perspective, which is primary here. That is, the husband is responsible for the initiation of the exchange. ... The husband enables or equips the wife to submit by the benefit of his loving service in which he acts as if he

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62 Payne, “What about Headship?,” 142, citing BDAG 1042.

63 Westfall, “This Is a Great Metaphor!,” 576.

64 I have witnessed this equally in America, India, South Africa, and Kenya. It seems a frequent complaint.

has the same status as a woman and treats his wife as the one who holds superior status.<sup>65</sup>

Thus each husband is commanded to love his wife and then, as a result, the wife is able to respect her husband. But from verse 18 through the end of the chapter, the only explicit commands given to married women are “don’t get drunk with wine” and “be filled with the Spirit.” In the context of being filled with the Spirit, a wife will naturally submit to her husband who loves her as Christ loves the Church – but each husband will also submit to his wife as well. Even when using the concept of submission, the Gospel turns abusive patriarchalism over on its head.

### **Appropriations: Ephesians 5:15–33 and inter-gender relationships in Africa**

While the Gospel, and Paul’s presentation of it in this second “Ephesians Moment,” frequently turn cultural expectations upside down, it is clear that it does so in continuity with OT revelation. In Malachi 2:14–15, for example, we are told that “no one who has even a small portion of the Spirit in him” (NET) is unfaithful to his wife.<sup>66</sup> Mercy Oduyoye notes that “whatever is keeping subordination of women alive in the church cannot be the Spirit of God.”<sup>67</sup> Inasmuch as a failure to love one’s wife as Christ loves the Church is a failure of faithfulness, and insofar as one oppresses his wife instead of serving her and building her up, to that degree he has shown that he does not have the Spirit of Christ. Abuse of women and girls, oppression, and repression of people on the grounds of their female sex, is inherently unbiblical and anti-Christian. Machingura recognizes that “as a way of buttressing men’s patriarchal or chauvinistic views, the bible is invoked to remind women about their place and role in society” as “biblical texts like 1 Timothy 2:11–12 can be applied out of context and erroneously

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65 Westfall, “‘This Is a Great Metaphor!’” 595.

66 The rather elliptical Hebrew – וְלֹא־אָהַד וְיִשְׂאָר רִזְה לֹ – can be literally rendered as “and not one has done, and a remnant of the spirit to him.”

67 Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Beads and Strands: Reflections of an African Woman on Christianity in Africa*, Theological Reflections from the South, (Akropong-Akuapem, Ghana: Regnum Africa, 2002), 97.

used to serve or support patriarchal agendas.”<sup>68</sup> Ndlazi agrees: “more often than not gender biased or gender discriminative biblical interpretation is more of *eisegesis* ... than *exegesis*.”<sup>69</sup>

Maasai wives understand subjection and subordination. Their mistreatment arises from the cultural supposition that women are “inferior to men.”<sup>70</sup> It is of more than passing interest that the root of *enkitok* (the Maa word for “woman”) is *-kitok*, “great.” These days, *enkitok* is frequently used by men as a disparagement. Similar to women in many traditional African cultures, Maasai females often have reason to believe that “all in all, it is not good to be a woman.”<sup>71</sup> But *enkitok* is, linguistically, the feminine nominalized form of the adjective *-kitok*, “great.” So etymologically the common Maa term for “woman” means “mistress”<sup>72</sup> or “Great Lady.” In actual practice, the masculine form *olkitok* means “master” or “boss” and is never used simply for “men.” I speculate that *enkitok-olkitok* were once a word pair analogous to the Hebrew *אִשָּׁה* and *אִישׁ* and the English pairs *woman-man* and *mistress-master*. Historical research has shown that previously among the Maasai, “relationships between men and women varied by their age, kinship, clan, and age-set affiliations, but they were generally based on mutual respect (*enkanyit*) and relative autonomy.”<sup>73</sup> I have seen that with in marriages of Maasai Christians, this mutual respect has often been restored.<sup>74</sup> As the

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68 Francis Machingura, “‘A woman should learn in quietness and full submission’ (1 Timothy 2:11): Empowering Women in the Fight against Masculine Readings of Biblical Texts and a Chauvinistic African Culture in the Face of HIV and AIDS,” *Studies in World Christianity* 19, no.3 (2013), 233–234.

69 Thulani Ndlazi, “Men in Church Institutions and Religious Organisations: The Role of Christian Men in Transforming Gender Relations and Ensuring Gender Equality,” *Religion & Spirituality, Agenda: Empowering Women for Gender Equity* 61 (2004), 64.

70 Hoyce Jacob Lyimo-Mbowe, *Maasai Women and the Old Testament: Towards an Emancipatory Reading*, *Bible and Theology in Africa* 29, edited by Knut Holter (New York: Peter Lang, 2020), 9. Sadly, this cultural supposition is too often maintained through poor interpretation of Scripture.

71 Musimbi Kanyoro, “The Meaning of Story: Theology as Experience,” chapter 2 in *Culture, Women and Theology*, edited John S. Pobee, 19–33 (Delhi: ISPCK, 1994), 27.

72 I.e., “mistress” in the literal sense as the feminine form of “master,” without any sexual connotation of adulterous liaisons.

73 Hodgson, *Once Intrepid Warriors*, 26.

74 Anne Nasimiyu-Wasike notes that Jesus overturned cultural assumptions of women’s supposed inferiority and “gave them equal status to men,” restoring “the original relationship between women and men first established by God at creation,” and

*enkipirta nasipa* (true meaning) of this passage in Ephesians is articulated in Maa, perhaps *enkitok* can again become an honorific, for “Christianity brings back the hidden meaning of *enkitok*.”<sup>75</sup>

In spite of all-too-common misreading of the Scriptures which support oppressive patriarchy, the Christian faith and the teaching of the Bible have “a liberating potential for a traditional society, especially in matters of family and personal relationship.”<sup>76</sup> Like many in the Church, Philip Payne grew up understanding that it is biblically obvious “that a wife must submit to her husband in everything and that a husband is the head with authority over his wife” but testifies that upon “closer investigation of Scripture” he was led “to discover that these passages do not support” male authoritarian leadership “in marriage, but teach mutual submission and self-giving in marriage.”<sup>77</sup> Commenting on the creation account of Genesis, Assohoto and Ngewa observe that “it is important to note that men and women were permitted to rule only over other living creatures, not over other human beings. Nor were men given authority to dominate women (or vice versa).”<sup>78</sup> Thus it “is against the standards of creation” “for a man or woman to assume authority over the other” and is in fact “a total dismissal of God’s purpose, which is a mutual relationship between man and woman together.”<sup>79</sup> This mutuality necessarily precludes abuse; wives should not submit “to husbands” nor should husbands give their lives for

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rejecting “anything that discriminated against women.” “Christology and an African woman’s experience,” chapter 9 in *Jesus in African Christianity: Experimentation and Diversity in African Christology*, 123–135, edited by J. N. K. Mugambi and Laurenti Magesa, African Christianity Series (Nairobi: Acton Publishers, 2003), 73–75.

75 Sam Ntinga, private conversation, August 2018. Ntinga is a Maasai pastor and was then administrator of Community Christian Bible Training Institute in Kenya.

76 Philip Jenkins, *The New Faces of Christianity: Believing the Bible in the Global South* (Oxford University Press, 2006), 175.

77 Payne, “What about Headship?” 142.

78 Barnabe Assohoto and Samuel Ngewa, “Genesis,” in *Africa Bible Commentary: A One-Volume Commentary Written by 70 African Scholars*, edited by Tokunboh Adeyemo et al., 9–84 (Nairobi: Word Alive Publishers, 2006; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 11. They add: “Our fellow human beings bear the image of the Creator and thus are not to be dominated but to be served (John 13:3–14; Gal 5:13; Eph 5:21).”

79 Lyimo-Mbowe, *Maasai Women and the Old Testament*, 144.



their wives in ways which enable abuse or other sinful behaviours or which compromise a believer’s allegiance/faith (πίστις) to/in Christ.<sup>80</sup>

Let us review our passage with a literalistic translation.<sup>81</sup> As English lacks the reflexivity of Greek, I will underline imperatives in bold, italicize participles, highlight other verbs in bold, and identify the dictionary forms of key lexical terms of the Greek parenthetically. I will use the contraction y’all to indicate the second person plural.

(15) Therefore **look** carefully at **how y’all live** (περιπατέω): not as unwise but as wise,

(16) *redeeming* the time ...

(17) on account of this, **do not be unwise**, but **understand/perceive** what is the will of the Lord.

(18) And **do not get drunk** with wine ... but **be filled** (πληρώω) with the Spirit,

(19) *speaking* to each other with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, *singing* and *psalming* in y’all’s heart to the Lord,

(20) always *thanking/giving thanks* for all/everyone/each-other to God our Father in the name of our Lord Jesus,

(21) *submitting* (υποτάσσω) to one another out of reverence (φόβος) for Christ,

(22) the wives, to their own husbands as to the Lord.

(23) – For a husband **is** head (κεφαλή) of a wife just as Christ, the head (κεφαλή) of the Church, himself Saviour of the Body.

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80 Craig S. Keener explicitly notes that the call to mutual submission does not apply “to abusive relationships.” “Mutual Submission,” 14.

81 There are different translation styles, ranging from a literalistic approach which attempts a more “word-for-word” rendering rather than a dynamic equivalency approach which seeks to render idea-for-idea. Literalistic approaches tend to result in rather awkward and stylistically wooden translations. They are helpful to convey the feel of the grammar of the underlying original text, but they typically do not sound natural or fluent in the target language.

(24) But as the church **submits** (ὑποτάσσω) to the Christ, in the same way so the wives to the husbands in everything.

(25) The husbands, **love** (ἀγαπάω) the wives, just as also Christ **loved** (ἀγαπάω) the Church and **gave** (παραδίδωμι) himself for her,

(26) in order that he **might sanctify** her, *cleansing* in the bath/ washing of the water of the word (ῥημα),

(27) so that he might present her to himself the Church glorious/ honoured, not *having* a blemish or wrinkle or any such thing, but rather that she **should be** holy and blameless.

(28) In the same way, the husbands **are obligated** (ὀφείλω) **to love** (ἀγαπάω) their wives just as their own bodies. The *one-loving* (ἀγαπάω) his wife **loves** (ἀγαπάω) himself.

(29) For no one ever **has hated** his own body (σάρξ), but rather **feeds** it and **cares** for it, just as also Christ the Church.

(30) For we **are** members of his Body (σῶμα).

(31) Because of this a person **will leave** father and mother and **will be united in marriage** with his wife, and the two **shall become** one flesh (σάρξ).

(32) This is a great mystery: now **speak** about Christ and the Church.

(33) Nonetheless, y'all [husbands] also, one by one, each: **love** (ἀγαπάω) his wife as himself, so that now the wife herself **might respect** (φοβέω) the husband.

In African contexts, Paul is describing how in Christ a husband and wife may have a restored state of *ubuntu*, *osotua*, or *harambee*, as husbands and wives “learn to live together in harmony.”<sup>82</sup> *Osotua* is an important relational term for the Maasai indicating deep or covenantal relational closeness and harmony;<sup>83</sup> in addition the OT and NT are named as *Osotua Musana* (Old *Osotua*) and *Osotua Ng'ejuk* (New *Osotua*). The key verses

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82 Elizabeth Mburu, *African Hermeneutics* (Nairobi: HippoBooks, 2019), 37.

83 See my exploration on *osotua* in “Lessons from Scripture for Maasai Christianity, Lessons from Maasai Culture for the Global Church,” *Priscilla Papers* 33, no. 2 (Spring 2019), 20; on biblical reconciliation involving restored *osotua*, see also Beth Elness-

of Paul's instructions for husbands and wives to cultivate this renewed closeness of relationship, 18b and 21–22, can be summarized this way:

Husbands and wives, be filled with the Spirit, submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ: *wives* to your husbands as the Church to Christ. *Husbands*: each of you love! your wife as Christ loved the Church.

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