

THE UNLIMITED POWER OF PARTNERSHIP IN MARRIAGE & IN LIFE

- I. *Again! I say to you that if two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for them by My Father in heaven* (Matt. 18:19).
 - A. The word “agree” in this passage is a translation of the Greek word *sumphonesosin*, a musical term from which we get the English word “symphony.”
 - B. Jesus is saying that if two different people will make a symphony or melody about anything they ask, it will be done.

Where should such agreement (harmony and melody) be expressed if not in the marriage relationship where two individuals have been joined together by God to function as one, i.e. to make a beautiful symphony and melody in life? No wonder the devil fights so hard against Christian marriages.
- II. In a symphony orchestra there are many different instruments of different sizes, shapes and sounds, just as we, as individuals, are all different and unique.
 - A. It is the variety of sounds together in harmony that enhances the musical experience.
 - B. An orchestra with only one kind of instrument, i.e., a hundred trombones, is seriously lacking.

The Church is like a great orchestra made up of many different kinds of people who are, too often, trying to create unity among themselves instead of concentrating on responding to the Great Conductor—the Holy Spirit. According to Eph. 4:3 we cannot create unity, —that is the job of the Holy Spirit—we can only maintain the unity that He gives.
- III. Paul’s most extensive teaching about marriage is found in I Cor. 7:1-16, and here he lays out a model in which each partner has equal rights, responsibility and authority.
 - A. This is the only passage about marriage in which Paul uses the word authority (Gk. *exousia*) and he gives the same authority to each partner.
 - B. In commenting on this passage, the eminent New Testament scholar, Dr. Gordon Fee, says, “In a way quite unlike anything else in all his letters, the argument alternates between men and women (12 times in all). And in every case there is complete mutuality between the two sexes” (Gordon Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 270).

Why haven't we heard more teaching on marriage from this passage?

- IV. When considered in its historical context, Eph. 5:18-33 also presents a model of partnership and mutuality in marriage.
 - A. The section on marriage is tied to the section on being filled with the Spirit; so Paul is actually presenting a model for Spirit-filled marriage and living.
 - B. In vs. 19-21 Paul lists 4 participles, which are evidences or characteristics of the Spirit-filled life—speaking, singing, giving thanks, submitting to one another.
- V. The word “submitting” in vs. 21 is from the Greek word *hupotasso* and in this passage it means to “join together with” or to “identify with.”
 - A. This is borne out by the kind of marriage known by the Ephesians called “Marriage Without Hand” in which the wife remained under the authority of her father who could end the marriage at any time (listen to the on-line lesson for a full disclosure of “Marriage Without Hand.”)
 - B. This is also borne out by Bauer's Greek-English Lexicon that shows that one of the meanings of *hupotasso* is to “join together with” or we could say to “identify with.”
- VI. The word “head” in this passage is from the Greek word *kephale* and recent studies have conclusively shown that the word has nothing to do with authority, but refers to the source or origin of something or someone (If this passage was about who is in charge Paul could have used a word like *archon* which means boss or leader).
 - A. Paul used *kephale* to undermine the pagan belief that men and women had originated from two different sources, men from a superior source and women from an inferior source.
 1. This was the basis for gender discrimination in the ancient world.
 2. This was also the basis for homosexuality, which was rampant in the ancient Greco-Roman world.

Plato said, “The truly noble soul is masculine and will therefore seek out another male as the object of his affections. The less noble will resort to the women's quarters for an object of their affections.”
 - B. By using the word *kephale*, Paul undermined this ancient concept and made the point of Gen. 22:12 that the woman was taken from the man and therefore they are made of the same substance and have an identical source.

- C. Dr. David Scholer, Professor of New Testament at Fuller Theological Seminary, after an intensive study of *kephale*, concluded that the information now available “supports a new understanding in Christ by which men and women are viewed in a mutually supportive, submissive relationship” (Scholer, *Women, Abuse and the Bible*, 44).
- VII. In vs. 25 & 33, Paul tells the husband to love or *agape* his wife, a word that means to love unconditionally and selflessly, i.e., the kind of love that sacrifices its own self-interests for the sake of another.
 - A. This was a revolutionary concept in the ancient pagan world where men were expected to rule and govern their wives—not lay down their lives for them as is expressed in Paul’s use of *agape*.
 - B. Paul never told the wives to love their husbands probably because, in that culture, they were already expected to give up their lives for their husbands.

“The concept of sacrificial self-giving so that a spouse can achieve full potential has been the role that society has traditionally given to the wife. Here Paul gives it to the husband. Of course, giving oneself sacrificially for the other is an excellent example of the submission wives and husbands are to have toward one another” (Berkeley & Alvera Mickelsen, “The Head of the Epistles,” *Christianity Today* 25 (Feb. 20, 1981).
- VIII. We insist on knowing “who’s the boss?” because we have been infected by a culture that is enamored with status, authority and power.
 - A. In Matt. 20:20-28 Jesus made it clear that His kingdom is not a kingdom that is preoccupied with status and power but with serving out of strength and love.
 - B. In Jn. 13:35 Jesus said that the distinguishing mark of His followers would be their *agape* for one another, i.e., their self-denying love for one another.

For an exhaustive study of gender equality in Scripture and in Christian history, see Sue’s on-line course “The Spirit, the Bible & Women” along with the workbook of the same name and her textbook, *In the Spirit We’re Equal*. You can access these items at her website, www.icwhp.org.