

The Pericope Boundary in Ephesians 5:18–24: Discourse Markers Favor the Break Being at Verse 22

Kevin G. Smith and Jose de Carvalho

Abstract

Since the proliferation of scholarly works examining Ephesians 5 through the lens of modern gender debates, the preferred segmentation of the text in many articles, commentaries, Bible translations, and Greek editions of the New Testament has shifted. Verse 21, “submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ,” is now commonly grouped with verses 22–24 instead of with verses 18–20. Scholars argue that verse 21, which focuses on human-to-human relationships, marks a sharp topical break from verses 18–20, which deal with human-to-divine relationships, but verse 21 fits thematically with verses 22–24. By contrast, we argue that linguistic considerations make it more natural to keep verse 21 with verses 18–20 and start a new subsection in verse 22. Our approach focuses on discourse markers that indicate coherence and discontinuity in the Greek text, most notably Levinsohn’s (2000) concept of a point of departure as the primary marker of discontinuity and Baugh’s (2015) notion of the distinction between a grammatical and a periodic sentence in Greek discourse. Whereas modern readers tend to dichotomize vertical and horizontal relationships, the author of Ephesians structured the text to position both giving thanks to God and submitting to one another as parallel results of being filled with the Spirit. We do violence to his train of thought when we impose modern categorizations of the world and contemporary gender concerns upon a first-century text.

Keywords

discourse analysis, discourse markers, mutual submission, periodic sentence, point of departure

About the Authors

Dr. Kevin Smith holds a DLitt in Greek from the University of Stellenbosch and a PhD in Theology from the South African Theological Seminary. He served for 14 years as SATS’s Head of Academics before taking office as Principal in 2018. His interests lie in the spheres of biblical studies and theological education.

Mr. Jose de Carvalho has been lecturing at the South African Theological Seminary since 2012. In 2017, he earned an MTh in Biblical Studies from SATS. His Master’s thesis was titled, “Christocentricity without Christoconformity: An evaluation of the healing ministry of Jesus.” Jose is passionate about course development and has developed several New Testament courses for SATS, including 1 Corinthians, Romans, Ephesians, Acts, and Hebrews.

1. Introduction

In the Greek text, Ephesians 5:18–24 is one sentence. Verses 19–24 do not contain a finite verb in an independent clause. Grammatically, verses 19–24 depend on πληροῦσθε (“be filled” in v. 18). However, verses 18–24 do not cohere naturally as a thematic unit. Almost all Greek editions and English translations acknowledge this by dividing the passage.¹

The editors of the UBS and NA editions of the Greek New Testament made a switch in the segmentation in the 1990s. NA26 (1983; similarly, UBS3 in 1975) presented 15–21 and 22–33 as the pericope divisions. They acknowledged the structure of the household code in 5:22–6:9 by presenting each pair of relationships (wives–husbands, children–parents, and slaves–masters) as one paragraph. However, NA27 (1993; similarly, UBS4 in 1998) divided 5:15–33 into three pericopes: 15–20, 21–24, and 25–33, while leaving 6:1–9 as two. This strikes us as unusual because it appears to:

1. obscure the household code,
2. violate the surface structure of verses 18–21, and
3. disregard the markers of disjunction in verse 22.

Since the 1970s, the growing interest in gender-related topics has seen a proliferation of writings about Ephesians 5:21–33 (Johnson 2006). Feminist and egalitarian authors have contributed many of the publications. They tend to argue or assume that the pericope is Ephesians 5:21–33. This demarcation has become so standard that many articles today have “Ephesians 5:21–33” in their titles (Morlan 2014; Mouton 2014; Marshall 2015; Archer and Archer 2019; Mowczko 2020). Perhaps the influence of this default tendency to group verse 21 with verses 22–24 in most recent scholarly articles reflects in the growing number of translations and Greek texts that group with 21 with verses 22–24. However, we argue that linguistic considerations make it more natural to keep verse 21 with verses 18–20 and start a new sub-section in verse 22. Our approach focuses on discourse markers that indicate coherence and discontinuity in the Greek text, most notably Levinsohn’s (2000) concept of a point of departure as the primary marker of discontinuity and Baugh’s (2015) notion of the distinction between a grammatical and a periodic sentence in Greek discourse. We begin by providing scholarly frameworks for identifying discourse boundaries, and then we show that they support our proposed segmentation more naturally than the main alternative.

2. Boundary Markers

To discuss legitimate boundaries between pericopes and paragraphs, we need criteria to inform where one section ends and the next begins. We will use the views of four scholars to provide a framework for segmenting a passage into its logical sub-sections.

2.1. *Beekman and Callow’s semantic units*

In their seminal work, Beekman and Callow (1974, 279) argue that “[t]he basic criterion is that a section, or a paragraph, deals with one theme. If the theme changes, then a new section has started.” They proceed to list a variety of grammatical and semantic clues that might indicate a

¹ The notable exceptions are the Lexham English Bible and the Common English Bible, which reflect the influence of Steven Runge (2010, 266) and Cynthia Westfall (2016, 100) respectively.

change of section of paragraph. Although they integrate their clues into their discourse, we extract and list them as follows:

1. A new theme may be stated.
2. Summary statements may transition to a new section.
3. Formal grammatical clues, such as certain conjunctions, may mark a new section.
4. In narratives, a change of time or location introduces a new setting and scene.
5. Rhetorical questions often introduce a new topic or theme.
6. The vocative form of address often introduces a new section or paragraph.
7. Repeated use of the same or synonymous terms binds a paragraph together.
8. Contrast, especially parallel contrasting statements, may indicate a basic unity.
9. A change in the tense, mood, or aspect of a verb may indicate a new section.
10. A change of participants may indicate the start of a new section.

Regarding vocatives, they say, “The vocative may both distinguish paragraphs and tie a section together” (Beekman and Callow 1974, 279). This phenomenon characterizes household codes. The fact that it is a household code is signaled by vocatives addressing different groups; they tie the section together. However, the sub-sections (paragraphs) of the code are signaled by vocatives indicating a change of the addressees. Beekman and Callow consider Colossians 3:18–4:1 as a simple example of this phenomenon, which is significant since it is a close parallel to Ephesians 5:22–6:9.

Beekman and Callow (1974, 273) make one more invaluable observation.

It may be, however, the boundaries of grammatical and semantic paragraphs nearly always coincide, although there is some evidence a grammatical paragraph may include several semantic paragraphs in Greek.

In other words, in almost all languages, semantic structure follows surface structure insofar as a new paragraph begins with a new sentence, but there is some evidence to suggest that Greek can start a new semantic paragraph without requiring a new sentence. What they stated tentatively in 1974 is now widely accepted. Ordinarily, Greek (like other languages) begins a new paragraph with a new sentence. However, Greek is capable of long series of subordinate clauses (cola), in which a natural change of theme may begin without an independent clause.

2.2. Kaiser’s exposed seams

Kaiser (1981, 71–72) points out that some authors clearly signpost the structure of their work. However, when they do not, “the interpreter will make use of a variety of clues to locate the slightly exposed seams which mark off specific sections of the book.” He proceeds to give eight examples of “slightly exposed themes”:

1. repeated phrases, terms, or sentences;
2. transitional conjunctions or adverbs;
3. rhetorical questions;
4. changes in time, location, or setting;
5. vocative address showing a change from one group to another;
6. changes in the tense, mood, or aspect of a verb (and possibly even changes of subject or object)
7. repetition of a key word, concept, or proposition; or
8. announcement of theme in a kind of heading.

Regarding vocatives, Kaiser (1981, 72) writes: “A vocative form of address deliberately showing a shift of attention from one group to another constitutes one of the most important devices. It is often used in the epistolary type of literature.” The logic for this is persuasive—when an author changes to or about whom they are speaking, a new [sub]-section has begun.

2.3. Levinsohn’s points of departure

In his landmark work, *Discourse Features of New Testament Greek*, Levinsohn (2000) gives considerable attention to coherence and discontinuity in Greek discourse. He views thematic change as the main indicator of a new segment and avers that a point of departure supported by some surface-level markers are discourse clues for identifying the change. A point of departure is “the placement at the beginning of a clause or sentence of an adverbial or nominal constituent” (2000, 7). He regards it as “a device that signals discontinuities.” If a sentence or clause does not begin with a point of departure, “then the pragmatic effect is often to convey continuity with the context” (2000, 14).

In his chapter on “Boundary Features,” Levinsohn (2000, 271–284) acknowledges that competing considerations may make it difficult to determine where thematic change occurs. He avers that “the presence or absence of a point of departure has a major part to play in determining the validity of potential evidence” (2000, 271), because a point of departure is “the primary basis for relating the information concerned to its context.” He proceeds to present a variety of factors that may be used as supporting evidence to confirm a new section, including a noun phrase that marks a change of participant reference, a vocative of address, and changes in the verbal tense, mood, or person as kinds of supporting evidence (2000, 278–279).

2.4. Baugh’s periodic sentence

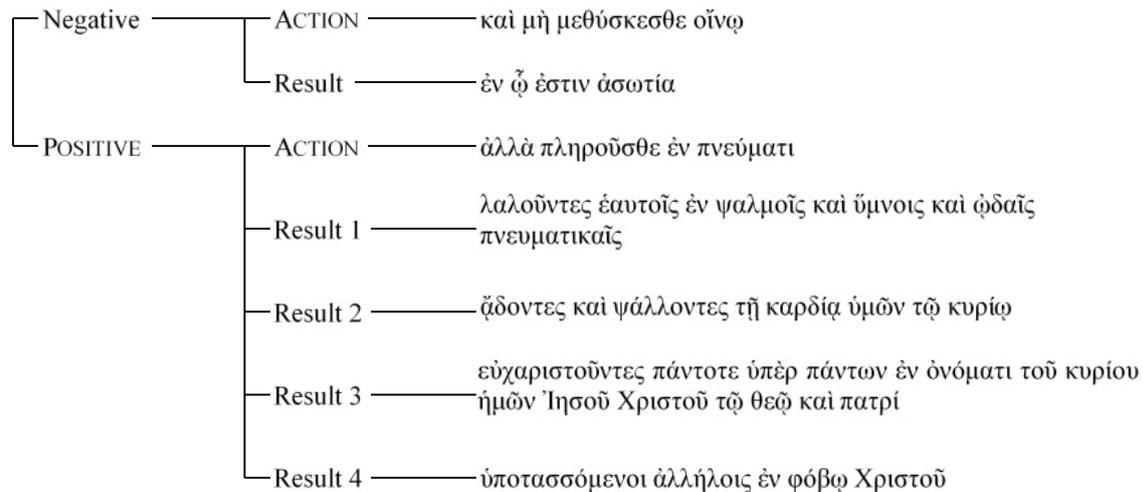
In his superb commentary on Ephesians, Baugh (2015, 15) argues that it is anachronistic to use the modern concept of a grammatical sentence to analyze ancient Greek prose. The Greeks did not use sentences, but cola and periods as “the essential building blocks of discourse.” These concepts derived from oratory training. A colon was where a trained speaker or reader would pause, while a period was where he would breathe. A colon corresponds roughly to a modern phrase or clause, while a period is an approximate equivalent for a modern sentence. Baugh uses the term periodic sentence to refer to a collection of periods that form one grammatical sentence (the modern definition), but in Greek are the equivalent of a modern paragraph.

To summarize, then, modern scholars dealing with the Greek style of Ephesians have focused on the grammatical sentence length and other traits that are more appropriate to a modern work than to an ancient Greek one. Cola and periods are the foundational elements of Greek prose composition, and they many times transcend the boundaries of the grammatical sentence. (Baugh 2015, 25)

Baugh is arguing that Greek can start a new period without making it a new grammatical sentence. We should, however, think of a new period as a sentence when using modern categories. Although he does not state it directly, it seems that new sections (i.e. periodic sentences) typically do begin with a new grammatical sentence.

3. The rationale for keeping verses 18-21 together

There are solid linguistic grounds for keeping verses 18–21 together instead of separating verse 21 from 18–20.



This is a single grammatical sentence. It begins with two present imperatives that prohibit and enjoin contrasting actions, forming a negative-positive contrast. The negative “do not become drunk with wine” (18a) is contrasted by the positive 18c “but be filled with the Spirit.” The prohibition is supported by a reason phrase (18b), serving to motivate not being drunk. The injunction is supported by four (or five) present-tense participial clauses (19–21), indicating the results of being filled with the Spirit.² Each participle is present tense, nominative masculine plural; all five are grammatically dependent on *πληροῦσθε* (“be filled”) in 18c, and they are parallel to one another.

Baugh (2015, 444) sees four short periods here. The opening period (v. 18) contains imperative mood verbs. It is developed by three cola that contain subordinate adverbial participles (vv. 19, 20, and 21 are each a period). The adverbial participles, when used in parallel to imperatives, function as supplementary imperatives to provide stylistic relief from the monotony of joining a series of imperatives with *καὶ* (2015, 443). The grammatical parallelism mitigates against separating verse 21 from verses 18–20, even though Baugh acknowledges that “[v]erse 21 acts as a transitional concluding exhortation for submission, which is then illustrated in how this works out for various groups within the family in 5:22–6:9.”

The supporting criteria espoused by Beekman and Callow (1974), Kaiser (1981), and Levinsohn (2000) provide no support for a paragraph or section break between verses 20 and 21. Although some interpreters see a change of theme in verse 21, the linguistic markers that would confirm segmenting the text there are absent. There is no point of departure (Levinsohn’s primary supporting criterion). There is no transitional conjunction or adverb. There is no rhetorical question. There is no change for verbal tense, mood, or aspect. There is no change of subject or object and no contrast.

The surface structure of verses 18–21 strongly favors keeping these verses together. The five participles stand in parallel to one another and share the same grammatical relationship with the main verb *πληροῦσθε* in verse 18. Although the primary criterion for segmentation is thematic change, where the surface structure so strongly supports conjunction instead of disjunction, one needs persuasive reasons to overrule it.

² Baugh argues that these participles function as supplementary imperatives for stylistic variation.

4. The rationale for a break at the start of verse 21

What then is the rationale for separating verse 21 from verses 18–20 and joining it to verses 22–24? Why do so many scholars either join verses 21–24 or treat verse 21 as a separate paragraph?

Their primary reason is thematic. Texts are segmented based on changes in theme (Beekman and Callow 1974; Kaiser 1981; Levinsohn 2000). Discourse features may signal or confirm a section change, but they remain secondary considerations with thematic changes being primary. Although they recognize that the discourse markers in the surface structure of Ephesians 5:18–24 link verse 21 with verses 18–20, they perceive a jarring topic change in verse 21 in which the theme of verse 21 belongs with 22–24. The first four adverbial participles (λαλοῦντες, “speaking”; ᾄδοντες, “singing”; ψάλλοντες, “singing”; εὐχαριστοῦντες, “giving thanks”) portray the worship of the Son and the Father as results of being filled with the Spirit, but the fifth (ὑποτασσόμενοι) switches the focus from vertical to horizontal relationships. This change is perceived as so sharp that the final participial clause, ὑποτασσόμενοι ἀλλήλοις ἐν φόβῳ Χριστοῦ (“submitting to one another in the fear of Christ”), is interpreted disjunctively. In other words, although it is grammatically linked, it is not seen as thematically parallel to the other four. Rather, they see it as a kind of heading for the household code to follow. Paul is saying, “[Now concerning] submitting to one another: Wives, ...”

Thielman (2010, 372) is representative of many who favor this segmentation when he argues that the thematic ties between verse 21 and the wives-and-husbands code are more compelling considerations than the grammatical links to verse 18. Although he acknowledges that the grammatical structure of the passage supports attaching verse 21 to verses 18–20, he does not see thematic coherence. Attributing the messiness of the transition to the oral nature of the letter, he writes:

The theme of submission, however, dominates the household code that follows, reappearing not only where the term ὑποτάσσω (*hypotassō*, submit) itself is implied (5:22) or used (5:24), but also where the concepts of fear (5:33; 6:5), honor (6:2), and obedience (6:1, 5) show up. The grammatical attachment of the participle to the previous section eases the transition to the new section, but the substance of the verse [i.e. v. 21], with its focus on submission, means that it is best taken with what follows and should be understood as an introduction to it (cf. Dawes 1998: 18–21).

This intuition that the break should be between vertical relationships (believers to God in vv. 18–20) and horizontal ones (believers to one another vv. 21ff.) is the primary rationale for a break after verse 21. What are the supporting reasons for this segmentation? We summarize three.

Firstly, verse 21 is transitional. It concludes the catalogue of results of being filled with the Spirit and introduces the first section of the household code. The simplest way to present it as a bilateral proposition⁴ linking what comes before and after is to make it a separate paragraph. While there is no doubt that verse 21 is transitional, there is no need to present it as a paragraph on its own. It functions as a tail-head connector, belonging to the previous paragraph while also serving as a natural bridge to the next.

Secondly, if we follow Baugh (2015, 444) in seeing verses 18–21 as four periods (one per verse), then the first three end with trinitarian references:

3 Verse 21 lacks the surface-level feature that typically signals a bilateral proposition, namely, conjunctions marking its bidirectional role in the discourse.

- Verse 18: ... ἐν πνεύματι (“with the Spirit”)
- Verse 19: ... τῷ κυρίῳ (“to the Lord”)
- Verse 20: ... τῷ θεῷ καὶ πατρὶ (“to God and Father”)

The word order of verse 20 is contrived, seemingly to end the period with the allusion to God. Exegetes might then reason that the worship which flows from the infilling with the Spirit climaxes with thanksgiving to the Father, which concludes that focus. This could make “submitting to one another” (v. 21) thematically distinct from the expression of worship mentioned in verses 19–20, as a result of which it represents a new paragraph or section. If they have reasoned that trinitarian worship climaxes with verse 20 and that submission is an unrelated and distinct theme, they feel justified in treating verse 21 as somewhat distinct from verses 18–20. They can do this by seeing the participle ὑποτασσόμενοι either as imperatival (“submit to one another”) or temporal (“when submitting to one another”).

We do not find these arguments convincing. If this is how the author intended the text to be read, he concealed his intent effectively. It would have been easy to signal that the disjunction belongs in verse 21, but using a fifth adverbial participle that parallels the previous four signals conjunction. Verse 21 also ends with a trinitarian reference, ἐν φόβῳ Χριστοῦ (“in the fear of Christ”), which strengthens its ties to verses 18–20 and undermines the argument from trinitarian allusions at the end of each period.

Thirdly, egalitarian scholars strive to connect verses 22–24 more closely to verse 21 to portray Paul as positioning wives’ submission to their husbands within a framework of mutual or reciprocal submission. This has been the most common and vociferous rationale for associating verse 21 more with what follows than with what precedes in recent publications. Scholars such as Belleville (2000), Westfall (2016), and Keener (2014; 2016) view “wives to your husbands” (the short reading in v. 22) as a phrase that qualifies “submitting to one another” (v. 21). Because “wives to your husbands” is not a new sentence, it cannot stand alone, meaning that there is no new and separate command directed only to wives. By inserting the imperative “submit” in verse 22, patriarchal translators create the illusion that there are two different kinds of commands—one in verse 21 directed to all Christians, and another in verse 22 directed exclusively to wives. This allegedly reinforces a gender-based hierarchy in Christian homes.

In conclusion, scholars have diverse reasons for seeing a break in verse 21. Egalitarians want to connect verse 21 as closely as possible to verses 22–24 to strengthen their view that Paul believes in egalitarian marriage characterized by mutual submission. Many non-egalitarian scholars agree with the segmentation, but for different reasons. They argue that the four participles in verses 19–20 portray congregational life and worship, whereas the fifth participle in verse 21 introduces the topic of submission and takes the ethical instruction in a new direction (Lincoln 1990, 354; Thielman 2010, 365). The theme of submission is then developed in the household code, which outlines who submits to whom.

5. The rationale for a break at the start of verse 22

If verse 21 belongs to the section 15–21, as the discourse markers suggest (see below), then we have only two options with respect to verses 22–24.

1. Keep Ephesians 5:15–24 as one section. This honors the surface structure in which verses 18–24 are one grammatical sentence. It is the approach followed by the Lexham English

Bible and the Common English Bible, which reflect the influence of discourse analysts Steven Runge (2010, 266) and Cynthia Westfall (2016, 100) respectively.⁴ In this view, “wives to your husbands” becomes an illustration of “submitting to one another.”

2. Segment Ephesians 5:22–24 as a new section. This recognizes that a new period in Greek discourse can begin without a new grammatical sentence, and it honors the semantic structure of the discourse.

The second option is the more natural way to read the Greek text of Ephesians 5. Multiple considerations support this segmentation.

Firstly, and most importantly, verse 22 begins with an unmistakable point of departure. The vocative noun phrase *αἱ γυναῖκες* (“wives”) operates as a nominal point of departure for a topic-comment articulation. It serves to switch the participant reference from the entire believing community in Ephesus to a specific subset, namely, wives. In doing so, it establishes a new topic about which the author intends to comment. Throughout the remainder of the household code, similar vocatives operate as new points of departure to switch focus from one group of participants to the next, introducing a new set of comments. Levinsohn (2000) rightly gives this criterion pride of place in identifying a thematic discontinuity; it is supported by some supplementary considerations.

Secondly, the imperative verb *ὑποτάσσεσθε* (the present middle imperative, “submit”) is present even if it is absent. There is enough external evidence for its presence to have caused the editors of the UBS editions some uncertainty as to whether to include or exclude the imperative. In UBS3 (1975), they rated its exclusion {C} to indicate considerable uncertainty; in UBS4 (1993) and UBS5 (2011) the rating is {B}, suggesting some uncertainty as to whether the verb should be omitted. Metzger (1994, 541) indicates that “[a] majority of the Committee preferred the shorter reading,” which implies that a minority believed that the original reading was *αἱ γυναῖκες τοῖς ἰδίοις ἀνδράσιν ὑποτάσσεσθε* (or similar).⁵ If the imperative is original, segmenting the text in verse 22 becomes crystal clear.

We agree that the shorter reading (without the imperative verb) is more likely original, as favored by the NA and UBS editions. However, even though the verb is absent, it is implicit. Its omission is through ellipsis—the author omitted it because it is understood from the context. Its implied presence is clear from two observations. First, the standard formulation for a section of a household code is (a) vocative noun plus (b) imperative verb. The parallelism implies the ellipsis:

- *αἱ γυναῖκες, ... [ὑποτάσσεσθε]* (5:22; “wives, submit”; cf. Col 3:18)
- *οἱ ἄνδρες, ἀγαπάτε* (5:25; “husbands, love”; cf. Col 3:19)
- *τὰ τέκνα, ὑπακούετε* (6:1; “children, obey”; cf. Col 3:20)
- *οἱ πατέρες, μὴ παροργίζετε* (6:4; “fathers, do not exasperate”; cf. Col 3:21)
- *οἱ δοῦλοι, ὑπακούετε* (6:5; “slaves, “obey”; cf. Col 3:22)
- *οἱ κύριοι, ... ποιεῖτε* (6:9; “masters, treat”; cf. Col 4:1)⁶

⁴ The LEB separates verses 21 and 22 with an em dash, expressing a less pronounced break than a full stop.

⁵ The variant readings vacillate between *ὑποτάσσεσθε* (PAM-2P) and *ὑποτασσεσθῶσαν* (PAM-3P); they also vary in the positioning of the imperative in the clause.

⁶ The exact same pattern occurs in Colossians 3:18–4:1. In 1 Peter 2:13–3:7, we have a variation. A generic command is given to all believers (2:13, *ὑποτάγητε*). When Peter turns to the individual groupings, he uses the formula (a) vocative noun plus (b) imperatival participle. The vocatives mark the shift from one group to another, while the participles derive an imperatival force from the start of the household code in 2:13.

Furthermore, the overwhelming majority of Greek scribes throughout history supplied a present imperative form of *ὑποτάσσομαι*, but they vacillated between the second- and third-person forms and they were unsure where to place the imperative. They never supplied any other lexeme. They never supplied anything but a present imperative.⁷ To native Greek speakers, a present imperative form of *ὑποτάσσομαι*, even if physically absent, was implicit in the text. Its absence appeared to be an error, which they corrected by supplying it.

We can now summarize the argument in syllogistic logic:

Premise 1: If a finite verb were present in verse 22, it would be clear to divide the text into verses 15–21 and 22–24.

Premise 2: Both ancient Greek scribes and modern experts concede that a present imperative of *ὑποτάσσομαι* is implicit in verse 22.⁸

Therefore: Since the verb is implicitly present, it is natural to divide the text into verses 15–21 and 22–24.

Why might the author have omitted the imperative *ὑποτάσσεσθε* in verse 22? The elision of the imperative positions the entire household code that follows as the fruit of being filled with the Spirit.⁹ In other words, the groups in subordinate roles (wives, children, and slaves) are empowered by the infilling of the Spirit to embrace the demands of their roles. Similarly, the groups in authority (husbands, fathers, and masters) are enabled by the filling of the Spirit to embrace the nonconformist demands of treating their subordinates as Christ treats them. In subordinating the entire household code to the command to be filled with the Spirit, Paul profiled the counter-cultural nature of the Spirit-filled life. He used three pairs of domestic relationships to show how believers' newfound identities in Christ are to transcend cultural stereotypes, transforming power into servanthood and rights into obligations (Keown 2016).

Thirdly, the supporting criteria for identifying a new paragraph or section favor treating verse 22 as the start of a new section. Baugh (2015, 15–25) pointed out that a new period (the ancient Greek equivalent of a sentence) may not be a new grammatical sentence; therefore, to insist that verses 18–24 should not be divided because they are one sentence is anachronistic, imposing a modern standard upon Greek discourse. The fact that verse 22 begins a new “sentence” is so clear that no less an authority than Metzger (1994, 541) remarks matter-of-factly that variant readings can be explained on the basis of “the main verb being required especially when the words *αἱ γυναῖκες* stood at the beginning of a scripture lesson.”

Which criteria for supporting a new paragraph or section corroborate the intuition that we need a break between verses 21 and 22? First, the words *αἱ γυναῖκες* (“wives”) fit Levinsohn’s (2000, 7, 14, 271ff.) definition of a nominal point of departure, his strongest marker of a boundary, whereas there is no potential point of departure in verse 21. Second, both Beekman and Callow (1974, 279) and Kaiser (1981, 72) consider the vocative of address (*αἱ γυναῖκες*) to be one of the strongest linguistic tools for shifting attention from one group to another. In verses 15–21, Paul is addressing the entire believing community. In verses 22–24, he is addressing only the wives. Third,

7 “The chronology of development seems to have been no verb—third-person imperative—second-person imperative. It is not insignificant that early lectionaries began a new day’s reading with Eph. 5:22; this most likely caused copyists to add the verb at this juncture” (The NET Bible 2005, nn. 31–32; Metzger 1994, 541). A lectionary reading could not begin with a verbless sentence.

8 Not all modern scholars would concede this point, but most do, even amongst egalitarians and evangelical feminists (Mowczko 2020).

9 The inclusion of the verb does not negate this implication, but the verb’s omission strengthens it.

in a household code the vocatives both unite the discourse as a code and signal internal shifts to new addressees. Fourth, there is an inferred change of verbal mood from adverbial participles in verses 19–21 to implicit imperative *ὑποτάσσεσθε* in verse 22. In manuscripts that include the verb, this criterion is weighty, but in those that leave it implicit, it carries less import.

Finally, ancient Greek authorities unanimously concur that there is a break after verse 21. Ancient scribes segmented the text more intuitively than modern editors. However, since they were native Greek speakers more familiar with the rhythms of ancient discourse, their feel for the period breaks is likely to be better than ours. The three major uncials that contain Ephesians 5—Sinaiticus (Ⲱ), Alexandrinus (A), and Vaticanus (B)—all treat verses 22–24 as a separate paragraph. The major lectionaries also saw a major break starting in verse 22.

If we were to add the later, more standardized “Euthalian Apparatus,” Ephesians is divided into two lectionary divisions of Eph 1–3 and 4–6, which sections are then subdivided into ten “chapters” (*κεφάλαια*, *kephalaia*) at: 1:3–14; 1:15–2:10; 2:11–22; 3:1–13; 3:14–21; 4:1–16; 4:17–5:2; 5:3–21; 5:22–6:9; 6:10–20. (Baugh 2015, 29)

The ancient scribes, free of the ideological forces shaping the past forty years, never imagined a segmentation of the text other than at verse 22. The major Greek editions of the NT prior to the 1990s agreed with the ancient authorities, but over the past 30 years, major editions such as UBS4, UBS5, NA27, and NA28 have moved the break to the start of verse 21.

6. Conclusion

What can we conclude about the segmentation of Ephesians 5:18–24? Leaving verses 15–24 as one unit is illogical, and the discourse markers provide more support for a break after verse 21 than before it. Verse 21 is transitional in the sense that it wraps up 15–21 while simultaneously serving as the bridge to the household code that starts in verse 22, supplying the verbal idea for verse 22. Nobody disputes that it is transitional and thematically shared by verses 18–20 and 22–24. However, it performs this task while remaining grammatically and conceptually subordinate to *πληροῦσθε* in verse 18. The point of departure that starts verse 22, *αἱ γυναῖκες* (“wives”), is a key discourse marker supporting a division at the start of verse 22. It marks a change of participant reference from the entire believing community to a focal subset, simultaneously marking the beginning of the household code. The change of subject, addressees, [implied] verbal mood, and genre mark verses 22–24 as a new pericope.

How conclusive are these factors? There are no discourse markers that favor a new section starting in verse 21. The rationale for those who make this segmentation is that the switch from God-directed results of being filled with the Spirit to community-directed results (“submitting to one another”) is such a jarring topical shift that it overrules linguistic clues, but we consider this distinction between vertical and horizontal evidences of the Spirit’s infilling to be an anachronistic modern scruple. Sometimes the motivation for separating verse 21 from 18–20 and attaching it to 22–24 seems to be ideological preference rather than linguistic evidence. The main linguistic alternative to our proposed division is to follow Runge (2010, 266) and Westfall (2016, 100) in leaving verses 15–24 as one unbroken discourse segment, but this makes a mockery of the obvious parallelism of the subsections of the household code, namely, wives-husbands, children-parents, and slaves-masters. The cumulative force of these arguments seems weighty.

Why does it matter? We do not think it makes much difference to how the ensuing household code, especially the directives to wives and husbands, is interpreted. The competing complementarian and egalitarian understandings do not depend on the segmentation, because the household code, and especially the instructions to wives, are subordinate to verses 18–21 regardless. Ironically, the theological implication that is distorted by wrongly separating verse 21 from verses 18–20 is the bidirectional impact of Paul’s pneumatology—proper relationships with God and fellow believers result from being filled with the Spirit. Paul framed his argument in that way, but we obscure the seamless integration of the vertical and horizontal dimensions of biblical worship and relationships by misplacing the pericope division.

Works Cited

- Archer, Melissa L, and Kenneth J. Archer. 2019. “Complementarianism and Egalitarianism: Whose Side Are You On? A Pentecostal Reading of Ephesians 5:21–33.” *Pneuma* 41(19):66–90.
- Baugh, S. M. 2015. *Ephesians*. Evangelical Exegetical Commentary. Bellingham, WA: Lexham.
- Beekman, John, and John Callow. 1974. *Translating the Word of God*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan.
- Belleville, Linda. 2000. *Women Leaders and the Church: 3 Crucial Questions*. Grand Rapids: Baker.
- Johnson, Alan F. 2006. “A Meta-Study of the Debate over the Meaning of ‘Head’ (Kephālē) in Paul’s Writings.” *Priscilla Papers* 20(4):21–29.
- Kaiser, Walter C., Jr. 1981. *Toward an Exegetical Theology: Biblical Exegesis for Teaching and Preaching*. Grand Rapids: Baker.
- Keener, Craig S. 2014. *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*. Second edition. Downers Grove: IVP.
- . 2016. “Mutual Submission—Ephesians 5:21.” *Bible Background* (blog). May 26, 2016. <https://craigkeener.com/mutual-submission-ephesians-521/>.
- Keown, Mark J. 2016. “Paul’s Vision of a New Masculinity.” *Colloquium* 41(1):47–60.
- Levinsohn, Stephen H. 2000. *Discourse Features of New Testament Greek*. 2nd ed. Dallas: SIL International.
- Lincoln, Andrew T. 1990. *Ephesians*. Word Biblical Commentary 42. Dallas: Word.
- Marshall, Jill E. 2015. “Community Is a Body: Sex, Marriage, and Metaphor in 1 Corinthians 6:12–7:7 and Ephesians 5:21–33.” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 134(2):833–847.
- Metzger, Bruce M. 1994. *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*. 2nd ed. New York: United Bible Societies.
- Morlan, David S. 2014. “Power, Sex and the Self: Notes on Ephesians 5:21–33.” *Bulletin of Ecclesial Theology* 1(1):53–60.
- Mouton, Elna. 2014. “Reimagining Ancient Household Ethos? On the Implied Rhetorical Effect of Ephesians 5:21–33.” *Neotestamentica* 48(1):163–185.
- Mowczko, Margaret. 2020. “Mutual Submission in Ephesians 5:21 and in 1 Peter 5:5.” *Exploring the Biblical Theology of Christian Egalitarianism* (blog). May 3, 2020. https://margmowczko.com/mutual-submission-ephesians-5_21-1-peter-5_5/.
- Mutter, Kelvin F. 2018. “Ephesians 5:21–33 as Christian Alternative Discourse.” *Trinity Journal* 39(1):3–20.

- Runge, Steven E. 2010. *Discourse Grammar of the Greek New Testament: A Practical Introduction for Teaching and Exegesis*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham
- The NET Bible*. 2005. Biblical Studies Press.
- Thielman, Frank 2010. *Ephesians*. Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids: Baker.
- Westfall, Cynthia L. 2016. *Paul and Gender: Reclaiming the Apostle's Vision for Men and Women in Christ*. Grand Rapids: Baker.