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SERMON TITLE: **The Worst Word in the Bible**

*Marriage Series: The Honeymoon is Not Over*

SCRIPTURE: **Ephesians 5:21-25**

DATE: **October 11, 2020**

View online service at [www.fpcd.org/live-stream](http://www.fpcd.org/live-stream)

Read also Psalm 63:1-8.

What are some words in the Bible we love to hate? Perhaps . . . Judgment; accountability; hell; sin; vengeance; repent; suffering

Today I have the pleasure of speaking on submission. It has a reputation for being the worst word in the Bible. At least that's what I have heard. ☺

Submission is mentioned a few times in the Bible. So as we speak of the word today, remember the best example: *Jesus' prayers were heard because of his reverent submission.* (Heb 5:7) Jesus did only what the Father told him. (Jn 5:19)

We are talking about submission because we are talking about marriage. The author of this advice on marriage is Paul, a single man who has never been married. You might dismiss his words thinking "he doesn't have a clue." But perhaps the fact that he wasn't married means he was able to observe. His singleness just might mean he is not writing from bias. Let's read our passage:

Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For a husband is the head of his wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. As the church submits to Christ, so you wives should submit to your husbands in everything. For husbands, this means love your wives, just as Christ loved the church. He gave up his life for her (Ephesians 5:21-25).

Let's look at the meaning of this rich passage from three angles: the theological thought behind the words, by examining the Greek. Then we'll examine the practice of the words, including what can carry us through as we cope with the differences that gender makes—you know—*Men are from Mars; Women are from Venus*—understanding the opposite sex. Finally, we'll look at Jesus, who set us an example for both male and female.

### Theological Thought

Let's begin with two words in the Greek, "submit" and "head"

1. SUBMIT: Wives are to submit to their husbands as to the Lord  
ὑποτάσσω – (verb) to render service, serve, be helpful  
ὑπηρέτης – (noun) One who functions as a helper, frequently in a subordinate capacity; helper; assistant

Some examples are:

- ~ **Moses**. He provided a service to God in bringing judgment on Egypt. Being in that subordinate position, as Moses

executed the will of God he also had the power and authority of God behind him.

- ~ **Military Enlistee**. A commitment made by someone to carry out the orders of the superior they are assisting. They are also given the tools to do it.
- ~ **Civil Employee**. A notary discharges his or her duties on behalf of the government.
- ~ **Physicians' Assistant**. He or she assists in carrying out tasks on the doctor's instructions and gradually learn the craft with more and more expertise.

So submission is a position of power and authority carried out with intention and expertise. There's a general sense of a uniform, ongoing goal. "Wives ὑποτασσόμενοι to your husbands as to the Lord." That is a verb participle present passive nominative masculine plural form(!) which implies that it is something that you do daily. It is not a one-time decision, but a daily intention. You give yourself to it by your own will.

There were many days in my marriage I quit the job! I dissolved my subordination. Sometimes the president is wise to listen to the vice president! He can rehire her after hearing out her complaints. Moses often wanted to quit. He told God what he thought of the outcomes of God's will, "Why have you brought all this trouble on your own people, Lord? Why did you send me? Ever since I came to Pharaoh as your spokesman, he has been even more brutal to your people. And you have done nothing to rescue them!" (Ex 5:22-23) He did this by drawing very close to God, so close that his face gleamed with God's radiance (Ex 33:18-23, 34:29)

2. HEAD: The identifier for the husband's position

"κεφαλή" – means "head; a being of high status"

There is one head in the family, per God. There is no double-minded submission.

In the Bible, "κεφαλή" is the symbol for father; for the husband in the relation to the wife; of Christ in relation to the Christian community. It's also a physical term: the prow of a ship or the head of a pillar. Your head is anointed in baptism (should you be "sprinkled.") symbolizing the commitment of the whole person. Head is also a figurative term: "You have not bowed your head under the mighty hand of God."

**It is a word that signifies unity.**

There's an old Rabbinical saying about the divinely willed unity of Israel: "Do not divide into two heads; for everything which

the Lord has made has only one head. He has given two shoulders, hands, and feet, but all the members obey one head.”<sup>1</sup>

So we see that κεφαλη symbolizes unity between Christ and the Church and between the husband and his wife. Male and female are different, and even though we will encounter many struggles to work out our differences, we wives are not to be divided by a power struggle with our husbands.<sup>2</sup>

### **The Practice of Submission**

God requires things that inspire the best in us. To accomplish unity and harmony between husband and wife requires intention and self-discipline. Let’s practice submission.

Once when our children were small, I read a parenting book called *How to Talk So Kids Will Listen and Listen So Kids Will Talk*.<sup>3</sup> I announced to my husband, whom I thought needed improvement, that we were going to follow these guidelines. We began at bedtime. We were going to “talk our children into bed” (including staying in bed!) using the methods of this book. We would talk to them nicely to convince them that they needed to get themselves in bed. It was disastrous—they took full advantage. Into bed; out of bed; running around; squealing—it became a game. Finally after a couple of days my husband had enough, “Hey, someone has to be in charge!” He was done with my book. There needs to be a leader. Ladies, do yourself a favor and let your husband be president.

Can a company have two presidents? It is not legally feasible because there would be no way for one president to enforce the rules, handle the fiduciary responsibilities, or manage the other president. In addition, what control issues it would create. Imagine a two-headed person. Who leads? Which one would be in charge?

Wives sometimes resist the husband being the head. Perhaps it is family background. The women in my family are strong-willed, driven, accomplished, and overbearing. But that last characteristic is not good. It hinders marriage. They way to change is to draw closer to Jesus, like the Psalmist. Feed your desire for God. Ask God to let you see him like Moses. Praise God and meditate on the things Jesus did. Use Psalm 63 that we read as your guide.

### **The Example of Jesus**

Jesus is equal to God. How did he handle submission? Paul writes:

“Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness” (Philippians 2:5-7).

John writes:

“After washing our feet, Jesus put on his robe again and sat down and asked, “Do you understand what I was doing? You call me ‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord,’ and you are right, because that’s what I am. And since I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash each other’s feet” (13:12-14).

Submission is not quite the worst word in the Bible when we understand the will behind it. Now, let’s not resist submitting to our husbands.

### **Here’s God’s picture of a married woman:**

Who can find a virtuous and capable wife? She is more precious than rubies. *Her husband can trust her, and she will greatly enrich his life. She brings him good, not harm, all the days of her life. She finds wool and flax and busily spins it. She is like a merchant’s ship, bringing her food from afar. She gets up before dawn to prepare breakfast for her household and plan the day’s work for her servant girls. She goes to inspect a field and buys it; with her earnings she plants a vineyard. She is energetic and strong, a hard worker. She makes sure her dealings are profitable; her lamp burns late into the night. Her hands are busy spinning thread, her fingers twisting fiber. She extends a helping hand to the poor and opens her arms to the needy. She has no fear of winter for her household, for everyone has warm clothes. She makes her own bedspreads. She dresses in fine linen and purple gowns. Her husband is well known at the city gates, where he sits with the other civic leaders. She makes belted linen garments and sashes to sell to the merchants. *She is clothed with strength and dignity, and she laughs without fear of the future. When she speaks, her words are wise, and she gives instructions with kindness. She carefully watches everything in her household and suffers nothing from laziness. Her children stand and bless her. Her husband praises her: “There are many virtuous and capable women in the world, but you surpass them all!”* Charm is deceptive, and beauty does not last; but a woman who fears the LORD will be greatly praised. Reward her for all she has done. Let her deeds publicly declare her praise. (Proverbs 31:10-31)*

Consider God’s advice and enjoy the blessing that comes from it.

AMEN

<sup>1</sup> Heinrich Schlier, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. III “κεφαλη” p. 677.

<sup>2</sup> If you are experiencing physical, mental, or emotional abuse, please contact a pastor or counselor for abuse is never to be suffered under the pretext of submission.

<sup>3</sup> By Adele Faber and Elaine Mazlish, published in 1980.