

# *The Psychology and Methods of Sin* *-contrasted with-* *The Mindset and Fruits of the Spirit*

*“The heart is deceitful above all things...who can know it?” (Jer 17:9)*

## *“Abuse and the Doctrine of Headship and Submission”*

**December 5, 2010**

**Sermon Text:** 1 Peter 2:13 – 3:7

**Scripture Reading:** 1 Samuel 25

### **Introduction**

This morning I intend to introduce you to an examination of the biblical doctrine of headship and submission in marriage. It will not do to simply dismiss these doctrines, as today’s “Christian” liberalism generally does, claiming they are merely the ravings of male chauvinists like the Apostle Paul. No. Anyone who believes that the Bible is what it says it is – the Word of God – knows that God sets out these doctrines for husbands and wives. Nor are these truths to be dismissed as something archaic, fitting for an ancient culture but not for ours. Our Lord Himself takes us right back to creation, to the first marriage, as does the Apostle Paul. God’s order for marriage in Eden was then and remains today

the same for all marriages in all places.

Matthew 19:1-6 ESV

(1) Now when Jesus had finished these sayings, he went away from Galilee and entered the region of Judea beyond the Jordan.

(2) And large crowds followed him, and he healed them there.

(3) And Pharisees came up to him and tested him by asking, "Is it lawful to divorce one's wife for any cause?"

(4) He answered, "Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female,

(5) and said, 'Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'?

(6) So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate."

The Apostle Paul does the same, and gives us even further information from the creation order –

1 Timothy 2:8-15 ESV

(8) I desire then that in every place the men should pray, lifting holy hands without anger or quarreling; (9) likewise also that women should adorn themselves in respectable apparel, with modesty and self-control, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly attire,

(10) but with what is proper for women who profess godliness--with good works.

(11) Let a woman learn quietly with all submissiveness.

(12) I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet.

(13) For Adam was formed first, then Eve;

(14) and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor.

(15) Yet she will be saved through childbearing--if they continue in faith and love and holiness, with self-control.

This is why, then, an early evidence that a church or person or denomination is or has already departed from the doctrine of the authority and inerrancy of Scripture is *the conforming of marriage and roles in the church to the standards of the world*. When, for example, a

church or denomination of churches decides that a woman can be an elder or a pastor in Christ's church, you can be sure that it has already rejected the authority and inerrancy of God's Word. This will then, in such cases, be only the first step in an entire cascade of disobedience to Christ. Next, homosexuality will be acknowledged as "valid" and soon such men and women will be standing in pulpits. The floodgates are open at that point and the church, which is to be the pillar of God's truth, is no longer the church. *This very thing can happen in any church, and we must always be on guard.*

We are not, therefore, going to deal with this sin of abuse and domestic violence by simply and sinfully dismissing the Word of God. The Bible is quite plain –

Ephesians 5:22-33 ESV

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

(23) For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior.

(24) Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands.

(25) Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her,

(26) that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word,

(27) so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.

(28) In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. (29) For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church,

(30) because we are members of his body.

(31) "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh."

(32) This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.

(33) However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.

### **The Abuser's 'Take' On Headship and Submission**

By now, each one of you must surely know that the abusive person,

particularly the abusive man (but let's not forget there are women abusers as well. The feminist movement has assaulted the Scriptures with great energy). We know that the abusive man is a person who –

- Has a mindset, a mentality, of control and power over. This is what defines him, especially in regard to his relationship with his wife or girlfriend. *This is how he thinks.*
- Has a profound sense of entitlement. He is *entitled* – this is his assumption, his outlook on life. He is the center of his universe and expects/demands everyone to acknowledge him. Especially his victims.
- And, as we have learned, he is a person who has a conscienceless assumption of justification so that he can use his weapons of abuse with no remorse. He has done “justice” – he has effected “righteousness” in his abuse of his victim. He might see the thing as “well, it’s too bad – but she needs to learn.”

It should not, therefore, take us by surprise that the biblical doctrine of the headship of the husband in

marriage is going to be subject to the abusive man's abuse. And therefore, as with the doctrine of predestination, the doctrine of headship and submission to that headship in marriage is a doctrine which must be, well – listen to this “adjustment” of the London Confession of Faith on predestination so as to apply it to the doctrine of headship and submission-

*“This doctrine is to be handled with special prudence and care...so shall this doctrine afford matter of praise, reverence, and admiration of God, and of humility, diligence, and abundant consolation to all that sincerely obey the gospel.”*

***“As we have been learning in this entire sermon series on abuse and domestic violence, the conservative, Bible-believing church – churches like ours – have not done a good job in handling these doctrines with prudence and care. As a result, they have often been taken as license, by abusive men, to give biblical warrant to their cruelties. To any person who might be here this morning, who has so perverted these Scriptures so as to justify the pursuit of their own self-seeking will and of power and control over their spouse, you are served notice that you have committed a great***

***and wicked sin, and are hereby, by the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ, who sees all and knows all, commanded to confess and repent.”***

Let's listen to some general comments by a few authors on this matter of abuse and the doctrine of headship and submission in marriage –

*“There are two kinds of power. One kills the spirit, the other nourishes the spirit. The first is Power Over. The other is Personal Power. Power Over shows up as control and dominance. Personal Power shows up as mutuality and co-creation. Mutuality is a way of being with another person which promotes the growth and well-being of one's self AND the other person by means of clear communication and empathetic understanding. Someone who [on the other hand] believes in Power Over expects to get what he or she wants through the use of Power Over another.”* [Patricia Evans, The Verbally Abusive Relationship],

Evans, who is not to my knowledge a Christian, goes on to speak about what she calls “the influence of patriarchy” as a contributor to abuse. Everything she says in the following statement may or may not be true in

the light of Scripture, but the conservative, Bible-believing church has too often just dismissed these kinds of observations by secular therapists when in fact there are truths here that we need to acknowledge -

*“We still live in a patriarchal culture that construes women to be subordinate to men. I used to think, when I was very young, that patriarchy was a term for old men’s ideas – ideas like ‘women shouldn’t vote.’ I thought that patriarchy was about ‘how it was in the old days.’ But now I see that patriarchy – a system of erroneous and dehumanizing beliefs about men and women – still has a tremendous influence in our culture and throughout the world...Discussing beliefs about power, entitlements, one’s own authority, being in charge of another person, being the authority in another’s life versus being one’s own authority, and so forth can help the abuser see how patriarchy has taught oppression.”*

Listen now to Brenda Branson and Paula Silva, taken from their book Violence Among Us (written from a Christian perspective) –

*“An attitude of superiority and a deep disrespect for women, combined with feelings of*

*entitlement and desire for power and control, prevent the abusive man from feeling empathy or compassion toward his wife. He feels little or no remorse when he slaps her around because in his eyes she is always wrong; she is the one to blame. His goal is to discredit her, to silence her protests, and to divert attention from his bad behavior to her failures.*

*Where do these attitudes originate? They typically result from 1) male role models in the home who disrespect or abuse women; 2) cultural attitudes toward women as servants or property; and 3) distortion of Scripture preached from pulpits of all denominations for generations, erroneously teaching that because God created Adam first, man must be superior to woman in every way – mentally, physically, and spiritually. The colloquial corruption of the King James Version’s ‘help meet’ in Genesis 2:18 into the so-called “helpmate” of tradition has been the source of many disrespectful attitudes toward women by Christian men.*

*God does not give husbands the right to control or punish their wives.... Other Scripture passages about submission (such as Ephesians 5:21-32) have been*

*distorted by abusive men against their wives. They ignore the foundation of submission ...where husbands are instructed to love their wives as Christ loved the church. What does that love and leadership look like? Christ's love did not exploit, exert power and control, intimidate, demean, verbally abuse, or use force or violence....He did not demand his rights. Instead, He humbled Himself as a servant and washed the disciples' feet.*

***“Submission is not a right given to a husband to demand but a precious gift given willingly by a woman ‘as unto the Lord’ (Eph 5:22). When an abusive, power-hungry man demands submission as his right, it is no longer a loving gift but a stolen treasure gained by extortion and coercion.” [Violence Among Us]***

Headship, as we will see in our examination of 1 Peter 3 and Ephesians 5, is not something that means a wife is bound to obey her husband's every whim. The husband is to lead his wife “in the Lord,” and this does not mean therefore that a wife is obligated to-

- bring him a beer on his demand
- do every task as he instructs her to do it

- conduct her daily affairs and schedule exactly as he directs her to
- obtain his permission before making any decision

***“Where real, biblical, Christ-like headship and submission are functioning, the marriage will be like the body of Christ serving and being led by Christ. It will be a relationship in which the one loves the other as God the Son loves God the Father and as the Son is led by the Father's will. The two are one flesh. Such a marriage will resemble a human body in which the head does not hate itself, but loves and nurtures its own flesh. The husband will understand that his wife is part of him, so that his will serves not only for his benefit but for hers as well. She will have no difficulty following that lead (submitting) because she will realize that she is loved and that her husband's will is Christ's will – for her sanctification and His glory.”***

**Example** – John and Mary are experiencing ongoing conflict in their marriage relationship. John wants one thing, but Mary sees it another way. John believes that the way to solve the problem (and the “problem” of course, is his wife!), is to read Ephesians 5 to her and tell

her that she needs to start doing what he says. After all, that is submission, as he reminds her. Mary, a genuine Christian, unhappily agrees, after all – the Bible does indeed say that the wife is to submit to her husband.

What is wrong with this picture? Plenty! Any time a husband sits his wife down and lectures her about her need to do what he says, that is a marriage you can be sure that is not functioning as Christ ordains. If I need to tell my wife to do what I say, I have already lost my leadership – I have failed in some point, that failure most probably is connected with some sense of entitlement, control, power over, or belief that my desires are to be met by my wife. MY desires. Not the Lord's desires. I will certainly not be nurturing and aiding in my wife's sanctification. So many times a husband's "biblical headship" has deteriorated into merely the indulging of his own sinful and selfish appetites.

*“Many misconceptions so popular today have been created by the abuser himself as a smokescreen to prevent another person from digging too deeply into his heart and mind. He is a master of manipulation who will use a myriad of excuses and blame to distract anyone trying to*

*get at the heart of the matter.”* [Violence Among Us]. And, of course, one of the most common “smokescreens” we run into in the church is “headship and submission” – all distorted so that it appears that the problem in a marriage is the wife's refusal to submit to her husband.

***“When we are in sin, we are generally the LEAST qualified of all people to explain that sin and the reason(s) for it. The sinner is the worst authority to consult on his own sin. And yet, the sinner usually fancies himself/herself as the BEST authority. And often the church falls for this deception. We listen to the sinner, to the abusive man or woman, and unquestioningly accept their explanation for what they did or did not do. We listen to them criticize (blame) others and we are often deceived into believing their blaming/criticizing allegations. The abusive man's wife did NOT “make him do it by pushing him too far.” His abuse is not explained by drugs or alcohol abuse, not by an uncontrollable anger or low self-esteem. How foolish we are if we listen to an abusive man expound the Scriptures about headship and submission. We might as well get into a car on the freeway with a blind man driving.”***

Listen now to the distortion of the biblical doctrine of headship and submission, and see the terrible damage that it does when used as justification by the abusive man –

We do not reject the biblical doctrine of headship and submission in marriage. It is a plain, healthy, righteous doctrine. A beautiful picture of Christ and His bride, the church. But we do acknowledge that sinful people have indeed perverted God's Word, as we see in the following true example taken from Battered Into Submission – The Tragedy of Wife Abuse in the Christian Home, by James and Phyllis Alsdurf –

*“As an 8-year old, Alice was abused by her brother. Forty years later as she talked about that incident and the many which followed, she spoke through tears. ‘I passed out and when I came to I was lying like I was hung on a cross. I carried that burden myself, thinking it was my own fault because of what I heard at church. The church was so powerful. The little girls sat down in front practically beneath the pulpit and the pastor always talked about hell, fire, brimstone, about harlots and adulterers. It always was the woman's fault. I wished then that I'd been born a boy. They seemed to be favored. They had a chance to go*

*to high school. I didn't. My folks bought insurance policies for my brothers, but not for the girls.*

*‘When my brother was after me, I'd want to open the bedroom door and tell someone, but I couldn't. After I left home I finally realized why: My folks wouldn't have believed me. My brother was kingpin. I guess I would rather go on believing that they loved me than find out the truth.’*

*Five weeks after marriage, her husband's emotional and physical abusiveness started. ‘Being in control was so important to him. He would make comments about needing to break me in like a horse. He didn't want his family to think he wasn't in control. I felt like I was in prison, like a caged bird. A bird who could fly but wasn't allowed.’*

*Alice blames the bulk of her husband's problems on the strict religious environment in which they both were raised. ‘It caused the problems in the first place. There was no expressing of emotions, especially for men. The church gave him the right to do everything he did. All we ever heard was that the woman has to be submissive. It never taught the next thing, that the husband is to love his wife as his own body. I never heard those*



verses in church. I didn't even know they were in the Bible until I read them at home myself.'

***If, like the evil judge who eventually responds with justice (Luke 18), an unredeemed society will hear the plight of the abused woman, can the people of God do any less? The prophet Jeremiah declares that to know the Lord is to uphold justice for the oppressed (Jer 22:13-16). As long as the church is quiet in a world which resonates with the cries of abused women, it is failing in its ministry of reconciliation. It is simply functioning as sounding brass, a clanging cymbal...The church is called to bind up the bruises of women who have suffered not only from the violence of their spouses, but also from the passive violence of a church which has failed to recognize their situation and to intervene on their behalf. Few of the many victims we interviewed see the church as a positive agent of change in their situation; it has not actively worked for their protection or addressed their husband's abusiveness with a balance of love and justice. Only a handful report that their churches have called the wicked and evil man to account for his wickedness.***

*Like any sin, wife abuse is no respecter of persons. It is not just 'out there' in society. It flourishes within the confines of the body Christ. By not acknowledging the problem, the church continues to suffer from a festering internal wound. And when it goes unchallenged, marital conflict of this magnitude prevents healthy family relationships and **BLOCKS EFFECTIVE MINISTRY ON EVERY LEVEL.***

*A woman from the Midwest, now leading a support group for abused women, noted that when she first told her pastor about being abused by her husband, the pastor said, 'I will never again bring this up.' 'I felt that the message he gave me was 'Please don't bring this up. I don't want to deal with it.' Later, the pastor did not even recall my having told him about the abuse. It scared him and he didn't listen.' That woman subsequently left the marriage, the church and the evangelical denomination to which she had belonged since her youth. The church kept me in a sick, abusive marriage for 21 years.'*

## **II. So, What does Headship and Submission Really Look Like?**

As you may realize by now, we are only introducing this subject this

morning and will need to continue next time. But as we draw things to a close today, listen to the Apostle Peter as he instructs us about husbands and wives and marriage and headship and submission. What does it mean to be the head of one's wife? What does submission look like?

We are going to have to spend quite a lot more time next week with these words –

### 1 Peter 3:1-8 ESV

(1) Likewise, wives, be subject to your own husbands, so that even if some do not obey the word, they may be won without a word by the conduct of their wives,

(2) when they see your respectful and pure conduct.

(3) Do not let your adorning be external--the braiding of hair and the putting on of gold jewelry, or the clothing you wear-- (4) but let your adorning be the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God's sight is very precious.

(5) For this is how the holy women who hoped in God used to adorn themselves, by submitting to their own husbands,

(6) as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord. And you are her

children, if you do good and do not fear anything that is frightening.

(7) Likewise, husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way, showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel, since they are heirs with you of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered.

(8) Finally, all of you, have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind.

What does all of this really mean? That a wife is to obey a husband who is actively disobeying God and do what he commands her? That she is not permitted to speak and voice her opinion – doesn't Peter say "a gentle and quiet spirit"? These are the things we need to look more closely at. For now, we end with these words from Leslie Vernick (The Emotionally Destructive Relationship) –

*"Submission is a discipline of the heart for all believers to practice, not just wives or women. All Christians are called to submit to authority (1 Peter 2:13), to one another (Ephesians 5:21), and to God (James 4:7). But don't misunderstand what submission is and what it is not. In the Greek, the word submission describes a*

voluntary action or attitude. Biblical submission cannot be forced. It is a position we take when we are motivated by our love for Christ and our desire to please and obey Him....

When a husband bullies his wife, his behavior does not describe biblical headship, nor is her forced 'submission' characteristic of biblical submission. The correct terms are coercion, manipulation, intimidation, or rape – and she is the victim. Let's make sure we use the right words.

I am amazed by those instances when a man who believes strongly in forcible submission is confronted with his own sin but is unwilling to submit himself to anyone else's authority for help and accountability, including his own pastor. Such a man is not open to correction, challenge, or change because he is always right. He manipulates the Scriptures to serve his purposes.

Jesus cautions those in positions of authority – parents, husbands, pastors, and elders – not to misuse those God-ordained positions for self-centered purposes. These roles are given to us by God to humbly serve the individuals or groups that have been entrusted to our care, not

to have our egos stroked or to get our own way. (Mark 10:42-45).

Sadly, many husbands have used their God-given position in their homes for selfish purposes, and often other Christians have unwittingly endorsed them. These husbands believe that they have license to do or demand anything they want, and that their wives are supposed to comply. This ought not to be!