



²¹ submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.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.

A few Sundays ago, I picked on Matt Chandler and his church for the serious mistakes in leadership. Thankfully that seemed to have a good outcome. But recently I came across a great quote from him that fits perfectly with our theme.

...I felt, as I was writing this, this thing in my gut. I felt this kind of tension in my gut, because although we have clearly shown that to be a helpmate is not inherently inferior because we see that God himself is our help, most often throughout the Old Testament, there is and will always be an aspect of submission to who holds the primary responsibility for the one that is to help with that responsibility. And so, as I was writing, here's what I felt in my gut: Lord, how are women who have known nothing but men who abuse and belittle and take advantage of and use them as commodities, as recreational devices, how

will a woman who has been nothing but harmed by men POSSIBLY going to hear this [i.e., submission] and understand it as beautiful? It's hard to be called to submission in a world full of little boys. It's hard. It's hard to walk in submission when you're surrounded by a herd of morons.¹

I friend of Ryan's directed me to this quote on Twitter and she made the simple comment, "It's so accurate." I was curious what she meant by that, so I began a Twittersation with her.

Me—But by accurate, do you mean that there really are that many morons running around? Genuine question re: your observations. thx

Her—My experience: Submission unimaginable/bondage when it's hypothetically to a man (boy) without vision, responsibility, initiation, submission to the Lord in everything. As I've heard, marry a man to whom you'd enjoy submission.

Me—I love that! But what happens if you're already to a boy/man who is NOT that person?

Her—A situation I'm aiming to avoid! Don't even desire to posit a guess since it's sad to me to think about. But: pray, affirm leadership where it exists, submit to the Lord in everything first and aim to submit to husband with eyes set on ultimately pleasing God thru it. But of course, I'm speaking as someone who desires to conform with scripture's ultimate say and also is not speaking from experience (marriage).

Me—Understood, but that's why I appreciate it so much. You seek to lean into hard truths and are in effect, preparing yourself to obey in the future. That's powerful stuff.

I really did appreciate her take on submission and headship. With this foundation, I think she is more likely to find a Godly husband. But her comments and the quote from Chandler present the chief problem with anyone who holds to the traditional view of marriage. What do you do when so many boys and men are a bunch of morons? Many of them won't or don't know how to lead. Some lead too firmly and lacking in love and a small percentage will move into the very serious territory of abuse.

I found this quote last week, several weeks after I decided to cover the topic of abuse in marriage, but it certainly pinpoints with laser precision what I was thinking.

This demonstrates the fact that many traditional complementarians still do not seem to accept the fact that male abuse of power is virtually universal, and that due to human depravity, the concept of male headship is often misused to promote the abuse of women and children. It is not enough for complementarians to say they are against all abuse, unless they are willing to acknowledge the particular virulence of male abuse. Hence, I would go so far as to challenge complementarians that teaching male leadership/female submission without noting the reality and potential for male abuse of power is at best dangerous and at worst immoral.²

By the way, this was written by someone who holds to the traditional viewpoint. If you have heard my last four messages on marriage, you know that I did not shrink from setting forth the clear teaching from Scripture that the husband is the head of the wife, just as Christ is the head of the church. I have written about 14,000 words on the topic and you can read or reread them anytime you want on our website. But I absolutely agree with his last sentence.

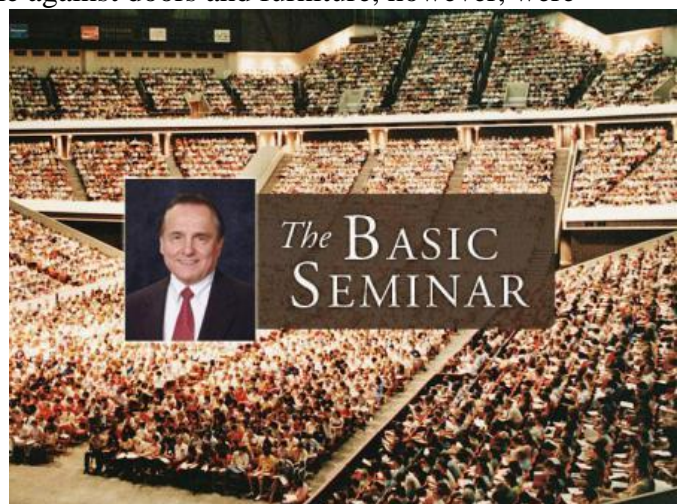
A few weeks ago it hit me like a ton of bricks that I need to make certain that my teaching on submission and headship is not only taught properly, but also understood properly. There is a Christian teacher's training curriculum called *The Seven Laws of the Learner*. I've never forgotten one of the Seven Learner Maxims: Teachers are responsible to cause the students to learn. Think about that principle. This means that if you leave here and have not learned anything, it's not your fault, it's my fault. So you can all kick back, close your eyes and not worry about being held accountable for anything! It's obviously not an absolute principle but it is helpful to keep in mind, especially for this topic. Since I am teaching something that not only does our western culture reject but so do many evangelicals, then I have an even greater responsibility to make sure it is properly understood and, in this case, properly applied. So, I agree that "teaching male leadership/female submission without noting the reality and potential for male abuse of power is at best dangerous and at worst immoral."

But some may wonder if it is such a problem that needs to be addressed in a sermon. It's not common but it does exist in far higher numbers than we would like to think possible. The author of two articles I read shared his experience. "Little did I (or anyone else) realize that one of our elders had been beating his wife for years, having put her in the hospital several times. At this same time, one of our ministers was fleeing arrest for felony child abuse."³

While I was at Trinity Seminary, Ruth Tucker was a professor of missions, though I never took any classes from her. What she describes next was happening while she taught at my school.

During his violent rages, my ex-husband often hurled biblical texts at me, as though the principal tenet of Scripture was, "Wives, submit to your husbands." He spit the words out, repeatedly beating me over the head, at least figuratively, with his black-and-white Bible. His hitting and punching and slamming me against doors and furniture, however, were anything but figurative. Nor were his terror-loaded threats.⁴

You might think, "Well anyone can take a good teaching and twist it out of context. Her husband obviously misunderstood what he was taught." Maybe, but there are far too many horrific examples of evangelicals wrongly teaching this belief. Many of you are familiar with Bill Gothard. For almost three decades, his *Institute in Basic Life Principles* was all the rage among evangelicals. He would fill



up stadiums with 10,000 people at a time. Since its inception, 2.5 million people have attended the basic seminar. So Gothard is no minor footnote in the evangelical world. Here's how Gothard responded to a "question of how a wife should respond if she is the victim of her husband's hostility. He replies, 'There is no 'victim' if we understand that we are called to suffer for righteousness.'" He then cites 1 Peter 2:21 and 3:1 in exhorting abused wives to suffer like Jesus."⁵

Ed Wheat has written many best-selling Christian books on marriage. He states that in a "severely troubled marriage" in which the husband comes and goes to his mistress, the wife should quietly accept the sinful husband the way he is. Furthermore, the wife is apparently responsible to mollify an abusive husband: "you have to be perfect in your behavior toward your partner... and you must be very sensitive to avoid anything that will set your partner off."⁶

One book that has sold over 600,000 copies states "repeatedly that wives are to obey their husbands in absolutely everything, without qualification, even if a woman believes her husband's command goes against the will of God. She states that women are to submit passively to harsh and mean [abusive] husbands based on the example of Christ's suffering given in 1 Peter 2:21-23. She furthermore argues that a wife must submit to an abusive husband even when the husband is beating her child, orders her to get an abortion..."⁷

Need I go on? Are you convinced that there is a need to address this topic? It's not all bad news though.⁸ "There is an inverse relationship between church attendance and domestic violence. Conservative Protestant men who attend church regularly are found to be the least likely group to engage in domestic violence, though conservative Protestant men who are irregular church attendees are the most likely to batter their wives."⁹ One study demonstrated that men who never attend church are 500% more likely to abuse their wives than men who attend church regularly.¹⁰

Furthermore, just because abuse exists and a small minority would use the Bible to justify their disgusting behavior, does not mean we should jettison the belief itself. Mary Kassian writes:

I've seen all sorts of doctrines twisted and used as justification to support sinful behavior: the doctrine of trust and generosity to bilk churchgoers out of money, the doctrine of truth-telling to justify slander, the doctrine of joy to justify adultery, the doctrine of abundance to justify greed. Jim Jones used the doctrine of social justice to force his followers to drink the kool-aid.

So do we toss these doctrines out the window because some people use them in a twisted and destructive manner? Or do we recognize that sinners will use whatever justification they can to excuse their sinful behavior.¹¹

No, we don't toss them out, but we do make sure that they are never abused or misused. It's not all that different from any other teaching in Scripture that can be twisted. For example, take the simple task of reading your Bible. Many churches and pastors have turned this into a legalistic

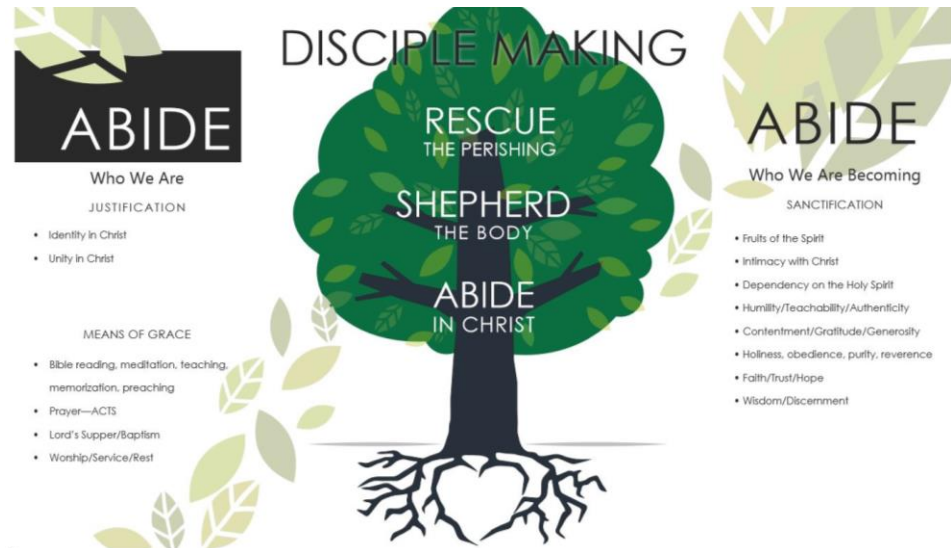
endeavor. If you have any struggles in life, the prescription is to read your Bible more and pray more. If your problems continue, then the obvious answer is to read more and pray more. This empty form of legalism can turn into a very subtle form of spiritual abuse.

Of course you should read your Bible and pray, but as a means for receiving more grace, as a way to encounter Jesus. That's why I like the old term "means of grace" that we use in our discipleship brochure. The simple fact is that you will not encounter Jesus if you ignore his word. And, in theory at least, the more time you spend in his word, the more you could encounter him. But it's not a guarantee that you will encounter Jesus. You might read your Bible because you're a disciplined person and you like to check it off on your daily list. You might read your Bible so you can be smarter than others and prove them wrong. Reading your Bible could increase your pride and drive you further from Jesus. So if something as simple as Bible reading and prayer can be abused, then clearly the doctrine of headship can be—and has been abused. So we don't throw it out, but we tread carefully.

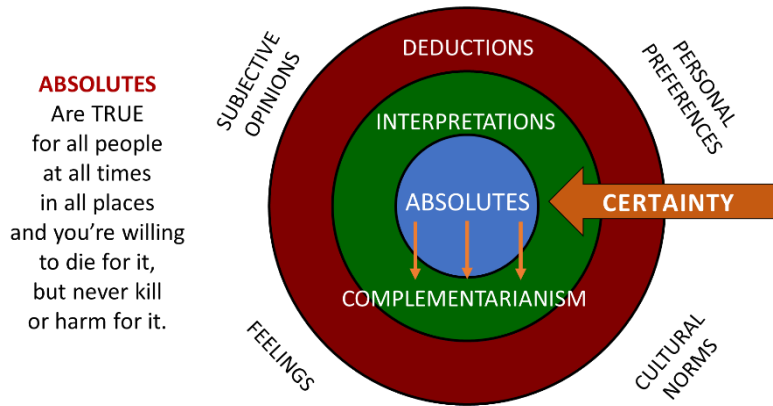
The verse I really want to focus on this morning is verse 24. *Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands.* We have already established that submission and headship are clearly taught but out of this passage, verse 24 may have the most potential to be misused or even abused. The command is not only to submit but to submit "in everything." How can such a radical statement be true? How does such a thing work out practically? My favorite Ephesians commentary states: 'No part of her life should be outside of her relationship to her husband and outside of subordination to him'¹²

I don't disagree with this commentary but So here's what I would say about this verse. Everything means everything, but it doesn't always mean everything. Got it? OK, let's pray. I don't want to water down the strength of this command, but it does require some comment. In other words, if you follow these principles they will keep husbands from ever abusing their authority, whether to a large or small degree.

1. Everything cannot mean anything that is against God's standards.



CONCENTRIC CIRCLE OF CERTAINTY



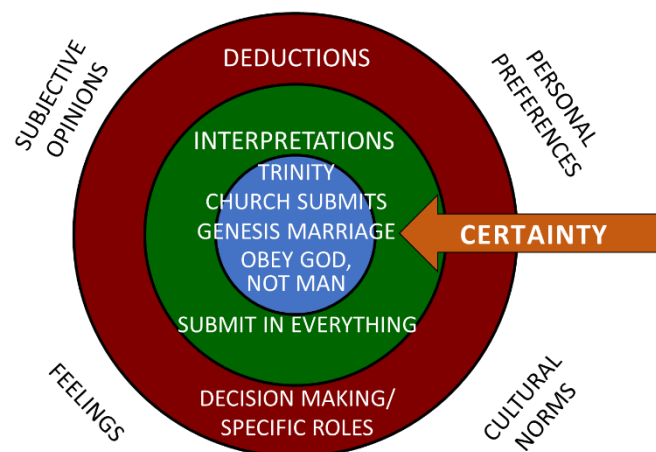
It does not mean every single decision or action the husband would require. Let's go back to the Concentric Circle again. Last week I used this diagram to illustrate the fact that I would not put the traditional view in the center circle of absolutes. However, the traditional model is based on much doctrine that is in the center circle, such as the Trinity and the functional submission of the Son to the

Father; the church submits to Christ and not the other way around; and the foundation of marriage and the beginning of Creation. These are all in the center circle.

The traditional view, including submitting in everything is in the next level of doctrinal certainty. I believe it is true for all people in all times and all places, but I am not willing to die for this belief. It's in the circle of interpretations. Then we can go further out yet when we get to the practical decisions within a specific marriage. These kinds of decisions are not absolutes and they are not even biblical interpretation. They are deductions and possible applications of the deeper truths. For example, the Bible does not tell us if the wife or the husband should balance the checkbook. That's not a 'to die for' belief and it's not true for all people at all times and in all places. This is a decision that husbands and wives must decide on their own, but as they make these decisions, they must also make use of the submission/headship principles.

And here is where we address abuse in marriage. If the husband is abusing his wife in any way, this is incredibly sinful and does not require submission by the wife. If the husband asks his wife to do something that is against God's standards, the wife must obey God rather than man. And guess what? Obeying God is in the center circle of absolutes.

CONCENTRIC CIRCLE OF CERTAINTY



2. The command to submit is addressed to the wives and NOT to the husbands. Husbands are never told to make their wives submit to them. The husbands' responsibility is to love his wife as Chris loved the church. This will be the focus of next week's message.

3. The husband's love helps the wife submit. The wife is to submit to her husband as Christ submits to the church. But the church is not coerced into submission but instead she is wooed, loved and nurtured into submission. Let me repeat what Ryan's friend shared. "Submission unimaginable/bondage when it's hypothetically to

a man (boy) without vision, responsibility, initiation, submission to the Lord in everything. As I've heard, marry a man to whom you'd enjoy submission.” Husbands, look at the wisdom contained in this. This girl desires a husband who is “submitted to the Lord in everything.” Do you understand how this will give your wife freedom and security? She can submit to you and she sees you submitted to the Lord. It's still her job to submit to you but you make it easier and even joyful to do so when she has confidence that you are already submitted to Jesus. Do you see the implication of this? It means that the best thing you can do for your wife is to love and obey Christ. As your will bends to Christ's will, your wife will become increasingly secure to bend her will toward yours.

4. The husband follows the headship of Christ.

How was Christ's headship demonstrated? It was not a power play but his role as head was demonstrated in sacrifice and love. The greatest leaders make the greatest sacrifices. The best leaders know how to care for those under them. Headship is not power. Headship is love and gentleness.

5. If the husband is abusive, the wife is not under obligation to submit to him.

If a husband is abusive, he is breaking God's law and he is breaking the laws of the State, which are also under God's authority.

6. Churches who teach headship and submission should make a clear statement on the sinfulness of any kind of abuse.

This statement from the Council of biblical manhood and womanhood is excellent.

STATEMENT ON ABUSE¹³

Adopted by the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood at its meeting in Lisle, Illinois in November, 1994.

- We understand abuse to mean the cruel use of power or authority to harm another person emotionally, physically, or sexually.
- We are against all forms of physical, sexual and /or verbal abuse.
- We believe that the biblical teaching on relationships between men and women does not support, but condemns abuse (Prov. 12:18; Eph. 5:25-29; Col. 3:18; 1 Tim. 3:3; Titus 1:7-8; 1 Pet. 3:7; 5:3).
- We believe that abuse is sin. It is destructive and evil. Abuse is the hallmark of the devil and is in direct opposition to the purpose of God. Abuse ought not to be tolerated in the Christian community.
- We believe that the Christian community is responsible for the well-being of its members. It has a responsibility to lovingly confront abusers and to protect the abused.
- We believe that both abusers and the abused are in need of emotional and spiritual healing.
- We believe that God extends healing to those who earnestly seek him.
- We are confident of the power of God's healing love to restore relationships fractured by abuse, but we realize that repentance, forgiveness, wholeness, and reconciliation is a process. Both abusers and abused are in need of on-going counseling, support and accountability.

- In instances where abusers are unrepentant and/or unwilling to make significant steps toward change, we believe that the Christian community must respond with firm discipline of the abuser and advocacy, support and protection of the abused.
- We believe that by the power of God’s Spirit, the Christian community can be an instrument of God’s love and healing for those involved in abusive relationships and an example of wholeness in a fractured, broken world.

I enjoy preaching very much but I did not enjoy needing to preach this message. It’s a powerful reminder that sin is so very destructive. This is hard but necessary stuff. I know there have been some who have had these struggles within our church and I’m sure you might be able to help someone you know to recognize the signs of abuse. May god grant us mercy and strength.

Rich Maurer
March 11, 2018

Addendum

“Can we come together as a Christian community and recognize that the doctrine of male headship has sometimes been used as a cover to perpetrate violence against women?” —Ruth Tucker ([here’s a favorable review](#) of Tucker’s book)

A better question would be, “Can we come together as a Christian community— complementarians and egalitarians—and stand together against abuse?” It’s a question Wayne Grudem and I asked Catherine Clark Kroeger and the Council for Biblical Equality (CBE) board on behalf of the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood (CBMW) in the mid-nineties when I helped draft [CBMW’s Statement against Abuse](#). Sadly, CBE’s answer at the time was a resounding no. CBE didn’t want CBMW to stand with them against abuse. I suspect they only wanted to blame CBMW for it.¹⁴ (Wayne Grudem has written his own personal statement.¹⁵)

¹ <http://www.sagetheblog.com/2015/05/obstacles-to-submission.html>

² http://www.etsjets.org/files/JETS-PDFs/50/50-3/JETS_50-3_573-594_Tracy.pdf

³ <https://mendingthesoul.org/wp-content/uploads/DV-in-Church-1-Peter.pdf>, p. 280.

⁴ Ruth Tucker, *Black and White Bible, Black and Blue Wife: My Story of Finding Hope after Domestic Abuse*, Zondervan, ©2016 p. 14.

⁵ Bill Gothard, *Supplementary Alumni Book*, vol. 5 (Institute in Basic Youth Conflicts, 1979), 10, cited by James and Alsdurf and Phyllis Alsdurf, *Battered into Submission: The Tragedy of Wife Abuse in the Christian Home* (Downers Grove, HI.: InterVarsity Press, 1989), 88.

⁶ Ed Wheat, *How to Save Your Marriage Alone* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983), 24-25,29,3, cited in <https://mendingthesoul.org/wp-content/uploads/DV-in-Church-1-Peter.pdf>

⁷ Elizabeth Rice Handford, *Me? Obey Him?* rev. ed. (Murfreesboro, Tenn.: Sword of the Lord, 1994), 31,35. Cited in <https://mendingthesoul.org/wp-content/uploads/DV-in-Church-1-Peter.pdf>

⁸ “The feminist hypothesis that patriarchy is the ultimate source of all abuse is not fair to the vast majority of complementarians who have never abused women or children and who are as appalled at abuse as are egalitarians. This radical feminist assertion also does not square with social science research—it illegitimately offers a simplistic explanation for a very complex phenomenon. To that extent it impedes the process of accurately understanding and finding viable solutions to abuse.”

http://www.etsjets.org/files/JETS-PDFs/50/50-3/JETS_50-3_573-594_Tracy.pdf

⁹ http://www.etsjets.org/files/JETS-PDFs/50/50-3/JETS_50-3_573-594_Tracy.pdf, p. 22.

¹⁰ David M. Fergusson et al., "Factors Associated with Reports of Wife Assault in New Zealand," *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 48 (1986) 410.

¹¹ <https://girlsgonewise.com/black-and-white-bible-black-and-blue-wife/>

¹² O'Brien, P. T. (1999). *The letter to the Ephesians* (p. 417). Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.

¹³ <https://cbmw.org/uncategorized/cbmw-issues-abuse-statement/>

¹⁴ Ibid

¹⁵ I strongly deplore any abuse of wives by their husbands and I believe the Bible teaches clearly against it. When pastors learn about abuse occurring in a home in their congregation, they have an obligation before God to seek to bring an immediate end to it, through direct personal conversation with the abuser, support of the abused, professional counselling, through means such as church discipline, protective personal intervention in dangerous situations, using law enforcement and other legal pressures, extensive prayer, and, if necessary, legal separation. Pastors also need to encourage their church members and attenders to tell someone in church leadership if abuse is occurring, so that appropriate means can be brought to bring an immediate end to it. Nobody in a leadership role in CBMW thinks that abuse within a marriage is justified by the biblical teachings about husbands and wives. Cited at: <https://girlsgonewise.com/statement-on-abuse-on-the-day-for-the-elimination-of-violence-against-women/>