



*<sup>21</sup> submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.<sup>22</sup> Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. <sup>23</sup> 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. <sup>24</sup> Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands.*

*<sup>25</sup> Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, <sup>26</sup> that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, <sup>27</sup> 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. <sup>28</sup> In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. <sup>29</sup> For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, <sup>30</sup> because we are members of his body. <sup>31</sup> "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." <sup>32</sup> This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.<sup>33</sup> However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.*

This series on the husband and wife relationships are coming at a pivotal time in our culture. On October 5 of last Fall the #metoo movement was essentially born when Harvey Weinstein was exposed as sexual predator. This has brought on an avalanche of accusations against a long list of celebrities and public figures. Some consider Rose McGowan to be a hero for finally standing up against Harvey Weinstein.



If there are any heroes in this movement, I would put attorney and former gymnast, Rachael Denhollander, at the very top. In August of 2016 she filed a complaint against Larry Nassar who has worked with Olympic gymnasts for almost twenty years. A sixteen month trial ensued and just before the final sentencing on February 5<sup>th</sup>, a “hearing was expected to last four days with 88 victim-impact

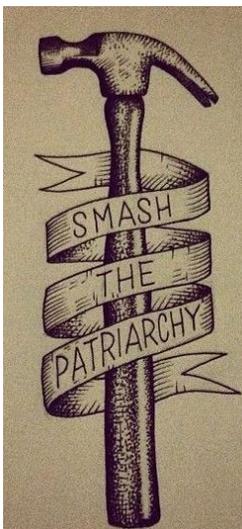
statements. More women and girls came forward to speak, and in total 156 women and girls made statements over seven days.”<sup>1</sup> Rachael is a hero because she acted with tremendous bravery long before the #metoo movement broke out but was no doubt helped by the movement at the end of the trial.

I believe that Rachael was clearly led by the Lord to be the leading voice in this trial. Listen to how she answered this question. What does it mean to you that you forgive Larry Nassar? The world does not understand Biblical forgiveness and neither do many believers but I think her answer is outstanding.

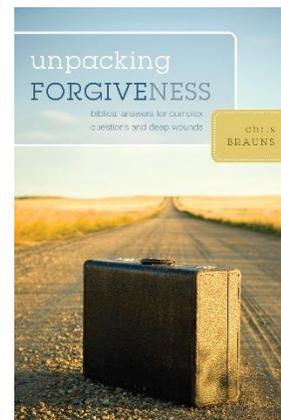
“It means that I trust in God’s justice and I release bitterness and anger and a desire for personal vengeance. It does not mean that I minimize or mitigate or excuse what he has done. It does not mean that I pursue justice on earth any less zealously. It simply means that I release personal vengeance against him, and I trust God’s justice, whether he chooses to mete that out purely eternally, or both in heaven and on earth.”<sup>2</sup>

This is not a complete statement on forgiveness but it is Biblically accurate. It matches the view of my favorite book on the subject—Unpacking Forgiveness. I have given away more of this book than any other book in my lifetime. Rachael’s husband just completed a MDiv and

Southern Seminary and is working on a PhD in Systematic Theology. These are very Biblically minded people.



The #metoo movement has brought about a much needed awareness of assault of all kinds but there have also been overreactions. And here is where it intersects with our marriage study. There are many responses like this blog post: #MeToo: Don’t just say sorry, smash the patriarchy!<sup>3</sup> Patriarchy, which means “Father Rule,” and represents any and all type of male leadership in society and in the home. is perceived to be the greatest ill in society that cannot be reformed. It must be smashed and obliterated. It must be ground to a powder and tossed into the wind where it can no longer harm society and oppress women.



But the problem for believers is that the Bible is unapologetically patriarchal. God is male, not female. Wives are commanded to submit to their husbands and not the other way around. Which is precisely why we have a great need for Biblical clarity on this topic; to know exactly what Scripture teaches and how to apply it. But if we are going to uphold the truth that wives are to submit to their husbands we also have to warn against abuses or potential abuses of this teaching. Even Rachael Denhollander painfully acknowledges the problems when she said that the "Church is one of the least safe places to acknowledge abuse because the way it is counseled is, more often than not, damaging to the victim."<sup>4</sup>

The context of her comment was in regard to sexual abuse, but her point is well taken. Churches are some of the most dangerous places on the planet. Let me explain. IF I am wrong about my understanding of the traditional view of this passage, then I am doing great harm to women and wives by promoting this view. Moreover—and here's the source of greatest danger—I would be using the Bible to back up my viewpoint. In other words, I am appealing to the highest possible authority to support my view and to encourage you to do the same. Now I don't think I am wrong about this passage but if I was, I would potentially be committing two grave sins. One, I would be guilty of squashing wives and women and two, I would be guilty of spiritual abuse by using the Bible to strong arm you into doing the wrong thing.

## Spiritual Abuse

When pastors and church leaders use their position and the Bible to either do evil themselves or to cover up the evil actions of others.

These are very serious issues which is why teachers are held to a higher level of accountability by the Lord. We can potentially do a lot of good for others but we can also we can do a lot of evil. I am no expert of marital abuse or sexual abuse but I have read a lot about spiritual abuse. Spiritual abuse happens when pastors and church leaders use their position and the Bible to either do evil themselves or to cover up the evil actions of others. I have seen it happen dozens of times and for every story I know about, there are hundreds more out there. This is why I take my role so very seriously. This is why two weeks ago I told you that I feel like teaching on this passage is like carrying around nitroglycerin. It has the potential to blow up in my face. I so want to be

guided by encouragement and warning like what Peter offered.

*1So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: 2shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; 3not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock. 4And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory (1 Peter 5:1-4).*

A few comments about this passage. One, Peter reminds us that we serve "God's flock." This is not my church or the elder's church or even in many ways "our church." We are God's flock. We

belong to him and because it is His flock, we must take great care to shepherd it wisely. Everything Peter says after this must take this fact into account. We are shepherding God's flock.

Second, the attitude and motives for shepherding are abundantly clear. *not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock.* Now there are shepherds who are in it for the money and I imagine some do it out of compulsion or a sense of duty. However, out of these three warnings, I think the most dangerous is the warning to not be domineering, or as the NIV puts it, "not lording it over those entrusted to you."

The core issue is power and authority. Elders are given responsibility and corresponding authority over those who they shepherd. In the very next verse in 1 Peter 5 we read, "Likewise, you who are younger, be subject to the elders." Subject is the same word as submit in Ephesians 5—same Greek word used. Hebrews 13:17 says the same thing. "Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account." So there is no question that elders have authority over God's flock. It is His flock, but he grants the right to exercise oversight and authority to the elders. Just like Jesus' parables of landowners who give the right to servants to manage their affairs, so elders are to manage and steward God's flock.

They are given authority to do so, just as husbands are given authority to manage their households with wives in submission. Just as parents are given the authority to manage their families with children in submission to them. Elders, husbands are parents hold positions of power—delegated power—but power nonetheless. And as we all know, power tends to corrupt. Anytime there is a position of power abuse of said power will always be a temptation. This is why elders are commanded not to be domineering over the flock, why husbands are to love their wives as Christ loved the church and why fathers are not to exasperate their children. In each case where the Bible grants a position of power it also attaches severe warnings for any misuse of power. Did you notice the warnings in the verses I read before?

1 Peter 5:4—*And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.*

Hebrews 13:17—*Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account.*

Elders will receive a crown of glory when the Chief Shepherd appears but the implication is that they will not if they violate the warnings. Hebrews is very clear—"as those who will have to give an account." And of course, elders will have to give an account to the Chief Shepherd. There is no wiggle room here. We will be held to account for our actions and how we stewarded the authority and responsibility given to us. The same goes for husbands and parents.

So I want you to know that I am very sensitive to the impact that the traditional view of husbands and wives can have on people. Churches can teach this doctrine in such a way that husbands feel empowered to rule harshly. If we are not extremely careful, we can commit two grievous errors. First, we can be guilty of causing harm to women. If we teach and apply this wrongly, then the abuse of women would be rightly laid at our feet. Do you see what I mean? If I teach this is in

such a way that clearly leads husbands to be abusive to their wives and they do it by using Scripture and an appeal to my role as a preacher, then I am just as guilty as if I had raised my own fist against that woman.

We commit a second grievous error if woman who are being abused come to us and we tell them that their problem is that they are not sufficiently submitting to their husbands. If they showed proper respect to him and cleaned the house the right way and did her duty in the bedroom, then whatever the husband may have done will never happen again. I know that this is cringe-worthy but I have heard of pastors giving this same advice on countless occasions. Even if this particular pastor never taught a harsh application of Ephesians five, he is guilty of causing even more abuse to this women by ignoring her cries for help. In effect, he would be abusing the woman a second time. All because the pastor does not understand the true meaning of Ephesians 5 nor does he understand what it means to shepherd the flock in a gentle, caring manner.

As I said before, I am no expert on abuse in marriages but I have read reams of material of spiritual abuse. It sickens me to the core and it makes me want to avoid it at all costs. This is why Rachael Denhollander believes that churches do not tend to be safe places for victims of abuse.

Let me give you one example. I have had great respect for Matt Chandler at The Village Church in Texas but a couple years ago, he and the church leadership made a terrible mistake. Their church was supporting a missionary family who worked with SIM in Africa. It was revealed that the husband was a pedophile and the wife sought a divorce to protect herself and her children. For some strange reason, the church leadership disagreed with her decision to divorce and put the wife under church discipline. It was an absolutely horrible decision that added an immense amount of insult to the injury she had already experienced. Thankfully, they eventually recognized the error of their ways and sincerely and thoroughly [apologized to her](#), but it was unfortunate that it happened in the first place. It was spiritual authority run amok.

But just because certain people and churches misuse their authority does not suddenly change the fact that they have been given a God-ordained authority and responsibility to exercise oversight of God's flock. In the same way, just because some husbands use Ephesians 5 to justify abusing or not loving their wives does not suddenly change the fact that they have a God ordained authority to lead and love their wives.

So before I address the issue of abuse in marriages, first we need to ask the question: Are we really sure this is what is being taught? Do we have a high degree of confidence that the traditional view, what is commonly called the Complementarian view is correct? I have started to lay this out in the past two weeks but I believe that more needs to be said. I know there are very serious issues with the interpretation and application of this passage. I have already addressed the issue of power and authority and next week I will continue to address the issue of abuse in marriages. But for now I hope you can see that there's too much hanging on this question not to address it thoroughly.

1. Eph. 5:21 does not teach mutual submission.

Two weeks ago I dealt with the question of whether or not Ephesians 5:21 teaches mutual submission. If you missed that message please read or listen to it. It is foundational to

understanding this passage. For those who oppose the traditional view, verse 21 is their linchpin verse which they feel automatically overturns the traditional view. And then last week I told you how verses 21-23 are one long sentence in the original language. It's abundantly clear that this is teaching that wives are to submit to husbands but husbands are never commanded to submit to their wives.

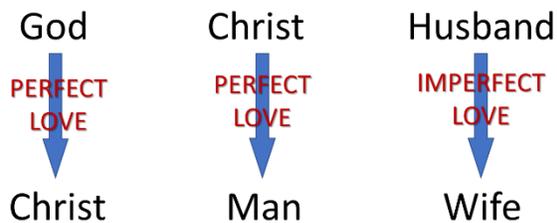
2. The wife submits to her husband because he is the head.

Verse 23 gives the reason for verse 22. *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.* Wives submit to their husbands for—or because—“the husband is the head of the wife.” Those who oppose the traditional view have two main arguments. We've already covered the first one—“the myth of mutual submission,” as it has been called. The second main argument is to state that head does not mean authority but merely means “source.” Here are a few verses by which to compare the meaning of the word.

1 Corinthians 11:3

*But I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ, the head of a wife is her husband, and the head of Christ is God.*

1 Corinthians 11:3—But I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ, the head of a wife is her husband, and the head of Christ is God.



This is the verse I mentioned two weeks ago which compares the submission of wives to husbands to the submission of man to Christ and Christ to God. No one would argue that the man is to submit to Christ just as no one would argue from Ephesians 5 that the church is to submit to Christ. It's the same consistent

message. In Ephesians 5 the word submit is used and in 1 Corinthians 11 the word head is used, but it should be apparent that they mean the same thing. Moreover, if the Son can willingly submit to the Father, even though they are both fully God and equal in every possible way, then it follows that wives submitting to their husbands is not a question of essential worth of the wife but of the complementary roles they are intended to fulfil.

Ephesians 1:22-23—And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, 23 which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

Ephesians 4:15—Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ.

There is no question that the word “head” in these verses means authority.

Two weeks ago I shared the research by Wayne Grudem that he did back in 1985 where he demonstrated that the word submit always means submission to an authority. In the 32 years since he did his research, not one example has proved otherwise.<sup>5</sup> In 2015 Grudem wrote a 30 year follow up to his original research with a very long title. *The meanings of kephalē (“head”) and hypotassō (“submit to”): After 30 years of controversy, where are we?*<sup>6</sup> So what he is

addressing is our two points here about mutual submission in verses 21 and 22 and the meaning of the word “head” in verse 23. Here are the conclusion of this paper:

- 7 of 7 Gk lexicons now give “authority over, ruler” as a meaning of kephalē (a Greek lexicon is a Greek dictionary.)
- 0 of 7 now give “source” as a meaning of kephalē
- In all of ancient Greek literature, in every example that takes the form, “Person A is the kephalē of Person or Group B,” Person A has authority over Person or Group B, 56 examples have been discovered showing kephalē w/ meaning of “authority over, leader, ruler”<sup>7</sup>

The best research and a plain reading of Scripture demonstrate that Paul actually intended to say that wives are to submit to their own husbands because the husband is the head.

3. Wives submit to husbands as the Son eternally submits to the Father.

I have given you Ephesians 5 and 1 Corinthians 11 to show this truth but let me give you one more passage.

*27 For “God has put all things in subjection under his feet.” But when it says, “all things are put in subjection,” it is plain that he is excepted who put all things in subjection under him. 28 When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things in subjection under him, that God may be all in all (1 Corinthians 15:27-28).*

Follow the teaching here. Verse 27 states that the Son is not in subjection to the Father. But we already know that he is to some degree since 1 Corinthians 11 says so and every minute of Jesus’ life was nothing but pure obedience to his Father. But then verse 28 states that the Son will be subjected to the Father in the last days. So this tells us two things. One, that whatever level of submission Jesus is now experiencing with his Father, it will be a greater level of subjection in the future. Second, it is clear that this is an eternal subjection. It happens at the last days and continues from there. Opponents of the traditional view argue that Jesus only submitted himself to the Father while he was on the earth, that it was a temporary submission. That in itself in no way disproves the teaching that wives are to submit to their husbands but it is also wrong at its core. The Son is not only in submission to his Father right now but will be so in even greater measure for all eternity.

Even the titles by which they have self-identified tell us the same thing. God the Father and God the Son describe the kind of relationship they have with each other. God the Father did not cause God the Son to be born. It’s not that kind of father-son relationship but it’s purely one of how they relate to one another. The Son is submissive to the Father and that will continue for all eternity. All of this demonstrates that two people—namely the Father and the Son—can be completely equal in every possible way but still have a difference in roles. And if this is true within the eternal Godhead, how much more can it be true between a husband and a wife.

I’ve expressed my concern about power and authority at some length. We need to on be guard against abuses of all kinds, including abuses in marriage. But in order to obey these commands and get the intended meaning and benefit from them, we need to have great confidence in what

they actually mean. This morning I talked about abuse of power in general and next week I will talk about abuse within marriages. I hope it has helped you to have more confidence in the meaning of this passage. If you have any questions at all, please do not hesitate to ask.

I was encouraged last week when I spoke with a woman who had a big smile on her face after the message. She was smiling because her husband had recently commented that they feel that their marriage has improved, that he had noticed the difference. That's the bottom line, isn't it? Lives transformed by the power of God's word and God's Spirit.

**Rich Maurer**  
**February 18, 2018**

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.usatoday.com/pages/interactives/larry-nassar-timeline/>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2018/january-web-only/rachael-denhollander-larry-nassar-forgiveness-gospel.html>

<sup>3</sup> <http://mikefrost.net/metoo-dont-just-say-sorry-smash-patriarchy/>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2018/january-web-only/rachael-denhollander-larry-nassar-forgiveness-gospel.html>

<sup>5</sup> He also wrote this research paper on the Greek word for head: *Does Kephale ("Head") Mean "Source" Or "Authority Over" in Greek Literature? A Survey of 2,336 Examples:*

[https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/tj/kephale\\_grudem.pdf](https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/tj/kephale_grudem.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> <https://view.officeapps.live.com/op/view.aspx?src=http://www.waynegrudem.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/Meaning-of-kephale-after-30-years.docx>

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.