Bulletin Article Wives be Subordinate to Your Husbands November 1, 2026

Last Tuesday the first reading for weekday Mass was from the 5th chapter of St Paul's letter to the Ephesians. In this part of the letter, our Lord, through His servant Paul, is giving instructions on how husbands and wives are to be towards one another. In this context, St Paul says: Wives, be subordinate to your husbands. Except for *maybe* teachings on sexuality, there is perhaps no other passage in Scripture that will draw the ire of modern man or contemporary feminism more than this one. There are plenty of attackers today who accuse St Paul of hating women based on this passage. So this is the first issue: if a person has any interest in eternal life, in getting to Heaven, in following our Lord, what should their reaction be to *any* passage in Scripture?

We have to start with dogmatic facts; dogma is the basis of everything else, including moral and spiritual theology. The (or a) relevant dogma here is that all, *all*, of Sacred Scripture is the inspired word of God. The Second Vatican Council's document on Sacred Scripture emphasized this point. That means that if someone grinds their teeth at this passage, makes accusations, rejects it outright, and so on – it is not St Paul, a mere man, that they are rejecting, accusing, and hating, it is our Lord Himself. That is not an option.

A person of faith, one who wants to be united with our Lord Jesus Christ and spend eternity with Him, has to look at this and say: this is the Lord's own instruction; so whatever it means, I will strive to follow it; the first thing I have to do, then, is know for sure what it means and then live it out.

So what does it mean when our Lord, through His servant St Paul, says: wives be subordinate to your husbands? The first reaction of many people is to think that it implies some sort of inferiority. Is that the case? Is that what the word 'subordinate' means here? Well, Dr Brant Pitre, a Scripture scholar, said that the Greek word, translated as 'subordinate' here is hypotassomai. Now recall the finding in the Temple. After Joseph and Mary found our Lord (at age 12) in the Temple, the Gospel says that our Lord went back to Nazareth with them and was 'hypotassomai' to them, that our Lord was subordinate to Mary & Joseph. The Greek word for subordinate that is used in the verse: wives be subordinate to your husbands, is the exact same word for subordinate used in the verse for Jesus at the finding in the Temple. Is Jesus in any way inferior to Mary and Joseph? Of course not. In fact, as good as they both are, they are still infinitely less than our Lord. So whatever is meant by 'subordinate' it cannot mean or imply anything like inferiority.

Subordinate, then, does not mean inferior, but it does mean something. We are still left with the question of: what does 'wives be subordinate to your husbands mean'? How is that to be lived out? It is always dangerous, if not outright wrong, to isolate a single verse or passage of Scripture and try to interpret it in that way. Scripture needs to be taken in its entirety – for example, using other parts of Scripture to help know what a word does or does not mean, like in the preceding paragraph. At a minimum, consideration has to be given to what St Paul is talking about overall in this section of his letter to the Ephesians. If we do, we see that he is teaching about marriage, which of course involves both the husband and the wife, and he does not leave the husband out. The instruction for husbands is simply: husbands, love your wives. By now, hopefully you realize that this is not a cheap, easy command. In fact, our Lord through His servant St Paul, goes on to say: Husbands, love your wives, *even as Christ loved the Church* and handed himself over for her to sanctify her; i.e., as He sacrificed Himself completely, totally for her. This is saying: husbands, look at the crucifix and now you do the same. Recall that our Lord's Passion was first His worship of the Father, His following God's will, and secondly a sacrifice made for our salvation. So what is the overall "picture" being given here on how marriage is meant to be? The husband thinks nothing of his own desires; he rather desires first to follow the Lord and then the true good of his wife and family, sacrificing his very self for that supreme purpose. The wife, knowing this about her husband – knowing that the husband will not ever think of his own desires, much less first of all, that he will seek with great diligence first and foremost the good of his wife and family but seeking to do the will of his good Father in Heaven who loves her – trusts her husband and entrusts herself to him, she follows his lead, she is subordinate to him. He is like a stone wall that surrounds her and her family, a buttress against evil.

This is how God created marriage to be and if He created it in that way, it is not for His good, His happiness, but for ours. This is how peace and happiness is built in marriage and families. This is how the Kingdom of

God is built up. Husbands and wives, is this what you want for yourselves, for each other, for your family? If not, then just be honest and say: I reject God, I will go my own way. Young men and women, not yet married but who have a vocation to marriage, is this what you will look for in a spouse?

All too often people focus on the 'sub' part of the word 'subordinate;' sub is not the root of the word, order is. It is describing an order. In this case, it is describing an order within marriage and family life. The order is this: Husband becomes like Christ towards his wife and family; wife trusts the husband and because of that and entrusts herself to him, meaning that she supports the direction he leads; she is indeed a "help-mate," the two become one.

How does this get corrupted? Undoubtedly there are numerous ways but here we will consider especially a married couple that has some degree of acceptance of God; they've decided that they are going to live a "very Catholic life." Then they come to this passage in Ephesians. The big temptation, one that will certainly corrupt their marriage and family life, is to focus on the command given to the other; the wife focuses on the command given to the husband, thus ignoring the command given to her; and the husband does the same – he focuses on the command given to the wife and thus ignores the command given to him. If you think you are above and beyond such a temptation, then you suffer terribly from the vice of pride. Now when each spouse is focusing on the command given to the other and ignoring the command given to them, it invariably gives rise to a contentious self-righteousness, which entrenches them even more in their position. They might as well skip it altogether, save themselves some agony, and go hire a divorce attorney. If a husband focuses on the command given to wives, he will adapt a sense of superiority, which is never from God; he will end up looking upon his wife as an object for his satisfaction, and perhaps treating her as a child or a hired servant. When wives focus on the command given to husbands, it is tantamount to saying: am I getting what I want; that is not love, it is anti-love. Then later on they will wonder: what happened to our children, we raised them in the faith? Men be men. Women be women. Husbands, focus on the command given to you; wives, focus on the command given to you; examine *yourselves*, not the other, each day on how well you have lived that out that day. Take your failures to do so to Confession, make a firm purpose of amendment, and keep at it.

Does: wives be subordinate to your husbands mean that the wife never speaks, that she acts always in some subservient way? Is this the example given by Mary & Joseph? When they found Jesus in the Temple, who was it that spoke up and said: "Son, why have you treated us so? Behold, your father and I have been searching for you in great distress." It was Mary, not Joseph. No, a wife being subordinate to her husband does not mean she is treated like a child or a person with no intellect or some sort of hired servant. Is this how our Lord, to whom we are all subordinate, treats or looks upon us? Of course not. This might be the case in some cultures but it is not the case in Catholicism, it is not the will of God.

There is often much truth in the old saying "a picture is worth a 1000 words," and here again the Holy Family provides a good example (or "picture") of living this out. Recall the flight into Egypt. Herod had put out the command to slaughter the Israelite children and an angel came and said go to Egypt. Who did the angel come to? Was it to Mary, God's greatest creature? No, this message was relayed only to Joseph; there was no direct message to Mary at all. And what did Joseph do? He gathered up his family and went to Egypt. Now bear in mind that leaving Israel – their culture, language, religion, home, relatives – much less for a pagan country, would have been a great suffering for both Joseph and Mary. So do you remember the part where Mary threw a fit, screamed at Jospeh, threw pots and pans? Of course not. What did she do? She gathered up Jesus and went to Egypt with Joseph, and she followed Joseph easily because she knew that he was a righteous man and would always look out for her and Jesus, first and foremost.

Husbands, before you act ask yourself: would this be something St Joseph would say or do? Wives, before you act ask yourself: is this something Mary would say or do. If you do, there will be much suffering to endure; but you will also begin to know the happiness of your Father's Kingdom.

God bless you, Fr Kuhn