Spiritual Disciplines

Lesson 19: Wednesday February 9th, 2022

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**TEACHING NOTES**

**Spiritual Discipline: Submission & Humility**

# Introduction

Good evening church. It is with great pleasure that I get to bring you the word tonight.

Please pray with me before we get into our lesson.

Tonight, I get to teach on the spiritual discipline of submission and humility. In my study and preparation for this teaching I began to do a word search in scripture with the words humble, humility, submit and submission. I found many different uses of these terms; a plethora of verses that popped out in my word search. However, what is far harder to quantify is the concept of submission and humility. While the words submit, submission, humble and humility may not be on every page of the Bible, the concept is.

It’s safe to say that the scriptures touch on this very topic from the first words of Holy Scripture to the very last words in Revelation.

Our Bible starts with the following words: “In the beginning – God.” Even in this is a declaration of something besides us, something that is not the creation, but rather an all-powerful God that is self-existent. Imagine coming face to face with God who can fundamentally change everything about the universe at His whim and desire. No man would stand before such a display of power and ignore it. God, by His very essence and being, demands that we submit to Him. *That concept* is all over scripture. We are *never* given the ability to opt out of God’s universe. We are fundamentally bound to His will and decree.

Because of this, that we are bound to His rule and reign, we are subjected to Him. We are to be submissive to Him. With that let’s jump into our lesson.

We will look at the following points tonight:

1. **What is submission and humility?**
2. **Why is submission and humility important?**
3. **What does Jesus’ humiliation teach us about submission and humility?**
4. **How should Christian’s practice the spiritual discipline of submission and humility?**
5. **What does it mean to be humble in our character as Christians?**

# What is submission and humility?

Let’s look at the definition of the verb form of these words:

***SUBMIT’, verb:*** To yield, resign or surrender to the power, will or authority of another.

To be subject; to acquiesce in the authority of another.

***HUM'BLE, verb:*** To abase; to reduce to a low state. To make humble or lowly in mind; to abase [belittle] the pride of; to reduce arrogance and self-dependence; to give a low opinion of one's moral worth; to make meek and submissive to the divine will.

To submit is literally to surrender yourself to another. To humble yourself is to reduce your arrogance and self-dependence.

I believe these definitions give us an excellent starting point as they help us understand that this spiritual discipline is all about surrendering. But what are we surrendering to?

In my personal study I’ve been reading through Ezekiel. I’ve been struck at how sobering God’s word is against the sins of Israel. Israel had hardened their heart toward God and thus committed the opposite of what we’re studying tonight. They were not submissive to God’s command; they were not humble. They were idolatrous, prideful, and wicked.

Read with me Ezekiel 5:5-12

Ezek 5:5 “Thus says the Lord GOD: This is Jerusalem. I have set her in the center of the nations, with countries all around her. Ezek 5:6 And she has rebelled against my rules by doing wickedness more than the nations, and against my statutes more than the countries all around her; for they have rejected my rules and have not walked in my statutes. Ezek 5:7 Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: Because you are more turbulent than the nations that are all around you, and have not walked in my statutes or obeyed my rules, and have not even acted according to the rules of the nations that are all around you, Ezek 5:8 therefore thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I, even I, am against you. And I will execute judgments in your midst in the sight of the nations. Ezek 5:9 And because of all your abominations I will do with you what I have never yet done, and the like of which I will never do again. Ezek 5:10 Therefore fathers shall eat their sons in your midst, and sons shall eat their fathers. And I will execute judgments on you, and any of you who survive I will scatter to all the winds. Ezek 5:11 Therefore, as I live, declares the Lord GOD, surely, because you have defiled my sanctuary with all your detestable things and with all your abominations, therefore I will withdraw. My eye will not spare, and I will have no pity. Ezek 5:12 A third part of you shall die of pestilence and be consumed with famine in your midst; a third part shall fall by the sword all around you; and a third part I will scatter to all the winds and will unsheathe the sword after them.

I wanted to draw our attention to this for a few reasons tonight. As we discuss submission and humility, we must understand that the opposite of these attributes is something that God hates. The opposite of Godward humility and submission is pride. Pride is detestable sin. Pride is the overarching sin of all sin. It is the rejection of God’s good and righteous commands.

# Why is submission and humility important?

So, why is submission and humility important? It’s important because it should be the mode of all men living under God’s rule. The man who is submissive, truly so – is the man who *does not* provoke the Lord. He is a man who *does not* work against God’s statutes. He is an upright and righteous man.

However, we must come face to face with the stark reality that if we were to search high and low throughout the entire history of the world, we would find no such descendant of Adam.

Instead, we will find this, over and over again: **Ps 81:11-14** “But my people did not listen to my voice; ​​​​​​​Israel would not submit to me. So I gave them over to their stubborn hearts, ​​​​​​​to follow their own counsels. ​​​​​​​Oh, that my people would listen to me, ​​​​​​​that Israel would walk in my ways! ​​​​​​​​I would soon subdue their enemies ​​​​​​​and turn my hand against their foes.”

We are like Israel, are we not? We are constant in our disobedience to God. Without saving grace, we do not submit to God. Like we’ve studied in Romans, God has given those who remain dead in their sin over to their sin: **Rom 1:24-25** Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.

**Romans 8:7-8** For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

**Genesis 6:5** The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.

The penalty for such sin is eternal, spiritual death. Those who are dead in sin and facing this penalty need eternal, spiritual life. Mankind must truly submit to God’s decree, rule, and reign. However, if the default mode of man is sin, then how could we ever submit to Him? That is precisely why submission and humility are important. These attributes have been modeled for us by Jesus. Not only are they modeled by Jesus for us as an example, but His submission and humility and subsequent atonement are the very means by which Christians can submit to God in faith.

# What does Jesus teach us about submission and humility?

If you were to search all of history for a perfectly righteous and upright man, you would only find one unique man, The God Man. You would find Jesus Christ, who did not descend from Adam and thus did not have the corruption of sin that we carry. Adam was not Christ’s head. Rather, God was His head, and he lived a life of perfect submission to His father.

I want to highlight a specific place where Jesus’ submission and humility was put on display. Let’s look at **Mark 14:32-36.**

**Mark 14:32-36:** And they went to a place called Gethsemane. And he said to his disciples, “Sit here while I pray.” And he took with him Peter and James and John, and began to be greatly distressed and troubled. And he said to them, “My soul is very sorrowful, even to death. Remain here and watch.” And going a little farther, he fell on the ground and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him. And he said, “Abba, Father, all things are possible for you. Remove this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will.”

If you’ve been in the church for a while, you know this scene. This is the night of the arrest of Jesus. He was betrayed by Judas for a measly amount of silver. Truthfully no amount of riches should be worth betraying Jesus. We know what is on the mind of Christ – the task set before him. What is that task? To submit to the full unbridled wrath of God. Jesus would drink the cup of God’s wrath.

**2 Cor 5:21** For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Jesus would be the atoning sacrifice for the sin of all the elect. Jesus would face the wrath of God. This atoning act was far worse than the physical pain Jesus endured on the cross. The real depth of affliction was taking the crucible of sin upon himself.

In this, Jesus models for us radical humility and submission. Even though Jesus eternally possessed a fully divine nature, He shows His humility by taking on a human nature and subjecting Himself to creation. We see the person of Christ allowing sinful men to put His human nature through a sham trial and to be put to death on a criminal’s cross.

Christ Jesus, in the flesh, is submissive to the decree and will of God the father. Christ was sent to fulfill the covenant of redemption. He had a covenantal work to do. He was fulfilling the covenantal obligations set forth by the terms of the covenant. And in that, let me repeat – He was submissive to the decree and will of God the father. The plan of redemption was not a response to our mistake, it was a planned definitive act – planned by God.

**Acts 2:23** this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men.

Think about the humble submission of Jesus Christ. ***Really think about it.***

The second person of the Trinity, God the Son, who is fully God. The self-existent and venerable “I AM” took on flesh and condescended into His own creation to save God the Father’s children. Jesus did this to bring God the Father glory and to bring the elect back into God’s fold.

Who does the first person of the Trinity, God the father, send to accomplish this? His only begotten Son. Jesus. Fully God and fully man. Jesus takes on flesh and submits Himself to the harsh reality of creation.

We ***cannot*** fully grasp or begin to understand how God can take on flesh and live within His own creation. The mystery of the hypostatic union is great. Consider the reality that God the Son upheld all things by His divine nature, while in His human nature He hung from the cross that His very divine nature was upholding.

We ***cannot*** begin to understand how God the son, who created everything and upholds it with His decretive power, could look at a fellow man who betrayed Him with care and love.

What does he say on the cross? **Luke 23:34** And Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” This is radical humility and submission.

He says this as “they cast lots to divide his garments.” Incredible. In my preparation I was brough to tears meditating on this. Thinking of the humility and submission of Jesus, let me read these verses: **Luke 23:35-37** And the people stood by, watching, but the rulers scoffed at him, saying, “He saved others; let him save himself, if he is the Christ of God, his Chosen One!” The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine and saying, “If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!”

Imagine the scene. God the son. Fully God! He assumes a position of humility. Every bone in my body when thinking of this scenario would want to inflict immediate justice and wrath upon those who were treating the Savior in this respect. But what does Jesus do? He submits to it. He is humble. He does not lash out. He does not flex his divine power to destroy and decimate them though it was simultaneously within His power to do so. We cannot fathom the submission and humility of that. It goes beyond what a fallen mortal man can truly understand.

This is the crux of this lesson right here. All that we do as saved saints is patterned by Christ. Why are we the way we are? Was it our novel idea? No. We are bound by the example and testimony of the *logos* – the Word.

This is why submission and humility are both so important. *Radical gospel empowered submission and humility in the face of trials is embodying the very thing that Christ went through in His suffering and oppression.* We are called to join the suffering of Christ in our lives, to do so brings us closer to Him. Is that not what all of us who have been saved yearn for and desire? We all desire to be with Him more and more every day.

When we embrace humility and submission our testimony will burn bright as white-hot steel in a pitch-black night. In God’s timing, those in the darkness will see our light and turn from darkness unto the true light: Jesus Christ.

Never cast-off suffering as something that God cannot or is not using. To do so is to deny the providential decree of God for you in your life. He is using your pain. Trust him. Submit to it. Submit to the Lord in this. Truly it is a good thing to be humiliated by our fellow men for His sake. Truly it is good to submit unto the Lord in these things. He will use it.

That is how James can say this very thing. **James 1:2** Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds. He knows that God will provide when we humbly submit to the trials of life. Praise God.

And before we move on to our next point, remember the sweet promise of Romans 8:28. Even when things are bleak, we trust God, for His plan is good. We submit to it joyfully and completely.

**Rom 8:28** And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good,

for those who are called according to his purpose.

This is a helpful transition as we begin to consider the following:

# How should Christian’s practice the spiritual discipline of submission?

How should Christian’s practice the spiritual discipline of submission? Now that we have some theological understanding of the importance of humility and submission, let us now turn to the application of such things.

I wish I could unpack the full context of the passage surrounding this verse, because it is a very rich passage on Christian conduct. However, my aim tonight is not to teach all of the other aspects of this passage but to remain fairly specific with this particular verse.

Look with me at Ephesians 5:21.

**Ephesians 5:21** submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.

In my study, one of the commentators on this passage brought out a very succinct exposition of this verse. When we read this, we can pull these following applications from it.

***Submission to the government.***

Christians are to practice submission in the political sense. Meaning, we are to give honor to and be obedient to the government. Scripture is clear that they are setup by God for the good of mankind.

What does that submission look like?

**1Tim 2:1-2** First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, **for kings and all who are in high positions**, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way.

We are to honor and pray for our ruling authorities. Do you pray for the president? For your political representative? Do you honor policemen with respect and obedience? We are called to do this. We are called to pay our taxes faithfully and without deception. This is humble submission.

I want to speak for a moment on when it is appropriate to *not* submit. When we ponder this discipline – there may be instances where we are not submissive. However, there is never a time when we are not humble in our rejection of submission. We are always called to humility in all things.

First, we never submit to another who is leading us into sin. A wife or husband should never submit to a demand from their spouse that is blatantly sinful. We must *not* submit to that. This is the case for all realms of life. For example, we do not submit to the law of the land that abortion is legal and morally acceptable. Just because the State says it is acceptable to murder your unborn child does not make it a moral good. No, we submit to God first in this. Abortion, while legal in our time and context, is no less abhorrent and wicked in the eyes of God.

There is a time for civil disobedience. I’ve listed 4 helpful statements to help you think through civil disobedience. These are from the online ministry of Gotquestions.org

* Christians should resist a government that commands or compels evil and should work nonviolently within the laws of the land to change a government that permits evil.
* Civil disobedience is permitted when the government’s laws or commands are in direct violation of God’s laws and commands.
* If a Christian disobeys an evil government, unless he can flee from the government, he should accept that government’s punishment for his actions.
* Christians are certainly permitted to work to install new government leaders within the laws that have been established.

***Submission within the family/household.***

Secondly, we are to submit within the government of the family/household.

The wife should be submissive to the husband. The children should be submissive to their parents. And while this is not necessarily applicable to our context, servants should be submissive to their masters. A more apt contextual rendering may be for employees to submit to their employers.

Again, let us ask the following question, what does this type of submission look like?

Wives, has your husband asked you to do something? As long as it is not sinful, strive to meet his request. Do so with humility and submission. Scripture is clear that this produces a beautiful testimony of your true submission to God as patterned after Christ.

We are not stating here tonight that the husband should abuse this command. Not at all. Husbands, work to be agreeable with your wife in all things. Do not use these principles for your own sinful gain, this does not honor the Lord or show your submission to Him as Lord.

Children, both younger and older. Do you honor your parents?

**Eph 6:1-2** Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. “Honor your father and mother” (this is the first commandment with a promise)

Just because you may have parents that are in sin or reject the gospel does not give you license to ignore the command to honor your mother and father. There is a way to show your parents respect while not agreeing with them. Strive for that.

Younger children, do you submit to your parents’ authority? Do you obey them? Are you constantly rejecting what they’re saying and dismissing it? Do not do this. Set your own desires aside and strive to humbly fulfill what they are asking of you.

Again, we do so because this is patterned after Christ. He submitted to the Father unto death and did so faithfully and without grumbling.

***Submission to the local church.***

Next, we are to submit ourselves to the local church.

Members of churches should be in submission to their elders. Have your elders requested for you to meet with them? Then do not neglect the request. Have they sought to lead you through a trial and given you guidance on how you should work through the situation? Try to submit to their guidance.

God has set the elders in the highest place within the church, called them to the highest service and the most honorable work. He has given them the greatest gifts. Therefore, we should all strive to submit to them.

However, it is worth pointing out that Christians do not submit to their elders in the same sense that they submit to Christ, their head. Church members are not called to submit to their elders in doing everything that they do, both right and wrong. Rather, they are to submit to their teaching, guidance, doctrinal positions, and exhortations *only when* those things are in agreement with the word of God.

***Submission to other Christians.***

Furthermore, we are to submit ourselves to other Christians. One member of the church should submit to another member. Likewise, Christians should submit to the counsel of more wise Christians. We should submit ourselves to admonitions of other Christians and vice versa. We should submit ourselves to the judgements/rebuke of our loving brothers and sisters. As you can imagine this takes great humility. However even if a less mature believer is coming to me with a concern, I want to submit to their admonishment humbly and truly consider if there is something I am missing or if I am in sin in some way. If there isn’t, then I can address that accordingly and humbly.

# What does it mean to be humble in our character as Christians?

I’ve spoken a lot about submission. But I want to turn the page to what it means to *be humble* in our character as Christians. Both submission and humility are intertwined to the Christian. We aren’t called to begrudging submission. No. We are called to submit in a certain way.

***We are called to humble submission.***

But what exactly does that mean?

Let me read a few passages to help us:

**Jas 4:6** But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, “God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.”

**Jas 4:10** Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.

**Luke 14:11** For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”

In these passages we start to see that humility is in opposition to pride and self-exaltation.

I want to briefly look at Romans 1:22-23

**Rom 1:22-23** Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.

What I find interesting about this passage is that it is fundamentally dealing with idolatry. At the center of idolatry is the forsaking of God as your object of worship and replacing Him with something else. At the core of Romans 1:22-23 is the truth that in the “great exchange” men exchanged God for images resembling mortal man, birds, animals and creeping things.

These are various idols. Mankind swapped God for a mere image of something within His creation. It’s so very detestable and sad. However, as many of you know, as you read on, you get a glimpse into Paul’s commentary on the evil of homosexuality.

**Rom 1:26-27** For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error.

Within this passage is a dire warning about what it means for a man or woman to fall in love with an image resembling themselves.

Mankind’s sickness of self-worship can lead to looking so intently at itself in the mirror that it literally falls in love with itself. Men literally idolizing men and falling in love with the male form and vice versa.

The reason I bring this up tonight is not necessarily to teach on the evil of homosexuality, Joshua Kirstine taught on that not too long ago. No, the reason I want to bring it up is to highlight the evil of self-idolatry and self-worship. ***It is not a sin that exists in a vacuum.***

Rather, it is a sin that is destructive. Self-idolatry is self-hatred. Full stop. When we prioritize our desires over God’s desires, we are embarking on a trip of self-mutilation and sinful suffering. I don’t have to prove it to you. Many of you have experienced the harsh reality of dealing with a completely self-obsessed person. They are typically victims of anything and everything, which isn’t surprising, because to them, the world exists for their whim and pleasure. If that is your worldview, then anything that threatens it will be the cause of your displeasure. It is truly a sad sight to see.

I highlight the opposite of Godward humility as an exercise tonight to help us see what true humility ought to look like. True humility isn’t your sweet unbelieving grandmother who is hospitable and kind. No, that is not what I’m talking about tonight. Humility for the Christian is a Christian who is sold out for God and His word. To the world that Christian is arrogant. However, to place oneself under God and His command is the least arrogant thing you can do.

So, what does humility look like?

It looks like deference to our brothers and sisters when we disagree on a Christian liberty issue. It looks like being slow to speak, slow to anger, and a quickness to want to listen when dealing with a difficult situation. It looks like submitting our desires, thoughts, and actions to the Word of God. It looks like having a meek and humble heart, which means that you may not always be right. It is assuming an attitude that understands that the world is not all about you.

It is confessing **Proverbs 3:5** ​​​​​​​​Trust in the LORD with all your heart, ​​​​​​​and do not lean on your own understanding. ​​​

It is confessing your sin and understanding your position before God like the tax collector in Jesus’ parable:

**Luke 18:9-14** He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and treated others with contempt: “Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.’ But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, a sinner!’ I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.”

In other words, *don’t trust in yourself,* because if you do you will fundamentally misunderstand the reason for your life. The pharisee, a trusted teacher of Israel, misunderstood the scriptures by adding law where no such law needed to be added, they missed the forest for the trees. However, the tax collector truly understood his position as a sinner who was in dire need of saving. He was ***NOT*** full of himself. He feared the Lord.

Finally, let me give you a few examples of how you can live out the spiritual discipline of humility.

Wives, are you crucifying your pride so that you can submit to and be led by your husbands? Is your preference to set the tone in your home and to lead your family because you do it better than he does? Is that not prioritizing your own selfish desires before the Biblical command to submit to your husband? Instead, put away your pride and come along side your husband and encourage Him and help Him when He does take those steps of leadership. Encourage Him to press into the Body more and get time with mature Christian men so that He can lead more effectively. Does this not bring great harmony and richness to marriage? Christ is indeed glorified in our marriages when we’re living out of Christ centeredness instead of self-centeredness.

Employees, are you so embittered and frustrated that your employer does not wish to implement your practices and direction within the workplace? Do you recognize your role as one that is under authority? It is true that your employer’s authority is limited. They *cannot* compel you to sin. However, where they have asked you to comply with their command and that command is not sinful – then are you joyfully submitting to that? Are you letting the joy of Christ permeate your conduct? Are you working hard, committing yourself to the task, and living up to your promises? These are examples of humble submission.

Citizen, are you submitted to your government? Where the law accords with God’s law and is not fundamentally unjust, are you in submission to this? For example, are you lying about your deductions on your tax return so that you get back more of a tax return? Resist this and submit to what God has put before you through the rulers. God will provide in riches and in poverty. Find solace in humbling yourself to the government and trusting in the providence of God.

More mature Christian, are you having difficulty submitting to a less mature Christian? Is your pride welling up inside of you? Are you finding it hard to hear truth even from the ‘least of these’? Check your heart brother or sister. God’s good gift of the body brings with it all sorts of Christians that are tasked with loving one another in truth and deed. Humble yourself and ponder what this person is telling you. You may find that they are speaking truth and they are pointing out something that you clearly need to do business with.

***Conclusion***

I want to end with this tonight. Trust not in your own understanding. Trust not in yourself. Trust not in the philosophies and political theories of men. Trust not in so-called religious texts that aren’t Holy Scripture. Trust not in your deeds, or actions, or merits. Trust not in your possessions. Trust not in your wealth. Trust not in your health. Trust not in any of this. All of these things can be taken from you in a moment!

Trust wholly on Christ. Trust that He is your sufficient savior who took on your sin, died and paid the price so that you could have relationship and new life everlasting with God.

***That is a submitted and humble Christian.***

Let us be ***that*** today.

Pray with me.