

The Message

Note: No sermon is quite the same when you read it. You miss the inflections, the understanding that you gain in the hearing. Nevertheless, the words are shared with you here.

Date: August 15, 2010

Scripture: Ephesians 5:15-21

Speaker: Mike Gammill

THE LIGHT

If you have your Bible with you today, please turn to our scripture lesson Ephesians 5. One of my favorite verses in the Bible is verse 22, which Pastor Cary did not read today. “Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord.” Can I get an “amen”? Guys, you can go to sleep. The rest of the sermon is just for the ladies. Hey, I’m just kidding!

In your worship bulletin, you may have noticed the title of today’s sermon—“The Light.” I didn’t want to put the real title of the message because I thought it might scare all of you away. Today we are talking about submission, one of those topics, such as sin and hell about which we don’t like to speak. Submission is not really fun or exciting. However, it is one of the central ideas that Paul writes about in the New Testament. We would be remiss if we did not study this idea.

Nevertheless, submission has been one of those topics that has been misused. People use it to get their way and be in control and abuse others. But abuses do not negate uses.

Let’s look at our scripture: “Submit to one another out of reverence to Christ” (Eph. 5:21). Then in verse 25, Paul does something very radical: He uses the word husbands. At this point, he tells the husbands and men what to do. This directive is radical because at the time this epistle was written men had all the authority. Men would actually write to each other about the “Household Code,” an instruction mandate that would designate the roles of the wife, children, servants and slaves. These mandates can be found in various places of the Greco-Roman empire.

Did you notice what is missing from that list? Yes, you’re right—there were no directions for the men. The “Household Code” did not list duties (or correct behavior) for husbands, fathers, or masters. Why? Because the men are in charge. All of these letters reinforce the idea that the man is in charge. Hence, women were expected to do as their husbands instructed, children were to obey their fathers, and slaves were to do as they were told. Therefore, Paul has the gall to tell husbands and fathers and masters how to obey.

Those in the church who have used this passage to justify the denigration of women are ignoring the fact that Paul talks to wives for three verses and then he speaks to men for twelve verses. So, let's take a look. Wives are supposed to submit to their husbands and husbands are to love their wives. Also, children are to obey their parents. In addition, fathers "do not exasperate your children" (Eph. 6:4). Now, is that idea relevant to our lives? It might be.

Have you noticed that in the Christian Education wing that we have a lot of "fathering" occurring? On any Sunday morning, we have over 600 children on campus. In our children's ministries, there are many opportunities for service and ministry. At this point, we have 180 positions and although we have over 100 volunteers, we will need a few more. If you love three-year-olds, give Theresa a call.

Notice, what Paul writes to slaves. Consider a slave's life. He has no control over his life. Yet, Paul writes that the Creator of the Universe pays attention to slaves and what they do. "Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not men, because you know that the Lord will reward everyone for whatever good he does, whether he is slave or free" (Eph. 6:7). What a radical concept!

Then, Paul tells masters, "Treat your slaves in the same way...since you know that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no favoritism with him" (Eph. 6:9). This verse reminds me of what it must have been like for a slave back in the fifth century. Born in Wales, Patrick was the son of a bureaucrat. Although he grew up around the church, Patrick actually criticized and made fun of it. He thought all the rules and "correct" behavior were silly. Then, an Irish raiding party attacked the coast of Wales and Patrick was kidnapped.

Taken to Ireland, Patrick was made a slave. He went from being an aristocrat to being a slave. And then God started talking to him. As Patrick did his duties as a shepherd, God spoke to him about His love for the Irish—the very people who kidnapped Patrick. For six years, God spoke to Patrick as he tended sheep in the wilderness. Then, God tells Patrick to leave. So, he leaves, gets on a ship, and goes to a monastery in France. After his training, Patrick returns to Wales where he becomes a bishop. One night after serving as bishop for thirty years, Patrick has a dream. In it, an Irishman pleads for him to return to Ireland and teach the people about Christ.

Returning to Ireland, Patrick carries the mission of Christ to a group of pagan people. He even returns to his slave owner to try to repay the ransom, but the owner refuses because he did not want to accept Patrick's money nor did he want to accept Christ. Nevertheless, Patrick was not deterred. He started monastic communities that completely Christianized Ireland in 100 years. God redeemed his slavery. Rather, than saying "how I can be in control," Patrick turned his life over to God and let Him be in control.

That's the key. When we look at the word submission, and when Paul writes about it, he is presenting a counter-cultural way of living. Rather, than the man, or the woman, being in charge, submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ means that Christ is in charge. Submission is not about you getting your way or I getting my way. It's about Jesus getting his way in our homes.

Some of you may ask: How do we protect ourselves from those who are dangerous and will abuse? Paul addresses those concerns earlier in this passage. For instance, in verse eight, Paul writes, "For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord." He stresses how important it is for Christians to shine in the reality of life. When Jesus lives in our lives and in our homes, he will expose what Paul calls the deeds of darkness. We would call these "the secret sin." These sins are what we do in hiding whether they be secret manipulation or controlling through deceit or shame. There are all manners of sin that we try to hide and about which we don't want people to know. Jesus will expose those things.

Yet, if we live openly, honestly, and genuinely before others, we will also gain insight as to how others are treating others. Paul says that it is necessary for Christians to live in the light and to be aware of the darkness. When we can see how others operate, we will know if they are giving Jesus control—or not. In verse 15, Paul writes, "Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise." Submission doesn't mean that we allow someone to mistreat us because we are told to be submissive.

Recently, I returned from a trip to my hometown in Montana. One day we went hiking at Island Lake, a very beautiful place. Since the hike is on a plateau, the girls could run ahead and hop from rock to rock. Sometimes, though, they would go farther than I could see. At that point, I would give a little whistle which meant "get back where I can see you."

At Island Lake, I'm not concerned about spiders or snakes. The only thing I am concerned about is grizzly bears, a worry that I have every right to have. In fact, the very day that we went hiking there was a report of a grizzly sow attacking and killing a man in Cook City which was just twenty miles from where we were. Am I concerned? No—I have mace. If you ever go into bear country, don't carry a gun. All you're going to do is make a bear mad. Don't take bells. I know they are sold in tourist shops but the natives call those things "dinner bells." You want the big can of bear mace. If your path crosses with a bear, just shoot the mace into the animal's eyes and it will walk away.

Knowing these things, I have the bear mace on my hip. I have the girls within eyesight because there is the possibility of a bear crossing their path. In your reality, there are people who do not have your best interest at heart. There are people who will try to take advantage of you. They will try to use this submission thing to get their way. (They're grizzly bears!) But remember, it's not about their

way. It's not about our way. It's about God's way. Therefore, we must walk wisely.

Hence, if we live our lives with our eyes open, seeing where we're walking in the light of Christ, we can see someone who has a bad motive a million miles away. Paul tells us that we need to be wise. He also writes, "Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit" (Eph. 5:18). Let me explain what Paul means in this verse. He's not actually prohibiting the consumption of alcohol. He wants you to understand that our brain has layers. At the core of it, we have what neurologists call the "reptilian brain," the part of the brain that controls urges and desires. This part of your brain has no inhibitions. It thinks about "want."

Let me illustrate. My house is filled with eight rambunctious children. I want them to go outside. "Children, do you want to go outside?" No response. They don't even hear me. I lower my voice and say, "Bluebell moo bars." Suddenly, they have ears to hear! "Here's the condition. If you want a moo bar, you have to go outside." Amazingly, eight little children go outside.

Because I knew that the reptilian brain in an eight-year-old is the most powerful force in his/her life, I was able to succeed. The children were just responding to ice cream and conveniently forgot that I was making them go outside to eat it in 100 degree weather. In adults, alcohol has the same effect. As we age, other parts of our brains develop that help us realize the effect of consequences. Alcohol, actually, deadens those parts of the brain and sets those urges free.

However, the Holy Spirit sets our entire person free. It strengthens and enables our heart to make fully formed decisions before God so that we will make righteous decisions to further his kingdom, to serve others, and to protect others. "Be filled with the Spirit" (Eph. 5:18). The Holy Spirit heals and frees us so that we may love well.

In closing, Paul writes, "Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart" (Eph. 5:19). Other translations say "from your heart." While we may be uncomfortable about our ability to sing, the important idea is to be a people of blessing, where we realize we don't need to control the people around us—but we can bless them with the words that we speak. With the things that we say, we give others freedom. We can give life with the words we use.

Last week I met a man who travels around the U.S. as a consultant. As an itinerant preacher, every time he sits down at a restaurant he asks the waiter, "In a few minutes, we will be praying over the food. How can I bless you as I pray to God?" There are other ways in which you can bless your neighbor. Jesus commanded us to bless. How can we bless? We can do that in the words that we use as we encourage others.

Notice verses 19-20: “Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, *always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.*” If Saint Patrick had dwelled upon the fact that the Irish had enslaved him, he would have never returned to Ireland. Instead, he realized that his enslavement was part of God’s journey for him and that he was thankful to God for all that God had given him. Patrick had the freedom in his heart to take Christ to those who had once enslaved him.

We need to focus on those things for which we are grateful. We need to reorient our disposition so that we are thankful in everything. We need to realize that no matter what factor in our life is enslaving us, God can redeem it. And we always have the freedom to serve Christ, no matter what is in our lives. The world and our enemy cannot take from us the ability to follow and to serve Christ. It cannot take from us our ability to submit to one another out of love, making Christ our king.

The kingdom of God is that place where God’s will is done and is accomplished. And that happens when we partner with God and see what he is doing and join him in our own lives.

The last and final word is that the Creator of the Universe, the one that bent down to earth and created man out of the mud into life and created us and sustains us with his will—this very God invites us to welcome him into our homes, our neighborhoods, our work places, and our church and to be the central governing authority in our lives. Therefore, we don’t have to be in control. By submitting to one another in his name, we invite God to be in control.