

April 14, 2013 – You Are Equipped Here

I like I don't know if it's statistics so much, but I like things that you can chart and that you can graph and I like looking for different kinds of trends. So this morning as we begin, I'm going to share with you a trend that I have observed in our Group. I think when you take a moment to think about this, I would be shocked if you did not identify this as well. Maybe you already have. Here's the thing that I've noticed about our Group. I want you to look around, don't point, but look around at the people who are here and imagine the people who are not here. Here's one of the things I've noticed about our Group here in Saskatoon. We have a very significant portion of our Group, our ladies specifically, who are very strong, and assertive and who have definite opinions and are comfortable sharing those opinions with you. Now just take a minute and go ahead and look around, don't point, just look around, think in your mind the people who aren't here and it seems to me like we have a lot of women, who that's kind of their personality. Strong and assertive and confident in that way. Now some of those women are married and some of them are not. The ones who are married, generally speaking, opposites attract, and so generally speaking those women are married to men who are a little more mellow and easy-going and not quite so forceful by personality. Right? I was thinking about that this week and I came across this cartoon and I thought maybe it fits a little bit. It says "My husband wears the pants in our relationship. I just tell him which ones to wear." Maybe that fits, I don't know. Anyways as I was thinking about that this week, I thought "That's kind of the make-up of our group at least a significant portion of our Group and so I thought "If that is true, then what in the world do I do with the text like Ephesians 5:22-24 that says:

"Wives submit to your husbands as to the Lord for the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the Church, his body, of which he is the Saviour. Now the church submits to Christ so wives should also submit to their husbands in everything."

Now, what do I say about that in this Group? To be honest with you, I was a little bit nervous, a little bit tense about presenting this lesson to you this morning and then I remembered my wife is teaching class so maybe it's not so bad. And I know from experience, nothing I ever say here gets transmitted to her after service, so I trust you all to maintain that this morning. It's a challenging text for us to process and it's going to take a little effort this morning, I'll

warn you up front, it's going to take a little effort for us to unpack it this morning and hopefully, put all the pieces back together in a way that's going to make sense and most importantly, is going to be consistent with the words Paul originally penned and the intention behind them. So, this morning, I'm going to invite you on that journey with me and I hope you will endure the work it's going to take us to get to the end. I think if we get to the end together, we're going to be blessed by our understanding of this verse and this passage out of Ephesians, Chapter 5.

So, what do we do with this verse. Well, there's a few things that people have done with this verse or a few ways that people have handled this verse in the past and so, one thing you could do is just say "Well, we're just going to write this verse off maybe it was a typo and ironically the computer program I use to put these slides up on the board so I don't have to retype them all, this particular verse had a typo in the NLV translation, it missed the 'to' and actually said "wives, submit your husbands" and I said "Well, that's a different interpretation of the verse so maybe that's a typo or maybe it's an anomaly, maybe it's a mistake, that verse isn't really meant to be there and so we'll just kind of ignore it a little bit or write it off a little bit. The only problem with that is that, Ephesians 5 isn't the only place that Paul is going to say something like this. In fact, there's other places that Paul repeats basically the same thing. Colossians 3 is one example. You go there and you see basically the same thing. "Wives submit to your husbands, husbands love your wives, children obey your parents, fathers don't embitter your children, slaves obey your earthly masters." So we can't really just write off that one verse, because there's other verses. So maybe what we should do is just write off Paul. Maybe just ignore Paul and say "well, you know what, maybe Paul didn't really know what he was talking Some people think he wasn't even married so how would he know what to write about texts like this and topics like this. So you know, and I've heard people say this, "Maybe he's just kind of a male chauvinist and from a patriarchal nation that was ruled by men and so we kind of write this stuff off because of that and we say, we're just not going to listen to that because of who Paul was." And you might be able to get away with that except for, Paul's not the only one who said it. And if you look through the New Testament you'll find other places, for example, Peter in 1Peter 2:3, says a lot of the same things. "Slaves submit yourselves to your mater; wives in the same way be submissive to your husbands; husbands in the same way be considerate and treat your wives with respect." And so we can't just write off Paul, then we've got to write off Peter too and we really don't want to do that because if we write off Peter and Paul, then we're actually writing off the bulk of the New Testament and we're writing off two of the main leaders in the early church and we don't really want to disregard them because if we disregard both of those guys, we're pretty much disregarding most of the New Testament and to do that, we have got to decide that it's not really the inspired word of God and it's not His communication with humanity and the problem there is that, we believe that the Bible is the inspired word of God and we believe that the Bible is God's communication and God's message to humanity and we believe that there are stacks of historical evidence and sound logical arguments that affirm those beliefs. So we can't just write the whole thing off in that case.

So, if we can't write it off, maybe what we could do is rationalize it a little bit; maybe we could explain it a little bit. So that line of reasoning goes something like this. The First Century was very much a male-dominated society and in that male-dominated First Century, women were considered to be second class citizens. Male children were considered to be second class citizens until they reached adulthood. Female children would probably be the third class citizen and your slaves were considered to be property. So in that context and in that culture, actually what Paul is writing and what Peter is writing, the Biblical view of women is actually

radically liberating for that time and that place. However, we are now in a different time and a different place, so maybe, what he wrote there doesn't strictly apply to where we are at now. The only problem with that line of thought is that there are some things in our New Testament that we can look at and we could study and say "you know that was probably, that's fairly clearly a cultural practice that they're talking about there." The way Paul writes and the way Peter writes in these passages, seems to clearly indicate that they're talking about principles that are not tied to any one time or one place or one culture. So...if we can't write them off, or ignore them, or rationalize them, the only choice we are left with is to look at these verses and somehow try to make sense of them. And that's what we are going to try and do together, this morning.

And as is almost always the case, when we try and make sense of something to make sense of these statements, what we really need to do is look at the larger context they were written in. And so, as we've often stated before as we've looked at passages in the Bible, when Paul wrote to the Ephesians, he didn't write a book to the Ephesians, he wrote a letter and in his letter there were no chapters and no verses and no sub-titles; there actually wasn't even lower case letters and punctuations, and that means that there was no real break between the text we covered last week and the passage that we are looking at this morning. If you weren't here last week or you don't remember what we covered last week, here is what it was in a nutshell.

Last week, we said in the Book of Ephesians, it's kind of like God's instruction manual for life and who better to write the instruction manual for life than the person who created the original design, right? So, these instructions we said last week, our conclusion was, they are not meant to be restrictive they are meant to be protective because after all, in Christ we have become a work of God we have become God's masterpiece so these instructions are there to preserve what God has created in us and what God has created us to be.

And so, Paul begins in Chapter 4 with his instruction to the Church as a body of believers and what he says is: As a body of believers, you need to be united where each piece fits together each piece functions and creates a body that is healthy; that is growing; and that is full of love. And then, last week, we shifted and said, "that's how we do it as a body but individually here is what the instructions are." He said "individually the instructions are that we are to be imitators of God; that we are to follow Christ's example; and we are to be lead by the Spirit. And so it's on the heels of all of this and of all of those instructions that Paul says: "Now let me give you some examples of what all of that looks like in real life. Let me show you how that's going to effect your relationships. So what follows is based on the premise that we are striving to be imitators of God, following Christ's example and being led by the Spirit. So with all of that in mind, we begin not in verse 22, but in verse 21 which is the preface to all of the paragraphs that come after. Eph.5: 21 says:

"Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ."

And as we read how Christ's example is applied to the various relationships under Christ, we do so with this opening statement firmly fixed at the forefront of our minds: "Submit to one another in your marriages out of reverence for Christ; submit to one another in your families out of reverence for Christ; Submit to one another in all your interactions, out of reverence for Christ;" which means, the principles that are going to be contained in the following paragraphs have universal applications. They are specific examples but the principles can be applied anywhere. Which means you don't have to have a spouse for these principles to be applied and transferred. Even if you don't have kids, these principles can be applied and transferred on. Even if you don't, as I assume most of us don't, have slaves or servants, these principles can be applied and transferred to your life. So, with that in mind, let us venture into where angels fear to tread, and see what Paul actually has to say in this passage. Paul starts out by saying in Eph. 5:21-25:

"And further, submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.

For wives, this means submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For a husband is the head of his wife as Christ is the head of the church. He is the Saviour of his body, the church. As the church submits to Christ, so you wives should submit to your husbands in everything. For husbands, this means love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her."

Now, there are two words in this section that people tend to wrestle with a little bit. One of them is applied to the wives and one is applied to the husbands. Now the first word that we sometimes struggle with is "Submit". If Paul had written this passage and said "Wives love your husbands" or "Wives respect your husbands" or "Wives encourage and support your husbands". If he had written it that way, we would be reading this at weddings all the time. But because he said "Wives submit to your husbands in everything" we kind of have a different feeling about it when we read it. We have some misconceptions about this word and about what submission is really all about. I remember in our early years of marriage and I remember times when I would be sitting on the couch and I had left my drink across the room somewhere...and I was lazy, a little bit, so I saw my drink over there and my wife was walking around kind of in that general area and so I would do this, and pretend to be using the force to draw my glass from the table over to my hand. My wife looked at me and said "What are you doing?" And I said "Well, I'm trying to use the force." And so what I would do is I would do this, and sometimes my drink would actually appear in my hand and so as silly as that is, sometimes that's our impression of what's submission is all about. Submission means my wife is at my beck and call to do whatever I want and whatever I ask her to do. I came across this cartoon this week. The caption says "Oh hon, more chips and salsa, submit, submit." And the caption below: "Taking Ephesians 5:22 out of context was bad enough but using the bell to summon his wife was both stupid and dangerous, right? LOL. And sometimes we just kind of have a messed up conception of what submission is all about. We have the wrong idea in our heads about it and so that leads us into wrong actions and wrong re-actions to this word when

it comes up. I think part of the problem is that this word “submission” is a word that we actually rarely use in our day-to-day conversation and the times that we do use it, we use it with a totally different meaning behind it than what Paul was meaning when he used it in this text in Ephesians 5.

Just consider some of the ways that we use the word “submission”. These are some of the ways I came up with as I was thinking about it. First of all, the first way is like when you're submitting your college application or form and that just doesn't transfer at all. So we'll skip that one. The one that I thought of was in like wrestling or M.M.A. Or whatever, when you have these two guys who are in combat together and one of them puts the other into a position that cannot be escaped from, or causes great pain or distress, and he holds that position on this other person until the other person finally taps out and surrenders or loses the match, Okay? Now that kind of move is called a “Submission hold.” That is not what Paul is talking about in Ephesians 5, okay. And the reason we can be sure that's not what he is talking about is because whatever definition of submission we use in verse 22, has to work in verse 21. And so whatever kind of definition we use in Verse 22 that kind of definition has to work in verse 21. And leg holds and arm bars that kind of definition just doesn't work. And so, clearly that's not what he's talking about.

The second kind of submission the way we use the word, is the kind that's involved with handcuffs and whips and all those sorts of things and that's clearly not what Paul is talking about here either.

The third kind of use of the word submission and probably the most common that I could think of comes in the phrase “Beaten into submission.” That's where we actually hear this word most commonly and that is not what Paul is talking about here either. And just as a side note, if you are, or you know someone who believes that verses like this in the Bible give the husband the right to treat his wife any way he feels like. You are mistaken. That's not what the Bible says. And if you are, or you know someone, that's been told that as a wife, you're responsibility, your job, is to take whatever treatment your husband dishes out to you. You are mistaken. That is not what the Bible tells us about marriage. In fact, those kind of concepts couldn't be farther from what Paul's instructions here really are. You see, submission is not timidity; servility; sub-servant; docility; or degrading; or weakness. That is not what submission is all about. In fact, true submission, are you ready for this, true submission is a sign of strength. A weaker person cannot submit. A weaker person can be forced and coerced and compelled to do something, but they cannot submit. Only the stronger person can submit.

Jeff, can you stand up for a second. Everyone take a look at Jeff. His brawn, his manliness. Stand up Jeff....Jeff, for arguments sake, is stronger than I am, okay. So, I cannot submit to Jeff, physically. I cannot submit to Jeff. Jeff can force me to do something. Jeff can compel me to do something, Jeff can make me do something, if he wanted to, physically, but I can't submit to him. Now Jeff on the other hand could submit to me. He could say “Yes. I'm

stronger than you Mike. Yes I have more power than you but, I will submit to you and do this thing that you are requesting I do. You see, submission can only come from the stronger person. Submission is about having the power to resist but choosing not to. At its heart, true submission is acting in the best interest of another person when it's within your power to choose to do otherwise. Which not only fits Verse 22 but it fits Verse 21 perfectly. Because that means what Paul is saying to us in Verse 21 is: Always act in the best interest of each other out of reverence for Christ. And that fits perfectly with everything else we are told about how we are told to live our Christian life together. How else would we act if we were imitating God because really that's God's M.O. Isn't it? To act in our best interest. Whether we know it or not; whether we see it at the time or not; whether we want it or not; whether we appreciate it or not; God acts in our best interests. Which means Paul's instructions in Verse 22 could be interpreted as follows: Wives always act in the best interests of your husbands. Now that sheds a little different light on it, doesn't it?

Now the flip side of the coin is about the husband. The second word that we sometimes wrestle with is this phrase "the head". Some would consider the head to mean the boss; the one in charge; the one in command; el capitain; big dog, numero uno; head honcho; king of the castle. And that's what we interpret the head as meaning. And so that's how we go into a relationship considering our role to be. However, one scholar redefines 'head' or explains it a lot better for us. He says: "Head in this context suggests 'responsibility for'. The husband has a leadership role, though not in order to boss his wife or use his position as privilege just as Jesus redefined greatness as being a servant; Paul redefines being the head as having the responsibility to love and give ones self and to nurture. Priority is placed on the husband but contrary to ancient society it is for the benefit of the wife. Which means, what Paul is saying here is not husbands rule over your wife with an iron fist; what he is saying is "Guys, you have the responsibility for your wife's well being. And when we put it all together, what this text is telling us is: Wives always act in the best interest of your husband and husbands, love your wife and take responsibility for her well being. All in the context and as an example of the principle: Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.

Now as we enter into Chapter 6, Paul is going to give us two more examples of this exact same principle in action. Here is what they are. First he talks about parents and children in Chapter 6, Verse 1-4:

"Children obey your parents because you belong to the Lord for this is right for you to do. Honour your father and your mother. This is the first commandment with the promise if you honour your father and mother things will go well for you and you will have a long life on the earth.

Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger by the way you treat them, rather bring them up with discipline and instruction that comes from the Lord."

Here's what he says: "Children obey your parents. Respect your mom and dad." Here's what that comes down to. Children, submit to your parents. Yes you have the power to resist and rebel and revolt. Yes you have the ability to be disrespectful and disobedient. Yes you have the freedom to break all of their rules if you want to. You could do that, but submit to them out of reverence to Christ. You could do that but instead, choose to act in their best interest not your own.

On the flip side...Parents, love your kids, cherish them. Don't provoke them. The N.I.V. Says "Don't exasperate them." And parents if you want to know what exasperate is, that sound that guttural sound your kid makes when you exasperate them, okay? And it says "Don't do that to your kids." It says "Don't lord your power over them. Don't take your bad day out on them. Don't neglect them. Don't deprive them of the things they need, including your own time and attention. Don't do that, instead submit to them out of reverence for Christ. Instead, love them and take responsibility for their well being."

Third example that he gives us. Ephesians 6, starting in Verse 5.

"Slaves, obey your earthly masters with deep respect and fear. Serve them sincerely as you would serve Christ. Try to please them all the time, not just when they are watching you. As slaves of Christ do the will of God with all of your heart. Work with enthusiasm as though you were working for the Lord rather than people. Remember that the Lord will reward each one of us for the good we do whether we are slaves or free. Masters treat your slaves in the same way. Don't threaten them. Remember that you both have the same Master in Heaven and He has no favourites."

Now, when we first read this verse, we often feel like, this one is a little bit irrelevant, right? Because we don't have slaves and we don't have servants anymore and so maybe it doesn't apply. Sometimes, we try to apply it to employer/employee relationships and that's not a really exact parallel to the master/slave dynamic. In fact, I would say that's actually too narrow an application for what Paul is saying here. You see, most people in this world are going to fall into two categories for you. Most people are either going to be under your authority or people who have authority over you. What Paul says here teaches us how to deal with both of those two groups of people. He says, for those who have authority over you, here's what you need to do. Obey them; respect them; serve them sincerely; work enthusiastically. Yes! You could decide not to do the task they give you. You could bad mouth them to other people. You could do the bare minimum required of you. You could drag your feet and complain about every little thing. You could do that. But instead, submit to them. Not because of who they are, but out of reverence for Christ. You could do that, but instead choose to act in their best interest, not just your own.

For those you have authority over, remember that you're also under God's authority, as they are under yours. Treat them the same way that you would want them to treat you. Don't be harsh

and demanding. Don't disregard their insights and opinions. Don't belittle them or make them feel undervalued or unimportant. Don't do that, instead submit to them out of reverence for Christ. Don't do that, instead, love them and take responsibility for their well being.

Here's the bottom line. I live here and as I live out my life here I'm trying to imitate God and I'm trying to follow Christ's example and I'm trying to be led by the spirit and I'm doing my best at that, but you live here too and we have to live here together and so, as we're living here together, we need to learn to submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. We need to learn to act in the best interest of one another. We need to learn to take responsibility for the well being of one another.

I'm going to leave you with Paul's encouragement that he gives to the people in Philippi, he says:

“If you have any encouragement from being united in Christ, if you have any comfort from His love any fellowship with the Spirit; any tenderness, compassion, then make my joy complete by being like minded. Having the same love; being one in spirit and in purpose. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vane conceit but in humility consider others better than yourself. Each of you should not look only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus.”