

“Relationships In Christ: Obedience & Service ”

25 October 2020 - Led by Rev. Sam Mawhinney

Welcome & Call To Worship:

Hymn of Preparation: IPH 527 Psalm 23 (The Lord's My Shepherd)

Prayers of Adoration & Confession: Graeme Murdock

Reading: Ephesians 6:1-9

Sermon:

The society we are raised in has a huge influence upon us. The Christian lives within society, but their allegiance is firstly to Jesus Christ. We are welcomed into Jesus' family, the Church, and become members of the Kingdom of God. This then means that we are “strangers”, “exiles” and “foreigners” in the world. It is this new reality that is at the heart of these instructions given to households and the relationships found there. Paul gives wisdom to know how best to live, honouring our Lord and Saviour Jesus and respecting the society we live in.

Paul does not take his instruction from society but from our relationship with Jesus. Our motivation and ethic are one of submission out of reverence for Christ (v.21). As we saw last week when discussing marriage and the relationship of husband and wife, the relationship is discussed and lived in light of our relationship with Jesus and this idea continues in these verses (6:1-9): Children in the Lord (v.1), Fathers' instruction of the Lord (v.4), Slaves as you would obey Christ (v.5), and Masters, He who is both their Master and yours is in heaven (v.9). In summary, **how we live is determined by our relationship with Jesus**, not our society.

Our relationship with Jesus changes our relationship to others. Jesus spoke a lot about how allegiance to Him would create changes to our relationships with others, including other family members (Matthew 10:21, 34-37). He spoke of how Church family relationships would have priority over and impact upon natural family relationships (Matthew 12:46-50). On a wider level, certain countries and their governments demand loyalty to the state above Jesus or any religion or philosophy.

This poses a significant challenge. Christians and others are persecuted for allegiance to their faith. Paul's concern is for the Church and he is wise enough to know that how Christians act will be viewed by family and society, and a judgement will be made. His aim is to enable the Christian to live well in society while always honouring Christ. He does not allow society to determine and dictate Christian thought and life, nor is he wanting to “blow up” or disrupt unnecessarily the societies we live in.

This is not easy. We do not always get it right, and there are differences of opinion and emphasis. The Church has taken a lot of criticism over the issue of slavery - our acceptance and promotion of it in some places at certain times - and though we can claim credit for the Christian faith of someone like William Wilberforce as the motivation for his strong drive to abolish slavery, we must be honest about our failures as well.

The household codes take their ethic (how we live) from our relationship with Jesus, not from society. That affects our relationships with others, and there is a recognition that difficulties

between Christians and society do exist. Yet they encourage relationship with society, recognising its need to maintain order, while giving glory to God. Understanding this is important and gives us a framework to work through how we live well. It must be applied and discussed.

Paul addresses two important relationships. Children and fathers; slaves and masters. Let's look at each group and try to focus on one aspect.

I. Children: Include Them! (v.1-3)

Paul starts with children. By not simply referring to boys, he was countercultural and incredibly radical. Both boys and girls are important to Jesus, and we must keep that priority within the Church. Children are hearing this within the congregation! How does ARPC include our children? How do we speak to them? We need to remember them, be conscious of them, facilitate their presence and make sure we are communicating the gospel message to them in an appropriate way.

This takes time and wisdom. This is what we as a Church family promise to do with our baptismal vows. *"Do you promise, by the grace of God, so to live in the faith of the gospel, and in love for one another, that this child and all others among you may grow up to love and serve our Lord Jesus Christ?"*

The obedience of children is expected in most cultures and is commended, because in the Lord it is right. Children, it is right to obey your parents. Jesus was an obedient son to His earthly parents and to His heavenly Father. The fifth commandment widens the remit to honour which includes obedience, and the promise is a twofold blessing of wellbeing and long life.

II. Fathers: Nurture Them! (v.4)

The word used here could mean parents, but most likely is addressed to fathers as they had power and authority in the society at that time. The problem with having authority and power is our sinful human heart. Inevitably, that authority and power tends towards its use in a dictatorial manner - "my way or no way" - or being harsh and insensitive, not listening and, sadly, even abusive. The levels of abuse towards children are high. Paul's instructions to fathers, in light of this sinful tendency, is "do not exasperate your children." Don't make your children angry; instead, engage in love and listening, aware of their age and maturity. Nurture them, teach them and warn them in the Lord.

Parenting is hard but it is a privilege and priority. Let me read to you some thoughts from Klyne Snodgrass on what this exhortation to fathers looks like.

1. Creating a context of grace, love, support, respect and encouragement
2. Always speaking the truth
3. Attending to the material and emotional needs of children
4. Teaching, enlightening, warning, holding accountable and disciplining all as part of life lived to Christ; giving them a theology
5. Giving experiences, especially in work and in caring for others
6. Refusing to put down, demean, or damage them (shrill and angry speech does not belong).
7. Rejecting jealousy and contempt
8. Granting freedom within legitimate boundaries

9. Avoiding unhealthy pressure and expectations
10. Refusing to live through the children

In Church, we should ask: *how important to us is our work with children? How are they integrated into the family? How do we live connected to our two families - Church and natural? How does our work as parents allow us to care for our children and provide for them?*

The Covid crisis has raised again the issue of how do we care for our elderly parents as children? How can we avoid ageism in our thinking? What an important, vital relationship this is!

III. Slaves: Serve Jesus (v.5-8)

This sermon cannot deal with the issue of Christianity's relationship to slavery and why Paul didn't call for its abolition, other than my introductory remarks. Slaves were a significant part of the society in Ephesus. Every house probably had a slave or had been a slave. They were numerous and society depended on them continuing to work. The Church had significant numbers as members and they were in every strata of society. They could earn and buy their freedom. However, their freedom was restricted. Many were poorly treated or abused and their lot was miserable.

What Paul does is redefine their relationship to their masters in Christ, and the implications of doing that are very far reaching. We could argue they lead eventually to Christians spearheading the movement for the abolition of slavery. The redefinition is that they serve Christ and are free in Christ. So they are to continue as they were, work hard and serve wholeheartedly because they are "slaves of Christ". Logically, therefore, the masters no longer have control of slaves as they serve Christ.

IV. Masters: Treat Slaves In The Same Way (v.9)

The idea that masters were to treat their slaves in the same way was simply mind-blowing. Masters were to respect and honour their slaves with sincerity of heart, make sure they were provided for and, in their authority and power, they were never to threaten or abuse, because with God there are no favourites. Slave and free are equal in the Lord. *"To apply mutual submission to slaves and slave owners was a startling redefinition of slavery"* (Klyne Snodgrass).

Now for us, the application lies in employer and employee relationships, and there is much to think through here. However, I want to take us deeper and consider:

V. Our Value And Role In Society

- A. **Who you are!** Your value is not determined by your age, gender, status, or level of pay. In Christ, you are precious, valuable, and worthy of respect and honour. Children, fathers, slaves and masters matter to God. Your value is determined by being in Christ.
- B. **What you do is important!** - not because society tells you it is important or pays you a significant wage. In fact, society often skews this hugely. A Premier League footballer can receive hundreds of thousands per week. However, as Covid has shown us, supermarket employees, checkout staff and shelf stackers, or a healthcare worker, nurse or cleaner are valued also. Everything we do as Christ's is for the Lord and makes all work valuable.

- C. **How you do your work matters!** Why? Because everything we do is seen and will be judged by the Lord who is the ultimate authority. This is our motivation. Jesus is always present and we are to be wholehearted, as we are serving Him. This will guard against being lazy. Paul says, *“and whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him”* (Colossians 3:17).
- D. **How we use power is important!** Power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely (Lord Acton). Sadly, we see this in ourselves and in many leaders around the world in every sphere of life. So Paul says to those with power over slaves, do not threaten them (v.9). Why? Because you have a master and are accountable to him as your judge. Husbands must exercise their authority with love; parents must nurture and teach, not exasperate and make angry; masters must treat their employees with respect and honour, and wholeheartedly look out for their well-being, because God has no favourites and He will reward everyone for whatever good they do (v.8).

So, as we finish this important section on relationships in Christ and how to live, we have read much about how we are to live. All of it is positive and should affect the way we live and how we view ourselves. There is a deep need within society for such loving, authentic, Christian service that we should not be ashamed of.

- I urge you then to live a life worthy of the calling you have received (4:1)
- You must no longer live as the Gentiles do (4:17)
- Put off your old self...put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness. (4:22-24)
- As dearly loved children live a life of love (5:1-2)
- Live as children of light (5:8)
- Be very careful then how you live-not as unwise but as wise (5:15)
- Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ (5:21)
- You know that the Lord will reward everyone for whatever he does (6:8)

The ethic of this life for the Christian in whatever relationship and sphere - husband, wife, child, father, slave or master - is determined by our relationship with Jesus. May God help us live well in love for God and each other and to do so for His honour and glory and our blessing. Amen.

Hymn of Reflection: IPH 452 King Of Kings, Majesty

Prayers for Others: Lorraine Zipser

Announcements

Closing Hymn: IPH 491 Be Thou My Vision

Benediction; And now may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all, now and forevermore. Amen.

Discussion & Application:

Nurturing our children - how can that be done well in our Church family and natural families?

Doing your work for Jesus – how might that make a difference to how you work?

What areas of society most challenge your living for Jesus?