

Prayer

It is my joy, Lord Jesus Christ, to love You who died for me;
It is my delight, Lord Jesus Christ, to live in the freedom of Your love;
It is my endeavour, Lord Jesus Christ, to work my every hour for You;
It is my desire, Lord Jesus Christ, to remain faithful all my life;
It is my clearest aim, Lord Jesus Christ, to love You;
Because You have loved me. Thank You.

Prayer Suggestions

Prayer ideas

Think about the things you will do today, and ask the Lord to bless you with love in each situation.

On-going prayers

- **Pray for those who preach** Pray for those who will prepare to preach next Sunday today. Pray that the Lord will give them their message.
- Thank God for the great gifts He has given you, especially love
- Pray for those whose lives have been blighted by drugs

Meditation

Holy Spirit, speak to me about the things of God:
teach me why perverse human nature
seeks to defy the hand of its Creator,
so I may understand my ever present failings.

Holy Spirit, speak to me about the mysteries of heaven:
show me how far science can go
and where faith begins in the quest for truth,
so I may give You glory for the world You've made.

Holy Spirit, speak to me about the person that I really am:
explain to me how my will has failed
and life has compromised my living,
so I may make decisions worthy of my calling.

Holy Spirit, speak to me about the path on which I stand:
show me how to come alive in faith
and live with fearless courage and love
so I may ever witness to the One who gave me all.

Bible passage – Ephesians 6:1-9

¹ Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. ² 'Honour your father and mother' (which is the first commandment with a promise) ³ 'that it may go well with you and you may enjoy long life on the earth.' ⁴ Fathers, do not make your children resentful; instead, raise them in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

⁵ Slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect, fear, and sincerity of heart, as you would Christ. ⁶ Do this not just to impress or please others, but like slaves of Christ, doing the will of God with your whole being, ⁷ serving with good will, as to the Lord, not men, ⁸ and knowing that whatever good anyone does, whether slave or free, he will receive this from the Lord. ⁹ And masters, treat your slaves in the same way. Do not threaten them, since you know that both of you have the same Master in heaven, and with Him there is no favouritism.

Thought for the Day

Text

Ephesians 6:4

⁴ *Fathers, do not make your children resentful; instead, raise them in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.*

Thought

People often quote the Biblical phrase 'spare the rod and spoil the child' (Proverbs 13:24), but they would be wise to refer also to its New Testament counterpart, found here in Ephesians. Surely the loving parent will exercise appropriate discipline with both justice and love.

There are many who are resentful of the perceived success of others; they may have been badly treated. However, those who exercise worldly authority will do well to keep this advice, and balance demonstrable justice with compassion and understanding, so that all are encouraged, not destroyed.

Bible Study

Review

This is not the most well read part of Ephesians, yet it is sandwiched between the famous passage about marriage relationship (5:21-33) and the much loved text describing the 'whole armour of God' (6:10-17). Nevertheless, there is a great deal for us to explore here, firstly about parents and children (6:1-4), and secondly, slaves and masters (6:5-9).

Each section begins with a command to obey, but this is only a starting point. As each paragraph unfolds, we find that each relationship must be characterised by Christ-like qualities, as we see in the phrases that qualify each major point, e.g. '*in the Lord*' (6:1), '*of the Lord*' (6:4) and '*from the Lord*' (6:8). Paul wanted to give the Ephesians guidelines for godly living within a pagan world. All in all, the combination of yesterday's passage and today's makes for a comprehensive set of moral instructions for Christian living in the social order of the first century; for marriage, for the family, and for work (more of this later).

The first verse begins, '*Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right*' but the command to be obedient does not reflect the austere respect expected of children towards fathers in the first century. Two features of the sentence turn it into something very different from what might be found in other lists of 'good moral living' in the Roman world. Firstly, Paul issues a radical call for children to be obedient to both parents, to mothers as well as fathers; and secondly, this obedience is '*in the Lord*', meaning that it is appropriate for a Christian family, and setting a higher standard than the pagan world. Later, we will look at how the quote from the fifth Commandments (6:2,3) reinforces the point (see 'going deeper'), but verse four also sets out the radical Christian alternative to paganism. Paul speaks of godly discipline and instruction that is '*of the Lord*'; this could mean instruction 'about God', but far more likely, it means that discipline and instruction should be given in a Christ-like manner, through the love and service of parents.

The mention of slavery creates moral problems for us, wherever it is found in the Bible; not least here, where Paul talks about it as if the normal working relationship was 'slave / master'. If we can be generous of spirit towards first century Christians, then we will understand that they lived in a world in which vast numbers of people, perhaps a majority, lived in forms of bonded work or slavery. The worst slavery was indeed fought, but in order to change the world's attitudes towards slavery, the Bible consistently describes slaves as people with rights and a life; which is infinitely more than they were offered in the pagan world.

Just as Paul tells children to '*obey*', but in a radical and Christ-like manner, the same is now true of what he says to slaves. They are to '*obey*' (6:5) but he adds '*as you would Christ*', and this is not an instruction given to Christian slaves in the face of the cruel treatment of pagan slave masters. The rest of the passage makes clear that we are talking about arrangements in a Christian household, because from verse 7, godly requirements are placed on masters. Masters must '*do good*' equally with slaves, so that they will be in a right relationship with God (6:7,8); indeed, they must not abuse slaves by threatening them for '*with Him there is no favouritism*' (6:9).

We will find out that these paragraphs say even more, but here in this part of Ephesians, Paul sets out a new moral order appropriate for God's people as a witness to the world. In our own day, God's people should learn from this about how godly moral discipline can be an example to the world, as well as right for the family. Moreover, though Christians should have nothing to do with slavery today except fight it, Paul's moral

instructions about the slave / master relationship may be interpreted as enlightening the worker / boss relationship; the parallels are stronger than many might think!

Going Deeper

The Bible study goes deeper to look at these issues:

- What does the connection with the fifth commandment mean? (6:2-4)
- What does this passage tell us about slavery or work today? (6:5-8)
- What is the significance of 'partiality' in verse 9?

Notes on the text and translation

Important words

V3 'live long'

The Greek word is 'macrochronos', meaning the long life associated with God's blessings in the life of the Patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, see Genesis). Notice that the Patriarchs lived in the Promised Land only, but God's people now live anywhere on the earth.

V5 'earthly masters'

The Greek says 'fleshly masters', but the word 'flesh' here refers to earthly things, and the phrase 'earthly masters' makes Paul's point clear.

Significant phrases

V6 'not just to impress or please others'

Other translations:

'not only to win their favour when their eye is on you' (NIV)

'not only while being watched, and in order to please them' (NRSV)

These two Greek words are difficult to translate; 'ophthalmoudoulos' meaning 'service of the eye', and 'anthropareskos' meaning 'man-pleasing'. They do not need to be translated as if to try and carry their analogous meaning into English, because we have expressions that convey this adequately by themselves; 'impress' and 'please others' will do fine.

V6 'doing the will of God with your whole being'

Other translations:

'doing the will of God from your heart' (NIV)

'doing the will of God from the heart' (NRSV)

At the end, the Greek uses the word 'soul' ('psychos'), not 'heart', which means literally 'doing the will of God from the self'. Some think that 'from the heart' will be understood as meaning the effort of the whole self, but I doubt this, and some will think incorrectly that 'from the heart' means an emotional response. My translation avoids this risk and is closer to the Greek.

V8 'and knowing that whatever good anyone does, whether slave or free, he will receive this from the Lord'

Other translations:

'because you know that the Lord will reward everyone for whatever good he does, whether he is slave or free' (NIV)

'knowing that whatever good we do, we will receive the same again from the Lord, whether we are slaves or free' (NRSV)

Other translations vary wildly from this, and the phrase 'slave or free' often comes at the end rather than where I have placed it, half way through. The Greek is idiomatic, but the meaning of it is clear; we receive back from God the same quality of care we put into our work.

Problems with the ancient Greek/Hebrew text

V1 'obey your parents in the Lord'

Most Bible versions say this, but the earliest manuscripts are split over what is said here, and some significant texts omit 'in the Lord'. This makes little difference to the general meaning of

the verse, but if you believe in the idea of 'spiritual parents', then it is significant. I tend to agree with the scholarly consensus that the phrase 'in the Lord' is a genuine part of the letter.

Going Deeper

What does the connection with the fifth commandment mean? (6:2,3)

The first set of moral guidelines here refers to relationships in the family, and radically, Paul speaks of the child's obedience to both mother and father (6:1). He does not present this as a new command from the Lord; even though it may have been new to the people of his day who came from a pagan background, it was certainly not new to the Jewish people. Paul quotes the great fifth commandment of the 'Ten Commandments' (as in Exodus 20:12 and Deuteronomy 5:16, which says slightly more);

'Honour your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the LORD your God is giving you.' (Exodus 20:12)

The main difference between the Exodus version and that found in Ephesians is Paul's replacement of '*the land the Lord your God is giving you*' with '*on the earth*'. He believed that the kingdom of God had replaced the Promised Land of the Old Testament, and was now to be found throughout the world wherever God's people lived.

The blessing of long life, however, is the same in both the Old Testament and the New. It would be easy to dismiss the idea that a godly family life equates to longevity, because there is plenty of evidence that life is far more complicated, and many godly people have experienced great turmoil after exercising the highest of moral standards within their families. However, Paul's reason for quoting this 'promise' was to draw attention to the ideal that as people grew older, parents and children would not go their separate ways, but care for each other in love. Such a message was as important for the first century as it is for today.

Perhaps more than this, Paul illustrates the fact that a command may be qualified with blessing. By drawing our attention to this feature of the fifth commandment, he gains scriptural approval to qualify the harsh command 'obey your parents' (6:1). Certainly, by the time we read verse 4, Paul is talking not about the rights of a parent to discipline a child (as if to reinforce the Proverb, 'spare the rod and spoil the child' – Proverbs 13:24). On the contrary, he seems to take the view of the child in a radically new way. He says that the child must not be made resentful, which can only be achieved if parents act in a manner that is totally just and child-centred, for children are quick to become resentful of discipline that is not just in their own eyes. However, to act in this way, a parent must show empathy towards the child.

This must be the first time in history that we read of an empathic approach to child rearing! It is certainly not the disciplinarian approach many 'Bible-believing' Christians assume to be right (based on Proverbs 13:24), but close study of the text must make us reach this conclusion. Scripture is not two faced on this; the discipline represented by Proverbs is to be moderated, surely, by the love of Christ as spoken of in this text.

What does this passage tell us about slavery or work today? (6:5-8)

In the Roman world, slavery was extremely common. Conquered peoples from around the world might turn up as slaves elsewhere in the empire, even intelligent and 'high class' people. Slavery was also the 'way out' for people who were unable to pay debts. The system of slavery trawled vast numbers of people at the bottom of the social 'pile' into a general labour force for the stable and rich in the Empire. We must forget the modern industrial notion of people working at jobs in factories; in those days, every form of building work or social project, large or small, was executed using slave labour under the authority of those who had the resources to pay for it. To this extent, slavery was still a 'family business', which is why we can take what Paul says about slaves and masters, and apply it to the modern world of work.

Today, we tend to define a slave as someone who has no rights, but the Old Testament defines plenty of rights for slaves. It contains many laws and regulations that control slavery and place humanising limits on this ancient social convention (e.g. Ex 21:20f., Lev 25:39 Deut 21:14,23:15 etc.). Paul also shows some anti-slavery credentials by defining slave traders as sinners (1 Tim 1:10), so we may expect that he has something radical to say about slavery and work done.

In verses 5 to 8, the same principles apply as in the first four verses, but we have not looked at the details. Paul offers a radical approach to the relationship of slaves and masters starting with obedience but adding the overriding authority of Christ. Paul envisages firstly a Christian household in which a master has a number of slaves at his service, all of them being part of the local Christian community. He might also be addressing either masters or slaves who worked with non-Christians, and the example of each one was an important witness.

Firstly, slaves were to obey, but 'as you would Christ' (6:5). He then describes what he means by this in verses 6,7 and 8. These three verses are linked together, and after explaining that to please Christ, a slave (or worker) should shun seeking to please or impress others (6:6), he set out three ways to be a slave (worker) of Christ;

1. Doing God's will (6:6)
2. Serving with goodwill (6:7)
3. Knowing that God will reward good work (6:8)

Each of these three is set out clearly, though in the prose of the letter, we can easily lose sight of the clarity with which Paul writes. Paul adds a phrase of emphasis to each of these, for example, '*doing God's will*' must be done '*with your whole being*', and each verse makes a solid case for Christian witness in work. Indeed, the last one indicates clearly that by now, Paul has moved from addressing slaves alone, to speaking about both slaves and masters. Both will receive from the Lord according to what they have done (a principle of Jesus' own teaching, as found in Luke 6:38), and the equality with which Paul eventually speaks about both slaves and masters is radical in itself.

What is the significance of 'partiality' in verse 9?

Right at the end of his piece about slaves and masters, Paul concludes with an emphatic statement of the equality of all people in the sight of God. We might expect this of Paul, who teaches elsewhere that all are alike, male and female, Greek and Jew, slave and free (Gal 3:28, Col 3:11). But we must not forget how radical it was for him to say in the Roman world that slave and master stand equal before God (6:9). However, Paul's comment is not just about the status of humanity, but the supremely just disposition of God; He shows 'no favouritism', a phrase also found elsewhere in Scripture.

- God shows no favouritism – see *James 2:9, Mal 2:9, Prov 28:21,24:23, 2 Chron 19:7*
- Paul commands leaders to be like Christ and show no favouritism – *Tim 5:21*,
- In Christ, there is no 'favouritism' – see *Col 3:25, Gal 2:6, Rom 2:11, Acts 10:34*,
- People perceived Christ as showing no favouritism – see *Mark 12:14*,

We should remember that Paul wrote this letter towards the end of his ministry, and much of it echoes the sentiments of Colossians, which has a similar passage about slaves and workers towards its end (Col 3:22-26). It worth noting therefore that the letter to the Colossians mentions Onesimus as one of the carriers of that letter (Colossians 4:9), indeed some suggest that the comment about him in Colossians suggests that Onesimus carried with him not just the letter to the Colossians, but also the letter to Philemon, which is now a part of scripture.

With this in mind, we may wonder whether Paul worked out his teaching about slaves and masters after meeting the runaway slave Onesimus and having to write to his Christian master to plead with him to accept back this slave who had run away; one who by rights and according to Roman law, should be put to death. This could indeed be the origin of Paul's strongly egalitarian teaching about slaves and workers.

Application

As a whole, this passage says a great deal to us even today about relationships in the home, and also relationships at work. Certainly, society has moved on, but the relationship between child and parent remains the same. It seems to me that here in this passage, Paul offers great wisdom in combining the child's discipline of obedience with a command to parents to discipline and teach in the love of Christ. In practice, these things can only be worked out by parents within their own family circumstances, and it is good that we do not have more detailed instructions that might tie their hands as they face the demands of being 'Christ-like'. It is also important for all God's people to make note of the fact that Paul urges all children to honour parents. The command to obedience is for small children, and the command to honour is adult. In our world today, elderly people in their eighties and nineties may well have children who are already retired. The Christian example must be to offer all aging people the honour respect and love that is their due, and the right people to do this is the children. It is something people too easily forget.

Paul's comments about slaves and masters are often tossed aside as irrelevant to today, because slavery has been abolished. Even where slavery exists today in all its appalling and cruel forms, including child, sex and industrial slavery, we would hesitate to offer Paul's advice as relevant even if its victims were Christians. Certainly, we would not wish to countenance the idea that anyone practicing such illegal slavery might claim also to be a person of faith. The nearest parallel we have today to the circumstances in which Paul gave this advice is the workplace; and what is said here fits this situation very well. Occasionally, a Christian 'boss' will have Christian workers, but often, a Christian will work either for a non Christian boss, or vice-versa. Following Paul's advice will not win worldly credits, though it may. Following Paul's advice will enable a

Christian to engage in work in a way that is godly and rewarding, even in difficult social circumstances. However, it is necessary to make the argument that connects this passage with the workplace carefully, lest there be misunderstanding.

Discipleship

Questions (for use in groups)

1. What does this passage of Scripture tell us about family life, and can you see this working in society today?
2. What does this passage of Scripture tell us about the workplace, and can you see this working in society today?
3. How should the Christian respond to the forms of slavery in existence in the world today? (to find out more about this, try googling 'slavery' on the internet.)

Topics covered by this text

- Family life, obedience, teaching and instruction
- Working life, obedience and attitudes
- Slavery

Personal comments by author

This passage is remarkable. I did not expect to find it as interesting as this, and nor did I expect to find Paul's advice so all embracing and reasonable. My impression from casual reading of this text was that it advocated stern parental attitudes and an approach to slavery that is out of date. How many people think this? How many are willing to read the plain text, think about it, and change their minds? Scripture is indeed relevant to today.

Ideas for exploring discipleship

- *In what ways was your own family life similar to what is described here? It may be that there are few connections to be made between this text and yourself. However you answer, the question is perhaps difficult. Pray about how you respond to it.*
- *Pray earnestly for those who endure the terrors of modern slavery, in all its forms. Research this on the internet if necessary.*

Final Prayer

Remove from us all guilt and fear, Lord God, for the enemy will use this against us repeatedly. We turn to You, Lord God, to release us from any evil grip of terror and fear, for only You can do this by the power of Your Holy Spirit within us. Thank You Lord God, AMEN
