

One of the oldest confessions of Christian faith went like this: Jesus is Lord. It has never gone out of style. It had bite in the first century, because pagan Romans at that time also said, “Caesar is Lord.” When Christians became numerous enough to be noticed, some people thought Christians betrayed Rome to say, “Jesus is Lord.”

We live again in a world where it has bite to say, “Jesus is Lord.” The authorities don’t yet say it is traitorous to say that. They are still apprehensive about the latent power of the Church to sway public opinion. So, they speak cautiously about it, even as they nibble away at its authority in many public and less public ways.

This tension between the Church and the governing and the cultural authorities makes it wise for us to consider more closely what it means to say, “Jesus is Lord.” I’d like to do that in the next few minutes in domestic ways. Jesus is Lord! Really? In our marriages and in the care of children and the elderly and in the way we go to work each day, what evidence is there that Jesus is Lord?

Ephesians 6:1-9 give us practical help as to that evidence we should be looking for. It’s evidence that usually doesn’t have an audience and doesn’t get applause. But it has real power in the messy business of life. We’d better get started.

Children and Parents

Ephesians 6:1: **Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. “Honor your father and mother” – which is the first commandment with a promise – “that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth.”**

The apostle showed admirable restraint when he wrote the first four verses of chapter 6. He had no children, and so he wrote very little about the behavior of children and their parents. What he did write was informed by Scripture, and it is full of wisdom. Verses 2-3 quote the Fifth Commandment: **Honor your father and mother that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth.**

Verse 1 is a kind of application of the Fifth Commandment: **Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.** Children honor their fathers and mothers, when they obey them. The grown son or daughter, who cares for an aging and failing parent also honors that father or mother, but in a very different way. Honoring father and mother is a lifetime calling. Obeying father and mother belongs to that time of life, when a son or daughter is still economically dependent on parents. That’s what the apostle had in mind, when he wrote verse 1.

So, if you still depend on your parents for food, shelter, and clothing, then honor God by obeying your parents. Did you notice the little phrase Paul used at the end of verse 1? **Obey your parents in the Lord.** Obeying your parents is an important part of following our Lord Jesus Christ. Besides, said the apostle at the end of verse one: **this is right.** Obeying your parents is action that makes the world work right.

Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord. The obedience of children gives honor to parental authority. But dads and moms must not use authority over their children harshly or arbitrarily. Harsh and arbitrary use of authority with children can create in them resentment and anger for years, perhaps for a lifetime. May I offer several guidelines for being more successful parents?

Guideline #1: your responsibility as a parent is not to be your children’s friend but to teach your children wisdom. When we have these child dedication services on Sunday

morning, these beautiful children “don’t know nothing, man.” They are learning about the world every day of their lives, and you parents are their first and best teachers. Even when you are not teaching, they are learning.

One of our granddaughters and my wife, Carole, were having a conversation about the procedure in our house for brushing teeth or washing hands or something like that. The child was four years old, and she looked at Carole and said, “Well, that’s your assumption.” I can’t believe she understood the word, but she used it rightly.

She learned the word and how it was used properly from her mom and dad. To be present at that moment was to watch a child beginning to learn the patterns of life. That’s your power as a parent. Stop trying to be their friend. Be their teacher. Help them to understand the world. Help them to be wise.

Guideline #2: don’t be neutral in matters of faith. I remember taking a babysitter home one night. We begin talking about the church and matters of faith. She said, “Our family doesn’t go to church. My parents want me to keep an open mind and to choose for myself about religion.” Parents who say that have either lost their faith, or they have never had a living faith. I said, “Don’t be neutral in matters of faith.” The truth is: You can’t be neutral in matters of faith. The parents of that babysitter were teaching their children in a powerful way that God doesn’t matter. The ancient wisdom of Israel in contrast has charted the course for people who believe in God and want their children to follow in their ways.

These commandments that I give you are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. (*Deuteronomy 6:6-7*) A wise professor once said, “You can’t impart what you don’t possess.” If your own spiritual tank is empty, you have nothing to impress on your children. But you can be sure that other voices on the Internet or TV, in peer groups and classrooms will be hard at work impressing their ideas on your children. Don’t be neutral in matters of faith.

Guideline #3: don’t let your older children intimidate you. Here’s an example of how that can happen. Our older daughter asked us if she could celebrate high school graduation week by going to the Oregon coast with a group of her fellow graduates to spend the night on the beach. It involved a nighttime ride over the Coastal Mountain Range with students we didn’t know and some students we did know and were wary of. To spare you some of the details we said No. As quick as quick could be she said, “You don’t trust me.”

Isn’t it amazing how kids can attack us where we are most sensitive and vulnerable? I mean, it’s an article of faith: “I trust my children.” For our children to accuse us of not trusting them is like being blindsided by a 300-pound defensive end. It calls into question our integrity. Most parents already feel uncomfortable in a teenage world; but now this: “You don’t trust me.” What do you say?

As God as my witness, I said to her, “You’re right. I don’t.” If I was stunned by her accusation, I think she was stunned by my agreement. It was an uncomfortable moment. I went on to say, “I don’t trust you in this situation, because I wouldn’t trust myself in this situation. I know how easy it is in the pressure of the moment to behave in ways I would later regret. We don’t know these kids. I don’t want you to have regrets.” Don’t let your older children intimidate you.

Slaves and Masters

Slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ. Obey them not only to win their favor when their eye is on you, but like slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from your heart. 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.

Before reflecting on this text, I need to address a criticism that I have heard. Some people read what the apostle wrote here and say, “That’s Christianity for you! He’s telling slaves to be content with being slaves, to be good slaves. Why wasn’t he inciting them to rise up against their masters and demand their freedom?”

That’s a cheap shot. It’s moral snobbery. The reason African-Americans and other minorities in our nation can protest racism and injustice is because American culture changed 50 years ago. Before the change you had to live in the Old South with its Jim Crow laws to appreciate how unchangeable that culture felt. That’s why we honor Rosa Parks. She decided she was going to sit anywhere on that Alabama bus she wished. But she was encouraged by sit-ins and marches and Supreme Court decisions that had already called into question that culture of discrimination.

Don’t be self-righteousness. Slavery in the Roman Empire was like pornography on the Internet. It was everywhere and acceptable, and even people who didn’t like it didn’t have recourse to do much about it. The apostle couldn’t change slavery, but he began to undermine it. That’s what his words in verses 5-9 do. We, however, are going to apply his words to present-day workplace relationship between employee and employer. I think they fit, albeit with some discomfort.

Here’s the action Paul called for among Christian slaves. Verse 9: **Slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ.** The modern office equivalent would be to say, “Employees, do the work you agreed with your employers to do.”

As so often in Ephesians 4-6, it is the motive that drives the worker that is unique. Verse 6: **Obey them not only to win their favor when their eye is on you, but like slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from your heart.**

About a month ago, we talked about doing the will of God. I said: 90% of doing the will of God is showing up every day and fulfilling your responsibilities. There is a world to be run. There are children to rear, jobs to be done, education to be gotten, beauty to be discovered, and praise and thanksgiving to be offered to God. So, when you set off for school or work tomorrow, you can do so in the full assurance that you are about to do the will of God for much of your life.

When you look at what you do to fill most of your waking hours, do you think of it as doing the will of God? Do you see God as being connected in any significant way with your work? If the work of slaves could be considered doing the will of God, how much more what you do everyday!

Take-aways

People sometimes visit with me in my office, and they say – good-humoredly – “Oooo, now I’m in the Principal’s office.” I don’t feel that way about myself, but I understand that my office carries with it a certain moral authority that people respect. So,

I have made my peace with comments about “the Principal’s office.” But after what we have thought about together the last three Sundays, it is important for you to hear me out on a matter of great importance.

I have said what I have said about Christian husbands, wives, children, and work, not to make anyone feel guilty. I am where you are. I have been married a long time, but I still want to know how to love my wife more like Christ loves the Church. My grandchildren are growing up in a noticeably different world than any of my children grew up in. How can Carole and I contribute to their training in Christ?

We here are on a journey together. We need a lot less finger pointing and a lot more coming alongside each other and saying, “Okay, bro, you need me today; I may need you tomorrow. So, let’s just help each other.”

Does anyone besides people of faith care about strengthening marriages and families? Our legal system cares a lot about resolving child custody and property settlement issues, but it seems to turn a blind eye toward the disaster that divorce is for children. Our educational system cares a lot about improving test scores, but it seems to turn a blind eye toward the impact that bad family life has on a child’s motivation to learn.

The Body of Christ cares. The Church swims against the culture, when it teaches that sex and children belong within marriage between a man and a woman for life. Of course it’s hard. It has always been hard. But wherever that ideal has been debunked and abandoned, men suffer. Women suffer more. Children suffer most. We with our demanding vision of Christian marriage and family life are still the salt of the earth.

Don’t give up. Endure hardness as good soldiers of Jesus Christ. **Wait for the Lord; be strong and take heart and wait for the Lord.** (Psalm 27:14)