

...at home and at work

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[0 : 00] Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. Honour your father and mother, this is the first commandment with a promise, that it may go well with you, and that you may live long in the land.

Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. Fathers, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, with a sincere heart as you would Christ, not by the way of eye service as people please, but as servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, rendering service with a good will as to the Lord and not to man, knowing that whatever good anyone does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether he is a slave or free.

Masters, do the same to them, and stop your threatening, knowing that he who is both their master and yours is in heaven, and that there is no partiality with him.

Well, I wonder if you're someone who knows what it is to enjoy a jigsaw. Perhaps on holiday, you throw all the pieces out of the box, there they are on the table, complete chaos, nothing seems to bear any resemblance at all to the picture you've got there on the box.

Yet gradually, order comes out of chaos. First you find the corners, then the edges, then clumps of colour which become an animal, or a mountain, or a person, or a building.

[1 : 47] The great satisfaction of putting the whole thing back together again. Well, that is a picture of what God is doing in his world. Ephesians chapter 1 verse 10 describes it as God's plan set forth in Christ, as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven, and things on earth.

God's plan for a whole new creation under the rule of Jesus Christ. And the church is God's display cabinet, if you like, of that future, as people from different nations, backgrounds, cultures, all come under the rule of Jesus.

And then as relationships are rightly ordered under the rule of Jesus. Last week, in marriages which mirror the beautiful relationship between Christ and his people.

And this week, in rightly ordered relationships, both at home, and also in the workplace. Now it may of course be that you were here last week, and you thought to yourself, well hang on a moment, this doesn't really apply to me, because I'm not married.

Or perhaps someone this week may think, well I'm not a parent, or I'm not a child, or I'm not in work. And yet actually, if we are disciples of Jesus Christ, what the Apostle Paul is talking about here should concern each and every one of us.

[3 : 19] Because it is about our corporate witness, our together witness, if you like, as a local church. And all of us live rightly ordered relationships in the whole of life that demonstrate that Jesus Christ is indeed Lord.

And thereby show the whole direction that world history is heading in. So our aim this morning is to see how both at home and in the workplace we can demonstrate that God's plan is on track by living lives that show that Jesus is indeed Lord.

If you're here looking in on the Christian faith, then I hope you'll see how very attractive and winsome the Bible's teaching is when it comes to these areas.

And how wonderful a whole society transformed by the message of Jesus, or how a workplace transformed by the message of Jesus would be. Now there's an outline on the back of the service sheet, as usual.

Do take notes. Many people find it helpful to take notes to refer to you later. First of all, Jesus Christ is Lord. We've been singing about the fact that Jesus is Lord this morning. Notice that this is a continuation from last week, where the Apostle Paul shows what it looks like to be filled with the

Spirit.

[4 : 41] Do you remember chapter 5, verse 18? Chapter 5, verse 18, it's where we started, wasn't it? It starts, Do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit.

What does that look like? Well, all the things in verses 19 and 20, including verse 21, submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ. Now hopefully we began to see last week, that doesn't mean that every Christian should submit to every other Christian.

Rather, the point is that chapter 5, 22 to 6, 9 goes on to show the areas in which that principle of verse 21 is to be worked out.

It means, of course, that as we put these verses into practice in the realm of marriage last week, in the home and in the workplace this week, that actually as we put these verses into practice, we are demonstrating that we are receptive to the Spirit's transforming work in our lives as he makes us into the likeness of Jesus Christ.

And it's hard, isn't it, to miss in chapter 6, verses 1 to 9, you probably noticed it as Estee read the passage for us, the repetition that Jesus Christ is Lord. So verse 1, children obey your parents in the Lord.

[6 : 05] Verse 4, in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. Verse 7, with a good will as to the Lord. Verse 8, he will receive back from the Lord. In other words, you and I will never work out what it means to be a Christian child, a Christian parent, a Christian employee, a Christian employer, apart from the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

It's what, of course, we've seen throughout Ephesians, that he is Lord. Just turn back to chapter 1, verse 21. Chapter 1, verse 21, Jesus has been raised from the dead.

It's what we celebrated two weeks ago on Easter Sunday. Chapter 1, verse 21, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, not only in this age but also the one to come.

In other words, to deny Jesus Lordship in any one area of life is a complete nonsense. It is like saying that gravity only works in some areas of life but not in others.

Just imagine going rock climbing with a friend and there you are at the bottom of some enormous cliff. You put your harness on, you've made sure all the safety equipment is working. But as you're doing that, your friend starts to climb up this enormous sheer rock face without any safety equipment on at all.

[7 : 34] So you shout up, hang on, you haven't got your harness on. And your friend shouts down, don't worry, I've checked, gravity doesn't work in this particular part of the country.

I mean, it's just madness, isn't it? And yet, how easily we compartmentalize our lives. Listen to one Christian writer on these verses.

It is much easier to appear authentically Christian at church than in private, at home, or at work. Sometimes the only way to discover if someone is an authentic believer is by asking their spouse or children or boss.

It's a very telling comment, isn't it? Which may expose one or two of us. Let me put it another way. We'll never get our relations with one another right until we first get our relationship with the Lord Jesus right.

if marriage, family life, or work is difficult, and my assumption is that that will be the case for a significant number of us at any one time, that marriage or family life or work life will be difficult.

[8 : 50] If that is the case, then we need first and foremost to consider how we are relating to Jesus. You see, what is the disobedient child to do first and foremost before they will obey their parents?

They need to recognize that Jesus Christ is Lord. What is the father who is failing to take the lead in the instruction of his family to do before he will do that?

He needs to recognize that Jesus Christ is Lord. What is the employee who slacks off as soon as their boss's eyes turns to do before they change?

They need to recognize that Jesus Christ is Lord. Just as the employer who treats their staff badly needs to do the same thing. So that's our starting point.

Jesus Christ is Lord. Secondly, the lordship of Jesus at home.

[9 : 58] Have a look at verses one and one to three. Children, obey your parents in the Lord for this is right. Honor your father and mother.

This is the first commandment with a promise that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land. Now, the God-given authority of parents over their children notice is to be recognized

and respected.

As parents bring their children up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord, as children obey their parents, so the post-Genesis 3 world of disordered relationships is overturned and order is restored.

And while it's true that each culture determines the point at which a child becomes an adult, and although adults are no longer bound to obey their parents, we are still noticed to honor them, as the fifth commandment quoted in verse 2 makes clear.

The Apostle Paul gives two reasons why children should obey their parents. The first notice because it is right, verse 1.

[11 : 06] I take it because this is God's creation model for right relationships between children and their parents. The second is the fifth commandment, which verse 3 comes with a promise that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land.

Originally, it was a promise to God's Old Testament people. The Apostle Paul now generalizes it to include all Christians. Generally, it will go well with you for family and society if children obey their parents.

John Stott says this, a healthy society is inconceivable without a strong family life. striking, isn't it? In other words, you and I should not be surprised that in our culture, which has turned its back on its Christian foundations, unruliness amongst children and a lack of discipline are growing.

Such a culture will, of course, inevitably over time collapse. It is the truth that no one dares speak about in the debate over knife crime, for example.

[12 : 18] Far more important than police numbers or school exclusion orders is what is happening in the home. What do you say? What does this kind of obedience look like?

Well, all sorts of things, I guess. I assume it means no answering back. I assume it means no to obedience only when there's a bribe. And I assume it means no to having to argue through every decision with a child.

world. I think it was Mark Twain who said that when he was age 16, he was surprised how little his father knew about life, yet he was equally surprised how much his father learned in the next six years.

I take it it was not his father who did the learning. What do you say? Are there any exceptions?

Well, yes. That phrase in verse 1, in the Lord, provides both the motivation in the Lord and yet also the boundaries.

If a parent wants a child to deny that Jesus is Lord, either by denying him outright or by acting in an ungodly manner which denies his Lordship, then their primary loyalty is obviously to the Lord Jesus.

[13 : 38] Well, some in the room can now breathe a sigh of relief. Others can't as we go on to fathers. Verse 4, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

Notice, will you, that fathers are addressed specifically even though children are to obey both parents. As the head of a household, it is the father who sets the spiritual tone.

Doesn't mean mothers don't have responsibilities in this area. But in our culture, where men so often abdicate responsibility, then the fact that the apostle Paul addresses fathers specifically, surely is particularly relevant.

Notice then there's a negative and a positive. The negative, do not provoke your children to anger. How easily parents can misuse our authority by making irritating or unreasonable demands, or by harshness at one extreme, or at another by favoritism or overindulgence, or by humiliating our children, or suppressing them, or by being sarcastic, or ridiculing them, or constant nagging. And then there's the positive in verse 4, bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. the word discipline, much broader than simply addressing bad behavior.

[15 : 11] Think perhaps of the way in which we might talk about the discipline that's involved. If you're an athlete and you're training for a particular event, so you can imagine we had interviewed some of the competitors for the London Marathon over the last few weeks or so before they ran last week.

They might have told you, but mightn't they, about the discipline that's involved in their training program, exercise, diet, sleep, and so on.

It would show that they were serious about the future. If they weren't doing the training, it would show that they weren't serious about the future.

And it's just the same with Christian parents. The extent to which we train our children as disciples of Jesus Christ demonstrates that we are serious about showing that Jesus is Lord.

The second phrase, verse four, the instruction of the Lord is more obvious. We are actively to seek to teach our children God's word, the Bible. Fathers, this is our job.

[16:26] It is our greatest responsibility privilege. And greatest privilege. We are to guard it jealously. Let me ask, when did you last think, fathers, about the way in which you are training your children?

When did you last think, fathers, about how you are teaching your children? children? It doesn't mean we are to do it all, but it does mean we are to take the lead in it as we train our children, as we teach them from the Bible.

We are not simply to delegate it, perhaps to school or to church or leave it all to our wives. Many of us will have very capable wives.

They may be more capable than we are in this particular area. They will long to help us to exercise our responsibilities, but we must not simply delegate to them.

I guess it begs the question, doesn't it, what are we ambitious about for our children? The Christian author, Don Carson, speaking many years ago, he said this, he said, he would much rather his sons grew up as dustmen, and yet knowing and trusting the Lord Jesus, than fulfilling their middle class potential, so to speak, in some high-flying job, pulling in lots of money, and not knowing and loving the Lord Jesus.

[18:02] Now I think it's very easy to go with Don Carson in theory, much harder to do so in practice. What about you?

It's all too easy to exasperate our children by burdening them with our own materialistic expectations, pushing, pushing, pushing to achieve, to get the grades, to get the school places, to get the places at universities.

These can be heavy burdens on our children, and they have nothing to do with the gospel. I guess for some of us, the problem is that actually we are more ambitious about our careers than we are about our children standing firm as disciples of the Lord Jesus.

Someone very honestly told me a few weeks ago, not someone in this room, told me a few weeks ago that frankly he felt he spent far too much time at work, and that his children were suffering for it. And he decided to draw the light, to draw a line. He decided he wasn't simply going to carry on climbing up the career ladder, and that he would entrust the consequences to God.

[19:17] Now isn't that a wonderfully encouraging thing to hear someone saying? I wonder if that is a line that you have drawn. The Lordship of Jesus at home.

Thirdly, the Lordship of Jesus at work. have a look at verse five. Slaves, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, with a sincere heart as you would Christ.

It is estimated there were 60 million slaves in the Roman Empire, servants, laborers, teachers, administrators. What is remarkable is the apostle Paul dresses them at all, but he does so as equal members of the church.

Christians, of course, were at the forefront of abolishing the slave trade, and while we are regularly reminded of the existence of modern slavery, it is clear, I think, from what's written here, that this applies beyond slavery to every workplace.

Just think of a city worker who is enslaved by their emails and their smartphone, whilst the employee stuck in a zero hours contract.

[20:34] So, how should the lordship of Jesus transform your attitude towards your boss? Well, in verse 5, notice it is recognizing their authority, not in the sense of being fearful, but a recognition that in serving them, you are serving Christ.

You see, what's the danger? Well, the danger, verse 6, is simply that we become people-pleasers, only motivated when others are watching us. Instead, we are to serve as if serving Christ.

And I take it for those of us in JAM who are still in full-time education, then I take it the same principle applies to our academic work as well. We are to do it as for the Lord Jesus.

It's what we were led, wasn't it, a few minutes ago in our prayers for them. In other words, the way we serve our boss is at peace with serving Jesus, serving with sincerity, cheerfulness, integrity, transparency, as we would the Lord Jesus Christ.

And yet, that phrase, as servants of Christ, again, shows us the boundaries, doesn't it? Not to do everything your boss tells you, but treat your boss as the Lord Jesus would have you treat them.

[21 : 53] So, for example, when you're asked to work all weekend or to lie to clients or whatever it is, I take it that is not what the Lord Jesus would have us do.

It is, of course, wonderfully liberating. So often the workplace is a place of massive injustice. You know, we feel we haven't been treated fairly.

No doubt there are many slaves in the church in Ephesus who felt precisely that, or who felt their hard work had gone unnoticed and unappreciated, just as no doubt there will be some of us here this morning who think exactly the same way about our place of work.

And yet wonderfully, verse 8, nothing goes unnoticed or unrewarded with the Lord Jesus knowing that whatever good anyone does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether he is a slave or free.

What do you say, what about masters? Verse 9, masters do the same to them and stop your threatening, knowing that he who is both their master and yours is in heaven and that there is no partiality with him.

[23 : 09] It is totally countercultural, isn't it? Their attitudes, notice, are also to be governed by their relationship with Jesus Christ who is Lord.

Whereas the temptation might be to threaten or to bully or to undermine or to manipulate, just as that is the norm in so many workplaces today, instead masters are to have the same attitude and ladies as slaves with their eyes firmly focused on Jesus Christ, knowing that ultimately they are accountable to him, their heavenly Lord, and master.

I said last week that someone had asked me a question recently, is it right as a Christian to be ambitious? And I had replied, well, it depends what you're ambitious for.

Let's be ambitious for what the Lord Jesus wants us to be ambitious about. For those you work for, for those you're accountable to, to be ambitious to demonstrate that Jesus is Lord.

By the way you treat those you work with. By your desire within the workplace to see the gospel that Jesus is Lord proclaimed. By the desire to do your work honestly and with integrity in a way that demonstrates that Jesus is Lord.

[24 : 40] Lord. By refusing to work all hours because you recognize that Jesus is indeed Lord of all of your life. That may mean saying no to some of the demands and expectations of work because Jesus who is Lord has given you other responsibilities as well other than work at home in the local church here.

I take it that's what authentic Christian ambition at work looks like. Being ambitious to demonstrate in all we do at work that Jesus is Lord.

I think it's why the language of career is so unhelpful. I know it's ingrained in us but it's not a biblical concept and it just takes our eye doesn't it off serving Jesus as Lord and on to serving my career instead.

But we don't worship our careers. We worship the Lord Jesus which of course makes it so much easier when we're faced with tough decisions at work. And again I guess there'll be a number of us here this morning and we do face tough decisions at work.

Well Jesus is Lord. We do the right thing and we leave the consequences to him. It is wonderfully liberating. It's why too I think the language of full-time Christian work or full-time Christian ministry is also so unhelpful because you see if we describe a few as being in full-time ministry well we can only conclude that the rest are in part-time ministry.

[26 : 24] But it's just not possible to be a part-time servant of Jesus Christ. It's why Paul you see he doesn't say does he to the Christian slaves for example he doesn't say serve your masters and then when you get a couple of hours off work to go to church then go and serve Jesus at church.

He doesn't say that. No verse 7 they are to serve their masters as to the Lord. In other words if we're serious about demonstrating that Jesus is Lord if we're serious about living lives that reflect the whole direction of travel that our world is heading in a new creation under the rule of King Jesus then I take it all of us will regard ourselves as in full time Christian ministry.

You cannot serve Jesus part-time. Now I'm conscious that for some of us that will be a massive shift of mind.

A massive mindset shift. shift to think that each one of us if we have put our trust in Jesus we are full time Christian workers.

And yet of course when we make that step it is in fact gloriously liberating and it fills the workplace with the most enormous potential.

[27 : 52] Enormous potential to demonstrate that he is indeed Lord. To demonstrate that actually the whole world is on a trajectory to the new creation when he will visibly be seen to be Lord.

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