Home Service Sheet for Sunday 30th June 2024

Call To Worship Psalm 103:1-5

Bless the Lord, O my soul,

    and all that is within me,

    bless his holy name!

Bless the Lord, O my soul,

    and forget not all his benefits,

who forgives all your iniquity,

    who heals all your diseases,

who redeems your life from the pit,

    who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy,

who satisfies you with good

    so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.

Opening Prayer

Gracious God, we praise You and bless You today for who You are and all that You have done for us and for our benefit. In creation You have provided food, drink, clothing and shelter. Through Your Son, You have offered us forgiveness and salvation to eternal life. In Your Holy Spirit, You fill us and make us more like Your Son in holiness and righteousness. For this and so much more, O Lord, we give You thanks and praise. May we continue to follow You each day and enthrone You on our praises

Hymn Now thank we all our God by Martin Rinkart

<https://youtu.be/T9MPUJsEVEM?si=k9HTmLaw2iQfrdfB>

Now thank we all our God with heart and hands and voices,

Who wondrous things hath done, in whom His world rejoices;

Who, from our mothers’ arms, hath blest us on our way

With countless gifts of love, and still is ours today.

O may this bounteous God through all our life be near us,

With ever joyful hearts and blessed peace to cheer us;

 And keep us in His grace, and guide us when perplexed,

And free us from all ill in this world and the next.

All praise and thanks to God the Father now be given,

The Son, and Him who reigns with them in highest heaven,

The one eternal God, whom earth and heaven adore;

For thus it was, is now, and shall be evermore.

The Lord’s Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy Name. Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those that trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For Thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

Bible Reading: Ephesians 6:1-9

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.

Bondservants, 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-pleasers, but as bondservants 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 bondservant or is 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.

Reflection

We seem to be living in a world today where the family is under sustained attack from all sides. All too often there are headlines in our newspapers about child neglect, youth knife crime and abuse. This is certainly not the kind of relationship envisioned by Paul in his letter to the Ephesians, that we are thinking about today. The bigger context here is found in one of the Ten Commandments, which addresses how children should act towards their parents, but does not specifically give commands to parents. The basic point is for children to honour their father and mother. There is also a promise given to the children if they obey, and that is that they will enjoy long life.

For children to show respect to their parents is probably the most common meaning of honouring, and a consequence of this is obedience. If you honour your parents, your children in turn will see and follow that example and look after you well in your old age and infirmity! Paul takes the shorter version of the commandment from Exodus and just spells it out more clearly. Children are to obey their parents, with the simple explanation that this is the right thing for them to do. This practical act of submission, however, should be limited in the same way that a wife’s submission to her husband is. If there is conflict between what parents ask of their children and what God asks in His Word the children should obey God first.

In all other circumstances, though, children are to obey their parents. That is, they are to listen attentively and do as they are told. When children leave and marry then this command is qualified by the commitments of the marriage relationship. However, that does still leave a grey area if children live with their parents beyond the age of 16 or 18, or they do not marry. Are they then still to obey their parents? Note that obeying and honouring parents is to be done ‘in the Lord’ or ‘to the Lord’. In other words, we are to obey and honour parents just as we would the Lord, and by doing this we are honouring God. As we grow older and mature the command to honour our fathers and mothers does not go away, although it might be practiced slightly differently. We need to continue to respect our parents throughout our lives, and care for them when that is needed. That is what I believe it means for adult children to obey this command.

Verse 4 gives us the other side of this command, showing us that this is not a one-way relationship. Yes, children are to submit to their parents, but parents are also called to submit to God’s ways for the sake of their children. Paul calls all Christian parents to a very different standard of love and care for their children. He begins with a negative command to not ‘provoke’ their children to anger. Practically speaking we could interpret this as always look to do what is good for their children. That doesn’t mean give your children all they want, but rather do for them and give them what is for their good. This comes through even clearer in the second half of verse 4. Paul writes, “bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.”

So now let’s move on to consider the relationship between masters and slaves, or for us today employers and employees. Paul instructs slaves, and by extension employees, to ‘obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling’. There are many people who read or hear this instruction today who immediately get all defensive. How dare Paul say something like this that has been used as justification for ongoing slavery over the years! The problem is that these people stop reading or listening here. They do not read on and see the fuller context, including the instructions to masters.

So, what should we take away with us to apply from Paul’s writings on submission amongst God’s people? First of all, we need to submit to God, recognising that He is Lord and Master of all. He loves us and does what is best for us, which makes it easier to submit. Secondly, as His people, we have responsibilities to those around us. If we are married, we must follow God’s ways of submitting to one another out of love for Christ. If we are children, we must submit to our parents and obey them when we are young, care for them and respect them when we are adults. If we are parents, we must not provoke our children to anger. If we are an employee, we must obey our employer and work diligently and conscientiously in our job. If we are an employer, we must be considerate of our employees, treating them as fellow human beings, and brothers and sisters in Christ. The whole purpose of this is to establish a new way of being for God’s people. In all of this we demonstrate that whilst we are living in this world, we must not be of it! Amen!

Prayer

Heavenly Father, we thank You for the family unit which was ordained by You from the beginning. We thank You for our families and all the love and blessings that we have given and received as part of them. Help us to be good parents and to instruct those in our care wisely. Help us also to be child-like in our relationships with others and to respect and honour them, as we do You, O Lord. May our example to others be good so that they would be pointed to You, the One who has ordered creation and put in place systems, laws and rulers. Whenever there is conflict between the ways of the world and Your ways keep us strong to obey You regardless of the cost to us. These things we ask in Jesus’ Name, and for His sake, amen.

Blessing

Send us out into this world, O Lord, firm in our knowledge of You, filled with our love for You, and inspired by Your love for us and all Your people. Amen.