

BCC4: RESPECT

Ephesians 6:1-9, Matthew 5:13-16 [MW20-08]

Sermon preached by Rev Wayne Thornton at Mangawhai and Wellsford, Sunday 23 February 2020

Our youths love luxury. They have bad manners, contempt for authority - they show disrespect for their elders and love to chatter in place of exercise. Children are now tyrants, not the servants of their households. They no longer rise when their elders enter the room. They contradict their parents, chatter before company, gobble up food, and tyrannize teachers.

What do you think? Fair enough?

- do you know who said that, or even when it was said?
any ideas???
- it's from the Greek philosopher Socrates in 400 B.C. ... that's right 400 B.C.!
so it is just as Ecclesiastes 1:9 tells us: *there really is nothing new under the sun*

The place and behaviour of children was obviously an issue long before Paul wrote

- but perhaps because these days children are seen as so important, precious even we kind of miss the “radicalness” of what Paul is doing here
- children are supposed to be there, children are expected to be there even more than that Paul addresses children directly
- Bible Scholar John Stott makes this comment:
Since Paul addresses the children as well as their parents,
he evidently expects whole families to come together for public worship
not only to praise God but also to listen to his Word.

Children are naturally part of the Christian community, part of the church

- members of the body of Christ
which contrasts sharply with that Victorian adage:
“children should be seen and not heard”
- and even more sharply with Roman practice where children were not seen
and in reality not cared about
Roman treatment of children has in fact been characterised as “callous cruelty”

In the Letter to the Ephesians Paul singles children out to speak to them

- this is how the Contemporary English Version puts it:
*Children, you belong to the Lord,
and you do the right thing when you obey your parents*
- the motivation for this is that children belong to the Lord
children are to do this because they are an integral part of God's family
- and what are children to do? ... “obey”
that is the way it is: children are to obey
- these days much is made of children's rights
and even the possibility that children can 'divorce' their parents

However I think it's clear that children don't know best and don't know everything

- though many think they do (especially some teenagers)
the reality is that they don't and are to do what their parents say
- and when they do, this promise is made in verse 3:
so that it may go well with you and and that you may enjoy long life on the earth
- John Stott writes:
what is promised is not so much long life to each child who obeys his parents,
as social stability to any community in which children honour their parents

However that's only half of it

- as we saw last week with husbands and wives
it's about a relationship, a relationship in which there is balance and reciprocity
someone does this while someone else does that
- now Socrates reminds us that children can be incredibly exasperating
it is what children do
hands up those parents who have ever experienced exasperating children?
- yet for someone who we don't think had any children himself
Paul displays amazing insight, he in fact turns the tables and says to parents:
"Do not exasperate your children"! (verse 4)

The CEV puts it like this:

*Parents, don't be hard on your children. Raise them properly.
Teach them and instruct them about the Lord.*

Raise them properly ... if only parents were able to do that

- how much better things would be in our country in 2020, and indeed 2030
but somehow many parents are just not able to do that
- this is something for us to consider seriously:
how can we help parents be better parents???
- let us look for what we can do
and actively support anything in our community that helps parents and children

Then Paul moves on to slaves and masters

- now I've heard people question this
saying that in this community founded on Jesus there shouldn't have been slaves
and quoting Galatians 3:28 "*there is neither slave nor free*"
- take careful note though: what Paul writes is way out there radical
he expects slaves and masters to be there, together, on the same footing

Then have a close look at the strong words Paul has for both

- slaves are to respect and be loyal to their masters
they are in fact to serve their masters wholeheartedly
as if they were serving the Lord
- masters are to treat their slaves in the same way
the CEV tells slave owners to treat their slaves "with this same respect"
- Paul points out that both slaves and slave owners
have the same Master in heaven, a Master who has no favourites

It's obvious to us, it makes perfect sense, no one can "own" another person

- but we have no idea how threatening, how radical, how revolutionary
Paul's words were in Ephesians 6:5-9
- listen to John Stott's take on it:
A message which thus united master and slave issued its radical challenge
to an institution which separated them as proprietor and property.
Thereafter it was only a matter of time before slavery would be abolished.

We can apply these words about 'slaves and masters' to employers and employees

- and indeed to any similar kind of relationship
teachers and students, coaches and teams, Bishops and clergy

Verse 6 is good advice for all of us about doing the right thing, doing your best

- behaving properly, and not just when we think someone is watching

When I was growing up, after Sunday lunch we often listened to a programme on the radio, 'Open Country' I think it was, with Jim Henderson. Maybe some of you know it, true stories from New Zealand's rural sector. Anyway I have always remembered one particular programme about a young bloke who joined a gang contracted to plant pine trees. They were taken out to the back blocks, given a bag of seedlings and a spade and sent off over the hills: walk three paces, dig, plant; walk three paces, dig, plant ... They were paid on contract, about 5 cents for every seedling planted. One of the old hands said to the young bloke: when you get out of sight of the boss, every few trees, dig a hole and bury a handful of seedlings in it, more money for less effort; everybody does it. At the end of the job, when the boss was settling up and giving bonuses he said to the young bloke: you'll do well; you're a good worker and you buried less than the rest of them!

Don't just do what you have to to get by

- do more than pay lip-service or eye-service
work for the approval of the One who is always watching

When we put ourselves back in Paul's day

- we can see why some people were worried about Christianity and how right they were to be worried!
- what Paul wrote put the social institutions of the Roman World the mighty Roman Empire itself, under threat
- by challenging the usual behaviour of wives and husbands parents and children, slaves and owners, Paul was striking at the heart
- the very fabric of society was being torn apart and a flawed cloth was being rewoven into something brighter and stronger that gave colour and protection and warmth to everyone

Yes it was radical and without a doubt challenging, but really, where was the down side?

- men and women were to support and encourage each other children were to be respectful and obedient, and were to be lovingly cared for
- work would get done well as slaves worked hard, being well-fed and given time off while owners didn't have to worry about runaways or rip-offs
- really, where's the downside in that?

Paul was advocating the tearing apart of the fabric of society

- in a way that replaced it with something better these days the fabric of our society is under threat and it doesn't look to me to be bringing something new and improved
- it seems to me as if people are snatching and clawing to make sure they get a piece for themselves
- and it doesn't matter what happens to anyone else as long as they get their little scrap ...
- which goes against everything Paul is writing about in the Letter to the Ephesians

How would our 21st century society benefit from following Paul's instructions?

- I invite you to really reflect on that because too often these days it seems people ask "what's in it for me?" or "what's best for my group?" rather than what would benefit society as a whole

It all comes down to respect, basic respect

- thinking well of someone else, acting well towards someone else and it seems to me Paul says that if you are not able to respect a person because they are behaving properly, respect their office or their position respect them as someone made in the image of God
- sure, we don't have to put up with being treated badly or abused but at the same time always endeavour to act respectfully
- yes in some sense respect does have to be earned however Paul says that even when a person does not act in a way that deserves respect, we are not excused the duty of showing them respect

Coach Don Shula tells of losing his temper near an open microphone during a televised game with the Los Angeles Rams. Millions of viewers were surprised and shocked by Shula's explicit profanity. Letters soon arrived from all over the country, voicing the disappointment of many who had respected the coach for his integrity. Shula could have given excuses, but he didn't. Everyone who included a return address received a personal apology. He closed each letter by stating, "I value your respect and will do my best to earn it again." There are two ways to gain respect. One is to act nobly. The other is, when you fail to do so, to make no excuses.

If we put into practice what Paul writes in Ephesians

- everyone is a winner, nobody misses out no one 'belongs' in any way to anyone else and in a way everyone is subject to each other ... in all areas
- wives and husbands, parents and children, employers and employees Paul has 'equalised' power and made it two way and it works ... if there is genuine respect
- it works if we acknowledge one Master, one in charge, the Lord God and it is what He says that goes

Something to take home this week?

- many of us are in that child – parent/grandparent relationship most of us have some kind of employer/employee, student/teacher leader/member arrangement
- put into practice the ways of behaving Paul writes about

If you'd like to take it further, how about taking an inventory, making a checklist

- of how you behave and act make sure you are indeed worthy of respect in your words and actions
- especially by those "outside" the church

And if you really want to push the boat out, go that extra mile

- try for an instance where you treat with respect someone who most definitely does not deserve it
- the person who pushes in at the supermarket checkout someone who pulls out in front of you when you're driving maybe someone who you see behaving badly on tv a person who speaks harshly to you for no reason ...
- and believe it makes a difference and allows God's kingdom to break in

To paraphrase how The Message puts it:

We are all under the same Master in heaven. He makes no distinction between us and them. Good work will get us good pay from our Master.