

Driving on the right side

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[0:00] So it's Ephesians 6, 1-9, page 1177. I'm just going to read it for us, the first nine verses, then I'll pray and then we'll think about it together. So this is God's word.

Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. Honour your father and mother, which is the first commandment with a promise, so that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth.

Fathers, do not exasperate your children. Instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord. 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 favour when their eye is on you, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from your heart. Serve wholeheartedly as if you were serving the Lord, not people, because you know that the Lord will reward each one for whatever good they do, whether they are slave or free.

And masters, treat your slaves in the same way. Do not threaten them, since you know that he who is both their master and yours is in heaven, and there is no favouritism with him.

[1:15] This is God's word. Amen. Let me pray. Lord God, we thank you for your word, the Bible. We thank you for your word to us today. This is the piece of your word that you want to speak to us as a body.

And so I just pray for our hearts now that you'd engage our hearts. I pray that you'd speak to us through your word, by the power of your spirit, and that you'd help us to live for you, change us, help us to know more about you ourselves and all that you've done.

And we ask for this in the name of Christ. Amen. Everyone, without exception, without exception, is under authority in some way.

And yet, despite that, we all, how we relate to it differs. There is one thing that I think, when you think, I don't know what your first thought is when you come to authority, but I think there's one thing that we mostly forget, that authority, when used rightly, is not there to be oppressive.

It's not there to be oppressive. But it's so that you can actually live with freedom. That's the purpose of authority. Now, that sounds counterintuitive, doesn't it? Because we believe the lie that authority and rules limit the choices we're able to make.

[2:38] That's what we think. It's to limit us. I can't do everything I want. I've got these, you know, heavy rules over the top. We believe that our freedom, our autonomy, is threatened.

The truth is, no one can be truly free unless there is a good authority and good rules over you. No one can be truly free unless you have that. Let me explain, and I'll use an illustration. Some of you will have heard me use this before.

Driving laws. Driving laws are set so that everyone is free to drive on the road safely. That's why driving laws are there. Great law.

Great rule. Everyone driving has to drive on the same side of the road. That's a great rule, isn't it? You all have to drive on either, depending on which country, the left-hand side, or the way they've set that rule up.

It means everyone who drives a car, drives on the road, is free to drive in safety. And now, you can go against that rule if you want.

[3:44] You can drive into people, but you won't be free, because you won't last very long. And everyone else on the road is no longer free to drive safely.

But, we're also given more than just the rule. We're not just left to figure this out, how it plays out on our own. We have those little dashes in the middle of the road, road markings to help us, so that we know one side from the other.

We have boundary markers placed. They're not there to oppress you. They're there for our welfare, to help us, so that we know how to drive.

We have the rule, but then we have things there to help us. They're not there to oppress, but they are guardrails to help us drive with freedom. This passage in Ephesians 6 cuts straight at the heart of authority.

It cuts how we respond to it, and in specific ways as well, and how to use it well. That God puts rules, and he puts guardrails in place, not to oppress, but so that we flourish.

[4 : 55] In the world Paul is writing, similar to today, this is just the pattern throughout history. Authority was abused, it always has been. And when Paul is writing, authority could be brutal, tyrannical, and it could dominate.

Particularly, we thought, in this passage, we're thinking about authority in the household. In the home. And in the house, in the home, the head of the house, in those times, the male, the man of the house, it was different to today.

He just did as he pleased. We thought last week about how culturally wives were treated, and how Jesus, through Paul's writing, tells them to live differently with their wives, and wives similarly.

Today, this is extended to the rest of those under the same roof. It's extended to the children and the household slaves, and we'll come back to that. But what we see is the church, being a follower of Jesus, it redefines how anyone living under that household authority should be treated, and how they should respond to that authority as well.

It is different. In the Roman household, authority was assumed. In our world, it is not. Autonomy, the right to choose how to live, is often at the forefronts of post-modern thinking.

[6 : 23] And now, instead of just that power and authority is assumed, we're kind of suspicious of those who have been given power. Having authority is not seen as something positive, but something that people use to oppress.

And so this morning, what we're really invited to discover is authority from two fronts. How to live with freedom under it, and also how to use it well if we have it.

How to live with freedom under it, and how to use it well if we have it. Where the motivation on both fronts is to serve one another with the grace of Christ.

The motivation on both fronts is to serve one another with the grace of Christ. Okay, so what is the principle of this passage? The principle that we're going to dig into as we set out is that God has ultimate authority over all creation.

He has ultimate authority over all creation. Look with me. The principle, it actually comes right at the end of the passage in verse 9.

[7 : 30] Look with me. It's that everyone is under the authority of the Master, the Lord of the whole cosmos. You read with me the second half of the verse, right at the end.

It says, He who is both their Master and yours is in heaven. And there's no favoritism with Him.

The living God, the trying God, the one who created the heavens and the earth out of nothing.

He is the Master, the Lord of every other Lord. He's the King of every other King. He's the Master of every parent, every child, every father and child, every earthly master or boss and slave at this time.

He is the one over who has authority over all. This letter is written to the church. You think this is the...

All these people who are mentioned here, the husbands, the wives, the children, the people within the house, he's addressing this whole cross-section of society together.

[8 : 35] Everyone in the church, but also everyone outside the church is under the authority of the living God. Before we go any further, I just do need to pause and explore the context a little bit because there is an elephant in the room here that jumps out of us.

What do we make of the fact that slaves were commonplace? What do we make of that? I just want to briefly explain that slavery in the Greco-Roman world is different to the associations that we might have when we hear that word.

Slavery was an accepted and widely established part of that world. It was just the way of things. It doesn't... Even though it was the way of things, that doesn't mean that it was approved by God.

It just means that it was part of the fabric of everyday life. It was like an economic institution. Over a third of Rome were all slaves. And everybody accepted that.

When I... With our modern ears, though, we don't think that way, do we? When you hear the word slavery, two things come to mind. The Transatlantic slave trade or human trafficking.

[9:50] Those are the things that come to my mind. That view of slavery to the modern ear is not the same as slavery in the Bible. It's important that we just get that at the beginning of things so that we don't import our modern thinking onto the Bible.

Here's a few things just to think about. In the Roman world, race played no part in who was a slave. Slave trade involved black African slaves forcibly taken from their homeland.

And in Roman, people of every race from every nation were slaves from every country in Rome. So race played no part. It was the accepted norm.

But also, you know, you think of modern human trafficking, people find it hard to escape that. There was ways to get out of slavery in Rome. Slaves often could be expected to be released after 30 years.

Not all slaves did hard labour. Some with good masters received an education and could work to gain their freedom. Even did, were trained up to be accountants and doctors.

[10:56] So it's very different. Having said all that, I don't want to paint a picture too pretty. It did still involve the coercive ownership of another human being.

And they were still sold like animals. They still had no legal rights and were still flogged and treated harshly by some masters. So I'm not saying it was good.

But what I'm just... The point I'm making is that it was the way the world ran. That's how it was.

What we see here, there is a hierarchy.

But verse 9, what we looked at, flattens the earthly hierarchy out. Every single person, slave or free, is under the God who made them a heavenly master.

That word for master is actually the word *kyrgios*, which is the same word we use for Lord Jesus. It's saying God is the master. He is the *kyrgios*, the master of everyone.

[12:01] And same verse, because he's the master of everyone. Look at me. See what else it means? See what he says? He says, there's no favouritism within him. There's no partiality. Every single person is made in the image of God.

That is the identity marker on every single person that is created by him. And so it doesn't matter what has been achieved in earthly life or the position that you've held.

The living God does not have favourites. You can't earn your way into his good books. That principle is the same in 21st century Scotland as it was in 1st century Ephesus.

The living God does not look at where we've come from, our level of education, who our parents were, where we went to school, or our position on the social ladder. He doesn't make a judgement on whether we've been a goody two-shoes or a rogue.

It is a level playing field. He is the Lord, the master over all. And his impartial lordship, he's not there trying to catch us out.

[13:00] His commands are there so that we will flourish. So that we can be free to live as intended.

We move to the, kind of the problem, that's kind of implied in there, is that we exercise authority badly and we resist it begrudgingly. We exercise it badly and resist it begrudgingly.

It is twofold, the problem. The problem is obedience to authority on the one hand and use it well on the other. The other elephant in the room is you probably, with our modern sensitive ears, it sounds quite strange for me to include children and slaves in the same section.

But in the Roman household, how they were expected to relate to the father or master of the house is very similar. You see that word, it comes in verse 1 and verse 5, the word obey, given the same instruction.

It's different to what we saw with wives and husbands. We saw the word submit, a voluntary choice. Obey is different, isn't it? Obey means, the way that it's put is, it's a responsive listening or listening with compliance.

[14:16] With the implication being that either there is, the problem would be disobedience, just not doing what's told, or obedience that is performed, not gladly but begrudgingly, to curry favour.

Just to be clear, it's not talking all children here. It's talking those old enough to understand instructions still under their parents' roof. What's fascinating is Paul assumes here they're part of the church community.

Because in the letter he writes to the church, he addresses them directly. The instruction to obey is not simply because I said so. I think I'm guilty of saying that one.

Look with me. Why is it? The instruction to obey is, obey your parents, in the Lord. The reason to obey parents is because you belong to Jesus and he is your Lord.

And he is the one who's given you your parents. He is over them. And so, to obey them is to obey like you're obeying Jesus.

[15 : 28] To obey your parents. It's what comes out in the, it's the same real reason that it comes out in what he says to the slave. The similar qualifier for slaves, verse five, slaves obey your masters.

End of the verse, how do slaves obey their masters? As you would obey Christ. It's these connections to Jesus that change the nature of what it means to obey.

We take them together. Obedience to parents, obedience to earthly masters is because they belong to Jesus and he is their Lord.

When they obey in that manner, they are doing it for him. Obedience to parents remains hard today, doesn't it?

Autonomy, I think it's especially hard today. Autonomy is celebrated today like never before. You only have to watch a few Disney movies to see children trying to break free from their parents' demands.

[16 : 28] I mean, Ariel would have had it a whole lot easier. Luca, there's, you go through the Disney movies, movies, they're nearly all kicking against their parents.

It would have gone a whole lot easier if they had just listened. Wouldn't have made great movies though. But deep down, what's going on inside the heart? Deep down, resisting parental boundaries or offering lip service, it's really a reflection of the child's heart when they don't get their own way.

Children, as they grow, want control, we all do. Yet boundaries that parents place are there to enable children to flourish. We're not just putting them there most of the time, hopefully, to just get our own way.

Driving on the wrong side of the road ends up in chaos. More often than not, so does disobedience to parents because it's there to help you, to grow, so that you're established.

Boundaries are not just so parents get their own way, but so that children are free to make good choices. What are Paul's instructions to slaves all about?

[17 : 41] Well, they're all about attitude, manner of service and motivation. Slaves, it says, they were tempted to be two-faced, working hard when the master was watching, but slacking when he disappeared, serving begrudgingly with little respect.

What is asked of the slaves are principles about how to respond to people in authority. There's nothing, it's nothing, you could apply those principles today to any authority that is over us.

It's very different, but because slavery is not an economic institution in the West, the same struggle with the principle is the way that we go into the workplace.

When we're called into that performance review meeting, when we're told to do the task we'd rather not, when we're called into a meeting and asked to explain why there's cuts on a company restructure, the temptation is to smile and then gossip and bad mouth.

The temptation is to swerve over the lines which leads to a wreckage. Paul doesn't just call on those under authority, he calls to those in authority to exercise it as well.

[18 : 56] You know, if you think it's all on one foot, no, no, no, those in authority must exercise it in a godly way too. Power and authority is necessary and in the hands of those who have it, it can be dangerous.

Look at what he says to fathers. I think we could, fathers it seems have the primary role here of training their children in the Lord. He says, don't exasperate them. He says to masters, don't treat them harshly.

Don't make threats. Don't refuse ever to compromise. Don't be domineering. Don't shout. Don't lose your temper. That behaviour from the one in authority won't help them grow in training and instruction of the Lord.

It might get you what you want quicker and it might get it more regularly but it's not the way that the living God treats us. What's going on in the heart?

Why do we resist or use it badly? We want control. It's pretty, it's actually quite simple. We want control. That is our heart posture.

[20:06] When it goes against what we want, when we lose it, we want it back. Under authority, we resist to protect our control our control. In authority, we dominate to enforce it.

And when we do, we're left with the wreckage of our own making. We need the one who possesses all authority to step into our mess.

This is a gospel that for today, it's Jesus who possesses all authority uses power to die as a slave for us. Our sinful condition means that we struggle when under authority and abuse it when we have it.

We're told to stay in our lane but swerve across the line in rebellion. How we treat people, the image of God, is a direct reflection of how we treat God himself.

Wanting to control people shows that if we could, we would control God as well. Hating authority reveals that we would rather God didn't set boundaries and good laws for us to live by and it's all an act of rebellion.

[21:19] Did you notice with me through the passage how often we see the connection to Jesus? Verse 1, in the Lord. Verse 4, of the Lord. Verse 6, being a slave of Christ, doing the will of God.

There is direct link here with what God does for us through his Son. The church, we, because of the good news of Jesus, we are in the Lord.

We are united to him. We are in Christ and he is in us. We are united to him through faith. That union with Jesus happens. The reason we belong to him is because of the gospel.

Jesus fulfills every area where we have failed. He's the perfect child. obedient to his father. He's the perfect son. The will of his father in heaven.

Through Jesus, we see, he reveals the father, we see the true father's heart for his children. A father who is never exasperated.

[22:26] He's never frustrated or annoyed. But who is patient, who instructs and trains us as those who belong to him. We see Jesus is, he is the Lord, he's the perfect master, never using his authority to be harsh or austere, but to serve with humility.

Jesus is the one who has all authority and dies the death that is reserved for slaves and criminals. For all the times we've been disobedient, rebellious, used, and I know this, we know this for ourselves, used our own authority for our own agenda and purpose.

Jesus used his power to pay in full. Jesus, Jesus Christ stepped into the oncoming traffic of God's judgment and he absorbed the fatal crash of asset.

it. As someone, myself, both under authority and in authority, both at home as a dad and as a pastor, reading this is very convicting.

It's very alarming. As parents, we know when we've sought control, we know when we've raised our voices and modelled to our children not the ways of Jesus, but our sinful traits and habits. Maybe in workplaces we've gossiped, called names, and wanted ill on those above us.

[23:54] Perhaps if you're the boss, maybe we've treated employees not with the respect they deserve, but with high expectations and created a culture of fear. We've all done it and perhaps even now we feel that sense of guilt, anxiety, frustration with ourselves and we want to make it right.

We want to do something to pay for all the mess that we've made, the car wreckage. If we want to pay for it, there's a sense in which I get that, but Jesus will have none of it.

If you feel that for your parenting or for your workplace, Jesus won't have any of it because he died the death of a slave and he pays for it all. He won't allow you, you can't pay for any of it yourself. He pays for it all so that you can be forgiven. Just let that wash over you. And maybe even say to yourself, I am forgiven because of the blood of Jesus.

I am forgiven because of Jesus' body on the cross because he paid it all. It means the guilt is no longer your cross to bear because Jesus bore it himself.

[25:15] We can respond in light of the gospel.

We get to, the response is this, that now in light of what Jesus has done, we get to serve as people in and under authority. That is the opportunity this morning is to reconsider our relationship with authority.

It's the new way of living by the Spirit of God that instead looking at authority figures with suspicion and fear, we get to look at them as people just like us who bear God's image.

And so we obey with a much higher motivation because the way that we treat every other person, the way we treat the image of God is the reflection of the way we treat the real thing, that we obey

in the Lord as we would obey Christ Jesus.

us. The living God sees everything and so we can do everything for him and his glory, knowing that he'll reward each of us for whatever good we do. Now, today, as God's people, we get to obey serving him.

[26:25] We get to serve others as we would serve the Lord Jesus. And it is the spirit of the living God that empowers and enables us to live that out so that we don't do it under this kind of fearing or under kind of obligation and compulsion, but we do it from the heart, knowing it's Christ for serving.

It's a very practical thing to think through. It's tangibly practical because for parents, it means the bedtime routine doesn't have to be full of drama.

And after the tenth time you've said don't, you don't have to sigh or lose it. Equally, in the workplace, you can walk into that performance review and instead of kicking off, you can cooperate. If someone on your team makes a mistake, he empowers you to teach them how to do it better than next time rather than blowing a gasket. It. When we live like that, it's the kingdom of God coming because it's the spirit of God.

We're living as citizens of heaven. When we say your kingdom come as heaven on earth as it is in heaven, the kingdom of God is the church.

[27:48] church and as we take his way and his values and his way of living into our world, it impacts and it changes the way that things are done in the home and in the workplace.

It is the way our master treats us, the king of the kingdom. So as we come in for landing, let's remember this, Jesus used his authority to serve us.

He uses authority so that we flourish as his people. And so whether you're under authority, the one with it or both, we're to serve one another wherever we are on the ladder.

It's easy to desire the wrong side. It's easy to take a shortcut, to cut someone up and overtake but it means we're not free. Jesus gave up his authority to serve you as one who died the death of a criminal and a slave so that we could rest in his finished work.

And so can I invite you that if you're exhausted of house drama, if you're exhausted of maybe yelling at your kids, tired of performing, today we get to rest as those invited into the gentle servant authority of the Lord Jesus.

[29:07] We get to rest in that and know that he is the one who serves us and we can serve knowing that is him we're serving. Let me pray.

Almighty God, it is very convicting for each of us to think of the way the two big things in our life, home and work, and how we live as your people in those places.

you know the temptations that we have to, for those of us who are parents to get frustrated maybe at times and exasperate, for those of us who are in work and the way that we respond to those in management above us and maybe those that we manage, Lord, I just pray that you'd empower us by your spirit to live that out, to be people of the kingdom, to be citizens of heaven and we know that when we live that way it's attractive.

Give us humility and servant hearts. Lord, we thank you that you are our master, you are our Lord, but you're the perfect Lord.

You've never exasperated us, you've never been frustrated or annoyed, you've never raised your voice, but you treat us perfectly.

[30:41] And so we want to serve you because of who you are and just I thank you for, you served us, we see it at the cross, we see it when you served us by giving your own life to pay for all our mess.

And so we praise you and we thank you, we pray for your blessing. In Jesus' name. Amen.