

Small Group Leaders Notes

Ephesians 6:1-9

Context

- **Unity and Order** - Unity and order are good parts of God's design for marriage, family work and the church. God's great plan is to bring all things together in unity under Christ (1:9-10.) The church is the place where this plan is put on display to the world and the heavenly realms (3:9-10.) As Christians we are to submit to the different authorities that God has put in place over the different parts of our lives.
- **Submission (5:21)** - Submission to authorities holds this whole section of Ephesians (5:21-6:9) together. Authority is part of God's good design and blessing is found as we live in submission to the different authorities that God has put in place over us (6:3.)

Tricky Bits

- **The Promise in v2-3** - There are a few tricky aspects to this promise.
 - Firstly, when the promise is first given in Deuteronomy 5:16 it says 'in the land...' In Ephesians it says 'on the earth.' Paul has taken the Old Testament promise that was given to Israel before they entered the promised land and he has expanded it to the whole earth in the church age. In the church age this promise is not just for 1 ethnic group living in 1 particular land. Instead it is for people of all ethnicities all around the world who submit to the Lordship of Christ and the authorities that he has put in place.
 - The second problem with this promise is how literally we take it. Clearly not everyone who obeys and honours their parents does live a long life, some people die tragically young. There are two things to say in response to this. Firstly none of us perfectly keep any of God's commandments let alone this one. Secondly this promise is meant to convey the sense that family life works best when we follow the makers instructions and submit to the authorities that he has put in place over us.
- **Parents disciplining their children** - There is the potential to get bogged down in a debate about whether or not it is right for parents to smack their children or not. This can become a very heated area of debate amongst parents so if I were you I would try and avoid getting into exactly how you should apply Proverbs 13:24. Instead I would focus on what is clear from this passage. Fathers are to train/discipline and instruct their children in the Lord. There will be different ways that this can be done in practice.
- **Slavery** - Again this could lead down all sorts of rabbit holes that you may want to avoid. It is helpful to remember that slavery in the 1st century was different to the slave trade of the colonial period. Many doctors, architects and managers were slaves in the 1st century and so 1st century slavery is closer to 21st century employment than 18th century slavery. It's also important to remember that Paul doesn't ever approve of slavery. Indeed he actually condemns slave traders in 1 Timothy 1:10. What Paul is doing here in Ephesians 6 is not approving of slavery but instead telling slaves how to operate while they are slaves. Elsewhere he will encourage slaves to seek their freedom if this is possible (1 Corinthians 7:21.) Here he is telling them how to serve if they are slaves.

Big Idea - Honour and obey those who God has put in authority over you. If you are in a position of authority then remember that it's God who has given you that authority and serve him.

Applications

- **For all of us who are children - Honour and Obey Your Parents**
 - What this looks like in practice will change as we grow older but it applies regardless of our age. Depending on who is in your group you will want to steer the conversation in particular directions. There will be a whole set of applications for those who are still living under their parents roofs. There will be very different applications for those whose parents are growing older and frailer. What will it look like to honour a parent who is suffering with dementia or unable to care for themselves physically?
- **For Fathers - Take responsibility for training and teaching your children to know the Lord.**
 - Father's are to be the Pastors of their families taking responsibility for the spiritual nurturing of their children. Too often those of us who are Dad's leave this vital ministry to mum or to the church when we should be taking the lead. Mothers and the church have an important role to play, but Dad is to take a lead as the one who is ultimately responsible.
 - What this looks like in practice will again vary depending on the age of our children. A situation like home group where there are a range of different people all at different ages and stages of life can be a source of rich experience that can be helpful to one another.
- **For Workers - Wholeheartedly obey and serve your earthly bosses because of your heavenly boss.**
 - Everyone's work situation is different so what this looks like in practice will vary but all Christians are called to this counter-cultural approach to work and those in authority over us. Our boss might not be very good, they may be unfair, but we are still to obey them as long as that does not mean disobeying the Lord. Mark's sermon on this passage is well worth listening to for helpful applications. <http://bec.uk.net/resources/sermons/app/series/everyday-life-ephesians-5-6>
- **For Bosses - Remember you have a heavenly boss and serve him as you exercise your authority.**
 - Whilst many bosses seek to treat those working under them well, the Christian has a unique motivation for doing this. We don't just do this for a quiet life or for high productivity, we do it because we are mindful that ultimately we work for a heavenly master who sees everything.

Questions

Starter Question - How do we normally feel about someone being in authority over us?

We are going to be thinking about authority in the home and the work place so it will be good to start by recognising that we are not always keen on authority. We don't always like to be accountable to someone. We can often feel that our freedom is being stifled. We almost always would prefer to be the person in authority rather than someone under authority.

1. Look at 6:1-3. Think about the different stages of life (children, teenagers, adults).

a) What might it look like to honour and obey our parents through these different stages of life?

Depending on who is in your group will shape which direction the discussion goes. Feel free to focus on the stages of life reflected in your group. For many of our groups this will mean wrestling with the question of honouring ageing parents.

b) How does Jesus motivate us to do this when we find it hard?

It's important that we don't just leave this as law. Jesus is calling to live like this in response to his grace (remember 4:1.) God has graciously made us part of his family through Christ. The fact that God is our heavenly father should shape how we relate to our earthly parents. In Christ we also have a powerful example not just of how he honoured and obeyed his earthly parents (Luke 2) but also how he always sought to honour and obey his Heavenly Father even when that meant great pain and sacrifice (Mark 14.)

2. Look at 6:4. What are Dad's to do? How are we to do this?

These are designed as simple observation questions to get the group looking into the text for the answers.

a) Think about the different stages of life (child, teenager, adult.) What will this look like in practice as our children grow up?

If no-one in your group has young children or teenagers but many in your group have adult children then you may want to focus your discussion on the relevant stage of life rather than talking about areas that are not particularly relevant to your group. This can provide a great opportunity to bring out the wisdom in your group. Just make sure that your group is clear that we're talking about training and instruction in the Lord and not just general parenting.

b) How can those of us who are not parents be involved in this vital ministry?

This is a vital question because there will be many in our groups who are not parents who are feeling left out at this stage. Whilst Father's are primarily responsible for this ministry it is a burden that they can't carry alone. You might want to talk about what it will look like for mum's to support and help dad's? What will it look like for them to work as a team? What will this look like in families where only 1 of the parent's is a Christian? Other questions to talk about could include; 'What's the role of the church in all this? How as parents can we make the most of church activities that our kids attend? How can families be better at drawing single people into family life so that everyone is blessed?

3. Look at 6:5-9. How are Christians workers and bosses be different from their colleagues? What should our attitude, motivation and aims be?

a) From your experience when is this particularly hard? What do we need to remember in these times?

The big difference is that Christians don't just have earthly masters they have a Heavenly Master. Ultimately whether we're employees or employers we work for God and this should dramatically change the way we approach our work. Undoubtedly this can be very difficult at times and it is good to give people the opportunity to talk about some of these difficulties but let's try and avoid this simply becoming an opportunity to moan about our work. Where there are difficulties lets turn to prayer.