



Trail Guide – July 27, 2020:

Ordinary Time

Anglican Bishop, N. T. Wright, asks an intriguing question in response to this past Sunday scripture that I had never considered: with respect to Ephesians 5:21-33, however you read it, “If this guideline still seems outrageous in today’s culture, we should ask ourselves: do our modern societies... really offer a better model of how to do it [marriage and family]?” He continues by asking if the break-up and breakdown of family relationships, spousal abuse, child abuse, father-absence, and more “indicate that we still have some rethinking somewhere?” Intriguing. He is not advocating an archaic understanding and application of this passage so much as he is inviting a thoughtful and open-minded examination of the principles reflected in Ephesians 5.

Chapter 6 continues the theme of reconciliation in the household as Paul addresses two other household/family relationships with respect to his imperative in verse 21, “being subject to one another out of reverence for Christ.” We face a significant challenge when reading these verses through 21st Century eyes, minds, and hearts. Especially as Paul addresses the direct relationship of slave and master without ever addressing the institution of slavery. Sadly, many through the centuries used these and other passages of scripture to justify slavery, even though that is clearly not Paul’s intent. We’ll explore this in more detail Sunday, August 2. In the meantime, read and reflect on these verses. Keep in mind two thoughts: Paul’s overarching theme of reconciling all things to God; and Paul’s more immediate theme of “being subject to one another” that is linked to being filled with the Spirit. Also, if you have not heard/seen Sunday’s message, please check out the part that unpacks some of the meaning associated with “be/being subject” to one another – a mutual endeavor.

Mon, 7/27 – [Ephesians 5:21](#) – The Greek word for “submit”, *hypotasso*, rarely appears in Greek literature and also rarely in the New Testament. This lack of additional contexts makes it difficult to translate and interpret. Instead of falling back on common perceptions, try to dig a little deeper. There is an explicit mutuality here that places equal responsibility on both parties. How does this fit with Paul’s theme of reconciliation?

Tues, 7/28 – [Ephesians 6:1-9](#) – Read through this twice. On your second read, pay close attention to your thoughts and feelings. What do you feel? What is your reaction? What questions are raised? Again ask the question: how do these statements fit in with, contribute to, help illustrate Paul’s theme of God’s reconciliation?

Wed, 7/29 – [Ephesians 6:1-3](#) – When we read this, we tend to think of younger children, adolescents, youth. It is likely that Paul was actually addressing adults with respect to honoring their aging parents. How do we, today, honor our aging adults? What might this look like for you/us to “show manifest esteem” to our aging loved ones?

Thur, 7/30 – [Ephesians 6:4](#) – How can fathers (and mothers) apply Paul’s command here to their family? What does it mean to “provoke to anger” and how can we avoid doing so in our families?

Fri, 7/31 – [Ephesians 6:5-8](#) – These verses evoke strong reactions and even repulsion – in some cases stronger than verses 22-23 of chapter 5. How can we read these verses and seek to interpret them for today, while we categorically reject any notion that Christians support the enforced subjugation/enslavement of anyone? (Note the closing phrase of verse 8 – “whether slave or free”.) On Sunday, I’ll be sharing some contextual clues.

Sat, 8/1 – [Ephesians 6:9](#) – In keeping with everything that has come before, Paul now addresses the other party in this example of needed reconciliation within the household. One definition of reconciliation is the bringing together of two estranged parties into a better, mutually beneficial and amicable relationship. As in previous cases, both parties here have equal responsibility as autonomous moral agents; whereas in the culture, the lesser party had no autonomy, no rights or freedoms. Paul reminds all, including those who think they hold power and authority over others, that all will answer before an impartial judge, master, and savior.

(Next Sunday, the 9th, we’ll wrap up our look at Paul’s “sermon to the Ephesians” and the message of God’s reconciling work through the cross.)

Feel free to share reflections, reactions, questions, inspirations – jim@leesburgumc.org. Looking forward to next Sunday!