

Daily Devotions from the URC

Ephesians 2

1st – 8th September 2018



Introduction

Here is the second part of our series on the letter to the Ephesians.

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with those who need hope,
Let the work you ask of us be the focus of all we are and do,
Give us the creativity to express who we are with you; in new,
resourceful and creative ways.

Breathe your creative fire through us
and let us be faithful in our sharing. Amen

Saturday 1st September Ephesians 6: 1-4

The Rev'd Ron Reid is a retired minister in the Mersey Synod serving as Link Minister at Rock Chapel, Farndon. He is a member at Upton-by-Chester URC

Reading

Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. 'Honour your father and mother'—this is the first commandment with a promise: 'so that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth.' And, fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

Reflection

As we are reminded, this is the only Commandment which comes with a promise of a good if it is obeyed. Others of course come with a warning and still others are stated baldly as being somewhat obvious.

The author of Ephesians extends this Commandment from "honour" to "obey" and introduces a counterpart obligation on fathers, with perhaps the promise of a long life for both parent and child. There is no mention of mothers, so perhaps the unstated assumption is that the father is responsible for ensuring the good behaviour of the child whereas the unconditional mother love for the child she bore encompasses and ensures its general welfare, so no reward is necessary. As for the child, obeying probably leads to a quieter life all round.

Of course, there is that word "discipline". Down the years many a father has interpreted this in the light of the aphorism "spare the rod and spoil the child". But surely that goes against the extended requirement not to provoke the child to anger. Ignoring this has resulted in many a life being blighted by the smouldering anger of resentment built up against a harsh (but not necessarily cruel) father

who no doubt felt he was acting in the best interests of the child in the long run.

Society has moved on and it is thankfully not now acceptable to discipline a child harshly either physically or mentally.

But that word discipline remains.

We as a denomination are engaging in Walking the Way - the way of discipleship. Same root. Discipline: discipleship: discipling. Which should be our priority? Fathers (and mothers) what can you do better than try to disciple your children by and in your life so that their days (and yours) may be long on the earth. A good for all.

Prayer

Father God and Mother God
help us to treat our children
and the children of others with respect
so that in our lives and in our behaviour
we may provoke them to catch discipleship from us. Amen.

[Sunday 2nd September Psalm 62](#)

The Rev'd Dr David Pickering, Moderator of the National Synod of Scotland, member Rutherglen URC

1 My soul finds rest in God alone;
From him comes my salvation sure.
2 My safety, fortress, sheltering rock—
In him alone I am secure.

3 How long will you assault a man?
Do you all seek to lay him low—
This leaning wall, this tottering fence—
And bring about his overthrow?

Jesus Christ. Grace be with all who have an undying love for our Lord Jesus Christ.

Reflection

So that you know what I am doing, I am sending a faithful witness to tell you the story...

What a responsibility Tychicus has been given! He has become the sharer of all he knows, has seen, and all that is burning within him: as well as the reality of what following the 'Jesus-way' involves. He wasn't the first to be the 'story sharer'; he wasn't the only witness; and we are proof that he wasn't going to be the last.

I find myself reflecting if in our world context, there is a renewed call and need for us to witness, to tell of Jesus and to share the hope that burns within us? After all, Jesus is not ours to lock away and make safe and if we are busy jealously hoarding him, surely we've got witnessing wrong?

How would our communities, our relationships, the places where we work and our front-line mission-fields be enlivened if the amazing hope of Jesus was invited to be an active, transformative part of the community's shared narrative?

Like Paul, our hope and prayer for one another surely must be for "peace for the whole community and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ".

Prayer:

Loving God,
Give us the strength and focus
that we need to be your faithful witnesses:
Enable us to share the hope that burns within us

even in chains. His calling, and its purpose to reveal the mysteries of God, go hand in hand regardless of difficulties.

It is all too easy to think that we shall not be heard above the many voices calling on people's attention but as I stood in the amphitheatre at Ephesus, and whispered, my voice filled the arena – a timely reminder that it is God, not us, who will bring everything into its tended purpose.

Lord,
I know with my head and with my heart
that if I can't even dare to tell someone about the gospel
then how in the world will the gospel ever come to life?
Yet I often feel small and inadequate.
The task ahead hangs heavy over me
and I find myself embracing the anxiety
rather than enjoying the journey.

Break every chain that hinders me from speaking boldly
full of courage and determination so that I will step out in faith
and will not fear. Amen.

[Saturday 8th September](#) [Ephesians 6: 21 - 23](#)

The Rev'd John Grundy is minister of St Andrew's URC Brockley and St Michaels United Church New Cross

Reading

So that you also may know how I am and what I am doing, Tychicus will tell you everything. He is a dear brother and a faithful minister in the Lord. I am sending him to you for this very purpose, to let you know how we are, and to encourage your hearts. Peace be to the whole community, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord

4 They plan his fall from his high place;
They take delight in spreading lies.
With false and flattering mouths they bless,
But in their hearts curse and despise.

5 Find rest, my soul, in God alone;
In him my hope is ever sure.
6 My safety, fortress, sheltering rock—
In him alone I am secure.

7 My honour and salvation rest
On God, my rock and mighty fort.
8 O people, trust in him always;
To him alone pour out your heart.

9 The low-born man is but a breath;
The high-born man is but a lie.
Weighed in a balance, side by side,
They come to nothing but a sigh.

10 Do not seek after wealth by force,
Or triumph in ill-gotten gain;
And even though your goods increase,
Set not your heart on what is vain.

11 My God has spoken; I have heard
12 That you are strong and loving, Lord.
Each one according to his deeds
You will assuredly reward.

Reflection

Our manse is situated on the side of a hill on the southern side of the Clyde valley. Its location gives a fine view north, and exposure to

prevailing westerly winds that a short time before were whistling over the Atlantic.

Looking down from my study window, our garden is surrounded by a fence, which consequent of the winter's wind, is distinctly 'tottering'. Looking up from my study window, the vista is over the Clyde valley to the Campsie Fells and Kilpatrick Hills, and on a clear day to distant Ben Lomond; 'rocks that shelter' Glasgow cradled below.

'Tottering fence' and 'sheltering rock' are pictures the Psalmist paints to speak of life and struggle and God. The Psalmist opens proclaiming trust in God, then with seeming undue haste, opens the heart in anguish, challenging God with tales of the enemies that assail in the bad lands of life.

Then the Psalmist changes tack, offering a way through the maelstrom. The line, "to him alone pour out your heart" reads as an invitation to try prayer. In doing so, perhaps, just perhaps, a new perspective may be perceived.

When the Westerlies of life hit, it can be easier to blame God than turn openly to God. It can be easier to advise of a path to peace than to navigate it. But if our tottering fence reminds me of being overwhelmed in life, then the distant hills remind me that God is there, even if obscured on a dreich day. May our tottering fence also remind me that when life is buffeted, it is time to go out on an intentional walk, to seek and then chew the fat with God, and be open anew to God's rock-like presence and purpose, and maybe to find a path to peace.

A Haiku (format) Prayer

When life gets stormy,
nudge me to seek your haven,
my sheltering rock.

Friday 7th September Ephesians 6: 19-20

The Rev'd Nicola Furley-Smith is Moderator of the Southern Synod

Reading

Pray also for me, so that when I speak, a message may be given to me to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it boldly, as I must speak.

Reflection

Encountering Ephesus is quite an experience. Once a bustling port and centre of trade, shiploads of tourists still clamour over its cobbled streets, whisked around by enthusiastic guides to learn its story: the great Library of Celsus, an amphitheatre holding 25,000 people and the Temple of Artemis - one of the 7 ancient wonders of the world. It is noisy! A place where several roads from different parts of the Empire met, no wonder Paul asks for pray so that he may declare boldly the message of the Gospel for what a mission field he encounters as he visits the synagogue there!

Paul has previously described the armoury needed to defeat spiritual warfare. The focus now shifts from militaristic imagery to that of prayer. Praying and constantly asking for God's help is how the soldier is able to stand his ground. Here prayer is not simply another of the soldier's weapons but becomes the battle itself, a reminder that we accomplish things not by our own effort but by the grace of God.

Paul pleads for his readers to intercede on his behalf so that he may boldly and freely proclaim the hidden purpose of the gospel. Yet, he is an ambassador (verb not noun) in chains – a bizarre picture of someone who ought to be free to come and go to take the message of the One he serves wherever it is needed. He, therefore, needs their prayers. Such a bold proclamation is his God-given duty as an apostle -

tears. It can carry passion and hold fear. It cannot ever be just about me, or just from you. If it is, then prayer has slipped into something less, something self-centred. God save us from that. And, writes Paul, God has.

We pray: "in the Spirit at all times in every prayer..." Here's the source. The assurance and promise is that, as we turn to Christ, we receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. Our praying is no solo effort, no private assault upon the hiding place of a distant God. The Spirit is God's assurance that we have already found our true home within God's love. The Spirit abides in each of us, breathing with us as we breathe into the silences and give ourselves to the words. Prayer is part of God's collaboration with us in friendship. We cannot pray alone because, in prayer, the Spirit is.

This is prayer's context. It isn't about me - it's about us. As we live out our witness we need help that ultimately comes from God. We play our part by responding to God through praying for one another. Just as the Spirit is the agent at work in my praying, so I become part of the symphony of prayers offering others into God's grace and mercy. Prayer reminds me that I belong to God. There is more; prayer reminds us that we belong to one another.

Prayer

Merciful God, hear our prayers for your creation.

Hear our anguish at its agonies.

Hear our thanksgiving for its treasures.

Merciful God, hear our prayers for your people.

Hear our anguish at their agonies.

Hear our thanksgiving for their treasures.

Merciful God, hear our prayers.

For you have taught us to pray and shown us your way, through your Spirit, in Christ's name. Amen.

[Monday 3rd September The Martyrs of Papua New Guinea](#)

The Rev'd Martin Knight is Minister of St Paul's URC, South Croydon

Information

The church in Papua New Guinea has been enriched by martyrdom twice in the twentieth century. James Chalmers, Oliver Tomkins and some companions were sent to New Guinea by the London Missionary Society. They met their death by martyrdom in 1901. Forty years later, during the Second World War, New Guinea was occupied by the Imperial Japanese Army and Christians were severely persecuted. Among those who died for the faith were two English priests, Vivian Redlich and John Barge, who remained with their people after the invasion of 1942 but were betrayed and beheaded, together with seven Australians and two Papuan evangelists, Leslie Gariadi and Lucian Tapiedi.

Reading Romans 8: 35 - 39

Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, 'For your sake we are being killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep to be slaughtered.' No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Reflection

The consolation of these words from Romans was hard-one by a persecuted Early Church.

They are likely to be familiar to most of us, as they are often used at funeral services, giving confidence to those who go on living that God's love is constant across all time and space.

Such reassurance cannot be underestimated when we learn of the circumstances surrounding the massacre of James Chalmers (known as 'Tamate'), Oliver Tomkins and companions in Papua New Guinea.

Such reassurance is needed as we face the constant stream of bad news in the media; the relentless examples of human pain and brokenness.

We are never – never separated from God's love.

Just take a moment to know that truth. Breath it in.

When we proclaim that 'all are welcome' in the Church, it is this truth from Romans that underpins our declaration. For just as it is true that nothing separates you from God's love, I'm afraid it is also true that nothing separates me either.

Nothing separates Donald Trump, immigrants crossing borders, Teresa May, those still facing screams of abuse at Pride marches, Syrians (who seem to have slipped our minds), the lonely living next door, or the 215 million Christians facing extreme persecution worldwide.

Nothing separates *(insert list of all humanity here...)*

God's endless love is the place we start with faith. Following Jesus on the way of mercy, justice, light and resurrection are what follow. They are the truths that judge us and shine light into the darkness that causes us to need reminding of God's love in the first place.

Prayer

We lock our shields of faith together, in testudo formation, ready shod to deliver the gospel of peace in politics, to those in authority from governments to international companies and global organisations.

We think of those who have no voice and for whom we must proclaim, sharply as with the sword of the word, the possibility of education for all; freedom from sexual harassment and safety from armed conflict.

In this world of contrasts give us the breastplate of righteousness to protect us from self-righteousness so that, shod with the things which make us ready to proclaim the gospel, we can walk through your world in integrity.

Amen

[Thursday 6th September Ephesians 6: 18](#)

The Rev'd Neil Thorogood is Principal of Westminster College, Cambridge

Reading

Pray in the Spirit at all times in every prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert and always persevere in supplication for all the saints.

Reflection

Ephesians draws us to another thread of truth about what standing firm in the faith might mean.

It's all about prayer - it's source and context. The source involves the most staggering interaction captured in this short verse. Prayer is from within; it is that offering up - in glorious language, stumbling silence, or anguished groans - of all we would share with, and hope to receive from, God. Prayer is our ongoing conversation with our creator and redeemer; our source, guide and goal. It comes from the powers of our minds and the deep wells of our hearts. It can be laughter and

listed. Nor is chain mail mentioned; lighter and more flexible than the earlier form: strips of metal fastened together.

The writer doesn't say if the belt carries sword and dagger or specifies the heavy broad sword and certainly doesn't include the greaves and helmet guards to protect the legs and head from slashing long sword blows.

"the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing until it divides soul from spirit, joints from marrow; it is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart." Heb 4:12

There is nothing in the list for comfort and little for protection, except what is almost the secondary use of the item. Interlinked shields in 'testudo' formation effectively make individuals into a fighting whole. We naturally tend to think of "we are all parts of the one body" solely in terms of eyes, ears, hands, feet etc. Protected by interlinked shields of faith we are more than individuals: effectively becoming Christ's body in the world.

I am not surprised by the inclusion of the caligae, the iron-hobnailed shoe that carried the legions across a continent. This is the call to arms begun in Eph 1:21, 22 now spelled out. The age to come is imminent - be prepared with only the things that further the ability of Christ come again to rule with authority, power and all things under his feet.

Prayer

Lord you provide for our needs and equip us to help provide for the needs of others and for our world environment. Even as we see the contrasts of people's lives and the events happening around them you provide the belt of truth which help us to name them.

God of never-ending, lavish love
What have we done that has hidden this gift from those around us?
What have we done that means our response to Paul's words in Romans is not
"well of course we are loved!"?
What have we done.
Words that we have spoken at the foot of the cross.

How rich is your gift to us?
How strong is your love in the face of us?
How bright is its light, searching all our gloom?

As we begin or carry on with this day,
give us a renewed sense of the boundless nature of your love
and the desperate need for us to live it.
Amen

[Tuesday 4th September Ephesians 6: 5 - 9](#)

The Rev'd Mike Walsh is a Special Category Minister in Chorlton, South Manchester.

Reading

Slaves, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, in singleness of heart, as you obey Christ; not only while being watched, and in order to please them, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart. Render service with enthusiasm, as to the Lord and not to men and women, knowing that whatever good we do, we will receive the same again from the Lord, whether we are slaves or free. And, masters, do the same to them. Stop threatening them, for you know that both of you have the same Master in heaven, and with him there is no partiality.

Reflection

When we think of slavery, most of us I suspect first think of the Atlantic slave trade. We should of course be glad that that time in our history is long gone. But the danger is that we make the mistake of living as if slavery itself was completely eradicated as it no longer seems to be a day-to-day reality for us.

We occasionally hear in the news stories of so called 'modern day slavery', and people trafficking, and it is of course right that we make every effort to end this scourge of our time too.

However, this too is something far removed from most of our realities.

Much closer to home however is the so-called 'gig economy'. Not slavery perhaps, but insecure employment where workers on extremely low pay, irregular hours, and no employment rights, try to make a living knowing if they do not 'obey their masters' there will be no work for them and another will simply take their place. This work does suit some as 'pocket money' to be earned flexibly around their primary commitments. But for an increasing number of people this kind of work has become their only source of income, without which they wouldn't survive.

May our eyes be opened to 'slavery' all around us, when buying a drink, having takeaway delivered, or ordering an online taxi.

Prayer

Generous God,
We know everything we have comes from you, and what may seem like the fruits of our labour comes to us as much through good fortune as our endeavours.

We pray for those who work just as hard, whose material needs are just as many, who do not receive just reward for their labour, who are

trapped in relative poverty and have little choice but to 'obey their masters'. Amen.

[Wednesday 5th September Ephesians 6: 10 - 17](#)

The Rev'd Ruth Browning is a retired minister and member of Thornbury URC

Reading

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his power. Put on the whole armour of God, so that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armour of God, so that you may be able to withstand on that evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. Stand therefore, and fasten the belt of truth around your waist, and put on the breastplate of righteousness. As shoes for your feet put on whatever will make you ready to proclaim the gospel of peace. With all of these, take the shield of faith, with which you will be able to quench all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

Reflection

Years ago I worked with someone whose hobby was being a re-enactor, a member of a group which re-enacts battles of certain historic periods. Gradually, we were all inveigled into joining him in making chain mail during the lunch break.

One of the intriguing things about this passage is the pieces of armour which the writer chose to highlight: belt, breastplate, shoes, shield, helmet, sword. The undershirt to prevent chafing and which, together with the short leather skirt, help absorb the shock of blows, is not