

Ephesians 6:1-9

After dealing with husband/wife relationships, we now turn to the rest of the household.

¹ Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.

Paul expected that children would be present in the Christian assembly to hear this letter read. Have we made a mistake in segregating children? As Jesus said in Mark 10:14...*Let the little children come to Me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.*

Again, the background of the status of children at that time is important.

- (1) The Romans spoke of “patria potesta” – the father’s power was absolute and he could punish however he liked.
- (2) At birth, only perfect children were allowed to live. If not perfect (or wrong gender) children were exposed to the elements to die.

In 2 Timothy 3:2, Paul says that one of the marks of the last days is disobedience to parents.

**1. What if the parents are non-Christian (and child/youth is Christian)?

Paul gives two reasons for obedience:

“in the Lord” – because of this reason; the context of the relationship. When children learn to obey their earthly parents, they are more apt to be obedient to their heavenly Parent.

“this is right” – this is God’s ideal. The word “right” is the same word that is often translated in the KJV as “meet” – appropriate or fitting. This is what God intended.

After Jesus was in the Temple in Jerusalem at the age of 12, Luke 2:51 tells us, *Then He went down to Nazareth with them and was obedient to them [parents]....* As a child, Jesus set the example for all children. This is the same root word as in Ephesians 6:1. The result of that obedience, and the obedience of all children, is in Luke 2: 52...*And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and people.*

Children might feel there is not much they can do for the Lord, but here is a very important thing, and one that is an important witness.

² “Honor your father and mother” – this is the first commandment with a promise: ³ “so that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth.”

**2. Is there a difference between “obey” and “honor”? If so, what is it?

Deuteronomy 5:16 – in a restatement of the Ten Commandments – says: *Honor your father and your mother, as the LORD your God has commanded you, so that you may live long and that it may go well with you in the land the LORD your God is giving you.*

This command and promise was particularly referring to the Promised Land, but in this context, Paul makes a more general application.

Sinclair Ferguson’s paraphrase: “Live in faithfulness to God’s covenant in your relationship to your parents and you will discover that the promises of the Lord’s blessing are true.”

The promise is not a threat, but rather **cause and effect**.

This relationship is shown in Deuteronomy 10:12-13...*And now, O Israel, what does the LORD your God ask of you but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to observe the LORD's commands and decrees **that I am giving you today for your own good?*** [emphasis added]

One of the effects is the building of trust between parent and child.

⁴ And, fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

Really applies to both parents. Probably only fathers mentioned because it was, at that time, a patriarchal society (see above). Another reason for singling out fathers is the tendency towards transference from father to heavenly Father. As with wives and husbands in chapter 5, there are mutual responsibilities of parents and children.

“provoke” (NIV, “exasperate”)

A similar passage is in Colossians 3:21 elaborates:

Fathers, do not embitter your children, or they will become discouraged.

****3.** How might a father (or mother) embitter, discourage or provoke a child to anger?

Again, a negative followed by the positive alternative. KJV – “nurture and admonition” It is to be of the Lord...not just secular matters.

Note this is addressed to fathers...in many homes, spiritual nurture and instruction is largely left to mothers.

****4.** What are some ways children can be spiritually nurtured and instructed?

Proverbs 14:26 reminds us of what many studies have confirmed: namely, that when a father is faithful in his faith, children are more likely to be so: *He who fears the LORD has a secure fortress, and for his children it will be a refuge.*

Paul gives an example in 1 Thessalonians 2:11-12 in how he dealt with the people in that church. This tells us what a father in a family is to do:

For you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children, encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory.

⁵ Slaves, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, in singleness of heart, as you obey Christ;

First, some background on slavery in the Roman world: It is estimated that between 20-30% of the population were slaves. They were of all ethnicities. People became slaves by being born to parents who were slaves, prisoners taken in warfare, being sold as a slave to pay a debt, or an unwanted infant was “rescued” by a slave trader. The roles of slaves could vary widely from management of estates or businesses, to household servants (including tutors for children) to workers in fields or mines. How they were treated was entirely up to their master. Almost all work in the Roman empire was done by slaves, which were considered by law not persons, but things.

Neither this passage, nor any other in the New Testament condones slavery, but addresses what existed in that time and place. The Apostle Paul encourages slaves to gain their freedom if they are able (1 Corinthians 7:21). Paul also encourages Philemon to take back Onesimus, “no longer as a

slave” but “as a dear brother” (v. 16).

Paul, who was at the writing of this epistle imprisoned himself, is showing that the power of the gospel transcends any form of opposition or persecution. This can even be seen in the history of slavery in our own country, and as a result we have so many beautiful “spirituals.”

If Paul were to write this today, he might have referred to employees and employers, and so this does inform our lives today. At each point, consider what this would look like in that setting.

The word for “**fear**” (phobos) can mean anything from loving reverence to real terror. In this context, it is closer to the former than the latter. (Ferguson)

“**singleness of heart**” refers to the focus of ones acts. NIV uses “sincerity”.

**5. What would “singleness of heart” look like in the workplace?

“as you obey Christ”

Again, there is the theme of submission, but only because the believer has first submitted to Jesus Christ. Many times in the New Testament, starting with the words of Jesus Himself in Matthew 25:40 (“*I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me*”), we are told to treat others the way we would respond to Christ.

6 not only while being watched, and in order to please them, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart.

An older translation, the New American Standard Bible, says *Not by way of eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but as slaves of Christ...*

Perhaps you have heard it said, “Character is what you do when no one is watching.”

Paul elaborates on this idea in Galatians 1:10....

Am I now seeking human approval, or God’s approval? Or am I trying to please people? If I were still pleasing people, I would not be a servant of Christ.

In a real sense, every Christian is to be a “slave” or “bond servant” of Jesus Christ. The Apostle uses this term (Greek, *doulos*) to describe himself in the opening of his letter to the Romans and Philippians and his letter to Titus. The writers of James, 2 Peter and Jude also use the same appellation of themselves.

Be faithful in serving as a Christian in all ways, wherever you are, and whatever you are doing.

Now, Paul’s expansion on these ideas:

7 Render service with enthusiasm, as to the Lord and not to men and women,

8 knowing that whatever good we do, we will receive the same again from the Lord, whether we are slaves or free.

The word the NRSV translates as “enthusiasm” is literally “good will.” But we could say that if one has good will in their work, they will do it enthusiastically – a word that literally means “God within”!

****6.** What would be the difference in a person's work who was working "as to the Lord"? What would it look like?

Paul says something similar in Romans 12:11....

Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord.

And in Colossians 3:17 and 23-24....

And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him. Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward.

Scottish pastor and seminary professor, Sinclair Ferguson, writes:

*"When we learn to do things for Christ we are set free from earthly servility and find joy and pleasure in our labours. We know that they can never be in vain in the Lord (1 Corinthians 15:58 – *My dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.*). Moreover, since we do them for His pleasure, they bring Him pleasure – and this in turn is our greatest pleasure."*

Jesus illustrated the principles of verses 7 and 8 in Matthew 25:34-40, that ends with the words, *Truly I say to you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers or sisters of Mine, you did for Me.*

And in Mark 9:41

I tell you the truth, anyone who gives you a cup of water in My name because you belong to Christ will certainly not lose their reward.

⁹ 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.

Both masters and slaves (employers and employees) should look upon God as the ultimate master. As in the previous teachings, there is a reciprocity where both parties have responsibilities.

As with everyone, the Gospel should be transformative in life of the master.

****7.** Can you think of any commands in Scripture that would be particularly incumbent on a Christian master (or employer)?

The Apostle Paul, while not "outlawing" slavery, calls masters to behave in a very different way toward their slaves.

"no partiality" – this is a basic principle of Christianity.

As Paul wrote in Galatians 3:28...

There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.