



Ephesians

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Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. Ephesians 6:1

Chapter 6 begins with a movement from the marital relationship to that of the responsibilities of and for children. Paul addresses the *teknon*, or children, directly. The word indicates a child, but in its fuller sense, it figuratively indicates “anyone living in *full dependence* on the heavenly *Father*, i.e. fully (*willingly*) relying upon the Lord in *glad submission*. This prompts God to *transform* them into *His likeness*” (HELPS Word Studies).

The word in this case is following the family unit of children within a household. In such a case, the children are instructed to, “...obey your parents in the Lord.” The words “in the Lord” are given to qualify the word “obey.” In other words, the assumption is that Paul is writing to children who are of the household of faith.

His words do not exclude the fact that all children should so obey their parents, but not all children will receive the words of Paul. Those who do not, still have God's general revelation of Himself which is instilled in them concerning family hierarchies. However, as is the case outside of God's special revelation of Himself to His people, these things often become skewed, or even outright rejected.

However, to avoid that happening within the faith, Paul explicitly directs the children who are “in the Lord” to obey their parents. If they are in the Lord, this is the expectation of the Lord, and they are to adhere to it. As Paul next notes, “...for this is right.” Even without this word of special revelation (meaning the apostolic authority of Paul's writing), it is understood throughout races, cultures, and societies that this is the normal and proper situation in the

family unit. How much more so then when it is an expectation of the Lord who has so structured the family unit!

Life application: The parents are to be the leaders in the family. The children are to obey the parents. How unfortunate it is that modern culture has turned this upside down in movies and TV shows. The children tell the parents what they will do and the parents back down as if the decision by the child is fixed. We must be careful to reject such displays and not get our family decisions caught up in this perverse role-setting.

“Honor your father and mother,” which is the first commandment with promise:

Ephesians 6:2

Verse 1 said, “Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.” Now, in support of his note that “this is right,” he cites the fifth of the Ten Commandments. In this, he notes that a special blessing is affixed to this command by saying, “which is the first commandment with a promise.” It is not only the first, it is actually the only commandment of the Ten Commandments with a promise affixed to it.

Some argue that the words of the second commandment also bear a promise –

“For I, the LORD your God, *am* a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth *generations* of those who hate Me, ⁶but showing mercy to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments.” Exodus 20:5, 6

This is not a promise. Rather, it is a general declaration of how the Lord works. It is a part of His nature which is being explained in those words. The promise of the fifth commandment is truly a promise, being affixed to show the importance of the command to those who will hear and heed. The promise itself is given in the coming verse.

Life application: The Bible lays great stress on the honoring of parents, and for good reason. If one is unwilling to honor their earthly father and mother, then a disrespect towards God is an obvious result of this attitude of the heart. Our heavenly Father is infinitely worthy of honor. Let us endeavor to honor Him by honoring our earthly parents in obedience to His word.

“that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth.” Ephesians 6:3

The words here are reflective of the promise made in the Ten Commandments to Israel, both in Exodus 20:12 and Deuteronomy 5:16. There is a portion he omits from his citation though. In the Ten Commandments, it says, “that your days may be long upon the land which the LORD your God is giving you.”

The people of Israel were promised an inheritance in the land of Canaan. In disobedience to the Lord, they would be exiled from that land. For them, to be exiled was a form of punishment. And so, a long life would be one of enduring that punishment. In other words, the true prosperity of Israel is tied into the land of Canaan, not merely to a long life. There was no need for this statement to be included by Paul when addressing the Gentiles. There is no earthly inheritance which comes through faith in Christ.

Therefore, this is a general blessing which is pronounced upon any and all – Jew or Gentile – who come to Christ. Things can be expected to go well with us, and we can generally anticipate a long and fruitful life on the earth, when we honor our parents. As this is a general promise, it cannot be expected in all instances. Like the proverbs of Solomon, it is a broad guideline that we can anticipate, not a blanket guarantee. In honoring one's parents, things can normally be expected to go well for us.

Life application: If you want things to go well with you, following the precepts laid out in the Bible is a good way for that to come about. In not following them, you will pierce yourself with many thorns, but in following them, you can generally expect things to turn out in a positive manner.

And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord. Ephesians 6:4

Paul's words now are directed to the head of the household, the father. The word is *patér* and it is generally used of a father, elder, ancestor, or senior. In Hebrews 11:23, a plural form of this word is used to speak of the parents of Moses. It is certainly correctly translated as "fathers" here as they are considered the head of their respective houses, as has already been established. However, if a house is lacking a father, for whatever reason, the word is broad enough to speak of the one who is in charge of it. The responsibility does not change if the actual father is not in the picture.

The father, being the head of the house, is told, "do not provoke your children to wrath." The word "provoke" is *parorgízō*. It comes from two words, *pará*, which means "from close-beside," and *orgízō*, which means to "become angry." Combined, they give the sense of rousing someone to anger "in a way that "really pushes someone's buttons" (HELPS Word Studies). The father is not to act in this manner and thus bring their child to a state of wrath.

Instead, Paul offers sound advice which is all too much lacking in today's world. He says that fathers are instead to "bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord." There are two separate ideas here. The first is "training," or nurture. This is whatever care and handling is necessary for the child to grow into a responsible person. The word is *paideia*, and it actually carries with it a stern aspect. It means, "discipline; training and education of children, hence: instruction; chastisement, correction" (HELPS Word Studies).

This then includes the idea of correction and punishment. The book of Proverbs gives several examples of what this word certainly includes. Two are –

“He who spares his rod hates his son,
But he who loves him disciplines him promptly.” Proverbs 13:24

“Do not withhold correction from a child,
For *if* you beat him with a rod, he will not die.
¹⁴You shall beat him with a rod,
And deliver his soul from hell.” Proverbs 23:13, 14

The same word is used in Hebrews 12 to explain our relationship with the Lord, just as a son is dealt with by his own father. The word is translated as “chastening” there –

“If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten? ⁸ But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons. ⁹ Furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected *us*, and we paid *them* respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live?” Hebrews 12:7-9

And as a confirmation of this, a variant of the word is used by Jesus concerning our relationship with Him. Again, it is translated as “chasten” –

“As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten.” Revelation 3:19

The second word that Paul uses, translated as “admonition,” is *nouthesia*. It means “properly, setting (placing) the *mind* through *God-inspired warning*” (HELPS Word Studies).

We are to improve the minds of our children through teaching them to reason things out so that they will come to godly solutions in their thought process. When Paul says, “admonition of the Lord,” that is exactly what he means. We are to speak of, explain, and correct faulty notions of the Person and work of Jesus Christ.

In doing these things, we will have children who also grow up in the way of the Lord, and who are set to continue this same training in their own children in the future.

Life application: It is never too late to begin the process described in these verses today. Although it is right that the process begin as early as possible, many do not come to Christ until later in life. From the moment this happens though, it is the responsibility of the parent to share in the knowledge of the Lord in order for the child to know and understand what has been instilled in the parent.

Bondservants, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in sincerity of heart, as to Christ; Ephesians 6:5

Paul now turns from the immediate family within the household, to those who are almost as close, and maybe even closer, as far as daily contact is concerned. The term “bondservant” is as good as one can get from the Greek word *doulos*. The term applies to one who is bound to the service of another. This could be a voluntary subjection or an involuntary duty, and it can also go as far as being a slave.

Their rights were extremely limited even in the best of cases. In some instances, they had virtually no rights at all. And yet, there is an irony in this status which will be fully revealed in verse 9. Without jumping ahead in too great of detail, it can be said that all are slaves in one way or another.

For the Christian bondservant, Paul instructs them to “be obedient to those who are your masters.” Despite the many difficult rigors often suffered under cruel masters, Paul simply makes the command. He doesn’t qualify it with, “If they are good masters,” nor does he give any hint that they have a right to rebel. The status of slaves or bondservants was simply a fact of life. Those who were so bound were to accept it. However, he does give a note concerning slaves elsewhere that is worth citing –

“Let each one remain in the same calling in which he was called. ²¹ Were you called *while* a slave? Do not be concerned about it; but if you can be made free, rather use *it*.”
-1 Corinthians 7:20, 21

However, as long as a person was bound, they were to be obedient to their masters. And yet, Paul adds on a descriptor for them to consider. It is a master “according to the flesh.” In other words, there are human limitations which are being spoken of here. Paul is implying that they are bondservants of Another as well, which is not according to the flesh. It is for this reason that they were to be obedient to their human master.

The same phrase is used again in Colossians 3:22. By using it as he does, Paul is letting them know that these human limitations to this human slavery have no control over the spirit. Man may subjugate their bodies, but their spirit is owned by, and in the complete control of, the Lord. It was an encouragement to them that their time of freedom would surely come.

And so, for whatever duration of their bondage to human masters, bondservants were to be obedient “with fear and trembling.” This same term is used by Paul on several different occasions, and it is particularly used of a person who is under a special responsibility to the Lord. Even though they are under the will of a human master, they are to be concerned that this will is satisfied. This is to be true even to the point that they would be afraid and ashamed

if the master was displeased. The desire for this should be so ingrained in them that it is not just an external fear and trembling, but one which is “in sincerity of heart.”

They should be truly concerned that their performance was spotless before their masters, just as it would be “to Christ.” The highest devotion of any man – slave or free – who has been redeemed is to the Lord, but Paul wanted the bondservants to show that same devotion to their earthly masters. The reason should be obvious. They were representatives of Christ. To be slack in their human duties would then reflect on their spiritual devotion to the Lord. Paul wanted this to never be the case.

Life application: In today’s world, we have employers rather than masters. But the premise of this verse should hold true in such cases. Our duties to our employers should be performed to the highest degree of trustworthiness as possible. In so acting, they will see that our conduct is without fault and will note that we can be trusted. If this is so, then it may lead them to wanting to know the Lord as well.