

In the modern world we have divided the workplace from the household.

But in order to understand what Paul is doing here,
we need to bring them back together.

Our English word “economics” comes from the Greek word for “household”
All of your “economic” labors are “household” labors.
You may do it in a different place than the place where you live,
but it is still household labor.

After all, think of a Greek merchant.

Most of his day would be spent away from the place where he lived.
People frequently had to travel for business (like today)
but they did not divorce their “economic” life from the “household.”

And so if we would understand what Paul is doing here
we need to think about our “economic” life as a part of our “household” life.

What you do in your “six days” of labor is all integrated.

You cannot be a “fine, upstanding businessman” in the workplace,
and a nasty tyrant at home.

You cannot be a loving husband and father at home,
and yet join in with the crude and foul-mouthed crew at work.

Because you are part of a new household.

Paul has already told us this.

He told us in 2:19 that we are members of the household of God.
Jew and Gentile together have been brought into a new household.
You are no longer a Gentile.
You are no longer a Jew.
You are part of a third race – a new humanity – in Christ.

From 2:19-22 there are no less than *six* words that have the “oikos” root.
A stranger is someone who is outside the house.
And you are being “built” into a house (v20),
and in v21 the word “structure”
and in v22 both “built” and “dwelling place”
are oikos words!

What is more, this household is governed by a new economics!

We heard about that in chapter 3,

when Paul talked about the “stewardship” of God’s grace (3:2),
a stewardship that has unfolded this “plan” of the mystery hidden for ages (3:9),
namely that Gentiles and Jews will be joined together in this new household.

The word “stewardship” in 3:2 is oikonomian,
which literally means “the law of the household.”
It is the same word translated “plan” in verse 9.

Paul continues using “oikos” words throughout Ephesians.
In 3:17 he prays that Christ may dwell (using a word meaning dwell in a house)
in your hearts through faith –
(After all, you are being built into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit! 2:22)

and in 4:12, 16, and 29 he returns to this theme with “building” language:
the body is “built up” like a house.

God has a new household in Jesus Christ.
And there is a new law for that household.
There is a plan – a rule for the household of God

What is that rule?
What is the economics of the household of God?
We’ve been looking at it over the last few weeks.

The economics of the household of God (the law of the household)
is one of submission.
Each part of the body (each member of the household) has a place.
You need to understand your place in the household.

Think back over how Paul has laid out the way in which the Christian is to walk:
Back in chapter 4, when Paul was looking for the word which best describes the walk
that is “worthy of the calling to which you have been called,”
the word he chose was “humility,”
followed up with patience, bearing with one another in love
and maintaining the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

Likewise at the end of chapter 4 Paul says,
“Be kind to one another, tenderhearted,
gracing one another as God in Christ graced you.”

And then in 5:1-2, when he explains what it means to imitate God as beloved children,
he says that we are to “walk in love, as Christ loved us
and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.”
And in 5:21, the word that sets up the whole discussion of household relations
is the word “submitting.”

In other words, humility, submission, bearing with one another,
sacrifice, laying down your life,
these are the watchwords of the economics of the household of God.

Are you characterized by humility?

Listen to how Paul explains this in Ephesians 6:

1. Children Obey Your Parents (6:1-3)

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

2 “Honor your father and mother” (this is the first commandment with a promise),

3 “that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land.”

Children,

you, too, are included in the call to imitate God!

You are to walk in love, as Christ loved us.

You are to walk as children of light,

and to try to discern what is pleasing to God.

All that Paul has been saying throughout Ephesians applies to you too.

And the way that you demonstrate your reverence for Christ,

the way that you live in the household of God,

the way that you demonstrate humility,

is by obeying your parents in the Lord.

What does it mean to obey your parents in the Lord?

God gave you parents to teach and train you in his ways.

Therefore you are to submit to their teaching

and learn from them how to walk in the way of Christ.

We have seen that humility is the chief characteristic of the law of Christ’s household.

What does humility look like for you as a child?

It is not just “doing what you’re told.”

Actually, Paul’s admonition in verse 6 is useful here:

“not by way of eye-service, as people-pleasers.”

It is rather “as servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart.”

If you obey your parents outwardly,

but inwardly you are seething with anger and rebellion,

that is not the sort of humility that Christ has modeled for us.

Your calling as a child is to humble yourself and do the will of God from the heart.

You may think that you know better than your parents,

(and you may be right, sometimes!)

but God has called you to obey them –

not because they are so good and wise,

not because they are always right,

but because he wants you to learn how to obey *him*.

If you learn *now* how to humble yourself and obey your parents
(even if you don't understand why you have to do this!)
then you will find many years later
that it is easier to humble yourself and obey God –
even when you don't understand why!

Because, children, there will be times as an adult
when you will not understand *why* God says that you have to do something.
You will see it in God's Word,
and then you will look at your life and say, "I don't get it!"

What will you do?

If you have disciplined yourself as a child to do the will of your earthly parents,
then you will be better prepared as an adult to do the will of your heavenly Father.

Obviously, if your parents command you to sin,
then you do not need to obey them.

You must always obey God!

Your parents are not always right.
Your father and your mother will at times be wrong.

But even when they are wrong, you still must honor them.
Paul goes back and quotes the fifth commandment:
"Honor your father and mother."

How do you honor your father and mother when they are wrong?

When they tell you to do something wrong –
or when they wrongly accuse you of something you didn't do –
you gently and humbly say, "that's not right."

I can't do that,
Or
I didn't do that.

The way you show honor to your parents is reflected in your attitude toward them.
You respect them.
And you respect them *not* because of how good they are,
but because you love God,
because you know that Jesus deserves your full love and honor,
and since he has called you to honor your parents,
you will honor them!

And that remains true no matter how old you are.

You still honor your parents.
Not because they are always right.
Not because they are so good.

But because you love God.
And God calls you to honor your parents.

Paul also points out that the fifth commandment is the first commandment with a promise.

What is a little curious here is that he alters the language slightly.
The fifth commandment promised “that your days may be long,
and that it may go well with you
in the land that the LORD your God is giving you.” (Dt. 5:16)
But Paul says “that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land.”

He leaves off “that the LORD your God is giving you.”

That is because the promise of a particular piece of real estate in the Middle East
has become the promise of the whole earth.

Paul says that the fifth commandment is transformed by the coming of Jesus.
Not that it changes in its basic meaning –
it is still true that obeying your parents results in God’s blessing on earth –
rather the change is the extension of the promise to Gentiles as well as Jews,
to the ends of the earth.

Some have wondered whether it is in fact true
that God promises long life and blessing to those who obey their parents.
After all, there are obedient children who die at a young age!

But that is not the way this promise works.
The promise is not phrased as an ironclad guarantee.
An ironclad guarantee is like the one in 1 John 1:
If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins
and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

It happens every time!

Notice how this one is phrased:
Honor your father and mother, “that it may go well with you
and that you may live long in the land.”
This is not an ironclad guarantee.
This promise states a general principle:
if you obey your parents then good things will happen

because you will be living your life in accordance with the will of God.

And even if bad things happen,
you have confidence that God will make it right in the end.

Paul then turns to fathers.

2. Fathers, Do Not Provoke Your Children (6:4)

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

One verse.

But behind this verse is not only the whole of Ephesians,
with its emphasis on God as the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,
and therefore as our Father as well,

but also when Paul speaks to fathers
he assumes that you will take all that the scripture says
about who God is as our Father,
and take it to heart in how *you* live as a father.

In other words, Paul assumes that *one sentence*
is enough to show you how you are to live as a father to your children.

Being a father is very simple.

Do not provoke your children to anger,
but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

Notice that I said this was simple.
I did not say that this is *easy*.

It is simple.
It is not complicated.

But that does not mean that it is easy to be a parent.

Because to be a godly parent, you must humble yourself.
Humility is once again the watchword.

If you are selfish and proud,
then you *will* find ways to provoke your children to anger.
But if you humble yourself,
and walk in love as Christ loved us,
then you will bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

What does this look like?

First, it means that you will teach them the Word of God.

Deuteronomy 6 tells us to teach our children what God has done in redemption.

We are to teach our children the history of redemption,
from Adam to Christ.

There is no better way to do this, than to *read* the scriptures to them
(when they are little)
and with them (when they are older).

Read through the Bible together.

Talk about it as you go.

And as they get older, read through longer portions.

Don't just read a chapter,
read a book – or at least a whole section (like the story of Joseph).

Think about it –

your children can sit and read a book for hours.

Why not sit and read the Word of God for hours?!

Let the narrative of the scriptures sink into them.

Show them how the whole story fits together.

(and if you don't know how, then come Tuesday mornings at 6 a.m.!)

But there is more to “discipline and instruction” than history.

History is where it starts, but it cannot stop there.

The language of discipline and instruction

is language that comes straight out of Proverbs 1-9.

If you want to know how to teach your children,

read Proverbs 1-9.

Proverbs 1-9 is the voice of a father teaching his son about the way of wisdom.

It assumes that you have already taught them who God is and what he has done.

But it also shows that until they understand *how* to live in God's world,

they are not ready to live as faithful adults.

Of course, in order to teach them effectively the way of wisdom,

you must first be walking in that way yourself.

You cannot teach what you do not know!

In order for you to disciple your children,

you must first be a disciple yourself.

The call to humility turns to our daily labor as well:

3. Slaves, Obey Your Earthly Masters (6:5-8)

*5 Slaves, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling,
with a sincere heart, as you would Christ,
6 not by the way of eye-service, as people-pleasers,
but as servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart,
7 rendering service with a good will as to the Lord and not to man,
8 knowing that whatever good anyone does,
this he will receive back from the Lord, whether he is a slave or free.*

In our day we do not have literal slavery,
but while we may have changed what we call it,
the same principles still apply.

Most of you have earthly masters.

Most of you have someone at work who can tell you what to do.

How do you respond?

Do you respond with sincere obedience,
as you would if Jesus Christ himself commanded you?
Because, quite frankly,
when your boss speaks, Jesus himself *is* commanding you.

Too often we only give “eye-service.”

We only want to look good.
But when no one is looking, we pop open a computer game,
or we sit and daydream.

Whom do you seek to please?

Are you a people-pleaser?
Or do you serve the Lord Christ?

You must repent of your eye-serving, people-pleasing, half-hearted obedience,
and render service with a good will as to the Lord and not to man.

This is the way of humility –
the way of the cross.

And since it is the way that the Master trod,
not only the servant, but also the earthly master, must tread it as well.

4. Masters, Remember that You Have a Master in Heaven (6:9)

*9 Masters, do the same to them, and stop your threatening,
knowing that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven,
and that there is no partiality with him.*

You may have authority over others in the workplace,
but you are to use that authority as a servant.

Notice the way Paul opens his address to masters:

“Masters, *do the same* to them.”

Do the same?

What does that mean?

How is a master to “do the same” to his slave, as his slave is to do to him?

Well, both the master and the slave are to humble themselves and serve Christ.

Those under your authority should *always* know

(at least, you should always make it clear – whether they get it or not!)
that you use your authority with humility, in the service of Christ.

They should see your love for them –

and above all else, your love for the Lord Jesus.