

## STUDY ON THE BOOK OF EPHESIANS

### CHILDREN, PARENTS, EMPLOYERS & EMPLOYEES

Read Ephesians 6:1-9

#### **Introduction**

This passage continues Paul's instructions on how to "Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ" (Ephesians 5:21). First, he discusses the delicate relationship between wives and husbands (Ephesians 5:22-33). Now he turns to the submission of children to their parents and employees to employers.

#### **Children Obey Your Parents**

*"Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. "Honour your father and mother," which is the first commandment with promise: "that it may be well with you, and you may live long on the earth.""* (vv1-3)

The command is simple. Children are to obey their parents. This not only means that children have the responsibility to obey, but parents have the responsibility to teach their children obedience – one of the most important jobs for a parent. We don't need to teach our children how to disobey because they have each inherited an inclination to sin from Adam – but obedience must be taught.

The apostle gives us two reasons for the child to obey the parent.

- First, they are to obey in the Lord. This means that their obedience is part of their Christian obedience, in a similar way to the wife's command to submit to her husband as to the Lord (Ephesians 5:22). "In the Lord," that is, obedience to parents is part of our obedience to the Lord. If my parent asks me to do something immoral, my first obligation would be to obey the Lord instead of my parent.
- The second reason is because it is simply right for a child to obey their parent.

#### ***Honour Your Father and Mother***

The command to obey one's parents is Number Five of the Ten Commandments -- "Honour your father and mother." Paul is paraphrasing the form of the command given in Deuteronomy 5:16. Obedience to parents is not only a manmade rule, but also given by God, to be built into the very fabric of our values. The verb translated "honour" comes from the idea of "to value, to deem worthy," then "to honour."

What it means to honour our father and mother may change as we grow into adulthood, but the principle always endures. The adult child does not owe the parent obedience, but they do owe the parent honour. Someone once said: "When the bonds of family life break up, when respect for parents fails, the community becomes decadent and will not live long."

#### ***Promises to the Obedient***

The command comes with two promises:

*"That it may be well with you..."* is self-evident. Those who obey their parents stay out of trouble a lot better than those who don't. Childhood and teen years are a very self-righteous time. We know what's best and ignore parental advice. At best, we hide our disobedient activity hoping not to be found out. Many are regretting today because they chose disobedience over obedience.

The second part of the promise is more serious yet: *"... you may live long on the earth."* Obedience to our parents is an invaluable protection that will increase our lifespan. If we don't learn from our parents how

to get along with people, we might be void of vital social skills. The culture of our inner cities is no less violent than that of Old Testament days. Obedience to our parents will keep us alive, now and in the future. Our lifespan is directly dependent upon our willingness to obey according to the bible.

For children to obey -- and for parents to enforce obedience -- is sometimes difficult. But children learn in "the school of the home" the vital ability to submit their wills to another. How can a child who doesn't learn to obey a parent when wills conflict, ever learn to obey God when self-will is propelling him beyond God's limits? Parents have a sacred task to teach obedience, for their children's spiritual and physical lives are at stake. Obedience to parents is directly transferred to obedience to our Heavenly Father. The Proverbs instruct us

*"Don't be afraid to correct your young ones; a spanking won't kill them. A good spanking, in fact, might save them from something worse than death." (Proverbs 23:13-14 MSG).*

*"Don't hesitate to discipline children. A good spanking won't kill them. As a matter of fact, it may save their lives." (Proverbs 23:13-14 GNT)*

### **Message to Fathers (and by extension, Mothers)**

*"And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord." (v4)*

Parents certainly have the opportunity to provoke their children to wrath, through an unkind, over-critical attitude that torments the child instead of training them. But Christian parents should never be like this. Of course, occasion occurs that leads to anger. That's a given. But Paul is directing fathers not to deliberately provoke anger by badgering or turning an incident into a power game. Fathers who try constantly to make themselves feel better at the expense of their children are neurotic. While anger is part of a conflict of wills, fathers are not to enflame it needlessly.

Purposely provoking our children doesn't produce good fruit. The result is either outright rebellion or discouragement. The purpose of discipline is training and directing the child's spirit, not breaking that tender spirit. Of course, mothers, too, must keep themselves in check, so that in their diligence to discipline they do not bring hurt.

### **Training and Admonition**

Both of these words can include punishment (or discipline), but that is not their thrust. "Training and Admonition" involve for example, maintaining discipline, diligence, teaching, instructing, showing, giving responsibilities, and then supporting them as they learn to keep them faithfully. Warning and instructions are included, too, along with correction.

But what makes this particularly Christian rather than merely parental are the words "in the Lord." Our "training and admonition" are part of our service to Christ. Our children belong to God, and we are raising them for him. We are told to "bring them up" in the Lord." The verb means first, "to provide food, nourish," then "to bring up from childhood, rear." We are to "nourish" our children in the Lord.

### **Message to Employees**

*"Bondservants, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in sincerity of heart, as to Christ; not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, with goodwill doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men, knowing that whatever good anyone does, he will receive the same from the Lord, whether he is a slave or free." (vv5-8)*

I've found it profitable in our day to substitute the word "employee" for "bondservant," and "employer" for "master," though they aren't fully equivalent. But the instruction Paul would bring in our situation of employees and employers would be very similar.

The key phrase in these verses is the words "as to Christ" which changes our entire perspective as employees. It reminds us that our work can and should be done as if we were working for Jesus – because we are!

These are his instructions using modern terms to employees:

- **Obedience:** Employees are to do what their employers tell them to. Notice that Paul says: "*masters according to the flesh.*" He is reminding the employees that their masters are only in power here on earth and their authority is neither universal nor eternal.
- **Respect (fear and trembling):** The obedience is not just to be to the letter of the employer's directives, but is to include respect, literally "fear and trembling." This isn't cowering terror, but respect. The phrase refers to "a proper spirit of Christian reverence"; "an attitude of due reverence and awe in the presence of God, a godly fear of the believer in view of the final day." We are to be God-fearers and to show due respect for our employers. We are not to despise them in our hearts; we are not to hate the boss. Notice how Paul brings attitude in, rather than mere legalism.
- **Sincerity of Heart:** translate a Greek noun used of personal integrity expressed in word or action, "simplicity, sincerity, uprightness, frankness." More than respect, we are to offer conscientious, careful service. "Sincerity of heart" is the flip side of "eye-service" (Ephesians 6:6).
- **As employees of Christ:** Sometimes it's hard to see our work as direct service to Christ. But it is vital that we bring our love for Christ right into the midst of every important relationship of our lives – and work is certainly one of those. We are to serve our employers with the same attitude with which we serve Jesus. Our conscientious work is part of our service to Christ, whether we are slaves, or employees, or entrepreneurs serving clients.
- **Not merely pretending (men-pleasers):** Modern translations have rendered this in colloquial language to help us understand the sentiment.

"Not only to win their favour when their eye is on you." (NIV)

"Not only while being watched, and in order to please them." (NRSV)

"Not by way of eyeservice, as people-pleasers." (KJV)

Oops! The boss is coming. Don't let him see you doing that." Christians are to be faithful to their employers even when no one is there to see. Our Christian work ethic is based on integrity, not impressing the right people.

- **He will receive the same from the Lord, whether he is a slave or free:** Paul relates a final reason for working hard for the Lord. God will return to us in the measure that we have worked hard for others; He will not allow our hard work to go without reward.

## Message to Employers

*“And you, masters, do the same things to them, giving up threatening, knowing that your own Master also is in heaven, and there is no partiality with Him.” (v9)*

Employers are to treat their employees with the same kind of respect, faithfulness, integrity that God expects of employees.

Some employers rule by threats and carry them out ruthlessly. The better ones, however, lead by example and from a position of respect. Yes, they may need to exercise discipline from time to time (Proverbs 29:21). They may need to let an employee go (one of the hardest tasks employers have to do!), but they must do it with honesty, justice, and integrity.

To masters (and employers) who have lost perspective, Paul gives two warnings:

**1. You have a Master in heaven who will hold you to account.** You cannot be an absolute tyrant, you yourself are under God's authority. You may be a master, in a position of authority, here. But ultimately you are a servant of your Heavenly Master and are just as accountable to God as your slaves or employees.

**2. God shows no favouritism in his judgment.** "Respect of persons" (KJV), "partiality" (NRSV, ESV), "favouritism" (NIV) render a noun that means, "partiality, the fault of one who when called on to require or to give judgment has respect to the outward circumstances of men and not to their intrinsic merits, and so prefers, as the more worthy, one who is rich, high-born, or powerful, to another who is destitute of such gifts." God will not give you a better reward because of your "class" or "station" than he will a slave or employee. He expects exactly the same kind of behaviour of each of you. You will be judged by how you have acted in this life, not by the position you held.