

EPHESIANS

WHO I AM AND WHY IT MATTERS

Today's passage in Ephesians is unique because it speaks to so many different groups of people directly. It speaks to children, fathers, and mothers (in a sense). We will wrap up the study by asking a question that is often asked even today – does the Bible condone slavery? Ephesians 6 helps us answer that question.

Discussion Questions:

1. Looking back at your sermon notes, what encouraged or challenged you the most?

Read Ephesians 6:1-9

2. In Ephesians 6, Paul helps us take a closer look at how our rightness with Christ should be transforming our relationships with others. Why is it necessary to be Spirit-filled in order to live in right relationship with those around us (spouse, children, coworkers, etc.)?

Relationships can be challenging at times. Misunderstandings, personality differences, and varying points of view can lead to conflict and pain. However, when relationships are as they should be, they can provide some of the most meaningful experiences we will ever know. In Ephesians 6, Paul calls our attention to the importance of being Spirit-filled believers in our relationships. The Holy Spirit's control makes all of the difference in living out those relationships with one another.

3. What does it mean for parents to raise their children in the discipline and instruction of the Lord? What does it mean that obedience to our parents reflects obedience to God? How does this change as we leave our parents' care upon adulthood?

Training and correction in the Lord offer discipline through admonition and rebuke while expressing affirmation and encouragement. You need to correct your children. The answer is not to abandon correction and admonition. Discipline may take many forms: sometimes, it can be a word, sometimes a timeout, and sometimes, if required, a spanking. That is the negative side of parenting. However, children also need the positive side of parenting—they need someone to teach them what is correct, explain what is right, and demonstrate how to live to honor God.

Children are not just obeying and honoring their parents, but in reality, they are obeying and honoring the Lord Jesus Christ, and that is why God takes so seriously disobedience to parents. By being obedient and respectful to their parents, children are honoring God as well as their parents. Obedience here describes listening attentively, heeding, and conforming to authority. It is a willingness to listen to and weigh words of advice, using them to shape one's life and actions. It is far from a grudging

obedience or rote responsiveness to command. It is genuinely wanting to know, listen and obey. We need to remind children to obey their parents in the right spirit and attitude because God listens to our hearts and not merely our outward actions.

4. All godly parents desire to see their children grow up to be well-adjusted, mature, responsible, and happy adults who enjoy the favor of God in their lives. What connection exists between this kind of life and parents who responsibly teach their children to obey and honor their parents in the Lord?

Christian children show their love for God by honoring their parents, which is right. Not only does this mean that children have a responsibility to obey, but parents have a responsibility to teach their children obedience — one of their most important tasks. It is critical for a parent to teach his child obedience so that the child grows up knowing how to obey God even when he does not understand everything or does not want to. Paul is helping us understand that obedience in our relationship with our parents reflects obedience to God.

Paul reminds us that children obeying parents and honoring them is a commandment with a promise that results not only in their well-being but a fuller and longer life on the earth (v. 3). This is not an absolute promise of a long lifetime, but rather, this is a declaration that by obeying and honoring parents, children learn to lead and have more disciplined lives that result in stability, longevity, and well-being. They learn to depend upon the leadership of their parents and, from their parents' example, the leadership of God. As the Holy Spirit helps children to obey, he also helps them to see the picture of God and the church that their parents present.

5. While Paul mentions fathers specifically (Eph. 6:4, Col. 3:21), most commentators acknowledge that it is fair to see these instructions as being written to both parents. How might a parent provoke their child to anger? What challenges do parents face in teaching their children obedience while nurturing their children's hearts?

Being a parent is never easy. First, it doesn't come with an instruction manual, and you can be assured that you will eventually make mistakes, no matter how hard you try to avoid them. However, we can find solace in the fact that God has given us some great advice as parents in the Bible. Ephesians 6:4 and Colossians 3:21 certainly give us a sound footing as we navigate the parenting waters.

Paul starts out with the statement: Do not provoke ... to anger. Provoke here means exasperating or irritating children toward anger or bitterness, which can easily lead children to disobey and dishonor their parents. There are times when our children are justified in their anger toward us because we have so provoked our children that anger is the fitting response. It may even be the right response to situations where righteous anger is warranted.

Why does Paul give such a command? *Lest they become discouraged.* A discouraged child is one who has not only lost heart but has lost hope as well. Some translations translate it, "lest he get discouraged and quit trying," "bitter about life," "exasperate." The idea here is that you can be so hard on your children that they stop trying to obey and honor you. Maybe your demands are arbitrary or

unfair, or you have higher expectations for them than yourself, or you have forgotten how to enjoy their presence. Whatever the case, children can eventually stop caring and stop trying.

6. Paul's admonition regarding slaves and masters isn't a commendation of such a system. Slavery is a deep stain on the history of the United States and was certainly ungodly and evil. The practices of slavery and human trafficking are still prevalent in modern America, with estimated 17,500 foreign nationals and 400,000 Americans being trafficked into and within the United States every year, with 80% of those being women and children. What stood out to you the most from the sermon regarding slavery?

While it is true that the New Testament doesn't explicitly oppose or directly challenge slavery, especially in the context of the Roman Empire, it is also important to point out that neither does it condone slavery. The fact that Christians are called to obey their masters doesn't endorse slavery as a practice (Eph. 6:5; Col. 3:22), even as Jesus' use of masters and servants in his parables wasn't an approval of earthly slavery. Jesus used this historical and cultural reality to speak of ethical and spiritual transformation. Paul's admonition to slaves to be obedient to their masters and masters not to mistreat their slaves (Eph 6:5-9, Col 3: 22-4:1, 1 Tim 6:1-2) is not a commendation of such a system. Instead, he is appealing to Christians to exemplify Christ in these situations. Furthermore, Paul points out that if slaves can obtain their freedom, they shouldn't enter into slavery again (1 Cor 7:21-23). Paul here in Ephesians is not giving an endorsement to slavery and masters but gives them both the same commands.

Paul does not condemn slavery outright for theological reasons. He tells us throughout his letters that non-believers are slaves to sin and that the Gospel frees a person from the inside out. Thus, he prompts the Ephesian slaves to see that they are freer than their masters if they work as willing slaves of Jesus Christ. Likewise, the Ephesian masters will only know true freedom if they recognize they are also slaves of Christ themselves.

7. If we view these verses beyond their immediate context (slavery) and apply them to the employee-employer relationship, what is Paul advising Christian employees to do? Christian employers? What connection exists between your attitude and ethics at work and your commitment to God? How can 1 Corinthians 10:31 guide us? When do you struggle the most to view your work in this way?

Paul says to obey your earthly masters (employers) as you would Christ, for we are all slaves of Christ. Here, the emphasis is on a person's attitude. The Christian servant must work with a godly attitude regardless of circumstances, working for his employer as he would Christ. Paul wants to teach us that our attitudes and commitment to work reflect the heart of our service and commitment to God.

Paul demonstrates that just as Christ loves and takes care of us, so too the Christian employer should do his best for those who work for him. The master must serve the Lord from his heart as an example for his servants to do the same.

We are called to serve with fear and trembling and with a sincere heart. Workers should respect and honor their employers, obeying them with a sincere and willing heart. As we obey, we want to show

honor to the one in authority over us and do what they say with a willing heart, not a begrudging, grumbling spirit. When we approach our work with servant-heartedness, we honor God.

Not only should we respect and obey our employers, but we should be producing excellent work. We don't just do what you have to do to get by, but we should work heartily as Christ's servants doing what God wants us to do. This should be working with a smile, keeping in mind that no matter who is giving the orders, you're serving God. If you only work hard because you desire to please others, you will only work hard if other people are watching. For Christians, work is a loving service to our employer and God. We must see it as a way to glorify God and love others as we work.

8. What's one personal takeaway from today's study you can focus on applying in your life this week?