

## Instructions for Children, Parents, Slaves and Masters

### Ephesians 6:1-9

Ephesians 6:1-9: *“Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. Honor 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. And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord.*

*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 eye service, 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.*

*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”.*

### Background Notes

The last section of Ephesians 5 teaches about the relationships and responsibilities of husbands and wives in God’s authority structure for the home. The subject of God’s authority structure in the home continues in this first section of chapter 6, with instructions on the relationships and responsibilities of children to parents, and parents to children, slaves to masters, and masters to slaves. Right now you may be thinking, “Wait a minute, Dave - I thought this was a continuation of the authority structure in the *home*. Why are slaves and masters mentioned here?” Slaves are discussed in this context because, in the Roman Empire, slaves were part of the 1st century home. The instructions to Christian masters and Christian slaves can certainly be applied today to Christian employers and Christian employees.

But I’m sure the larger question in your mind is, “Why are the duties of slaves and masters even mentioned at all? Why didn’t Paul just command Christians to release their slaves and abolish slavery? Wouldn’t that be the more Christian way?” As a social institution, slavery is not condemned - nor is it condoned - in the New Testament. However, if the principles of New Testament teaching are followed, slavery will come to an end. In fact, the teachings of the New Testament led to the abolition of slavery in the western world.

Furthermore, if Christian masters were to follow the directives given here, slaves would be elevated to a position far superior to that of many workers today under the free enterprise system! Slaves were at least provided with room and board for themselves and their families. Sometimes the entire family would be employed. Slaves often had a respected place in the family. In fact, when they had a kind master, many slaves chose to stay on at their job even when granted their freedom!

## **Doctrinal Point:**

### **Believers should submit to one another.**

In Ephesians 5:21, we are exhorted to submit to one another in the fear of God. There were two sub-points under this principle in the last section of Ephesians 5: wives should respect their husbands, and husbands should love their wives. There are four more sub-points in the first section of Ephesians 6.

a. **Children should obey and honor their parents** (v1-3). *“Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. Honor 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.”* The term “children” here conveys more than preschoolers. Teens would certainly be included in this term. Notice that children are directly addressed in this letter. This indicates that the apostle Paul assumed that children would be present at the church meeting where this letter would be read. The teenagers were not off having fun and games while their parents were in church - they were all worshipping together! And that’s a good application for today.

The phrase “obey in the Lord” (v1) implies that children will recognize of the authority structure that God has set up for the home. Children are subject to parents, not vice versa. Children are not only to *obey* their parents, but to *honor* their parents as well. It’s interesting to listen to my students at Emmaus Bible College talk about their parents. Showing respect for their parents is a sign of a godly young person. Even when their parents are not around to hear what they’re saying, these students honor their parents.

The phrase in verse 3, *“that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth”* does not mean that the godly teenager will never die at a young age. The point is that learning to submit to authority in the home, and thus honoring your parents, is a principle that tends to a longer life. Proverbs 10:27 says *“the fear of the Lord prolongs days.”* The converse is also true. People who never learn to submit to authority have all kinds of psychological and physiological problems that tend to shorten their life spans - regardless of fat-free diets and exercise. So children should obey and honor their parents.

b. **Parents should discipline and instruct their children** (v4). *“And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition [discipline and instruction] of the Lord.”* “Fathers” here could also be translated “parents”.

Notice that we have a “do” and a “don’t” here for parents. First the “don’ts.” Don’t “provoke them to wrath” means don’t nitpick and nag. Don’t be unreasonable and inconsistent. Don’t use undue harshness. Don’t arbitrarily exert your authority to show who is boss around the place. Don’t put your children down – don’t insult or despise them. If you run your home this way, your family will not function well, and your

children will most likely turn out to be either teenage rebels or mental zombies. Parents, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath!

Now the “do’s.” Do “discipline and instruct them.” Bringing them up in the “training and admonition” of the Lord means to discipline them wisely and instruct them in the Lord. How do you discipline children? Don’t discipline for mistakes – do discipline for defiance! Have a few well-defined rules. Don’t make a lot of nit-picking rules and regulations. It’s a *home*, not a military camp! Although we all make parenting mistakes, we can and must look to the Lord for patience and wisdom.

How do we teach and instruct children in the things of the Lord?

1. *Have family devotions.* Make a time when the family is together each day to learn and apply God’s Word, and to pray together. Usually a mealtime works out best. Make sure your Bible studies are interesting and age-appropriate for your family. (Don’t just study Leviticus all the time or you’ll wear your kids out!) Use variety in your family devotions – you may even include music and drama. Have “missions nights.” Serve ethnic foods and discuss the challenges of evangelism in other countries. Give your older children or teens opportunities to do the devotions.

2. *Practice what you preach and model what you teach.* You can’t wear masks in front of your kids! Don’t kid yourselves - they will see right through you. Teenagers have X-ray vision. Be authentic and honest. Parents should strive to model Jesus Christ to their children in the way they live their lives.

**c. Slaves should serve and obey their masters (v5-8).** *“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 eye service, 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.”*

The phrase “*according to the flesh*” in verse 5 means in the physical or earthly realm, as opposed to the spiritual realm. In other words, in the 1<sup>st</sup> century *home*, slaves were to recognize the authority structure. Slaves were to obey and submit to their masters. The *church*, however, is different. Christian slaves and Christian masters would have been in the same church together, and sometimes slaves would actually have been the elders and leaders in the local church. In those cases the masters would have been subject to the slaves in the line of spiritual authority in the local church. In the home, however, slaves were to be subject to their masters and serve them *as if they were working for the Lord* – knowing that they would be rewarded accordingly at the judgment seat of Christ (v8).

All of this can be applied to being a good employee today. Just think - you can get a reward in heaven for being an exemplary employee and putting in a good day’s work for your boss! Slaves should obey and serve their masters.

d. **Masters should serve and care for their slaves** (v9). *“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.”* Christian masters were to serve their slaves, care for them and provide for them, and not threaten or mistreat them. The same should be true of Christian employers today.

Are you a Christian employer or manager? Do you serve your employees and the people under you, or do you just “use” them and mistreat them? You can have a great testimony for the Lord if you serve and care for your employees - or a terrible testimony if you don’t treat them properly. Remember, you too have a Master in Heaven and you will be rewarded (or not rewarded) on the basis of how you serve and care for your employees. You will not be able to say, “But wait a minute, Lord, I was the boss!” There is no partiality or favoritism with God (v9).

### **Practical Application**

#### **How do you work when the boss isn’t watching?**

Verse 6 says *“not with eye service, as men-pleasers.”* That means doing a good job even when your boss is out of town or not watching. Recently a TV ad depicted an office employee who thought his boss was out of town, so he was lounging around the office and talking about how he planned to play golf that afternoon. Meanwhile the boss could hear everything that was said. Believe it or not, this happens all the time - but if you’re a Christian, it shouldn’t! “When the cat’s away, the mice will play” should never be said of a Christian employee.

Do you know that Christian slaves brought higher prices in the 1st century? They were more valuable! They were honest and they worked harder because they worked “as unto the Lord.” Are you more valuable to your employer today because you’re a Christian? Let’s hope so! It’s a convicting question, isn’t it? How well do you work when the boss isn’t watching?