

CHILDREN, OBEY YOUR PARENTS IN THE LORD

Ephesians 6:1-24

Key Verse: 6:1

"Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right."

Ever since the world was created by the Almighty God, the relationship problem has been the most fundamental problem for all mankind. Adam, the first man, disobeyed the command of God regarding the spiritual order. Since then, God was not able to have a close relationship with Adam. As usual, God was looking for Adam to see if he was doing well. So God called him, "Where are you?" (Ge 3:9) He answered, "I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid." God wanted to embrace him. But Adam distanced himself from God because he sinned against God by eating the fruit of the good and evil tree. Jean Paul Sartre (1905-1980), atheistic existential philosopher, predicted that at the last part of the 20th century there would be a more than 50% divorce rate and 20% of the people would live together with contract marriage. His prediction has been realized. The more the world is civilized, the more human relationships are getting worse. Spiritual order and human relations are closely related. Last summer, right before the UBF International Summer Bible Conference, one of the young shepherds dropped by the Chicago UBF church and declared, "I am my own man. So nobody can tell me, 'do this,' or 'do that.'" When he said that, he meant that his family's journey to Turkey for 20 days right before the UBF International Summer Bible Conference was not right, but he could do everything, because he is his own man. So his wrong concept of human relationships broke spiritual order in doing the work of God. Historically speaking, each nation wants to have her own nation, and each person wants to have his own family, and each person wants to have his own freedom. In doing so, they largely ignore mutual relationships. There are many young people who want to marry. But they do not know the relationship between husband and wife. Once, a young husband candidate visited his senior pastor on Saturday morning while he was preparing the Sunday message. The young man was sitting on a sofa and did not show any hint of leaving. So his senior pastor could not write his message for two hours in order to chat with him. Finally, his pastor asked him, "Have you ever thought about supporting your wife after marriage?" Then his face was flushed and after a few minutes he murmured, "No, I have never thought about that." Then the pastor told him, "You'd better think about how to support your wife after marriage and then come back and talk about your marriage problem." Then the young man hurriedly picked up his coat and left the room. Where human beings are living together and human communities are existing, we must value human relationships. Here we learn that we cannot ignore human relationships when we expect to have better families or a better society. St. Paul in prison is very mindful of the relationship

between children and parents. He is also mindful of the relationship between masters and slaves. We want to think about this relationship problem. May God grant us his grace to accept one word of God in our hearts.

First, the relationship between children and parents (1-4).

Wordsworth said in a poem, "The child is father of the man." When he said this, he meant that children are curious, sometimes spendthrifts, troublemakers and disobedient; especially, they are very noisy, talking about many things. But they are future leaders of each country. They are now children, but they would very soon be fathers. In Jesus' times, children and women were not included in numbers because they were not earning any money. Children were not included in numbers because many children died before they became grownups due to many epidemic diseases. But Paul honored children as future leaders and admonished them. Look at verses 1-3. "Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. 'Honor your father and mother'--which is the first commandment with a promise--'that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth.'" Here, Paul admonishes children to obey and honor their parents and says that it is the first commandment with a promise. Here, "children" does not necessarily mean those under teen age or babies in diapers. Here, "children" means those who have parents, whether they are 40 years old or 50 years old. Paul admonishes children to obey and honor their parents in the Lord, for it is the first commandment. Actually, it is the fifth commandment. But it is the first commandment regarding human relationships, basically the relationship between parents and children.

What does "obey" mean? Obedience is the same as love. Without love, nobody can obey anyone. Therefore, when Paul said, "Children, obey your parents," it can be paraphrased, "Children, love your parents." Paul also said, "Honor your father and your mother." When we study the Bible, we learn that "honor" means to recognize someone as he or she is. Children must recognize their parents as parents.

These days there are not many children who obey their parents and honor their father and mother. For example, there are many senior citizens' apartments and nursing homes and in them old men and old women who have money live all by themselves. They say that in 1995, right before the earthquake in Northridge, California, there was a 65 year old man. He had three sons. They were all wealthy. But none of them visited his house in that year. So he cried every day, saying, "Oh, my sons!" and "Oh, my grandsons!" On Campbell Street in Chicago, there were many grandparents, each possessing a big house. But they live all by themselves. To them, there are many hardships of life. But missing their children and grandchildren is the most painful one. An

old man met a neighbor old man and said, "Good morning! What is your name?" The neighbor old man answered, "I have no name." "How many children do you have?" "I have no children." "How many grandchildren do you have?" "I have 17 grandchildren." In this discourse, the old neighbor expressed his deep longing for his 17 grandchildren. In a family, there must be grandparents. Then there will be no babysitter problem. But these days, grandparents are lazy. They don't take care of their grandchildren. So we are sometimes too burdened in order to find proper babysitters. In a family there must be parents whom the children love so dearly, hugging them and sitting on their laps and talking much nonsense. In a family, there must be children. Without children, a family atmosphere is like a funeral home.

This country is sorrowful because there are so many broken families and there are so many young people from broken homes. This country is very sorrowful because when a man gets old and is not so useful, he is supposed to live all by himself, crying every day. Instead of laughing and enjoying time with their grandchildren, grandparents are crying in the gloomy room every day. Some say that grandparents are unnecessary, because they are old and they cannot make money. But it is not so. They are absolutely necessary for their grandchildren, because grandchildren need grandparents' love. Busy and rash parents' love is not enough. That's why God made grandparents and parents and children to live together. But if each family member is selfish, they cannot experience the happiness of living together. Most parents send their children to the babysitter instead of to their grandparents. Many grandparents feel too tired to take care of grandchildren, not knowing the joy of caring for grandchildren, and not knowing that God supplies necessary strength to take care of grandchildren. May God restore family relationships in this country so that we may be happy indeed.

How can children obey their parents in the Lord? Children cannot love their parents, because children are very self-centered and want to be loved by their parents until they are fully spoiled. But children can love their parents because God gave them the heart to love their parents. Parents want their children to study well and get the highest scores. Then, as an expression of their love, children must study hard and each child must be number one in his class.

There is a man called Dr. E. Winn, Jr. in Mississippi. He was born in 1923, the only son of Eustace Winn, Sr. He loved his father. So he studied very well as his father hoped. His father wanted him to become a medical doctor. So he studied hard and got into medical school, and right after his medical school graduation, he married his high school sweetheart. When he loved his father, he tasted joy and happiness. So he began to help all his senior citizen relatives, including Missionary Sarah Barry's parents. When he took care of his senior citizen relatives, his happiness grew. Then he began to take care of all senior

citizens of his town. It is really a beautiful story. He took care of his mother, until she died at the age of 90, and his father, until he died at the age of 96. In reality, this was not only Dr. Winn's case, it was the original American family system. However, since pragmatism prevailed in this country, many grandparents and parents have been possessed by demons. They think selfishness is the way to happiness. But selfishness takes away all their relationships with their parents and with their children and grandchildren as well.

It is always beautiful to come back to the Bible story. Let's think about Isaac, the father of faith (Ge 24,26). Isaac really wanted to marry, we assume, at around age 22. But his father Abraham was so obsessive and possessive. So Isaac could not marry until he was 40 years old. But in order to please his father, he never complained about his father's delaying his marriage. Moreover, after Abraham's death, Isaac had to live with independent faith. He was a very gentle and patient person. Abraham was like a general. Isaac was like the poet, Heine, and was a well-digging expert. As soon as he dug a well and made it a water supply source, neighbor people came and took the well by force. So he had to move around so many times. Isaac's life was literally a life of concession and humiliation. But one day, King Abimelech saw that although Isaac's well had been taken away, still, Isaac dug another well, and God was with him, and he was prospering day after day. So the king came and apologized formally, saying that they were wrong for taking his wells and made a treaty of peace. Here, Isaac shows the evidence that he loved his father Abraham so much that he learned his father's spiritual heritage and put it into practice. Finally, he was a blessing to his neighbor towns and was pleasing to God. Here we see that Isaac obeyed his parents in the Lord.

Joseph was sold by his step-brothers to Egypt as a slave (Ge 37-45). But wherever he went, he did everything as if he were doing it for the glory of God. At the beginning, he was a housekeeper. He did so well that the king's bodyguard, Potiphar, trusted him until he was only concerned with eating three meals a day, and he entrusted everything else to Joseph's hand. At that time, Joseph was only 17 years old. By God's leading, he was put in a royal prison. But he worked so hard that the warden entrusted all the work of the prison to the hand of Joseph. By God's leading, Joseph became the premier of Egypt, and the second-in-command, next to the king, of the Egyptian Empire. At that time, famine spread all over the lands of Egypt and Canaan. But by Joseph's wisdom and foresight Egypt preserved seven years' portion of the grain of Egypt. The time came when his brothers went to Egypt to buy some grain. Joseph recognized them. And he knew his father's heart, that these twelve brothers must be changed until they could be fully qualified to be the twelve patriarchs of Israel. So Joseph pretended that he didn't know them. He also pretended he did not understand Hebrew. Joseph gave them a hard time until Judah repented his sin of

selling his younger brother Joseph. As soon as Judah repented, Joseph revealed himself to his brothers, then went into the next room and cried with a loud voice for a long time. Afterward, he came out to dinner with his brothers. And he gave five times more food to his real brother Benjamin.

Finally, Joseph ordered his brothers to bring his father to Egypt. They brought Jacob. Jacob and Joseph embraced each other and cried a long time. "Joseph, my son, you are still alive!" "Father, it is Joseph!" After Joseph's disappearance, his father Jacob said many times that he would go to the grave with great sorrow. But by God's grace, Jacob could see his beloved son Joseph. Father Jacob and son Joseph's relationship was not a special one. It was a very normal one. We must be like Jacob, who missed his son until he wanted to die many times. Joseph missed his father, so he did his best to climb up the ladder of success. Finally, he became premier of the Egyptian Empire and brought his father and God gave them a happy meeting. Joseph took care of his father. His father asked Joseph not to bury his bones in the land of Egypt, but in Canaan. Joseph obeyed, took a long journey to Canaan, and buried his father. How beautiful it is when children know their father's hearts and obey their fathers in the Lord.

What is a father's role before his children? Most of all, a father must spend enough time with his children. Read verse 4. "Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord." Paul's time was the time of Roman control. At that time, a father's authority over his children was limitless. A Roman father had absolute power over his sons. Even if his son became a high-ranking official, a Roman father could sell him as a slave. The fathers of Rome imitated the Roman Emperor's absolute dictatorship over their sons. How exasperating! So their sons were all useless in the long run. On the other hand, sometimes children are loved by their parents until they are completely spoiled. But they feel unloved when they do not know how to obey their parents. As we know well, children are very sensitive, romantic and full of curiosity and a rebellious mind. But Paul urges that parents should not make them angry. Instead, they must bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.

Most parents want to love their children instinctively and spiritually. But they do not know how to love their children. So without any wisdom and prayer, they only give an extra amount of allowance. At the same time, they spend very little time with their children. But the last part of verse 4 says, "bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord." How do parents give their children training? It is very easy. First, they must spend time with them. Second, they must always maintain communication. Third, they

must give good influence to their children, so that their children will naturally follow their parents' lifestyle. This is the best way of training. Before sleeping, a father should read a few verses of the Bible to his children under college age and pray together. This is also good training. If parents imitate Jesus, children also imitate Jesus. If parents treat their children like their possession, their children become very rebellious. Let's read verse 4 again. "Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord."

Second, the relationship between slaves and masters (5-9).

When we study the Bible, we find that a slave system is totally opposed. Scriptural doctrine is opposed to the opinion that slavery is itself a desirable institution with much to be cherished and perpetuated. The grounds are that one man cannot lawfully possess and exercise authority over his fellow man. Slavery is founded on the assumption of the inferiority of one class of people to another. Paul does not say that slavery is right; nor does he suggest that they overturn the slave system. Paul admonishes the children of God who are slaves. Basically, they must be slaves of Christ and do their best for the benefit of their human master. Then they are not slaves in the sight of God; they are children of God. Living in this world, we must overcome human situations. In some ways, there are many bosses and there are many slaves. American people naturally and habitually say, "my boss." But they do not say, "I'm a slave to my boss." Communism was established by Heine, a Jew, who spoke the German language. He was a romantic poet. In his poems, equality of human beings, the nobility of romanticism, and social democracy are well expressed. His poems were so wonderful that Mendelssohn, Schubert, and Schumann, all world-class musicians, composed music to his poems. At that time, in the intellectual world, Karl Marx came to learn Heine's life principle and organized democratic socialism in his economy. Later, it became communism. Likewise, American Puritans and those who pioneered, living an average of only 40 years because of hard labor, hoped to establish a social democracy. But because of hybrid people's extraordinary moneymaking, this country could not establish social democracy. This country turned out to be a capitalistic country. President Clinton's health care plan is the initial stage of social democracy. But capitalists knew what he was going to do and have given him enough of a hard time. In this way, capitalism produced the master class and slave class. They say that in a private college, the president receives \$600,000 per year, but an ordinary tenure-track professor gets gross pay of \$30,000-\$40,000 per year. However, German people are very exemplary. Everybody worked hard before talking about a health-care plan. So the country returned to social democracy and miraculously this country was united. Paul says to slaves, "Work hard!" Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not men."

Look at verse 9. "And masters, treat your slaves in the same way. Do not threaten them, since you know that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no favoritism with him." We must acknowledge that we have a Father in heaven who judges the living and the dead. We must deal with brethren who are under us with love and respect.

Third, the armor of God (10-24).

Look at verses 10-11. "Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes." These verses clearly tell us that we are living in this real world which is full of the power of the devil. We must know that we are not struggling man to man, but we are fighting against the devil within us and within others. Let's read verse 12. "For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms." Sometimes we fight with our brothers. Then we must remember that we should not fight with our brothers. It is foolish. It is the devil who makes us fight among brothers and sisters. Therefore, the most stupid thing is fighting among brothers and sisters. Instead, we must wear the full armor of God so that Satan may not have a chance to attack us. First of all, we must wear the belt of truth buckled around our waist. In exercise, how the middle section of the body works determines victory and defeat. Therefore, we must wear the belt of truth buckled around our waist. We must also wear the breastplate of righteousness in place. We must know our vulnerable places, the upper body and our stomach. And we must put the breastplate of righteousness in place. We must also wear gospel army shoes so that we can go around and preach the gospel of salvation. Please read verses 14-15. "Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace." Next, we must have faith based on the word of God as the most potent weapon. Then the devil's flaming arrows will be in vain. We must also wear the helmet of salvation and take up the sword of the Spirit. The sword of the Spirit is the word of God. In order to have one word of God in the battle with the devil, we must really keep one word of God in our hearts with the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit. In short, we must do our best to hold on to one word of God.

Most importantly, in our battle with the devil, we must pray on all occasions. With our own strength we cannot defeat the devil's schemes and power. Therefore, we must pray to depend on God's wisdom and strategy and God's almighty power. We must pray that the children of God may be soldiers of Christ. Our Supreme Commander is Jesus Christ

our Lord. Look at verses 19-20. "Pray also for me, that whenever I open my mouth, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should." When we are shielded with the armor of God, and we depend on God, we can have peace and faith and the great love of Jesus Christ. Read verse 23. "Peace to the brothers, and love with faith from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." May God richly bless you so that your family may be a paradise where there are grandparents, parents, sons and daughters, grandsons and granddaughters who sing and praise God together.