

# The Lordship of Christ<sup>1</sup> in the Home and at Work

Ephesians 6:1-9

Key Verse: 6:7-8

**“Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not people, because you know that the Lord will reward each one for whatever good they do, whether they are slave or free.”**

Today’s passage is a continuation of Paul’s teaching about unity in the Christian household through new relationships. In 5:21-6:9, we can find three basic relationships: husbands and wives, parents and children, masters and slaves. Paul’s main theme is submission to one another, recognizing the order and harmony of God’s creation as it is made new through Christ. Paul applied submission to wives as partners, but he applies it to children and slaves differently. That is why he uses the word “submit” in regards to wives, and “obey” in regards to children and slaves. Many people misunderstand that unity is established through equality by eliminating authority. However, the Bible tells us that the authority of parents and masters is legitimate and is to be respected because it is given by God. Without authority there can be no order or harmony, but only chaos. Without respect for authority, homes become dysfunctional, schools become like a jungle, and the society completely breaks down. So we need authority. While upholding basic authority, God also restricts its use by parents and masters. This is because abuse of authority also destroys the order and harmony of God’s world. So we need to learn how to follow authority and how to exercise authority in Christ in the home and at work. This is what Paul teaches us today. This passage naturally divides into two parts: relationships between parents and children, and between masters and slaves.

## **I. Parents and children (1-4)**

Parents and children: vast amounts of literature have been devoted to this subject. Here, the focus is on parents and children “in the Lord.” Christ redeems this relationship and makes it new. It can be most fruitful in Christ. But we must follow some simple teachings. What are they?

**First, children, obey your parents (1-3).** Verse 1 says, **“Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.”** Here “children” refers to those who are growing in a Christian family. The fact that Paul addresses them directly shows that he expected them to hear his letter as important members of the church. In Greek, the word is “tek’-na,” which refers to children who live with their parents.

# The Lordship of Christ<sup>1</sup> in the Home and at Work

Paul told them to obey their parents, whose authority is given by God. It was not a suggestion or advice, but a command. Many children wonder why they should obey their parents. So Paul explained in three ways. **First of all, it is because “this is right.”** When we say, "this is right," it means that something is true in general and can be applied universally. People in various cultures down through history have agreed that children should obey their parents. This teaching is found not only in the Bible, but in most major religions and philosophies. Those who follow this truth are commended and those who violate it are punished. Yet when we see our times, many young people don't take obedience to parents seriously. Rather, they admire the disobedient as though they were freedom fighters. They agree that lying, stealing, and immorality are sin, but they don't see disobedience to parents as sin. But we should know that both in Romans, where Paul talks about the utter degeneration of society (Ro 1:30), and in 2 Timothy where he describes the marks of terrible times in the last days (2 Tim 3:2), disobedience to parents is one of the key factors he mentions. Children should obey their parents. This is right in order to establish healthy families and societies.

**The second reason for children's obedience is because it is one of God's Ten Commandments, as Paul quotes in verse 2, “Honor your father and mother...”** The Ten Commandments can be divided into two parts: first, the relationship with God, and, second, relationships with each other. In the second part, the first command is for children to honor their parents. This is a very important command. Those who learn how to obey their parents lay a good foundation for obedience to God. Jesus learned obedience, beginning with his parents (Lk 2:51). On the other hand, those who disobey their parents break God’s command, and often become troublemakers later in life. Often they cannot be trusted, nor do they trust others. Children’s obedience is important to God. God promises to bless those who obey him. Verses 2b-3 say, “...which is the first commandment with a promise – ‘so that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth.’” Everybody wants things to go well with them and to live a long life. Here is the secret to doing so: obey your parents. There is a story about George Washington. At age 15, he wanted to join the Royal Navy. However, his mother was so saddened by this that her heart was breaking with tears. Then, in honor of his mother, George changed his mind, saying, “I cannot exchange my mother’s tears for my own dream.” After that, his mother placed her hand on him and said, “God will surely bless you. Everything will go well with you.” As we know, he came to rule a nation, not just a ship.

# The Lordship of Christ<sup>1</sup> in the Home and at Work

**The third reason for children's obedience is found in the words "in the Lord."** Christ is Lord of the family. Christ wants children to be obedient to their parents. Children are to obey their parents just as they obey Christ. Christ works through this relationship to bless them. We can find God's purpose for the Christian household in his words to Abraham in Genesis 18:19, **"For I have chosen him, so that he will direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing what is right and just, so that the Lord will bring about for Abraham what he has promised."** The words "in the Lord" put Christ at the center of children's obedience. This also tells us that children can be discerning. If parents tell their children to go against Christ, such as not believe the gospel or to lie, steal or cheat, then the children should not obey their parents. If parents demand their children to choose them over the Lord, Christian children must choose the Lord. For the greatest loyalty of a Christian child is to the Lord, even above their parents. In Luke 14:26 Jesus said, **"If anyone comes to me and does not hate their father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters - yes, even their own life - such a person cannot be my disciple."** While it is important to note this exception, the general rule is that children must obey their parents in the Lord.

**Second, parents, raise them up in the Lord (4).** While Paul tells children to obey their parents, he does not tell parents to exercise authority. Rather, he cautions them not to abuse their authority and to carry out their duties. Look at verse 4. **"Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord."** As the head of the family, fathers are responsible for their children's education. And since husband and wife are one, mothers are equally responsible. So the footnote translates verse 4 as "parents." The instruction for parents contains both a negative and a positive element. The negative is **"do not exasperate your children."** The word "exasperate" means "to irritate or provoke to a high degree; annoy extremely." Colossians 3:21 says, **"Fathers, do not embitter your children, or they will become discouraged."** When parents abuse authority over children, the children become angry and bitter. Parents usually blame their children and call them rebellious. But parents must understand when it is a reaction to their abuse of authority. Many parents want to fulfill their own dreams and expectations through their children. They place heavy demands on them and restrict their freedom too much. They give them a long list of items to do. This can suffocate their children. On the other hand, some parents neglect their children, using television and video games as their babysitters. Then the children form many bad habits and don't grow properly. When they receive

# The Lordship of Christ<sup>1</sup> in the Home and at Work

their report cards, it is not good news. We parents must take to heart the warning not to exasperate our children.

The positive command is: “...instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.” God gives parents the primary responsibility of raising their children in the Lord. The church, schools and government may be a help, but primary responsibility is given to parents. In the final analysis, parents will bear the consequence for raising their children. If the children are a blessing, parents will rejoice. If the children are rebellious, parents will grieve. So parents must train and instruct their children in the Lord. The goal of this is to help them know Christ and grow in a personal relationship with him. Parents cannot make their children Christians. But we can make the best environment for this to happen. We should help them develop a godly character and to use their gifts and talents. This is the best way for parents to love for their children; it is the best inheritance we can give. The issue is, how? Parents should love their children, share Bible stories, and pray for them in their homes. It is most important to show a good example. Mother Barry has a brother Tom who is just nine months younger than she. He shares the same Christian faith but is different in one respect. He married, had four sons, and now has 28 grandchildren. Most of them live near each other on a mountain in North Carolina. Every Friday, Tom leads the men in Bible study. The members range in age from 82 years old to seven years old. Nevertheless, they love and respect each other. After Bible study, it is the youngest members who clean the room. Tom's third son John has eleven children. John and his wife share Daily Bread with their children every day based on Mother Barry's notes and they pray together. They train their children to be humble, polite, and serving. Whenever guests visit, all the children serve, including the seven-year old. They all refer to their elders with respect, saying, “Yes, Sir,” and “Yes, Ma’am.” It was from this family that Emily was raised and went as a missionary to Afghanistan. The fruit of training and instruction in the Lord is indeed beautiful. Children raised in this way are the hope of our families, as well as this nation.

## II. Masters and slaves (5-9)

In Paul's time slavery was common, and Ephesus was filled with slaves. As the gospel was preached, they heard about true equality in Christ, regardless of social status, and they joyfully believed in Jesus and joined the church. But when they began to act like equals with their masters, conflicts arose. Paul did not try to reform the slave system. Rather, he focused on building a beautiful Christian

# The Lordship of Christ<sup>1</sup> in the Home and at Work

community which would reveal unity in Christ. He taught slaves and masters how to relate to each other in Christ.

**First, slaves, obey your earthly masters (5-8).** Verse 5 says, “**Slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ.**” Then, in verse 6, Paul points out a specific problem of slaves, which is that they seem to work only when their master watches. In Greek, the word is “eye-service” or “sight-labor.” Slaves worked like this because they felt unjustly treated and had no hope. However, Christian slaves should be different. Verses 6b-8 say, “**...as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from your heart. Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not people, because you know that the Lord will reward each one for whatever good they do, whether they are slave or free.**” Martin Luther said that a cleaning woman can do the will of God when she tidies up a room. Engineers, accountants, janitors, truck drivers, or any kind of worker can do the will of God at home and in their working place. Homemakers can cook as though Christ will eat their food. Teachers can teach as if the boy Jesus is in their class. Doctors and nurses can care for patients as if they were Christ himself. This teaching greatly encouraged slaves in Paul’s time. They were regarded as property and treated like living tools. They were beaten at random without any “rights.” The only difference between donkeys and slaves was that slaves could speak. In brief, their lives were miserable without any hope. They did not have their own identity. They had no reason to work hard, or even to live. However, when they received Christ as their Lord, they became the children of God and slaves of Christ. Now Christ was their master. Christ was their hope. Whatever they did, they worked for Christ, doing the will of God. Christ rewarded them generously with many blessings, especially living hope in the kingdom of God.

There is no longer slavery in America. We enjoy freedom and equality. We never think that we are slaves. However, sometimes we feel like slaves. We feel limited, trapped and frustrated. Life seems to be so hard and without hope. Our work is an endless drudgery, and caring for children can seem very burdensome. Of course, people hope to improve their lives through education and making more money. But the economic downturn has left most people burdened with debt and negative about the future. Yet we must know that even if our quality of life improves we cannot really be happy or satisfied because there is no true hope in the world. Our true hope is in Christ, Christ alone. We find our identity in Christ. We are the servants of Christ. Whatever we do has meaning and purpose because we work for Christ, not people. Christ himself is our reward. When we put our

# The Lordship of Christ<sup>1</sup> in the Home and at Work

hope in Christ we can live joyfully and victoriously even though our situation does not change. We can reveal Christ in our homes and at work give a great influence to the world. Joseph in Genesis, whether in his father's house, Potiphar's house, a prison cell, or the palace, put his hope in God. God was with him and used him as a blessing. God saved many people and advanced his redemptive plan. Like Joseph, in Christ, we can be world changers.

**Second, masters treat your slaves with respect (9).** Verse 9 says, “**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.**” In Paul’s time, many masters exploited their slaves. They used them for their own benefit and did not care if they lived or died. They could never imagine the situation of the slave. But Paul told Christian masters, “**treat your slaves in the same way.**” This reminds us of the golden rule: “**Do to others as you would have them do to you**” (Mt 7:12). If masters wanted to be respected by their slaves, they should first respect their slaves. This is how Christ lived. They needed to follow Christ’s footsteps. Paul added the phrase, “**Do not threaten them.**” Many masters resorted to threats of violence and oppression in order to coerce slaves to do their bidding. These days many employers use the threat of salary cuts or dismissal. They kill the spirit of their workers and damage their lives and families. This is not wise. Paul said, “**since you know that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no favoritism with him.**” Earthly masters should realize that there is someone over them. Jesus is the Master of all (Lk 12:5). As we remember this, we can be fair and mindful of the weak and oppressed.

As we studied new relationships in the Christian household, there is one common factor to them all. They are not human-centered, but Christ-centered. In Christ there is equality, justice, and brotherhood, as well as authority in which there is order and harmony. This authority is not for taking advantage of others, but to build up the body of Christ and for the mutual benefit of all. The ultimate purpose is to please God. A healthy Christian household can be built up when we accept Christ’s Lordship in all of our relationships in the home and at the workplace, and live a Christ-centered life. We are servants of Christ. Christ is our true hope. Christ is our reward. Let’s put our hope in Christ.