



Ephesians Week 15 - Ephesians 6:1-9

December 17, 2023 - Pastor Jason Carter

Today covers children's honor toward parents, a father toward children, and relationship between slaves/masters in Roman society.

The book *Dominion*, written by historian Tom Holland, is a great resource about how Christianity shaped our modern world. The irony being that many of the biblical principles that gave worth and value to those on the fringes like women, children, slaves and the poor, are now rejected as backward or repressive in our culture.

Ephesians 6:1-9 NIV ¹"Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.²'Honor your father and mother'—which is the first commandment with a promise—³ so that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth.⁴ Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.⁵ Slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ.⁶ Obey them not only to win their favor when their eye is on you, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from your heart.⁷ Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not people,⁸ because you know that the Lord will reward each one for whatever good they do, whether they are slave or free.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 can only truly appreciate the wisdom of God if we understand what the world was like 2,000 years ago and recognize how these truths and principles still provide wisdom, guidance, and the codes by which we can live by. These words are Holy Spirit-inspired with the understanding that the human heart would embrace them and not just try to impose them.

-What does this mean to "embrace them and not just try to impose them?"

If the Christian faith did much for women, it did even more for children. In Roman civilization at the time of Paul, there existed certain features which made life perilous for the child. Paul is speaking God's desire to answer the incorrect cultural expectations of the time.

V.1 "Children, **obey** your parents in the Lord, for this is right."

Greek: hupakouo (pronounced hoop-ak-oo'-o) to *obey* what is heard (literally, "under hearing"); acting *under the authority* of the one speaking, i.e. *really listening* to the one giving the charge/order; a subordinate.

The language of "subordinate" is NOT used in Paul's language on marriage, but it IS used here for children to their parents. They are not equals in this relationship. The way to honor parents is to obey and respect them and try never to cause them pain. Paul uses the 5th Commandment from Exodus 20:12 as his reference to validate this statement.

Paul shows that he sees children as valuable by addressing children directly in the reading of this scripture. He knows it will be read to the gathering of believers. By acknowledging them, he is actually including them as part of the church and of value to the life of Jesus. He does this to refute the Roman culture of the time. He is both instructing and bestowing value to children in a culture where they are not seen as such.

From Barclay Study Bible: "A Roman baby always ran the risk of being repudiated and exposed. In the time of Paul that risk was even greater. The marriage bond had collapsed and men and women changed their partners with bewildering rapidity. Under such circumstances a child was a misfortune.. Unwanted children were commonly left in the Roman forum. There they became the property of anyone who cared to pick them up. They were collected at nights by people who nourished them in order to sell them as slaves or to stock the brothels of Rome. Ancient civilization was merciless to the sickly or deformed child. Seneca writes, 'We slaughter a fierce ox; we strangle a mad dog; we plunge the knife into sickly cattle lest they taint the herd; children who are born weakly and deformed we drown.' The child who was a weakling or imperfectly formed had little hope of survival."

- What does it look like to show that you value children?

- What does the Bible say about the value of children?

**Joining with Nebraska 117 and Teen Reach Adventure Camp as well as caring for those that are born to us are ways that we value children here at Good News.

V.2-3 "Honor your father and mother"—which is the first commandment with a promise—³ so that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth."

Paul now includes them in the expectation of honoring and fearing the Lord through submission. He addresses them as a willing participant in the kingdom of God.

We must remember people are being saved out of that Roman culture so Paul has to address it. Paul is challenging incorrect mindsets and long held beliefs. It is the same reality for people get saved today and are now confused by new biblical expectations.

- What long held beliefs did you have about interacting with people and how to treat each other that had to shift when you gave your life to Jesus?

Young people:

Paul told you to obey and honor your parents and/or caregiver as well as your elders, bosses, those in authority. Why? Because they have navigated life and have the victories and scars to prove it. We have knowledge, understanding and wisdom. We desire to see you not make the same mistakes we did because some of us still limp from bad things that have happened to us and the mistakes we have made. We have also learned how to do things correctly and how to honor the Lord and others. We can see a player, a schemer from a mile away. There are patterns if you know what to look for and we have learned what to look for. We are not as easily fooled. When we warn, it is not because we do not want you to have fun or that we do not believe you can accomplish what you are setting out to do. We can just see farther because we have been seasoned by experience and wisdom.

Our desire is for our ceiling to be your floor. It is why you need older people in your life, to help you navigate and learn from. We are for you and believe in what God wants to do in and through you

Do you know why young people are the most likely to be part of a revolution? Because they are the most likely to be inspired (passion)...and to be manipulated.

- Can you share an example?

- Those who are maybe 40 or above, when was the last time you were inspired? 😊

V.4 "Fathers,^[b] do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord."

From Barclay Study Bible: Under the Patria Potestas (power of a father), a Roman father had absolute power over his family. He could sell them as slaves, he could make them work in his fields even in chains, he could punish as he liked and could even inflict the death penalty. Further, the power of the Roman father extended over the child's whole life, so long as the father lived. When a child was born, it was placed before its father's feet, and, if the father stooped and lifted the child, that meant that he acknowledged it and wished it to be kept. If he turned and walked away, it meant that he refused to acknowledge it and the child could quite literally be thrown out.

God desires through Paul to bring value to people in a deeply flawed culture. Paul is speaking to Christians to tell them how to live in spite of the culture around them and perhaps what they have come to know and expect their entire life. The Bible's instructions were revolutionary to this era.

- In Ephesians alone there are instructions that are completely "upside-down" to the culture around us. Can you share some examples?

- What are some revolutionary concepts you have grown to understand as you learn the ways of God's Kingdom?

Fathers:

Don't exasperate your children. Sometimes we Dads can be too harsh. We can **expect too much too soon**. We forget what has taken us years to learn and develop- like skills and wisdom that a child can't operate in yet. I think every healthy father wants better for their kids. They don't want their kids

to make the same mistakes. But we **can't parent out of fear or control**. You can't control and teach at the same time. We must teach, instruct and guide. But we also have to **leave room** for them making mistakes. Ultimately, we must emulate and live what we teach.

We can't forget the **duty of encouragement** towards our children. Martin Luther's father was very strict, to the point of cruelty. Luther used to say: "Spare the rod and spoil the child--that is true; but beside the rod keep an apple to give him when he has done well." Encourage your family. Make sure you are doubling the good you say over pointing out what is imperfect. If you have been too harsh, apologize. Humble yourself. Ask for forgiveness.

- What does it look like to parent out of fear? Do/Did you struggle in this area?

- Are you a good encourager to your children or children in your care?

- Do you need to apologize to your children? Does it seem impossible to do? How can we do it and do it well?

Again, from the book, Dominion: How the Christian Revolution Remade the World:

We forget how upside down the kingdom of God is. We often question why God commands us to obey in certain ways, to sacrifice, give, turn the other cheek, love the unlovable and to make it part of the way we live.

In Rome, troublesome slaves were nailed to crosses. This was the only way to control foreigners under the rule of the Roman machine. It served as a deterrent. The Romans would not even look at those on the cross because it was considered so vile, beneath them to look at such a thing. **But that Jesus would die in the same manner- shameful, vile and repugnant- is revolutionary to think.** That Jesus would become the impetus for our spiritual transformation but also the transformation of our natural world. Most of the Western world has been influenced by the Bible and its values, by this Jesus. The cross, a device of torture and shame, has become the most globally recognized symbol of a God there has ever been.

When it does not make sense to our flesh to submit in its various forms, Christ serves as our example. Our obedience unleashes God's kingdom and subverts sin and our human nature. I don't think it happens immediately but, in time, many godly decisions later, our obedience grows. So when God asks us to do something, you never know what He will do through it! *He asks us to submit, to love, to honor, to obey etc. It is counter-cultural but His way is so much more profound than we can know.*

V. 5-8 NIV ⁵ **"Slaves**, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ. ⁶ Obey them not only to win their favor when their eye is on you, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from your heart. ⁷ Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not people, ⁸ because you know that the Lord will reward each one for whatever good they do, whether they are slave or free."

Slaves: Greek is "Doulos" describing one who is bound to another in servitude. By Roman times, slavery was so extensive that in the early Christian period, one out of every two people was a slave!

NT Wright: Treatment of slaves, and its legal regulation, varied enormously in the ancient world, from country to country and owner to owner. Many slaves were valued, respected and trusted family members—and many were used and abused in every way imaginable by careless and inhumane masters and mistresses. But they were simply part of the way the world worked. In this area at least, Paul wasn't starting from scratch and attempting to design a new way for the world to run. Everyone would be liberated, from every form of slavery, in the **age to come**; but in a world where many Christians were slaves working for non-Christian masters, it was worse than useless to suggest instant emancipation. Paul wisely chooses a different route.

Within the Greek and Roman cultures, a slave by law was not a person but a thing. Aristotle states that there can never be friendship between master and slave, for they have nothing in common; “for a slave is a living tool, just as a tool is an inanimate slave.” So, **as we read this text**, the Bible is providing a behavioral code if a Christian found themselves serving as a slave or was the master to a slave.

There was a difference between the Roman slavery and New World slavery that happened here in the US and around the world centuries later. Racial factors had no role in Roman slavery.

Whereas slavery in America in the 17th through the 19th centuries principally involved acquisition of black African slaves forcibly taken from their homeland, Roman slaves were of virtually every race of people in the Mediterranean region and involved people from every country. **This is why Paul did not speak out directly against slavery. Some facts and further reading can be found [HERE](#) and below:**

1. **You could expect to be emancipated at some point in the years to come.** A great number of slaves could even expect to be released by the time they were 30 years old, period. In fact, so many were being released from their servitude in the early 1st century AD that Caesar Augustus declared 30 years old to be the minimum age for emancipation and then limited how many were freed each year. Owners paid the slaves an occasional sum of money, To reward them for their hard work. This fund was commonly used by the slaves to purchase their freedom.
2. **Many slaves worked in a variety of specialized and responsible positions.**
3. **Many slaves received education and training in specialist skills.**
4. **Freed slaves often became Roman citizens and developed a client relationship to their former masters.**

All of this was a different type of system than our modern day slavery. I do think you will find Romans could be cruel but government actually played a role in mitigating to a degree. From what I read it was dependent on the government official, circumstance, and the master to how a slave was treated.

Remember also, Israel was expected to treat the foreigner differently because they were once slaves. So there was a code of conduct in the treatment of the foreigner who desired to live among them. Paul is reinforcing the expected behaviors to Gentile believers living within this Roman system.

In our context, the word “master to slave” or “master to bondservant” would be more closely related to employer and employee. So when we read Paul’s instruction, there is a code of conduct for one who is an overseer and the one working for the owner. Just to be clear, there is no reason to remain under a boss or company who treats you poorly. If you have the ability to get another job, do so. But Paul is giving the ground rules of how we behave whether we find ourselves leading OR serving. **Paul also does not say break the law, undercut your values or be dishonest because your boss says to.**

- When you go to your job, do you work there like you are working for the Lord?
- How are we honoring those who employ us? Is Jesus honored by our behavior? Our words?
- Do we show up cleaned up, dressed in an honoring way, and representing God well by our appearance? Do we show up on time?
- Do you give your best? Does your witness as a Christian speak in character and work ethic?

If there is something that needs to be challenged, do so. Just let your character and work ethic add substance to your objections.

Treat “your master” (boss) with honor and respect, like you are serving Jesus. In the same way that Jesus is your Master and has treated you, do the same.

So for bosses, directors, managers and business owners, take care of the people who are under your supervision. Treat them like people and not an ends to a mean.

Do not threaten them. Hold them accountable but do not use your position to control, manipulate or coerce.

Ephesians 6:9 NIV “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.”

Ultimately all of us have one Master to which we live. In all areas and all arenas, we are called to live for Jesus- for His honor. This is a challenge in our culture and in our day to day life. Daily we must seek the Lord for His power, His strength and His leading.

We all leave today with responsibility...

- Are we willing to submit in the areas we have discussed?
- Are we willing to trust the Lord with a husband who does not love? A wife who does not respect? A parent who is not living the Christian life? A boss who is a jerk? Or a worker who does not care? --
- Can you pray for them and obey God to the best of your ability to see His kingdom move through your obedience?
- What upside-down action is He asking you to take?
- Are we actually doing it/living like we live in/for a different Kingdom?
- What expectations does God have for the way you live that you need help living up to? Or maybe that you are refusing to live up to?
- Are you willing to give your life for Him in any way He asks?