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## **Surrendered to the Spirit: Family and Work**

*Salvation is a Life: A Study in Ephesians*

**Ephesians 6:1-9**

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I think we could all agree that the easiest place to come off as super Christian is here. It's really not too hard show up for a couple hours and you can be super Christian. But it's in the most ordinary, everyday relationships of life where we're exposed and we learn who we really are in our marriage, our family, where we work. So, this is what we want to talk about today.

If you have a Bible, turn with us to Ephesians Chapter 6. If you're new with us, we've been working our way through the book of Ephesians. Next week, we'll finish it off and then on to Christmas stuff. So, Paul has been teaching us all these absolutely magnificent truths about who we are in Christ. But as he gets more towards the end of the book, he's talking about what do these truths look like, lived out in the most ordinary, everyday relationships of life. Last week, Ryan talked to us about marriage, husbands and wives. This week, children and parents and slaves and masters. So, there's a couple of things just to notice to start with. In each of these pairs, there's one group in the pair that was significantly devalued in a first century Roman culture. And in each case, that's who's listed first: wives and husbands, children and parents, slaves and masters. Already, you get the sense something revolutionary is happening here. But second—and probably more importantly—is understanding these people did not all have a copy of Ephesians that they were reading. They had one copy and it would have been read to the church. So, they would gather and it would be read to them. So, it's significant that Paul is addressing each of these groups of people specifically. He's assuming these people are part of the family, and he's talking directly to them to teach them. Now for us, that doesn't seem that unusual, but to understand in a first century Roman culture, to teach women in a public environment was unheard of. To teach children in a public environment was unheard of. To teach slaves in a public environment was unheard of. So, the fact that God is honoring them with value and dignity by talking directly to them, again hinted at the idea there is a revolution coming. Things are radically changing for the people that are in Christ. So, Chapter 6, verse 1:

**Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. HONOR YOUR FATHER AND MOTHER (which is the first commandment, with a promise), SO THAT IT MAY BE WELL WITH YOU AND THAT YOU MAY LIVE LONG ON THE EARTH. (\*NASB, Ephesians 6:1-3)**

So, the Greek word translated **children** is kind of vague, and probably each culture is going to translate it a little bit differently. I think for us, what makes the most sense is any child or teenager—adolescents—that's still living at home under the authority of their parents. They are captured in the idea of **children**. **Children, obey**. That word **obey** is a compound Greek word taken from two words and it literally means, *listen and act*. Listen and act. So, to **obey**, talking directly to the children—teenagers and children—listen and act, obey your parents. Why? Because

they're always right. (*laughter*) Or perhaps I misread the text. I wish that was true. As a parent, I wish it was true. I wish I always got it right, but that's just not realistic. That's not what the text says.

### **Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. (Vs. 1)**

Because it's the right thing to do. This is often referred to as the naturalistic argument, and what's meant by that is every culture anywhere in the world has an understanding that parents should take care of their children and children should obey their parents. It's just the way God has designed and created it to work. But I think there's more to it than that, and it's captured in the phrase **in the Lord**. It's important to understand in each of these categories of people, they are picturing something that we need to teach us something about God. So in this case, Paul is so valuing the children that what he's saying is, "Children teach us as adults what it looks like to trust and obey God, because God is our Father and we are His children." So where do we get a picture that helps us understand that's how we should live? It comes from the children among us constantly reminding us this is the way it should look. So, children, teenagers, need to understand your value to the body is to teach us as adults and constantly remind us to listen and to obey God by how you listen and obey your parents. In a way, you might think of the Ten Commandments, and what Paul identifies in verse 2:

### **Honor your father and mother,**

Value your father and mother, which is the 5<sup>th</sup> commandment. But in essence, what you might say is the way that a child or a teenager ultimately obeys the 1<sup>st</sup> commandment **to love the Lord, your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength**, is by obeying the 5<sup>th</sup> commandment. In other words, especially for a young child, how do they even understand what that means to know and love God? First, they learn to obey and respect and listen to their parents. Which is how they're going to obey the 1<sup>st</sup> commandment, because eventually that gets projected onto God, and that's how we're supposed to listen and obey God. So that's where Paul goes—verse 2—goes to the 5<sup>th</sup> commandment, **the first commandment with a promise**. So, what is the promise? Verse 3, and this is where we need to make sure we're clear on what this says. So, Paul gives kind of an edited version of the 5<sup>th</sup> commandment from Deuteronomy, Chapter 5. The big concern in Deuteronomy is that when the people enter the Promised Land, that the generations to follow will forget God. They'll forget what God did for them. They'll forget how God delivered them from Egypt, and they'll forget God, and they'll end up following after the pagan ways of the nations around them. So that's what Deuteronomy is about. So this particular command with a promise, was that if these children remember to listen and obey their parents when they move into the promised land, it will keep the families intact, and they will pass God on from generation to generation. In other words, as the family goes, so goes the community, so goes the nation. It's important then to understand this was a national promise that for the nation of Israel to remain a nation, to flourish, to pass God on, it required that the family continue to be a point of focus and that the children obey their parents and their parents pass on a right view of God. But this is not an individualistic promise. This then gets us into trouble. It's not saying that every child who obeys their parents will live a long life. That's not what it means.

Over the years that I've been pastor here, I have walked with too many families who have lost children. It is so painful, it is devastating, and some of them in their grief, will come back to this verse and say, "Wait a minute, God promised. Many of those children were wonderful, loving, obedient, Christian children, and the promise is, 'If they act that way, they'll live a long life.' God didn't keep His promise." But it's a misunderstanding of the promise—that's not what God's saying. There's nowhere where the Bible says that. But together as a community, the community in general, will flourish as long as families remain healthy and pass God on. So, Paul has to edit the promise a little bit because we're not Israel. In the Old Covenant, Israel was an ethnic community that actually inherited a piece of ground, a piece of land together. That's not true of us in the New Covenant. We're a spiritual people. We're not an ethnic people, and we don't have a piece of land. So, it's just slightly edited to say, together as the people of God we'll remain strong and flourish if our families remain strong and flourish.

So, verses 1, 2 and 3 are addressed specifically to children and adolescents. So in the spirit of that, I want to talk directly to the teenagers and the children in the room. And to understand how much Paul is valuing you, not simply as the church of tomorrow, but as the church of today. You have a role. You have an assignment. There's something you're supposed to be teaching us as adults, and we need you to do your job. And that is, you're constantly reminding us, "This is what it looks like to trust God, to listen to Him and obey Him." And as you do that, you're picturing how we as adults, as the children of God, need to listen and trust and obey God. As children grow up and they move into adolescence, what they want is freedom. What they want is independence. And that's good and normal, but it's really important to understand that freedom comes by listening and obeying your parents. It doesn't come by rebelling against what they say because ultimately, this is projected onto God. Where we as God's children are going to find the ultimate freedom is not in rebellion, is not in choosing to go our own way. It's in choosing to listen to Him and to trust Him and to walk in His ways. I am never more free than when I walk in the center of God's will. We should learn that as children and then project that onto God as we get older. So let me see if I can illustrate this.

So, years ago, when we still lived in town, we lived right down here at about 40th and Highway 2, and I had a golden retriever named Jacob. Jacob was a very obedient dog. Three or four times a week, I would go for walks on the bike path—walks through the neighborhood—and I always took Jacob, and I never took a leash. Didn't need to. He always stayed right there with me, always obeyed what I said. But as we would walk through the neighborhood, there were always houses that had fences with dogs inside the fence, and they would start barking and growling and carrying on, wishing they had the same freedom as Jacob. There were also houses that had chains around trees and dogs hooked to the chain. And apparently dogs are slow learners because it happened every time. They would bark and growl and they would run until they hit the end of the chain, and then they seem shocked that all of a sudden, they hit the end of the chain, and they're kind of knocked silly. Then I would look at Jacob, and I'm pretty sure he always had this funny smirk on his face (*laughter*) because he knew what the deal was. All those dogs wanted the freedom that he had, but they wanted the freedom on their terms. So, they were chained to a tree. Jacob got all the freedom a dog could want because he was willing to submit to me as the master, and I'm in charge. "You do what I tell you, you get all the freedom you want." For children and teenagers to understand, if you're going to demand freedom on your terms, you're forcing your parents to chain you to a tree. And someday, if you keep doing that, God is going to chain you to a tree. Because

the only way you're really going to find the freedom that you long for is by learning to listen and to submit and to obey what your parents say. That's what children are teaching us as adults. Verse 4:

**Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.**

It is specifically fathers. It's not parents. It's the exact same Greek word used in verse 2 to distinguish fathers from mothers. So why just fathers? I've seen plenty of mothers provoke their children to anger. So why is Paul picking on fathers? The answer is because it represents his role in the home, and he's the one most likely to provoke frustration or anger or despair. To really understand what's being said, you have to understand the first century Roman culture. The dad, the husband, the man of the house, was the authority and he ran the show. Children were considered property to the father. The father could literally do anything he wanted to his children without consequence. It was not unusual that children were beaten. It was not unusual that they were abused. A father could sell his children into slavery. A father could chain up his children, literally. And a father even had the freedom to put his children to death. So, this is how the fathers operated. But all of a sudden, something revolutionary is happening. If you go back and read through Ephesians and look at the wonderful pictures of who God is as our Father. We are His children. He is our Father. The assignment of the father at home is to rightly picture for his children this is who God is. The days of being the boss, the days of being the authority, the days of running the show like that, those days are over. That child that has accepted Jesus as Savior and stands equal with the father in every way before God. So, this is bringing on a revolution when it says, **bring them up**. That's one Greek word that actually was translated in Chapter 5, verse 29 as *nourish*. The job of the father now was to nourish, to cherish, to treasure, to love his children.

It's a sobering thing for me as a dad to realize every single thing I do with my girls is intended to be a picture of this is how God fathers you. Every time I interact with my children, I need to be aware what I'm doing right now is teaching you about God. Therefore, what Paul is saying, is for fathers, "You need to rightly represent who God is to your children." And he identifies two specific things: **bring them up in the discipline and instruction**. The Greek word translated **discipline** is a word that means to *train by action*. It's more what we would think of as discipline. It's correction. **Instruction** is a Greek word that means to *train by words*. It's more teaching, it's instruction. So my assignment as a father, is to teach my children, to instruct them, and when they get off the path to correct them, as a picture of that's how God, as our loving Heavenly Father, treats His children.

Now, I think we often spend lots of time disciplining and very little time teaching. And I'm going to suggest to you that's exactly backwards. I mean, think about it logically. How can you correct your children if you first haven't taught them what they're supposed to do? What are you correcting? So, it often looks like this, we discipline and we discipline and we discipline, we discipline and we discipline, and we occasionally teach. I think that's upside down. I think it's we teach and we teach and we teach and we teach and we teach, and we occasionally discipline or correct. To understand that oftentimes I think we're disciplining our children for things we think they understand. We assume they get it. We think we've been really clear as parents, but oftentimes I don't think that's the case. I don't think we've been nearly as clear as we think we've been, and it's often confusing to children because we're correcting them for something they just don't really

understand. So, I settled into the position with my girls: “I’m going to teach them and teach them and teach them and teach them until I’m absolutely sure they understand exactly what I’m asking of them.” Once I’ve arrived at that conclusion, if they disobey me, that’s an act of rebellion and I need to correct that. But most of my emphasis is on teaching and instructing.

I also think there’s a significant difference between correcting and punishing. I think those are two different things. Now think about this theologically, because what the father is representing to the kids is this is how God corrects you. When I as a Christian, wander off the path, when I sin, God is not punishing me for that sin. Jesus took my punishment on the cross. **There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus.** He’s correcting me, but He’s not punishing me for my sin. As a father, that’s a completely different mindset. Sometimes when kids mess up, I will hear parents say, “Well, now I need to punish you,” to which I would like to ask the question, “What does that mean?” Because you’re supposed to be picturing how God fathers us, and He does not punish us for our sin. Punishment is payment. You did the crime you do the time. Jesus took the payment on the cross. So, I’m not punishing my kids when they wander off the path—and they will—I’m trying to correct them. I’m trying to get them back on the path. It’s a different mindset. To me, it’s a very sobering thing to realize even today with three adult children, every interaction with me as their father is still teaching them something about who God is. This is how your heavenly Father loves you. Verse 5:

**Slaves, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in the sincerity of your heart as to Christ; not by way of eye-service, as men pleasers, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart.**

(Vs. 5-6)

So again, this is significant, that the assumption is these believing slaves are in the congregation, and Paul is talking to them directly. This alone is indication of something dramatic that’s changing. But we do need to talk about this whole slavery thing to understand it. So, Ryan mentioned last week, there’s people that think Paul was a woman hater, that he was a misogynist. Often those same people would say Paul was pro slavery. So, I’m going to be fairly blunt with my answer, but honestly the only way you could make a comment like that, is if you are completely ignorant of the writings of Paul and completely ignorant of a first century Roman culture. It just isn’t true. So, let’s talk about this slavery thing. There’s almost nothing about slavery in the ancient culture that would correlate with the horrors of what we experienced with slavery in our own country 200 years ago. In the ancient world, when one nation conquered another nation, you had to do something with those people who had been conquered. You couldn’t put them all in prison. You couldn’t just release them. They regroup and come back and kill you. So, you had two options. One, is you could slaughter them all, and sometimes that’s what was done. But by far the more compassionate option was you brought them back to enslave them in order that they might become part of the culture of the conquering nation.

Now these slaves were workers, but they were also doctors, they were teachers, they were lawyers, they were business owners. Some slaves owned slaves themselves. Some people actually sold themselves into slavery because they could live better than they were living by not being a slave. And it was very common that eventually these slaves could work their way to freedom and becoming citizens of the country in which they lived. So, it’s estimated roughly 60 million slaves made up the Roman Empire. About 1/3 of the Roman Empire were slaves. This was their

workforce. Rome had conquered so many other nations, and these people were assimilated in to the culture. Is God for slavery? Of course not. This is not the way God intended it to be. It's a concession to life in a fallen world. The Bible is full of concessions to the reality that we live in a sinful, fallen world and there's lots of things that aren't the way they should be. But for these first century people living in the Roman culture, this was just normal. This is the way the world was. They really didn't give it all that much thought.

So now Paul is addressing the slaves and the masters. Some people might say, "Well, why didn't Paul call on the Christians to lead a revolution to change all that?" Well come on, let's talk about that. You're talking about a fledgling, small movement up against the massive Roman Empire. If the Roman Empire was under the perception that the mission of Christianity was to overthrow slavery, they would have been massacred in a heartbeat. So, this is the reality into which they lived. So, Paul says: **slaves be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh**. So, this is a very interesting statement. Essentially, what Paul is saying is, "Yes, this is the way it is on this fallen planet, but this is not the way it's supposed to be, and this is not the way it is in the kingdom of God." So, side by side, slave and master both have become Christian; both stand equal in every way before a holy God. Just think about how absolutely revolutionary this was. That yes, in a fallen world this is what it is, but this is the beginning of significant changes, and the master must understand that this slave is equal to you before God in every way. May not be that way in the flesh, but it is that way in God's kingdom, which already hints that something different is coming.

He says: do this **with fear and trembling**. So, what does that mean? It means exactly what it sounds like it means. There is the reality that the way this works in the Roman culture is if you as a slave choose to believe that your freedom in Christ means freedom from your master, your master has the authority in the Roman Empire to make your life miserable, including putting you and your family to death. As a matter of fact, this act of rebellion could cost the lives of all the Christians. So, when he says **fear and trembling**, he's saying, "This is pretty serious stuff. You better be careful how you live out your newfound faith." Not so dissimilar to Christians all around the world that live in persecuted countries where these Christians have to be very thoughtful, very wise about how they conduct themselves. Because if they are not, likely they will be persecuted. Not only them, their family, and even possibly the rest of the Christians. All it takes is one wrong move to devastate a lot of people. So, Paul's just simply saying, "Hey, this is the way it is right now, be really careful how you conduct yourself."

**In the sincerity of your heart as to Christ**. So, I mentioned each of these categories of people are intended to teach us something about God, who He is, what it looks like to follow Him. So, what he's saying to these slaves is actually instead of rebelling, be the best slave you can possibly be because now you're representing Christ. This is now the light of Christ shining into the darkness. Over and over again in the New Testament, Paul refers to himself, he refers to us as believers, as slaves to Christ. So ultimately, who we're serving is Christ, and we're all slaves to Christ. So, who models this to us? In the first century, it was the slaves. Verse 6:

**not by way of eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart.**

Slaves in the first century Roman Empire were notorious for being lazy, and that actually makes sense. They stood nothing to gain by working hard. They didn't profit from that. So they did as much as they had to when someone was watching. What Paul is saying is, you're no longer working for your master. You're now working for *the* Master. We're slaves to Christ, so we're going to do our absolute best. Not just when someone is watching, but we do our best because Jesus is watching, and ultimately that's who we're serving. This is our witness.

Now it is not difficult to transition this conversation to workers, to employees in the community. This is the workforce. So, think about this. Given what has transpired in our culture over the last 10 years, it's hard to imagine a practical way that we could demonstrate something really different about us, than recapturing what it means to have a work ethic and to be a good employee. There's a lot of people that would say, "You know, I really do love Jesus, and I really do care about the people around me at work, but I'm just not comfortable with this idea of talking about Jesus with my coworkers." So, what Paul has given you is another option. Another way to let your light shine, another way to witness to the transformation you have experienced in Christ, is to be a really good employee. This isn't all that complicated. Just go to work. Just show up to work on time. Work really hard, whether someone is watching or not, and genuinely care about what you're doing. I'm going to guess every employer in the room would say, if that was happening with my employees, it would get my attention, because it would be quite a shock in this culture that has lost its work ethic.

As a matter of fact, Paul goes so far as to say, that this is **the will of God** at the end of verse 6. Two weeks ago, I mentioned there's places in the Bible that we refer to as the revealed will of God. Often, Christians are searching for the will of God. Well, there's certain things where God has said, "Well, this is My will." So, in Chapter 5, verse 18, this is the will of God: **Do not be drunk with wine, but be filled with the Spirit.** Here's another one in Chapter 6, this is God's will: you're no longer serving your employer, no longer serving your boss, now you're serving Jesus and so we need you to act like it. So, we need you from sincerity of heart, to work hard, to do the right thing, to represent Jesus well in the marketplace. Verse 7:

**With good will render service, as to the Lord, and not to men, knowing that whatever good thing each one does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether slave or free.** (Vs. 7-8)

Now that last line, **slave or free**, is helpful because who he's talking to is the workforce. Whether you're a slave or you're free, you still work for somebody. And so that helps us understand the application to ourselves. What he's saying in that verse is that doesn't mean your boss is going to notice. That doesn't mean your boss is going to be kind and compassionate. That doesn't mean your boss is going to reward what you're doing. That's just the reality of living in a fallen world. But now you're not working for the boss, you're working for Christ. And Christ does see, and He does know, and He will reward you, and that's your motivation for representing Christ well. Verse 9:

**And masters, do the same things to them, and give up threatening, knowing that both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no partiality with Him.**

Now I love the way this is written. There are obviously masters in the congregation, and you would expect—because masters have authority—they have power. They’re influencers. There’d be a whole paragraph about all the things related to masters. Instead, it just says, “Hey, masters, same for you. In that there is this message that we’re no longer going to believe that masters are here and slaves are here. Now in Christ, that’s gone, and the master and the slave stand equal in every way before God. So, masters, this is simple: same for you.” It’s the call to live out this magnificent truth of who we are in Christ. Even says no more **threatening**. We’re done with that. This is a revolution. We’re going to do it differently. You’re now brothers and sisters in Christ, and the expectation is you act like it. When he says, “We’re both slaves and masters serving *the* Master, and He’s in charge, and this is what He’s asking of you.” And then he says, **there is no partiality**. This Greek word, translated **partiality** is an interesting word. It literally means to *lift your face*. So what it means is this, when I encounter someone, the first thing I’m going to do is lift my face and see who it is. If it’s a slave, I’m going to treat them this way. If it’s a woman, I’m going to treat them this way. If it’s a child, I’m going to treat them this way. If it’s a master oh, I’m going to treat them this way. What Paul is saying is, “Hey, we’re done with that. That no longer applies. Everyone is equal in Christ. Women, men, men, children, adults, slaves and free—all equal.” And if that’s true, then we should act like it. This has huge implications for employers. Thinking about how you treat the people that work for you, to treat them in a way that rightly represents Christ to them.

Now think about this if all we took out of Ephesians was to understand this magnificent theology and just apply it in the relationships we’ve talked about last week and this week. So, the only place we lived it out, is in our marriages, in our family and out in the workplace, it would be a revolution. It would turn this community upside down. We have enough people here that it would dramatically change this community. I guarantee you, people would sit up and take notice, like, “What is going on with these Bereans?” Here’s the deal. We can do this. The truth is true. Empowered by the Spirit of God, we can do this, that the light of Jesus shines brightly into the darkness. I pray that will be so.

*Our Father, we’re so thankful for what is true. This is a revolution. It’s hard for us to understand how dramatically things were changing in the Roman Empire because of Jesus. Lord, may we live out the truth in the most practical relationships of our lives as our testimony to the presence of Jesus in us. In His name, we pray. Amen.*

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