

specific actions would be appropriate and what would be inappropriate?

Lesson Twelve (6:1-9)

Children and Parents (6:1-4)

1 Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. 2 "Honor your father and mother" (this is the first commandment with a promise), 3 "that it may be well with you and that you may live long on the earth." 4 Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

Being a Father himself, God is interested in children. He knows they can bring wonderful gladness to their parents (Prov. 10:1) or bitterness and grief (Prov. 17:25). For this reason, the owner's manual for the marvelous invention called mankind has instructions about raising children.

Children ultimately must make their own choices about how they will live. Not even God himself will force anyone to be what he does not choose to be. The job for parents, then, is not to make all the choices for their children, but to be teaching them to make the right choices for themselves.

V. 1 Children, obey your parents in the Lord—

This is one of the few places in the Bible addressed specifically to children. Whatever else the church teaches children about morality and decency, it must not neglect this primary commandment. Church and youth group activities should be designed to strengthen, not weaken, a child's loyalty to his parents.

The word "obey" means literally "to hear under." It means to get under the authority of someone and pay attention to their commands. Children should learn to obey their parents for at least two reasons. First, they should obey because their parents know more about life and can protect them from danger and hurt. A wise, loving parent helps a child get off to a good start in life. Second, they should learn to obey the Father in heaven. Refusal to obey authority in one area of life usually spills over into other areas.

The phrase "in the Lord" has been given some strange applications. Some have understood it to mean that children should obey their parents only if their parents are "in the Lord"—that is, Christians. Others have taken it to mean that children should obey only if the instructions are "in the Lord"—that is, what the Lord

would have recommended. (If the Lord wouldn't have wanted you to mow the yard, don't do it!) There is a grain of truth in this, but the child must be extremely cautious about disobeying his parents because of what he thinks the Lord would have wanted. I prefer to take "in the Lord" simply as the sphere in which children offer their obedience. Obedience is something the Lord wants from them, so when they obey, it is "in the Lord."

Is it ever right for a child to disobey his parents? Perhaps, but rarely. If a child is told to kill or steal or violate any explicit command of God, he should refuse to do it and suffer the consequences. If a young person comes to a point where he must choose between Jesus or his parents, he may have to reject parents and move out. If he is too young to move out on his own, he is too young to make the choice. (Consider Matt. 10:37-38 and Luke 14:25-30.)

for this is right—Children obey their parents because that is simply the way it ought to be. Parents are not perfect, but then, neither are kids! Even though the boy Jesus was wiser than his parents, he returned with them from Jerusalem to Nazareth and "was obedient to them." (See Luke 2:41-51.) He obeyed simply because it was right.

It was wrong for the Pharisees to neglect their elderly parents, saying all their wealth was "corban" (Mark 7:11). It is wrong for children to be disobedient to parents, for this is a sign of a depraved man without God (Rom. 1:30) and a sign of the "last times" (2 Tim. 3:2). Jesus came to make things right. (See Malachi 4:6.)

V. 2 "Honor your father and mother"—To "honor" means to "revere, esteem, or set a high value on." Sometimes it is even translated elsewhere as "worship." An adjective made from the same Greek word means "precious, costly, valuable."

When God first gave this commandment in Exodus 20:12, he showed that he wanted children to have the kind of respect and honor for their parents that results in obedience. Severe penalties were established for the rebellious son who refused this command. (See Exodus 21:15, 17; Deut. 21:18-21.)

(this is the first commandment with a promise)—The Ten Commandments are listed in Exodus 20:3-17 and Deuteronomy 5:7-21. When you read these passages you will find that not only is this the first commandment with a promise—it is the only commandment with a promise!

It is also interesting to notice that there are six commandments dealing with a person's relationship with other people, and the commandment to honor parents comes first among these six.

V. 3 “that it may be well with you—This part of the promise is found only in the commandment as found in Deuteronomy 5:16. God promised general prosperity and well-being to those who honored their parents. Since Paul quoted this promise with approval, it must also apply today. (See next comment.)

and that you may live long on the earth—Long life is promised in the commandment in both Exodus and Deuteronomy. (According to the warning in Deut. 21:18-21, the extremely disobedient would look forward to a very short life!)

In the old covenant, God’s blessings were directed more to a physical Promised Land with good crops, many sons, and long life. God’s blessings to Christians are oriented more in the spiritual plane. Whether we are prosperous and long-lived or not, we have an eternal treasure laid up in heaven. The promise was to be fulfilled “in the land which the Lord your God gives you.” For the Christians, this has primary application to heaven.

V. 4 Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger—In this kind of context the word “fathers” sometimes should be translated “parents.” (See the Living Bible and *The New Testament: A Translation in the Language of the People* by Charles B. Williams.) Mothers can learn from this verse, too!

God wants parents to exercise good judgment in the way they rear their children. It is possible to be so heavy-handed and unreasonable with children that they are driven to rebellion. They despair of ever pleasing their parents, so they stop trying (Col. 3:21).

Modern parents, however, often go to the opposite extreme. They discipline timidly and reluctantly, fearful of incurring the wrath of their spoiled children. They are constantly seeking the approval of their children and avoid any discipline that might displease them. The remainder of this verse shows the perfect balance God has intended.

but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord—Parents should “bring up” their children with loving care. This word translated “bring up” is the same word Paul used for “nourish” in 5:29. The two main ideas of the word are to protect from harmful influences and to provide the necessary nourishment.

The word “discipline” is derived in Greek from a simple word (*paio*) meaning “I strike.” Parents who love their children will discipline them (Heb. 12:6), and spanking is an integral part of discipline. (See Proverbs 13:24; 19:18; 20:30; 23:13-14; 29:15, 17.)

It is important that both you and your children know the difference between spanking and child abuse.

The following guidelines will help you establish proper discipline:

1. Do not discipline in anger. If necessary, send them to their room to think about their wrong action while you get a hold on yourself.
2. Do not discipline for revenge. Spanking is not a way of getting even with children for having made you look like a poor parent.
3. Do not discipline to the extent of physical injury. The child’s posterior is nicely padded and is a safe place for spanking. Use a stick or other object small enough so that it will break if you accidentally apply too much force. (Contrary to child psychologists and dog trainers, I prefer to use my hand. It is always available, and I know if I am spanking too hard.)
4. Do not strike the face. A spanking should be entirely different from getting beat up by the school bully.
5. Aim for correction more than punishment. Be sure the child knows what was wrong and why he is being punished.
6. Follow every disciplinary action with love.

Here is one last practical hint: Have some way to let your children know when you are suggesting and when you are requiring. If a child must comply with every casual suggestion of the parent, under threat of punishment, it will be a heavy burden. At our house, the kids learned when they were faced with a punishable offense by the count: “One...two...three!” We never counted unless we were prepared to spank them—right then and there—for disobedience. We never prolonged the count. Both we and the kids knew there had to be a spanking if they had not yielded by “Three!”

The word “instruction” used by Paul carries the idea of admonishing, warning, and teaching. (See 1 Cor. 10:11 and Titus 3:10 for uses of this same word.) The words of warning given to children should be instructive. They must never be mere threats of punishment that are never carried out. A parent must never warn of a punishment unless he is fully prepared to follow through.

Slaves and Masters (6:5-9)

5 Slaves, be obedient to those who are your earthly masters, with fear and trembling, in singleness of heart, as to Christ; 6 not in the way of eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but as servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, 7 rendering service with a good will as to the Lord and not to men, 8 knowing that whatever good

any one does, he will receive the same again from the Lord, whether he is a slave or free. 9 Masters, do the same to them, and forbear threatening, knowing that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and that there is no partiality with him.

V. 5 Slaves, be obedient to those who are your earthly masters—The practice of slavery was widespread in the first century. As much as one third of the population of Rome and other great cities was made up of slaves. Slaves were considered inferior by birth, naturally fitted for slavery. Slaves were mere chattel property, in no way equal to a free citizen.

Since Jesus came to “set at liberty those who are oppressed” (Luke 4:18), one might have expected Christianity to urge slaves to revolt and run away. Surprisingly, God had another plan to end slavery. If the slaves would become the kind of men they ought to be (verses 5-8), and the masters would become the kind of men they ought to be (verse 9), the problem would solve itself.

“Be obedient” is the same instruction Paul gave to children in verse one. Slaves could practice their Christianity through obedience. They could honor Christ by being the best slave any master ever had. If this principle was valid for slaves who served their masters involuntarily, how much more is it valid for modern employees who obtained their jobs freely and by choice?

with fear and trembling, in singleness of heart, as to Christ—A man should work for his employer with devotion, as if his employer were the Lord (Col. 3:23). His “fear and trembling” are not so much for his earthly master, as for the disappointment and displeasure of his Master in heaven. “Singleness of heart” means total commitment and a whole-hearted desire to fulfill one’s purpose.

V. 6 not in the way of eyeservice, as men-pleasers—Paul apparently coined the Greek word for “eyeservice,” since it is found nowhere except here and Col. 3:22. The picture of the slave who works only when being watched is so clear that it needs little explanation. Once while working on a construction crew, I was told to slow down to make the work last longer. “Just look busy when the foreman comes around.”

but as servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart—Whether the foreman is watching or not, the Master is. Just as in the previous verse, the Christian worker should give full-hearted devotion to his job, for this is the will of God.

V. 7 rendering service with a good will—It would have been hard for the Christian slave to obey a

pagan master and see him support a temple of idolatry with the profits. It would also have been hard to serve a Christian master, wondering why he did not quickly set you free. Either way, the Christian slave was working for someone else’s benefit. How could he feel good about that?

The very essence of Christianity is serving, not being served (Matt. 20:26-28). Even God’s own Son came in the form of a slave (Phil. 2:7) and learned obedience through what he suffered (Heb. 5:8). His example as a suffering servant made the abuse endured by Christian slaves both tolerable and purposeful (1 Pet. 2:18-25).

as to the Lord and not to men—It did not matter if a slave’s master was unworthy of his service. The slave had a Master in heaven who was worthy, and he could dedicate his service to him. Verses 5, 6, and 7 all say this same thing.

V. 8 knowing that whatever good any one does, hi will receive the same again from the Lord—Whether slave or free, a man ought to look beyond his paycheck in considering whether he is adequately paid. The Lord is keeping books, too.

When all this children get to heaven, God is going to make a lot of things right. The faithful slave who served well in spite of abuse will be rewarded. When a man stands before God, it is better to be deserving more than he deserved. If you are overworked and underpaid, praise the Lord! Think about it.

whether he is slave or free—Now a new note slips into the song. God is going to settle up with people some day, regardless of whether they were slaves or free men—even master! This thought, fully developed in the next verse, sounds the death knell of slavery. How can masters go on treating other human beings like chattel, when he and they will someday stand before God to answer for the way they lived?

V. 9 Masters, do the same to them—“Masters, your slaves are doing their best for you—now you do your best for them!” God is not one-sided in his social concerns. He is neither pro-labor or pro-management. He wants each side to take care of its own responsibilities. The same God who wants soldiers to “be content with your wages” (Luke 3:14) is also outraged when the wages of the laborers are kept back by fraud (James 5:4). If anything, God’s wrath seems to be hottest against those who become wealthy by withholding from their workers. (See James 5:1-6.) The Christian employer is obligated before God to do his best to provide for whomever he hires.

and forbear threatening—Masters must “leave off” the threatening and harassment of their servants.

They are not dealing with mules or dogs; they are dealing with fellow human beings.

knowing that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven—Masters (Gk. *kurioi*) must remember the Lord (*kurios*) in heaven. Although the Roman law gave them the right to beat a slave so severely he would die, there was another Court with jurisdiction in the case. Before that Court the earthly masters will stand with their slaves as equals and fellow servants of the Master in heaven.

and that there is no partiality with him—The Greek word for “partiality” is literally “face-taking.” A judge in court of that time would look up to see who the defendant was. If he was a slave, he was given altogether different treatment than a free man, or especially, a master. With the divine Judge, however, a man’s social or economic standing does not matter. His race or nationality do not count. Masters who have been cruel and abusive will no longer have protection from the law. This sobering thought made Christian masters take a whole new outlook toward their slaves.

Study Questions

1. Why should children learn to obey their parents?
2. Is it ever right for a child to disobey? What do you think?
3. Are prosperity and long life guaranteed to every obedient child?
4. Should parents always try to avoid making their children angry? What does verse four mean?
5. It is often asserted that spanking a child will stifle his creativity and self-expression. Will it?
6. What is the difference between physical discipline and child abuse?
7. How does the teaching for slaves apply to any of us today?
8. How will the Lord “make it right” to a slave who was abused and mistreated?
9. What was the masters’ responsibility, and how does that apply to any of us today?
10. Prior to 1860 many Christian people, including Alexander Campbell, owned slaves in America. Is slavery compatible with Christianity? Did these people have a “blind spot” in their perception of Christ’s will?
11. Why didn’t Paul just condemn slavery as contrary to God’s will, and call for an end to it?

Lesson Thirteen (6:10-24)

The Whole Armor of God (6:10-20)

10 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. 11 Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. 12 For we are not contending against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers against the world rulers of this present darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. 13 Therefore take the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. 14 Stand therefore, having girded your loins with truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, 15 and having shod your feet with the equipment of the gospel of peace; 16 above all taking the shield of faith, with which you can quench all the flaming darts of the evil one. 17 And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints, 19 and also for me, that utterance may be given me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, 20 for which I am ambassador in chains; that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak.

Soldiers of Christ, arise! The eternal Lord is leading forth to victory against the infernal foe! Despite Satan’s schemes and strategies, we can be strong in the