

“Ephesians”

Fall Series 1

Lesson 9

“Ephesians 6:1-9”

Objective: To understand the message that Paul meant to convey to his audience and then to come to understand what that message means for us today as those living in the 21st century. We will seek to ascertain what this message means and to determine how we are intended to live our lives as those who are disciples of Christ in our modern context in light of the message it contains.

Materials: We will begin by examining carefully the Greek text of Ephesians, examine other early translations such as the Syriac Peshitta, and any other sources along with the historical setting of the first century Roman world that can help us to understand the original meaning. We will then examine early interpretations and understandings and examine commentaries and modern interpretations to enlighten our understanding for our contextual situation.

Procedures

1. We will begin by translating the text from Greek into English
2. We will examine the contextual setting and seek to understand as much as we possibly can about the historical, cultural and social settings in order to understand the message.
3. From here we will seek to find out how to best apply the calling that Paul has for the early disciples to our modern contextual framework in order to do our very best to live as disciples of Christ in our modern era.
4. We will seek to understand the attitudes that we are called to have as disciples and to reflect not only the actions that are the calling of a disciple, but also to learn how to form our attitudes to reflect our calling as followers of Jesus Christ.

Translation

Ephesians 6:1 **The children, listen to your parents [in the Lord] for this is right. ² *Honor your father and your mother,* which is the first commandment with a promise: ³ *in order that it may be well for you and you may live long upon the earth.* ⁴ **And, the fathers, do not make your children angry, but raise them in the instruction and in the admonition of the Lord.** ⁵ **The slaves, listen to your earthly masters with fear and trembling in sincerity of heart, just as to Christ, ⁶ not only when you are being watched, people-pleasing, but as slaves of Christ doing the will of God from the soul, ⁷ with good will, rendering service as to the Lord and not to men, ⁸ knowing that if each person will do good, this he will receive from the Lord, whether slave or free. ⁹ And the masters, do the same to them (the slaves), stop threatening them, knowing that also for them and for you the Lord is in the heavens and there is no favoritism with Him.****

Lesson

In this section of his letter, Paul will continue the admonitions that he began in chapter 5 with regard to family relations. Once again, it is good for us to be reminded that this section of Paul's letter builds on what he has put to his audience in the first 3 chapters regarding what God has done for believers and where they now stand in the schema of God. One of the really important things for us to recognize is that Paul does not in any way view salvation as some form of transactional relationship where pay has been given and now labor is expected. Instead, he will use the very familiar contextual framework of the "gift" or the "favor" of God. The contextual understanding of this concept is not as is so often it is portrayed in modern literature. The idea of "pure" gift, at least in the way that we understand it is a modern construct. In its simplest form this would have been seen as unjust and un-relational by the standards of many in the ancient world.¹

A central tenet in concepts of the "gift," or "grace" is that some form of reciprocity is anticipated once the gift is given. Such

¹ John M. G. Barclay, *Paul & the Gift* (Grand Rapids MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2015).

reciprocity is not transactional in nature in the way that we understand being paid. Very often a gift is given that is undeserved by the recipient. However, once that gift is given there is the anticipation that the gift will elicit some form of response. Often the anticipated response is one of gratitude. Gifts are intended to enhance and create relationship. If there is no response to a gift, then the question becomes: What is the purpose of the gift? Another issue is that fully unmerited gifts impact on issues of justice and double-predestination in very complex and detailed ways. As I said, it is often the case that the chief expectation of the giver of a “gift” was that there would be a response of “thankfulness” or gratitude.² In light of such an understanding Paul might be expected that those who have received the “grace” (χάρις - *charis*) will respond to this gift with thankfulness, and praise that reflect the nature of the giver, God.

A part of that response, we examined in our last lesson, in chapter 5, in Paul’s instructions to husbands and wives. In this section, the relations between children and their parents will be addressed. Paul continues to focus here on very close

² John M. G. Barclay, *Paul & the Gift*.

relationships as indicative of the changes that should occur in response to the “gift” of God. I believe that Paul here is explaining how expressing gratitude to God should manifest itself. ^{6:1} **The children, listen to your parents [in the Lord] for this is right.**

In Roman society, in the bringing up of children and in their education, the influence of the father was considered to be paramount. Although it was anticipated that the mother would be the main influence in the life of a son for the first seven years, the father would then take over and was the son’s main teacher and companion until age sixteen. At age sixteen, the son would then be placed in the charge of some distinguished, or trusted friend, for a year or two. Later on, it became the practice to place children in school from the age of seven and there they were to be accompanied by a pedagogue (a disciplinarian and moral instructor).³

Within Judaism, there was a strong emphasis placed upon the religious upbringing of children and this was seen as ultimately the responsibility of the father. Again, it was the case that children were taken to school by their fathers from the age of

³ Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, in the Word Biblical Commentary series, Vol. 42 (Dallas TX, Word Books, Publisher, 1990), p. 400.

seven, but ideally the real central point of their education remained the home and not at school. At the heart of children's instruction was the Torah, which itself enjoined the teaching of the commandments to children.⁴ The duty of parents was not only to teach their children, but particularly to teach them discipline. They were to instruct the children in the way they should go, and then when the child was older they would not depart from it.⁵ In the ancient Jewish world, it was the case that severe discipline and beatings were seen as an integral part of a child's upbringing that had the ultimate moral well-being of the child at heart.⁶ It is perhaps the case that Paul, knowing of this cautions fathers against angering their children.

Paul's instructions regarding children are not unusual in many respects, but perhaps they may be seen as unusual in relation to discussions of household management.⁷ It is notable that Paul writes also in order to instruct children in relation to

⁴ cf. Deuteronomy 4:9; 6:7; 11:19; 32:46.

⁵ Proverbs 22:6 - **Train children in the way they should go; when they grow old, they won't depart from it.** CEB.

⁶ Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, p. 400. cf. Proverbs 23:13-14 - **Don't withhold instruction from children; if you strike them with a rod, they won't die. 14 Strike them with a rod, and you will save their lives from the grave.** CEB.

⁷ Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, p. 402.

their parents. He seems to focus on the communal aspect of the family. As I mentioned before I think that it is the case that there is the recognition that the family is a central aspect of community: a building block so to speak. It is the case that all members of this community are called upon to contribute to the well-being and unity of that community, starting with the family. Again, it is worth reminding the audience that these lessons, the instructions of Paul, are based in the concept that the followers of Christ are called to live in a manner “worthy” of their calling.⁸ One of the great expressions of living in a manner that is “worthy” is to be found in the midst of the close relationship of family that Paul describes here.

Paul also connects his words of admonition to the commandments of God handed down through Moses. He wrote: ²
Honor your father and your mother, which is the first commandment with a promise: The quotation here is based

⁸ Ephesians 4:1-3 - **Therefore, as a prisoner for the Lord, I encourage you to live as people worthy of the call you received from God. 2 Conduct yourselves with all humility, gentleness, and patience. Accept each other with love, 3 and make an effort to preserve the unity of the Spirit with the peace that ties you together.** CEB.

on Exodus 20:12⁹ and Deuteronomy 5:16.¹⁰ This is indeed the first commandment where the promise is part of the commandment itself.¹¹ Thus far the motivation for the children's obedience has been twofold toward their parents: 1. It is a part of their commitment to the Lord. 2. It is generally the right and proper thing to do. Now Paul will provide a third and fourth motivation and they are: ³ ***in order that it may be well for you and you may live long upon the earth.*** In truth there is also a fifth injunction indicated here in that the quotation comes from Scripture and thus makes this an injunction of Scripture.¹² That too should be seen as a motivation for doing this.

There is a long explanation regarding how Paul could call this, the fifth of the commandments, the first commandment with a promise since the second commandment also seems to contain a

⁹ Exodus 20:12 - **Honor your father and your mother so that your life will be long on the fertile land that the LORD your God is giving you.** CEB.

¹⁰ Deuteronomy 5:16 - **Honor your father and your mother, exactly as the LORD your God requires, so that your life will be long and so that things will go well for you on the fertile land that the LORD your God is giving you.** CEB.

¹¹ Thomas B. Slater, *Ephesians*, in the Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary series (Macon GA: Smyth & Helwys Publishing Incorporated, 2012), p. 160. There is much discussion regarding this, but the truth of what Paul says here regarding this being the first commandment with a promise is logical, as well as true.

¹² Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, p. 404.

promise to those who keep it.¹³ In truth, there are a number of, sometimes complex and intricate theories put forward, but the simple answer appears to be that the promises of the second commandment are not set out, strictly speaking, as a promise to the one who keeps the second commandment, but for the one who keeps the commandments in a more general way. In other words, the promise is not specific simply to, nor directly connected to, the second commandment.¹⁴

Paul then turns from his instructions to children to giving instructions to “fathers.” **4 And, the fathers, do not make your children angry, but raise them in the instruction and in the admonition of the Lord.** In light of what we know, especially about the role of fathers for their children, in this time, this is a crucial role. This role was crucial then and it is still crucial today. In a journal article published by the National Council on Family Relations, Broderick highlights the crucial importance of fathers

¹³ Exodus 20:4-6 - **Do not make an idol for yourself—no form whatsoever—of anything in the sky above or on the earth below or in the waters under the earth. 5 Do not bow down to them or worship them, because I, the LORD your God, am a passionate God. I punish children for their parents’ sins even to the third and fourth generations of those who hate me. 6 But I am loyal and gracious to the thousandth generation of those who love me and keep my commandments.** CEB.

¹⁴ Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, p. 404.

for their children.¹⁵ It sometimes makes me wonder why we, as human beings, have to learn really ancient lessons anew from a scientific perspective. Sometimes I think it the case that we choose the hard path when it is not necessary. Paul understands the crucial role that fathers play in the development of their children's lives and clearly conveys that in his words here. I appreciate those like Broderick who are examining roles such as that of the father and attempting to raise awareness of the importance of this role.


It is interesting that one of the styles "of fathers" is to be what Broderick designates as The Autocrat. In this style, fathers attempt to control their children through unilateral power assertions. What happens is that their children end up avoiding these fathers as much as possible. These children, in the study, were always among the troublemakers at school and did not adjust well in social situations.¹⁶ There is much research being done today with regard to understanding why people do not turn out to be good citizens, good people or law-abiding in their nature. Unfortunately, there is much bias in a great deal of this research

¹⁵ Carlfred B. Broderick, "Fathers," *The Family Coordinator* (1977) 26:3, pp. 269-275.

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from all sides, which in my mind invalidates many of the conclusions reached. Paul is here trying to challenge those in his audience to be better fathers to their children and in doing this, he gives some specific things that he believes will help. He challenges fathers to be conscious of, and to avoid exasperating, and angering their children. In other words, do not be an autocrat, ruling your children with an iron fist. This is not the way of the Lord's people. This is not the way Paul challenges his audience to demonstrate gratitude, or to live in a "worthy" manner as followers of Christ.

This, however, is only a part of the advice that Paul gives. He also challenges fathers to raise their children in the instruction and the admonition of the Lord. What does this mean? Does it mean taking your children to attend the Christian worship assembly, taking them to Sunday School? I believe that it certainly means this, but far more than this. It means actually being a teacher of children and not just taking them to another teacher. Children learn so much from watching their parents. Parents are the single most important influence in the lives of their children. Parents are more important than the teachers at school, the teachers at church, or any other factor. Fathers, and mothers, are



critical components in the partnership of parents, with others in the raising up children in the ways of the Lord. As such, Paul appears to be aware of some potential issues with this not being done, especially by fathers, and he seeks to address these concerns and offer some advice.

Those that are worthy of the calling of Christ, will seek to do better, they will seek to make more of a difference in the lives of their children. In this, they will seek to be better fathers to their children and be more of a positive influence. This means that they will train them, instruct them, in the way of the Lord. They will do it personally, not simply farm it out to others, or abdicate this sacred task to others, who may or may not do it well. Certainly, this does not mean that they cannot seek the assistance and the help of others, but the ultimate responsibility belongs to fathers and mothers first and foremost. Sometimes people wish to blame their Sunday School teacher, or even their youth minister, if young people do not learn their spiritual lessons. Certainly, it may be the case, that such people may be able to do better, but the primary responsibility still lies with the parents of the child and that weight of responsibility is to rest heavily upon the father to fulfill


his part in this. The instructions of Paul carry the weight of his master, Jesus Christ, and therefore are of critical consequence.

Paul then transitions to something that we either find irrelevant or perhaps offensive to us today. Paul addresses the issue of slaves, and he likely does not do so in a manner that most would find acceptable today. Certainly, his words are not socially or “politically correct,” by modern standards. Slavery was a fact of life during the time that Paul wrote. Rather than taking the stance that moderns would most likely take today, seeking the abolition of slavery, Paul challenges slaves to be good, obedient, and productive slaves. ⁵ **The slaves, listen to your earthly masters with fear and trembling in sincerity of heart, just as to Christ,** What incredibly shocking instructions are given here. Rather than proclaiming rebellion, some form resistance, or even lobbying for change, he proposes something far more radical to our ears. He proposes “obedience” and “respect” for masters.

This advice gets to the heart of what being a Christian means: it means being, acting, and doing things in ways that defy normal human logic that focuses on the self, this world, and upon what humans see as common sense. Such behavior makes no

sense from the standard human perspective. That is the point; Paul is challenging the worldview of those who are followers of Christ. They are to be different, to think differently, to act differently and to seek different things from life. So often today many people proclaim that they live lives that worship and honor God and Jesus Christ. Sometimes, this has meant building great physical church buildings in honor of God, building institutions, or great organizations to serve the call of Christ. All of these things can often be constructed, or created, with far less personal cost and commitment than Paul calls for here. He calls slaves to become really great slaves to their masters, serving them with all of their strength, obediently, and respectfully.

Paul here issues the challenge that slaves are to serve their masters as if they were serving Christ Himself. What an incredible statement: Can you imagine how these words will have jangled the sensibilities of those effected by them? If you were a slave how would these words impact you? How would you understand Paul's message here? These are radical words, disturbing words; they disturb and seek to shatter the status quo with a new way, a different way. A way that challenges us at every level of our being;




challenges us to conceive of a different reality, a different way of thinking and of living. Perhaps it is the case that these ancient words can still challenge us to our core today even as they did so long ago. In no way am I here intending to advocate the return of slavery, or to endorse it, but I challenge us all to consider what Paul is saying about how we as Christians should serve others in all the many aspects of our life? What about the way we serve our employer, our church, our community, our family? What if we served in all of these ways as if we were serving Christ Himself? How would we be changed? How would those around us be effected by people acting in such a manner? What would change in our world?

People who act in such a fashion defy the reasoning of the fleshly mind. Such people will look and act like Christ. As He served His Father, so we also are called to serve Him. We are not called to seek our human rights above our obligations to Him. We are to seek the benefit and the welfare of others above our own. Maybe that does mean seeking human rights, but not selfishly, for ourselves, but for others. We are to reflect in our being, in our actions, in our spirits, the reality of being followers of Christ.


When are we to do this? Always, and in all circumstances. This is the challenge that we can hear in these words from Paul. They do here apply just to slaves, but how much more do they apply to those who are free? We are to do this all of the time and in every circumstance: **⁶ not only when you are being watched, people-pleasing, but as slaves of Christ doing the will of God from the soul, ⁷ with good will rendering service as to the Lord and not to men, ⁸ knowing that if each person will do good, this he will receive from the Lord, whether slave or free.**

Paul calls upon the disciples of Jesus to be different, not to do things in order to please other people, or ourselves, but to do them in service of Christ, doing the will of God. This service is rendered not simply to men, but as if it is service to God Himself, from the soul. Such service is not expected to be something that is done grudgingly, or in some self-centered way, but in a manner that reflects the new reality of the existence His followers, of His disciples. Paul does make, what is perhaps, a concession to our sense of self-interest. He recognizes that the journey of a disciple needs to be encouraged and that though we have begun that journey, the selfishness in each disciple is not simply destroyed all



at once, but it is destroyed little by little, more and more, with each passing day; and in the midst of each new choice that we must make this is to be the case. It is perhaps in the midst of these, controversial and challenging words of Paul that we can see most clearly the magnitude of the choice that is called forth from those seeking to be followers of Jesus. Such a person is called to sacrifice Himself completely and totally. That sacrifice takes place again and again in the midst of the choices that we make each moment of each day. The followers of Jesus, choose to be inconvenienced for Christ as we serve others, and at the same time we also serve as ambassadors of Christ and His Kingdom, proclaiming the good news.


Paul makes it clear that the issue is not simply one of slavery or of being free, but of recognizing our place in the plan of God. We are to serve as emissaries, as replicants, of Jesus, daily. We are called to be willing to lay down our life in small ways, and in great ways, for as long as breath is in our bodies. In this, we will proclaim the truth of the Gospel in a manner that is far more powerful and lasting than any church building, any organization, than any physical monument. Our life will be a lasting monument



to the truth of the good news of Jesus Christ. He is raised from the dead to the right hand of God, and everything is now changed, everything is different than it was before.

Finally, Paul completes his thoughts in this section with words to those that are the masters of slaves. It would perhaps be our expectation that he would call upon them to free their slaves. I do not know why he does not command this, but it is certainly the case that I do not know everything, maybe you do? Perhaps it was for some type of mercy that Paul chose these words of admonition, I do not know. There are many possibilities as to why slavery is not simply condemned here. What I do believe, however, is that the words here reflect the good and perfect will of God for the greatest good and well-being of His children. Paul wrote: **⁹ And the masters, do the same to them (the slaves), stop threatening them, knowing that also for them and for you the Lord is in the heavens and there is no favoritism with Him.**

Paul challenges his audience here with a recognition that God values slaves as much as he does masters. He does not show favoritism and the unspoken, or perhaps unwritten, threat here is



that in whatever a person does they will ultimately answer to God for it. Paul especially challenges slaveowners here to stop making threats to those that are bound to them. The Lord is master of both slave and free and He will judge both without partiality, or bias, of any kind. It matters not whether we are American, or Chinese, rich or poor, educated or uneducated, Democrat or Republican, Labor or Tory (I had to throw in something British) we will all stand before God and answer for any cruelty or selfishness that we inflict upon others.


The words of Paul, in this section of His letter, jangle our nerves and shatter our sensibilities, but it is perhaps in the midst of our disturbed condition that we are more open to hear the challenge of Paul. He calls us to walk in a manner that is “worthy” of our calling. He calls us to walk like Jesus did, to serve like Jesus did, to live and breathe like Jesus did, and to sacrifice ourselves like Jesus did. We are called to follow.

Synopsis

In this section of Paul's letter, he continues to address the behavior, the hearts, and the soul of those who are followers of Jesus. His admonitions are reflective of the recognition that the followers of Jesus have received the "favor" of God and have now be transferred into His Kingdom. Though they still live in the old world, they are called to be agents of that world's transformation.

That transformation begins with the transformation of the self, as we begin to change our focus and our behavior to reflect both our gratitude to Christ and the reality of our new existence. Paul addresses matters related to family relations and starts, in this section, by focusing upon the way children are to behave in relation to their parents. They are to listen to them, and honor them. Paul here reminds his readers of the promise of God to bless those that respond in this way to their parents by blessing them with a better, and a longer life.

Paul then turns his attention to the way fathers are to treat their children and the responsibilities that they have for instructing them in the ways of the Lord and admonishing them in His ways. It is perhaps the case that Paul addresses fathers here



because he knows of some issues with regard to how fathers are fulfilling these functions. Whatever the reasons for addressing fathers here, rather than mothers too, it is clear that there are clear expectations placed upon Christian fathers.


Then, in a way that perhaps, challenges to the core our modern sensibilities Paul addresses the way slaves are to respond to their masters. They are to become really great slaves, honoring God through their actions and their attitudes, especially toward their masters.

Paul ends with instructions to masters regarding the way they should treat their slaves and they are challenged to “stop threatening” them. This is not just to stop threatening the good slaves, but applies to all slaves. There is contained in this admonition both a promise and a threat. The promise would seem to be the recognition that God will reward proper behavior, while the threat would seem to be that He will punish improper behavior.

In these words, the challenge stands for us today to live our lives as true followers of Jesus in all situations and in all of our relationships with others.

Questions

1. Why do you think it is the case that often children choose not to listen to their parents?
2. What are some ways that children might demonstrate honor for their father and mother?
3. How do you define what having a “good” life is?
4. What are some ways that fathers make their children angry?
5. What are some ways that parents can fulfill their obligation to instruct their children in the “way of the Lord?”
6. What are some ways that parents abdicate their responsibility to instruct their children in the “way of the Lord?”
7. What are some ways that parents can encourage their children to follow Christ?
8. What are some ways that can be discouraging to children in their following of Christ?
9. Why do you think Paul does not condemn slavery in Ephesians?
10. How do you think a slave would feel about being told to be a good slave to their master even if their master is not a good master? Why would they comply with Paul’s words?
11. How do you think Christ could be proclaimed by a slave to their master?
12. What do you think it means to do the will of God “from the soul?”
13. How are you able to tell if someone is engaged in “people-pleasing?” How do you respond?

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14. What are some ways that you render service to the Lord in your own life?
 15. What do you think it means to do good?
 16. What do you think it means when Paul warns his readers that God does not show favoritism?
 17. In what ways can people show that they expect favoritism?
 18. Have you ever chosen simply to forgive someone rather than demand your rights? How did that make you feel and why did you do it?
 19. What are some ways that this passage of Scripture challenges you to change the way you live your life and the way that you see your goals in life?

To Take Home

What is Important to know?

It is important to know that with God there is no favoritism. I think it is often the case that we convince ourselves that God will respond to us positively because of who we are. Perhaps, we compare ourselves to others and we are Americans (blessed by God), we are a good people (certainly not as bad as some), or we have received grace (and therefore our card has been punched). There is a warning in Paul's words against such complacency, or arrogance. How has becoming a follower of Jesus changed your lifestyle?

Where is God in these words?

God is in these words challenging His children to be more devoted followers of Jesus Christ. He challenges them to focus on others above self, and to focus on the progression of the Kingdom of God over personal rights. The words here call for a transformation that is deeper than just being on the surface: the call here is for transformation of the heart and the soul. What are some ways that you seek to allow God to change your heart and your soul to more fully reflect the calling of Christ?

What does any of this mean for how I live my life?

The words of Paul here challenge followers of Jesus to examine all areas of their lives and to place all areas of life under the lordship of Jesus. This starts within the most personal and closest relationships that exists and flows out to all others. These words mean that I am not to see my life as my own, but as belonging to God. He is my master and my Lord and as such I am called to live my life in obedience to Him and as a reflection of belonging to Him. What are some things that you do that reflect that you belong to Christ?

What is the word of God calling us to do?

The word of God is calling us to be people that reflect the nature of Christ and not to be focused upon what we want and what we need, but upon the needs and wants of others. We are called to be followers of Christ that reflect Jesus in our thoughts, our actions, and in the depths of our souls. What are some ways that you seek to feed your soul with the things that continue to help you to submit to the transformation of God in you?