

Sermon Series: *The Book of Ephesians*



Submitting... Out of Reverence for Christ

Part 3: Children to Your Parents & Servants to Your Masters

(Ephesians 6:1-9 ESV)

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 go well with you and that you may live long in the land." ⁴ Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

⁵ Bondservants, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, with a sincere heart, as you would Christ, ⁶ not by the way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, ⁷ rendering service with a good will as to the

Lord and not to man,⁸ knowing that whatever good anyone does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether he is a bondservant or is free.⁹ Masters, do the same to them, and stop your threatening, knowing that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and that there is no partiality with him.

Introduction

It is the calling of the Christian to strive to align our thinking with the truth revealed in Scripture and not the evolving opinions of the pundits of popular culture. If we truly are followers of the Jesus revealed to us through the Bible, then the Bible and the Bible alone possesses the authority to tell us how we ought to think about a variety of issues.

Living like this will constantly push Christians further and further towards the margins of society. Many of us already feel as though we walk alone in steadfastly clinging to God's revealed truth on many of the cultural issues before us today. Yet, we are not alone. Jesus said to those who would join him in completing his mission in this world,

"I am with you always, even to the end of the age."¹

One of the issues about which Christians will find themselves at odds with popular culture is the issue of submission. Talking about submission in our culture today seems to me to be a bad word. Submission is not a quality we esteem very highly. In our thinking, those who submit are those who are weak. And we certainly do not want to model our lives after those who are weak.

However, I hope to change your thinking about submission a bit. This has been my prayer during these past two weeks on this topic and it is my prayer today. I pray that you will not quickly stop pondering submission even after we move on to the next topic. If you don't already, then I pray that you will not only see submission—biblical submission—as an admirable quality, but also as a divine quality.

As we have already seen in the previous two sermons on this topic, [part 1](#) and [part 2](#), submission is a work of the Holy Spirit. In Eph 5:18 Paul issues a command to his readers that they *"not be filled with wine, but be filled with the Holy Spirit."* Paul then explains that one piece of evidence that the Holy Spirit is at work in your life is,

Ephesians 5:21 (ESV)

"submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ" (Eph 5:21).

¹ Mt 28:20.

We will never submit to one another without a reverent, fear for Christ. Christ Jesus is our highest example, yet even he was submissive. We cannot forget this fact as we ponder what it means to “submit to one another.”

Submission is a Quality of Divinity

Submission is a divine quality. It's older than sin. Submission existed before this world existed. It predates Adam & Eve and even the whole created universe. Submission existed even before sin corrupted the harmony of this universe.

Submission is not a result of the fall. Actually, *sin resulted from a failure to submit*—the failure of Adam & Eve to submit to God's will. It was that failure to submit which opened a dark door and allowed sin to find home on this planet. Submission is not necessarily a sign of weakness, but it can be a hint of holiness.

Jesus Submitted to His Heavenly Father

Why do I say this? Because *Jesus submitted to God the Father before the beginning of time*. On the night before his crucifixion, Jesus said this as he was praying.

(John 17:5 ESV)

⁵ And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed.

Before the world existed Jesus enjoyed a glory which he did not have when he prayed this prayer “during the days of his flesh.”² Jesus gave up that glory when he entered this world. This was the will of God the Father. Jesus submitted himself to the will of the Father.

(John 6:38 ESV)

³⁸ For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me.

Doing the will of God the Father was the goal of Jesus' life. He submitted himself to his Father's will and humbled himself by taking on the form of a servant and wrapping himself in humanity.

(Philippians 2:5-8 ESV)

⁵ Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷ but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. ⁸ And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

² Heb 5:7.

Submission is a Christ-like quality. Jesus submitted himself to the will of his heavenly Father. And Jesus also submitted himself to his earthly father.

Jesus Submitted to His Earthly Father

At the end of Luke chapter 2 we find the only story in the Bible which gives us any insight into what Jesus was like in his childhood. When Jesus was twelve, his family went to Jerusalem for Passover. When the feast was over everyone traveled in groups—made up of family and acquaintances—back to their home town. After going a day's journey out of Jerusalem, his parents began looking for him but could not find him. They walked back to Jerusalem searching for him. They looked all over Jerusalem and after three days of searching, finally found him in the temple. He was safe,

Luke 2:46-47 (ESV)

⁴⁶ "... sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. ⁴⁷ And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers.

Joseph and Mary were amazed at him. Mary said, "What are you thinking? We've been looking everywhere for you for the past three days and we're worried sick about you!" Jesus said, "Why were you worried about me? Didn't you know I'd be in my Father's house?" They didn't understand what he was saying.

(Luke 2:51 ESV)

⁵¹ And he went down with them and came to Nazareth and was submissive to them.

In other words, Jesus went home and he obeyed his parents. Jesus obviously possesses a clear sense of God's purpose for his life. He obviously is unafraid of living without his family. He is not intimidated by the education and authority of the religious leaders in the temple. He is astonishingly intelligent and possesses a notable degree of wisdom which amazes the temple teachers. In some ways he's clearly smarter than his parents. Yet what is his response to his mother and his father.

Luke 2:51 (ESV)

⁵¹ ... he was submissive to them.

In that moment Jesus chose to place himself under the authority of his parents. He chose to be submissive to them.

Being submissive is not a quality of the weak. It is a quality of the meek. And according to Jesus, "the meek shall inherit the earth."³ Being submissive is a divine quality. Being able to submit to those in authority over you, is something we cannot do without being filled with his

³ Mt 5:5; cf. Ps 37:11.

Holy Spirit. Being submissive is something God has called us to do⁴ and he has given his Holy Spirit in order to enable us humbly submit in the contexts which require it.

Children: Submit to Your Parents

This is the truth that Paul is illustrating in these verses. He uses the home as the arena where this Holy Spirit enabled submission ought to find its most obvious expression. First he illustrated it through wives being able to willingly submit to their own husbands. Then he illustrated this truth by husbands submitting to Christ in obeying the command to love their wives. Today we will see this illustrated by children submitting to their parents and slaves submitting to their masters.

(Ephesians 6:1-4 ESV)

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 go well with you and that you may live long in the land.”* ⁴ *Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.*

Children Were Present in Corporate Worship

The first observation we can make from these verses is that Paul addresses children directly. He expects children to be present in corporate worship. It was customary in the early church to gather together on the Lord's day and listen to the Scripture being read. This was their only access to the word of God. No one had their own personal copy of the Scriptures. The only way to know God's word was to gather with God's people and listen to it being read [SS class coming up]. It was also within this context that a letter such as this would be read aloud to the whole congregation. It is noteworthy that Paul fully expects children to be present within the corporate worship service as this letter was being read.

1) Obey Your Parents, for This is Right

Paul gives the command, “Children, obey your parents.” This is another way of saying, “Children, submit to your parents.” He offers three reasons why children should obey their parents. First, he simply points to the *right*-ness of this.

Ephesians 6:1 (ESV)

¹ *“Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.”*

The phrase “*in the Lord*” is virtually synonymous with the phrase Paul used as he instructed wives. There, in 5:22, he wrote, “*Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord.*” Paul understands submission to those over you in authority as an integral part of Christian duty. Obedience to others flows from the Christian's desire to be obedient to Jesus. A true

⁴ 1 Ptr 2:21 *“For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps.”*

relationship with Jesus will influence and effect every other relationship in your life. Paul states quite clearly, it is just right for children to obey their parents. It is fitting and proper for children to obey their parents. He does not say that children should obey their parents because they are older, or wiser, or more valuable. He simply says this is 'right.' In writing similar instructions to the Colossians, he wrote that children being obedient to their parents "*pleases the Lord*" (Col 3:20).

Obey Both Parents

We should note here that children are to obey 'parents,' plural, and 'parent,' singular. The command is to honor **both** father and mother. Children are to honor *both* parents, not one or the other. Therefore, Paul exhorts children to submit to their **parents**, not just the father or only the mother, but both of them. Recall what we are told about Jesus back in Luke 2.

Luke 2:51 (ESV)

⁵¹ *And he went down with them and came to Nazareth and was submissive to them.*

Jesus was submissive to *both* parents. Children ought to obey both parents. Not just dad or just mom, but both of them.

2) Obey Parents for This is the Fifth Commandment

The second reason why children should obey their parents is because it is one of the Ten Commandments. Paul quotes the fifth commandment.

Ephesians 6:2 (ESV)

² *"Honor your father and your mother."*

He is quoting Exodus 20:12.⁵ It was God himself who gave these first commands to the people of Israel. It is God's will that a child honor his father or mother. To honor someone means "to greatly respect and highly esteem." Paul is clearly explaining that obedience and submission to one's parents is part of what it means to honor one's parents.

No Expiration Date

There is no expiration date on this command to honor your parents. The command is not "honor your parents only while you live with them." Or "honor your parents only until you are eighteen." The command is "honor your father and your mother" - period. This command applies to us for as long as we live.

Son, Move Your Chair

⁵ There is no time limit on this commandment. There is no escape clause, such as "until you are eighteen," which frees one from being obliged to this command. As long as one has parents, one is commanded by God to "honor" them.

We have some friends who own a little cabin at a Christian camp up in New Hampshire. We were visiting them a couple of years ago. My friend, Craig, just retired from teaching school, so he's somewhere around 60. His parents were also there. His father is about 85. They had been doing some work to replace the back pillar which supports the deck. The old pillar had been removed while the new one was being constructed. After dinner we went out on the deck to talk. My friend, forgetting about the repair work, seated himself a little too far in the corner of the deck just above where the work was taking place. When his father came out on the deck and saw where his son was seated he said, "Son, what are doing? Move your chair over here." Craig obediently got up and moved his chair away from the corner.

I had to chuckle. In that moment age was irrelevant. It a quite lovely little scene of a son honoring his father by obeying him.

May each of us strive to obey this command and honor our parents—both of them—so long as we have them with us.

3) Obey Parents for This Will Be Rewarded

The third reason children ought to obey, or be submissive to, their parents is because a reward is promised.

Ephesians 6:2-3 (ESV)

² ... *(this is the first commandment with a promise),* ³ *that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land.*

Paul notes that God backs up this command with a promise. That promise includes blessings in life and length of life. The person who submits to his parents will be blessed with a life that "**goes well**" and entails "**living long in the land,**" or "**on the earth**" (NIV). There's no other promise like this in Scripture.⁶ It's absolutely unique. If you desire living long in the land, then honor and submit to your parents.

Fathers, Do Not Provoke, but Discipline & Instruct

In closing this section, Paul has a word for fathers.

Ephesians 6:4 (ESV)

⁴ *Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.*

⁶ Gaebelein, Frank E., A. Skevington Wood, Homer A. Kent Jr., Curtis Vaughn, Robert L. Thomas, Ralph Earle, D. Edmond Hiebert, and Arthur A. Rupprecht. *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Ephesians through Philemon*. Vol. 11. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981) 81.

Evidently, Paul had seen or experienced fathers provoking their children to a place of frustrated anger. Being a follower of Jesus changes everything, even how you parent your children. So Paul encourages fathers not to be the kind of father that would prevent his child from keeping the command he had just stated. It seems that Paul is saying, “Fathers, if you want your children to honor you, then stop intentionally being irritating. Don’t provoke them. Discipline them and teach them the word of the Lord.”

Fathers are to *discipline* their children and *teach* their children. The word ‘discipline’ means “to train someone in accordance with proper rules of conduct and behavior.”⁷ This is hard work. The word ‘instruction,’ means “to teach correct belief.”⁸ In other words, teach the truth. To summarize, fathers are to avoid frustrating their children and making them angry (by proving how right they are) and are to train their children how to *behave* properly and how to *think* truly.

The call to consider the feelings of children is unusual during this time period. In first century Greco-Roman culture, the father’s authority was absolute in the home. Offering a command to think about instruction and life in general, from a child’s point of view, is actually quite revolutionary.⁹

Servants: Submit to Your Earthly Masters

In the final relational grouping to illustrate Holy Spirit inspired submission, Paul turns his attention to the relationship of servants and masters. He addresses servants first.

(Ephesians 6:5-9 ESV)

⁵ Bondservants, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, with a sincere heart, as you would Christ, ⁶ not by the way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, ⁷ rendering service with a good will as to the Lord and not to man, ⁸ knowing that whatever good anyone does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether he is a bondservant or is free. ⁹ Masters, do the same to them, and stop your threatening, knowing that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and that there is no partiality with him.

Paul gives the command, “servants, obey your earthly masters.” It’s the same call as he gave to wives, husbands, and children—submit to those who have authority over you, namely your earthly masters. In order to keep this practical, ask yourself, “Who is your earthly master? Who

⁷ Louw, Johannes P., and Eugene Albert Nida. *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains*. (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996) 466.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 414.

⁹ Gaebeleine, 81.

is the one person who most directly and immediately has authority over you?" Think about your work situation? Do you have a supervisor or manager in mind?

How should this be done? How should servants submit to earthly masters? Paul offers six ways this is to be done.

1. **With fear and trembling** (v.5). This expression "usually refers to the fear of humans in the presence of God and his mighty acts."¹⁰ This is an incredible call to serious living. Paul is not playing games. The Christian life is not one of dispassionate obedience. God expects his children to be hard workers who do their work with such a deep sense of focus and intensity that Paul can describe the service of servants towards their masters as being done "with fear and trembling." The phrase forces us to the conclusion that how we serve our masters is an expression of our service toward God.
2. **With a sincere heart** (v.5). Christian workers are to be "characterized by integrity and singleness of purpose."¹¹ God's people are not to be frauds at work. We are to be sincere and genuine, never faking or pretending. Integrity and authenticity should be the marks by which we are known at work, not duplicitous posturing. Our supervisors should see a kind of sincerity with us that cause them to know that we have a different heart from all the rest of our coworkers.
3. **As you would Christ** (v.5). We should serve our earthly masters just as we would Jesus. Christ is our ultimate master, and yet, we do have earthly masters over us. Jesus would have us serve them with the same attitude with which we would serve him. Serve your master just as you would your Savior.
4. **Not with eye-service as a people-pleaser** (v.6). We are also to serve in way that is consistent and does not vary based upon who we think may or may not be watching. This means we should not work any harder when our boss is watching, nor any less when he is not. We should each do our work as if God himself is watching, for He most certainly is watching all that we do. If you want a promotion at work, then keep this in mind, for "promotion comes from the Lord" (Ps 75:6-7).
5. **As servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart** (v.6). Again, Paul repeats the same point. When you are at work, you should work as if you are working for Christ and no one else. This entails "doing the will of God from the heart." This means you pour your whole heart into your work and have a deep desire to be obedient to God rather than than please yourself. This means you want to hear "well done" from God, long before you ever want to hear from your boss.
6. **Rendering service with good will as to the Lord and not to man** (v.7). Let your service to your boss be motivated by good will. Are your motives good as you are

¹⁰ O'Brien, Peter Thomas. *The Letter to the Ephesians*. The Pillar New Testament Commentary. (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1999) 449.

¹¹ O'Brien, 450.

serving? Are you serving your boss with good intentions. Good intentions should stand behind all you do at work, as if you were serving the Lord and not man.

Submissive Service Will Be Rewarded

Paul now offers one reason for why believers should serve earthly masters in these ways. It will be rewarded by God.

Ephesians 6:8 (ESV)

⁸ knowing that whatever good anyone does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether he is a bondservant or is free.

A reward awaits all who obey this command to submit to earthly masters. All the obedient service which Paul has just spoken of, will one day be rewarded by the Lord. And he will give a reward to all who obey him, whether they were slaves or whether they were free. God's rewards will be just and will be given to all who chose to conduct themselves according to his teachings.

Masters: Submit to Your Master In Heaven

In closing, Paul has a word or two for all who find themselves in places of authority.

Ephesians 6:9 (ESV)

⁹ Masters, do the same to them, and stop your threatening, knowing that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and that there is no partiality with him.

Amazingly, the same instructions Paul just gave to the servants, he also gives to the masters. He expects them to behave the same way... except for one thing. He instructs them to **stop threatening**. He commands them to cease any verbal abuse. He reminds them that they too have a master, and theirs is a heavenly master and not an earthly one. This heavenly master will not be partial. He cannot be deceived and he keeps track of every word that is spoken.¹²This master knows all and sees all. Those who are masters and managers would do well to remember this.

Conclusion

As we conclude, one final question cries out to be answered. Is there any time we should not submit to our parents and our managers? I believe the answer is yes. We should not submit to parents or managers when doing so would cause us to fail to submit to God.

¹² Mt 12:36.

One thing has been abundantly clear throughout this section on submission and that is that our highest allegiance belongs to God. We are to submit to those in authority **as unto the Lord**. We are to serve people **as servants of Christ**. Our submission to others is subservient to our higher submission to Christ Jesus. When the latter would be compromised by the former, then we should not submit.

Jesus submitted to his parents when he was twelve up until the beginning of his public ministry and he began doing the will of his Father through a public preaching ministry. However, when his mother and brothers showed up one day to silence him he did not submit to his mother and replied, *"Those who do the will of my Father are my mother and sister and brother."*¹³

The apostles were commanded by Jesus to go to the ends of the world and make disciples in his name. However, when they were commanded by the Jewish supreme court to stop preaching in the name of Jesus, they did not submit to those in authority over them, because doing so would have caused them to fail to submit to Jesus.¹⁴

We should never submit to anyone who would lead us into sin. We should never submit to supervisors or managers who desire us doing anything sinful, unethical, or illegal. We should never submit to anything or anyone that would cause us to fail to submit to God's revealed will.

If, today, you find yourself in a difficult relationship in which you are finding it difficult to submit, then the first question to ask is, "Am I being expected to sin?" If yes, then do not submit. Your highest reverence is to the Lord Jesus.

If the answer is "no," then the second question is, "Lord, is there pride in my heart from which you are trying to cleanse me?" If the answer is "yes," then confess it and ask him to purify your heart. If the answer is "no," then seek the Lord about what is calling you to do in this particular circumstance. Earnestly pray. Ask the Holy Spirit to lead you about what you are to do in your particular situation.

But as you do, keep this in mind. Being submissive is a divine quality. It is not a quality of the weak. It is a quality of the meek. And according to Jesus, "the meek shall inherit the earth."¹⁵

There is great reward promised to those who submit to others out of obedience to Christ. Children are promised a blessed and long life if they honor and submit to their parents. Servants are promised that they will receive back from the Lord a good reward for all that they do. Masters too are promised a reward from the heavenly Master who shows no partiality.

Children, submit to your parents in the Lord for this is right and pleases the Father.

¹³ Mt 12:46; Mk 3:21; cf. Jn 7:5.

¹⁴ See Acts chapters 4 & 5.

¹⁵ Mt 5:5; cf. Ps 37:11.

Fathers, don't provoke your children, but instead discipline and instruct them.

Servants, submit to your earthly masters out of a sincere heart and good willed intentions knowing you are being watched by God the Father.

Masters, don't be harsh with those who serve you, and put away all your threatening language.

Submit, to one another out of reverence for Jesus.