

An Ordered Life

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[0 : 0 0] in my younger years i played competitive football and i was quite good as well i'd watch other teams warming up and i'd feel pretty intimidated they were playing one touch in a tight square floating long balls to each other or doing keepy-ups with their heads they looked like professionals and like partick thistle yesterday their intimidation didn't last long because when the first whistle went and we were playing real football i'd crunch into the striker and noblem you learn quickly that looking good in warm-ups means nothing when the whistle goes and the real game starts living out our faith in the ivory tower of a christian community like ours is one thing living out our faith in the real world is another thing looking good in the church means little when the pressure is on at home or at work the whistle goes and the real game starts this is the burden of the apostle paul in ephesians 5 verse 22 to 6 verse 9 living out the gospel at home and at work the thing is it's here in the real world when the whistle blows that god wants us to live out our faith in christ and it's here in the real world we have the opportunity to show exactly what we're made of there are three distinct sections in paul's instruction first how we are to express our faith in the context of our marriages chapter 5 verse 22 through 33 we saw that last week second how we are to express our faith in the context of our families ephesians 6 verses 1 through 4 and third how we are to express our faith in the context of our careers verses 5 through 9 now we dare not reverse the order the most important relationships we have are as husbands and wives then as children and parents and only then as servants and masters if we get that order wrong our christian faith will suffer this is a basic truth but it's not always an obvious truth the most important relationship a christian husband has is with his wife then with his children then with his work if he puts his children before his marriage as do many in our society he's getting the order wrong so if he spends all his time doing what his children want his children want him to do rather than looking after his primary responsibility his wife he's in dangerous territory even more dangerous is when he puts his work before his family when he sacrifices his marriage and his parenting on the altar of his career this is god's wisdom for us marriage first children second work third in that order well last week we considered from ephesians 5 22 through 33 the respective roles of husbands and wives wives are to submit to their husbands as models of christ and husband and husbands are to love their wives as the mirror of christ this week we want to continue the fundamentals of god's design for the church as we consider the two relationships detailed in these verses children and parents verses 1 through 4 servants and masters verses 5 through 9 this is god's design for the health of his church

faithfully living out the gospel paul has preached in ephesians 1 through 3 heavenly father we bow in your presence may your word be our rule your spirit our teacher and your greater glory our supreme concern through jesus christ our lord amen first of all then from verses 1 through 4 children and parents children and parents well if marriage is under attack in our society the relationship between children and parents even more so children are treated as adults and not as children and parents are treated as children and not as parents paul's instructions though directed toward a culture very different from ours strike to the heart of what it means to be a christian child or a christian parent he instructs children to honor your parents for the lord verses 1 through 3 and for parents to train their children in the lord verse 4 children honor your parents in the lord first of all from verse 1 through 3 it'll soon be christmas and we'll be singing together once in royal david city where we'll sing the line christian children all must be mild obedient good as he it is no less the aim of christian children to be like jesus christ than it is for a christian adult to be like jesus christ and this is how to be a christian child this is how to express our faith in jesus in real life obey your parents in the lord honor your father and your mother it might not be as dramatic as some of the great christian heroes we read about in books like hudson taylor and and mary slessor but this is how we are to express the gospel in real life children by obeying and honoring our parents we do it you'll notice in the lord we obey them out of respect for god for this is his command to us and we obey them out of gratitude for what jesus has done for us on the cross by dying to take away our sins and to make us new people well obedience to our parents is one thing it's an external thing but honoring them goes even deeper because our hearts are involved in honoring our parents in a way that they don't necessarily have to be when we obey them we obey our parents because we honor them in our hearts we notice that this command is also backed up by a promise it may go well with you and you may live long on the land here's a promise taken from the old testament whereby obedience to one's parents was seen as key to one's continued occupancy of the land of israel but in the new testament it's expanded to mean that a child's place in god's new society the church is demonstrated and assured by his or her being obedient to their parents the child who does not honor and obey his or her parents for all that they might profess to be a believer in christ is no christian now there are a number of applications we can make of this command and i hope we're all listening the first concerns at what age do i as a child stop honoring and obeying my parents at what age do i as a as a child

stop honoring and obeying my parents i mean i'm a grown man do i still have to obey my mother yes as long as she is my mother i am under obligation to honor her and obey her when we our children our parents look after us but when our parents grow old obeying and honoring them means looking after them we remember the sober injunction of first timothy 5 verse 8 if anyone does not provide for his relatives especially for members of his own household he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever no one ever stops being a child the second application concerns the limits of a child's obedience we obey them in the lord as long as what they're commanding us to do does not go against our faith in christ we are duty bound to obey them so if they command us to stop going to church we have a duty to resist and to say to our parents no and that's fine the third concerns the exact wording of what paul says obey your parents and we'll come back to this many children today face the pressure of social media which although it comes across as being trendy and cool is more dictatorial than any parent anywhere social media coerces and pressures our children to conform to a societal artificial standard which no one can keep unfortunately our secular education system may also teach things which are at odds with the biblical teaching our parents hold to in both situations we are called to obey our parents not social media not our teachers not our friends but our parents it is they whom god has placed in authority over us and who are ultimately accountable for us and then the last application concerns the cost of a child's obedience you know it might be easy to obey and honor our parents if it examples of christ-like love and holiness but what if they are drunks who want nothing to do with christianity and abuse us or they are religious hypocrites who find fault with everybody else never with themselves now this is a harder question one with no real black and white answer but the principle still applies honor your parents in your heart they might not be ideal parents but they are the parents god has given you and in obeying and honoring them not only are you expressing your faith in christ but you are a living witness to your parents of the difference the gospel has made in your life and therefore can make in theirs hard to be a child these days listen it's always been hard to be a child but the gospel is as much for children as it is for adults and the grace and strength we need to honor and obey our parents god has for us through prayer and his word whether that's for children or for parents so children honor your parents in the lord and then parents verse 4 train your children in the lord i'm not sure why the bible versions focus on fathers because the word paul uses here is directed toward parents mother and father

parents do not provoke your children to anger just like a woman children in paul's day were treated not as the precious idols they are today but as little more than slaves they were workers in their father's fields they carried on the father's line but other than that they were just another pesky mouth to feed paul's instructions to parents therefore are culture changing he's saying to them parents you take your children seriously they are not your slaves they are of equal importance to god and in the church as you are our children are very sensitive and therefore as parents we must be careful to bring them up in a loving and nurturing atmosphere john stott whose commentary in ephesians i commended to you last week although he was never married never had children what wisdom that commentary contains he lists ways in which we can provoke our children to anger ridiculing them being sarcastic about them belittling them expecting them to think and behave like adults showing favoritism being inconsistent in our discipline he asks the question how many angry young men hostile to society at large have learned their hostility as children in an unsympathetic home ultimately our children are our responsibility not the state's when there is conflict between what the state wants for them and what we want for them we as parents win every single time and when the state tries to unreasonably interfere in our parenting we must say no we want to provide for our children a loving safe environment for them to grow into the mature Christians we long and pray for them to be we do this by bringing them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord we don't bend them to our standards be like me as your dad or me as your mom we train them in the model in the gospel of Christ we model it for them we teach it to them by our words and our works when they stray we sensitively discipline them by knowing that it hurts us more than it hurts them we must never discipline our children in anger that is an abuse of power rather explaining how much we love them and why what they've done is wrong we sensitively and tenderly train them to say yes to Christ the prosperity of the church depends upon parents bringing their children up to follow Christ as parents we must ask what are we teaching our children by allowing them to do anything they want whenever they want with whoever they want so sport on a Sunday is an issue that every parent has to deal with trust me recognizing that most sport in Scotland takes place on a Sunday do we allow our children to play sport on a Sunday or not now I personally do not but it is a grey area upon which we may disagree the important question to ask is this what am I teaching my children by the decisions

I make for them and what am I teaching them by the way I speak about people who are different from them do we take the time to explain to our children the difference between the genders that there is such a thing as a boy and there is such a thing as a girl but that they must never engage in bullying behaviours toward others who are not like them in the sovereignty of God their discipleship in Christ is not automatically assured the greatest pain I know for many Christian parents is that their children do not share their faith even though they have been brought up in the most beautiful Christian home but our God is a covenant God a loving God and we know that in later years many people who were brought up in Christian homes but have wandered away from the faith of their parents returned to the loving lessons they learned as children it should be apparent to us all should it not that Christian parenting is very far from easy that's why we want to pray for our Christian parents theirs is a heavy responsibility and they need all the help they can get we never stop being parents even when our children grow up

[17:17] I'm noticing there Peter and Marian are both nodding there we never stop being parents even when our children grow up and then by extension we can also apply Paul's teaching here to the relationship between grandparents and grandchildren recognizing that the responsibility that granda and granny have is to reinforce the lessons the child's parents are teaching them at home nothing different from their parents being a Christian child or Christian parent isn't easy at the best of times especially when a son should say that his mother is both the smelliest and the most beautiful smelling thing in the whole world but in all the laughter and in all the sadness it's our prayer that the faith of Jesus Christ would be expressed by honoring on the part of our children and training on the part of our parents so children and parents between verses 5 through 9 then we have servants and masters or slaves and masters most of us spend at least of our a third of our days at work a third of our lives at work and it's vital we do

God has made us for work and the New Testament commands us not to be lazy not to be shirkers God's word has much to say to us about how we should approach work by example we have faithful ladies like Dorcas in the New Testament Joseph in the Old Testament we have Paul himself who supported his ministry by making tents there are many lessons we can learn from hard working believers in the Bible like these but this passage here is complicated by two things first Paul lived in a world where the economy of the Roman world was based on slavery but like the American South 150 years ago the question is why doesn't Paul condemn slavery outright here in Ephesians 6 certainly from his other writings especially in Philemon it would appear that he was against slavery it would be worth coming back to this and exploring the Bible's teaching on the evil of slavery but enough to say the seeds of Christian teaching on the equality and dignity of all people eventually led to the end of slavery

William Wilberforce through whom slavery was abolished in the British Commonwealth was himself an outstanding Christian believer the second issue is the existence of trade unions trade unions trade unions in the United Kingdom owe their existence to outstanding Christians who fought for the rights of workers to proper pay and conditions like Lord Shaftesbury they form a vital part in our society ensuring the human dignity in the workplace without becoming political in any way the abolition of trade unions is a slippery slope to a totalitarian state again it would be good to spend more time understanding the Christian roots and ethics of the trade union movement so we have slavery and trade unions but let's put these things to one side for a moment having said these things let's briefly consider

Paul's commands to both servants and masters here in Ephesians 6 servants obey your masters in the Lord verses 5 through 8 masters do good to your servants because of the Lord servants obey your masters in the Lord verses 5 through 8 the key to a Christian's behavior and character in the workplace consists in this our ultimate master our ultimate supervisor our ultimate rewarder is Christ we might work for an earthly employer but ultimately we're working for Christ it is he ultimately who controls our career path our promotion prospects and our performance reviews now it's easy to say this when we have a great employer but when our employer is unfair it's tough and yet by our submissive and obedient diligence in the workplace we are working not to please them as much as we're working to please

God we are to be sincere not half-hearted in our devotion to work we are to work hard not only when the eyes of our employers and our supervisors are upon us but all the time we are not to be people pleasers even though we know that in our society people pleasers get ahead whereas those who actually do the work do not rather in our work we are to have an eye to what the Lord thinks both of the quantity and the quality of our work so if we're serving a customer treat that customer as though he were Jesus Christ himself if we're meeting with our manager treat our manager with the respect with which we would treat Jesus restrain and abstain from office gossip and constant whinging at work just get on with the task we've been given to do because we want to do we not to let our work ethic be attractive to our colleagues so that eventually when they ask us why we're so different we can point to our faith in Jesus as the ultimate reason don't we know that we can preach the gospel at work yes in this complicated age even without using words we can do it by the quality of our work and our conduct especially by being exemplary and trustworthy employees and yet there's a proviso here the limits of our obedience to our employer does not rise above our responsibility to obey

[23 : 57] God the limits of our responsibility to our employer does not rise above our responsibility to obey God when they ask us to do things that go against God's word we have a responsibility to say no I'm not going to do that and this is why so when a Christian midwife is tasked with helping with abortions she has every right to say no I'm not going to do that and this is why when a Christian doctor as we know has happened is tasked with helping with euthanasia she has every right to say no I'm not going to do that and this is why even if our defiance is not protected under British law our obedience to God is more important in these areas than our obedience to our employers other than that as workers workers for whom sometimes work is crummy boring and hard were told to work for our employers as if they were standing in the place of Christ we must never live to work rather we must work for Christ so that we may live out his gospel in every area of our lives work included if for any reason you were struggling as a

Christian in the workplace there are many resources available here to help you there are books written specifically to help Christians in the workplace there's helpful advice from those who've been working for many many years like Donald Morrison up there will I'm sure give helpful advice to anyone who is struggling in the workplace and there are great examples of how to keep going in the workplace even though you're finding it hard do not suffer alone come and speak to me afterwards and I'll guide you to some great resources we have make the most out of the church by using these resources to learn how we can glorify God in the workplace and make our workplaces expressions of the gospel we so love and then finally from verse nine masters do good to your servants because of the Lord because of the Lord in the world of Paul's day slave masters had the right of life and death over their slaves and yet think about this it was entirely possible that in the

Ephesian church certain slaves could as a function of God's gifting to them become elders and have spiritual authority over their masters in the world of the day the church was the most equalizing institution in society well for those of us who are employers the teaching of Paul is that we should treat those who work for us as we ourselves would wish to be treated by them if we were in their situation we wouldn't want to be threatened by our employers so we don't threaten them we must remember that although we may think we have free reign to treat our employees as we wish we are all ultimately accountable to God who shows no favoritism he is not impressed by our professional credentials so we must do our employees good pay them properly provide them with good conditions in which to work there is a certain

Christian employer in this congregation and I'm looking at him whose employees often come round to our house to do some work and they all say the same thing about him he is great to work for he is honest trustworthy and understanding of their personal circumstances he does good to them he pays them well and for that they are loyal hard working and they have nothing bad to say about him it is a fantastic tribute to his Christian faith as an employer and it shows that he has understood how the gospel is to be applied in the workplace as employers we must remember that our employees are equal to us in their dignity and in their needs they have families to care for so we must pay them decently they have their own physical and mental health to care for so we must provide them with good conditions in which to work and in all our dealings with them we must be thoroughly honest

Christian men and Christian women so there's so much more we could say but Paul's instructions in this section give us the basics for how to express the gospel not just on the training ground but when the whistle goes and real life begins marriage first parenting second work third there's the order of our priorities as parents we must train our children in the Lord as children we must honor our parents in the Lord as employees we must obey our masters in the Lord as employers we must do good to our employees in the Lord the consistent word in all these relationships you will notice is in the Lord in the Lord the central relationship every human being must have with God in real life is with Christ himself in the Lord Jesus and the gospel of his cross shaped grace must be at the center of our lives if we want to make the whole of life work for us marriage parenting workplace and so we close with this appeal is

[29 : 54] Jesus at the center of our lives have we placed our faith and trust in the Jesus who can strengthen us and give us great grace to be the best husbands and wives we can be the best children and parents we can be the best employers and employees we can be the centrality of this relationship in the Lord with Jesus is what will set the church God's new society apart and show the world that the gospel really does work