

Ephesians 6:1-9

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[0 : 00] Father in heaven, thank you so much for your great love for us! Lord, we are overwhelmed by what you're doing here at Shoreline today.

! Lord, that's because we're overwhelmed. Amen.

Why on earth are we starting our first public service in a public place with this passage? Right? It's kind of nuts.

The reason we're preaching Ephesians chapter 6 today is because we finished Ephesians chapter 5 last week. Now that kind of sounds like a bad reason, right?

You know, let's pick something flashy and fun and exciting. We're preaching Ephesians 6 because we believe that the Bible, all of it, is God's word.

[1 : 12] That to a world that desperately needs renewal and needs revival and redemption. So when we get to a confusing passage, or an unexciting passage, or a passage that is offensive to our sensibilities, we don't skip over it.

No, we dive into it. And when we do, when we pay close attention, when we approach it in an attitude of humility, well, we might just find that a difficult passage like this one is exactly the message of renewal and redemption we need.

That's why we're preaching Ephesians chapter 6 today, on our first day of public ministry. Last week, Rob showed us, at the end of chapter 5, that a husband's authority in a household isn't there so that he can assemble to himself a group of servants.

A husband's authority exists to show us who is ultimately responsible to sacrifice in service to the family. Just like Jesus sacrificed for his bride.

That's the analogy that Paul made the church. Husbands have a helper in their wives, not a servant. But what about people who do have people in their service?

[2 : 38] How are they to live? And the parent-child relationship, that's very different too. What about that? How do people who have been raised with Jesus, who are having their hearts transformed and their minds renewed, as we've been looking through the book of Ephesians, who are called to imitate Christ, how do they manage these relationships?

Where there are significant roles of authority and service. And that's what today's passage is about. from both the position of authority and for the person under that authority.

What about people who don't kind of fit those categories? Maybe you're here doing like, you know, I'm self-employed and there we go. One man show. I think you'll find that you do fit these categories.

Let's dive in and see. Verse 1. Children, obey your parents and the Lord, for this is right. Honor your father and your mother. This is the first commandment with a promise, that it may go well with you, that you may live long in the land.

I once encountered someone who had really big problems with the idea that we need to honor and respect our parents. He told me that if his parents chose to have a baby, that was their decision, but he had no part in that choice.

[3 : 55] So he had no responsibility to that. He said it with anger. In fact, I don't have the heart to tell you. The words he used, they were so full of hate and disdain.

It just breaks my heart. His parents hadn't aborted him in the womb, but in his mind, he didn't owe them respect. They had fed him, but in his mind, he didn't owe them honor.

They had clothed him, and they had taught him to speak and to walk, but in his mind, he didn't owe them love. They'd give him a home, but in his mind, he didn't owe them anything at all.

The list goes on and on, but he wasn't thinking about any of that. He just wanted not to owe them anything. Against that, Paul is saying here that honoring our parents is right.

It's right because it's in step with how God made us, and that just resonates with our heart, doesn't it? Christians and non-Christians alike. We all just recoil when we see children who just trample over and disrespect their parents.

[5 : 09] We think it's a serious character flaw when adult children ignore their parents. Why is that? It's because God made us to honor our parents, and we naturally dislike it when we don't.

Honestly, every civilization in history has held the family in high regard, and especially children honoring their parents. One historian put it this way. When the bonds of family life break up, when respect for parents fails, the community fails, and it will not live long.

Why did that man hate honoring his parents? It might have been they hurt him. It might have been that. Maybe they ignored him. Maybe he knew some other parents who were abusive.

But if I had to guess, based on the way he talked about it, he just hated the idea of honor and respect. He hated the idea that he would be responsible to someone else.

He wanted to be in control. He wanted to be in charge to be God. God, if you're honoring and obeying your parents, it's an act of humility.

[6 : 31] And it declares that you're subject to authority. And it means you're accountable to somebody. And that's a hard thing to do, isn't it?

Children, this means that honoring your parents. There are a couple children here today. Honoring your parents. And Paul here wants to recommend especially obedience as a part of honoring our parents.

It's an act of worship because it's honoring God's plan for our lives. What's more, he reminds us that God wants to bless us through this.

He points out very specifically, this is the first commandment with a promise. It will go well with you. You may live long in the land. Now, don't think of that as selfish. God wants us very specifically to pursue what's best.

And what's best for us is a life of humility that honors the family the way that he structured it. So children, young and old, Jesus, our King, lived a life of complete obedience to both his earthly parents and his heavenly Father.

[7 : 46] He did that not only to become an example for you, though he is an example for us, but also to fulfill all righteousness and become our Savior.

But when we honor and obey our parents, we not only honor them, we honor him as our heart is more and more conformed to his likeness.

so your obedience to your parents is a weightier act of obedience and of worship than singing all the praise songs in the world because that's his praise song brought to life.

Now that he's addressed children, Paul has a word for their parents. Verse 4, fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. Don't provoke your children to anger.

What does that mean? Elsewhere in the scriptures, when this word provoke to anger is used, it's almost exclusively used of God. And what is he angry at?

[8 : 54] Sin. People's sin. Here's an example from 1 Kings chapter 16. God was speaking against the evil king Bashar saying, I exalted you out of the dust and made you a leader over my people Israel, but you have walked in the way of Jeroboam and have made my people Israel to sin, provoking me to anger with their sins.

So if requiring our children to eat their vegetables gets them angry, Paul's not saying don't do that. That's not what he's talking about here. He specifically, he's saying don't sin against your children. And most specifically, he's saying don't use your God-given authority and your physical power over your children in sinful ways. I ran across a wonderful quote explaining the depth of what this looks like and what it should look like in our lives.

It reads, fathers are made responsible for ensuring that they do not provoke anger in their children. This involves avoiding attitudes, words, and actions which would drive a child to angry exasperation or resentment and thus rules out excessively severe discipline, unreasonably harsh demands, abuse of authority, arbitrariness, unfairness, constant nagging and condemnation, subjecting a child to humiliation, and all forms of gross insensitivity to a child's needs and sensibilities.

I love that explanation. It's so thorough. And it shows all the different shadows in our hearts. It shines light on them.

[10:37] That's what Paul wants us not to do. What does he want us to do? To bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. The Greek word he translates, that's here translated bring them up, occurs only one other time.

in the entire New Testament. And we read it last week, actually. In chapter 5, verses 28 to 30, Paul is instructing husbands to love their wives like their own bodies.

He says this, He who loves his wife loves himself, for no one ever hated his own flesh, but, and here's the word, nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body.

So when Paul says bring up your children, he's not just thinking of raising a child, as if, just babysit them until they get older.

He wants fathers to nourish their children with a God-saturated, love-focused, others-soaked worldview that causes their souls to flourish.

[11:52] How do we do that? We fathers need to connect our children to the great father. It's the only way. And how do we do that? Well, Paul calls it the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

What's that? The instruction of the Lord? That's the Bible. So, fathers, by next Father's Day, let's earn our world's greatest dad mugs by reading the Bible with our children, by praying with them, by faithfully loving and lovingly disciplining them, by helping them think about their friendships and the news through the lens of the Bible, by modeling Christian behavior for them.

We don't need to be Bible scholars. We just need to open it and read it with them. We don't need to be eloquent. We just need to seek God in prayer with them. We don't need to be skilled culture critics.

We just need to know what idolatry looks like and point it out. And we don't need to be the perfect example, but we do need to be the example of repentance when we do fall.

Okay. Deep breath. Verse five. Slaves, or bond servants, depending on what translation you're reading, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling with a sincere heart as you would Christ, not by the way of eye service as people pleasers, but as bond servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, rendering service with a good will as to the Lord and not to man, knowing that whatever good anyone does, this he will receive back from the Lord whether he's a bond servant or is free.

[13:37] Let's get right to it. Slaves, obey your masters. It's a rough one, right? Even before we try to recalibrate our thinking and try to read it as Paul was saying, was trying to communicate in the first century, I want to acknowledge that throughout the history of the church, especially in the United States and in certain Western cultures, people have used this passage and others like it to justify great evils that it was never intended to justify.

And here's how we know that. In the Old Testament, we read how God rescued his people, Israel, from slavery in Egypt. When he did, he gave them a new set of laws so they wouldn't plunge back into the sins of Egypt.

He gave them a lot of structure like the Ten Commandments, new civil laws, the purity laws, and many religious regulations and requirements to order their lives around justice for men and praise to God.

Among those laws were laws for a new kind of slavery. It looked nothing like the slavery of the ancient world or the slavery that you and I think of when we hear that word.

Where other ancient slave systems like the Egyptians were cruel and exploitative, God's new slavery was actually a system of restoration.

[15:24] Incredibly. Here's how it worked. Instead of being left forgotten and homeless, a bankrupt Israelite could take refuge in God's new kind of slavery by getting a job working for someone else for a period of years before all debts were forgiven.

In modern terms, this is basically a combination of bankruptcy protection and a privatized jobs program. So instead of exploiting a bankrupt person, it actually gave them a job, a home, and a home for the future and it legally protected them.

What was that new slavery like? Almost the exact opposite of the slavery that we have in our minds from the North American slave trade.

Where the North American slave trade was enslavement for life, God said, when you buy a Hebrew slave, he shall serve six years and in the seventh year he shall go out free for nothing.

Where American slavery was marked by violence and no justice for the slaves, God said, when a man strikes the eye of his slave, male or female, and destroys it, he shall let the slave go free because of his eye.

[16:40] If he knocks out the tooth of his slave, male or female, he shall let the slave go free because of his tooth. Even more, he said, when a man strikes a slave, male or female, with a rod and the slave dies under his hand, he shall be avenged.

There's justice for slaves. And physical harm to slaves was forbidden. Where North American slavery used up every ounce of the enslaved person's energy for the master's benefit, God wanted his system to benefit the destitute person just as much.

He said, when you let him go free in the seventh year, you shall not let him go empty-handed. You shall furnish him liberally out of your flock, out of your threshing floor, and out of your winepress.

As the Lord your God has blessed you, you shall give to him. When a slave went out, he didn't just leave. They left with the resources in hand to set them up for a future with a fresh start.

where North American slavery deprived people of basic possessions, Hebrew slaves could actually become independently wealthy while serving. In Leviticus chapter 25, we read, a close relative from the slave's family may redeem him, or if he grows rich, he may redeem himself.

[18:04] Where North American slavery was characterized by brutality, God said, you shall not rule over him ruthlessly, but shall fear your God.

God took the evil, exploitative slave systems of the ancient world, one closely mirrored by what we have in our heads when we think slavery, and turned them on their head.

He transformed a system that exploited slaves for the benefit of masters into a social safety net. That served both the slave and the master and glorified God.

God's version of slavery is so opposite the world's version. Why does he even call it that? Why doesn't he say we've got this new system with a new name?

I think it's because he wants us to know that his ways are not our ways, and his thoughts are not our thoughts. whether we are cruel and exploitative, he is loving and restoring.

[19:14] He takes our most sinister evils and renews them. He takes something designed to destroy and makes it something that restores. And if he can do that with something as huge and pervasive as a system of slavery, what can he do with you?

If you don't have a living relationship with the living God, you might not recognize that he does the same thing in people. We're almost to the end of the book of Ephesians, but the whole book has been about how Jesus is risen from the dead for everyone who will repent and believe in him, and how God uses that power, the power that raised Christ from the dead, the same power of God that breaks the world's evil systems and turns them into a good, that power to redeem and transform you.

If you're drawn to the kind of God that turns children to their parents and sets parents to nourish their children, if you're excited by a God who takes something as awful as slavery and makes it an incredible good, if you're intrigued by a God who promises to do even greater things in you and in your heart, turn to Jesus.

He died in your place and he rose again so that you might know his love, so that you also can rise again if you are found in him, so that you can know and worship and serve and be transformed and blessed by this great God, turn to Jesus.

If you want to walk down that road, talk to me, talk to someone else you know who's a Christian, we will lead you to him. There's much more to say about how God transforms slavery.

[21:15] This isn't the whole story. There's a lot to be said about how he transforms us, the whole story. We're going to return to our passage today. We already know about American slavery.

We just looked at how God totally transformed the slavery of the ancient world. But Paul didn't actually live in either of those situations. He lived in the first century when the Roman Empire owned the entire known world.

The slavery laws in Ephesus, which is in modern day Turkey, they followed the Roman slave laws. How does that compare to what we just discussed? The Roman slave system is a mixed bag.

It lands somewhere in between the two. It is not as completely evil as what you and I typically have in our minds, but is nowhere near the restorative restoration that God has in mind with his slavery.

Here are a few facts for us. Slaves, positively, were allowed to accumulate money of their own, to purchase their freedom, to start a business, and often that business was a cooperative venture with

their former masters.

[22 : 19] ancient historians record that by law, Roman slaves were typically freed after seven years of service or 30 years of age, whichever came first.

So that's good, but it wasn't all great. Most employees, as many as 90% by some estimates, were bond servant or slave contracts. That's going to be important in a moment for us, I'm going to say it again.

Almost 90% of all employment contracts were slave contracts. Masters could physically harm slaves, basically without repercussion, and many did.

Roman slaves also enjoyed fewer legal protections than freed persons. So it's back and forth. It's definitely not an ideal situation, but it isn't what we think of when we think of slavery.

And so these are the slaves that Paul is talking to. And so that's why many of our Bibles translate the word here bond servant because it's not, when we read the word slave, it's not communicating to us what it communicated in the first century.

[23 : 31] And that's not to say that Paul is pro-slavery here when he says, you know, obey your masters. In fact, Paul elsewhere in scripture will say, if you can slaves, get your freedom. The book of Philemon, the whole book, is Paul's letter to a slave master requesting the release of a slave, Onesimus.

So he's not pro-slavery, but these are simply his instructions for those people who happen to be slaves. Now, as we've already said, basically the entire workforce, like 90% in Ephesus, would have been slaves.

contracts. So most, if not nearly all, employer-employee relationships at this time are bond-servant contracts.

So when we hear bond-servants in this context, our minds should be moving more and more towards employees, interestingly enough. And suddenly, this text becomes a lot more relevant to a lot more people than we initially expect when we're reading the passage.

So what's Paul's message for employees? The center of his instruction is to work like we're working for Jesus, not for men.

[24 : 52] In each of the four verses addressed to slaves, Jesus is mentioned, he says in verse 5, to be obedient as to Christ, to behave verse 6, as servants of Christ, to render service verse 7, as to the Lord rather than to men, knowing that they will receive good, verse 8, from the Lord.

What does that look like? What does that mean to work for Jesus when you work at EB or the schools or the hospital or your cadet? What does that look like?

One pastor tried to expand our vision of how work could be to Jesus. He said it like this, it is possible for a housewife to cook a meal as if Jesus Christ were the one going to eat it, or to spring clean the house as if Jesus were going to be the honored guest.

It's possible for teachers to educate children, for doctors to treat patients, and nurses to care for them, for attorneys to help clients, shop assistants to serve customers, accountants to audit books, and secretaries to type letters as if in each case they were serving Jesus Christ.

And this isn't imaginary service to Jesus. We don't have to pretend that Jesus pulled in to the garage driving the car we're changing the oil for.

[26 : 14] That's not where we're headed with this, and that's not what Paul wants us to get out of it. You don't have to act like you're working for God while in reality you know you're working for a bank or for a construction company.

But by doing good work, work, you honor God and are doing it for him in several ways. First, work in and of itself honors God.

God gave our first parent, Adam, and by extension us, a job saying, be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves in the earth.

Subdue the earth, have dominion. God wants us to bring out this world's potential as faithful stewards. When you make a hospital safe by mopping the floors, you're doing that.

You're fulfilling God's plan that humanity would grow as stewards of the earth. When you work in a bookshop, helping people find the book they need for their education, you're doing that that we might develop and mirror his creative genius.

[27 : 35] Your fruitful work in every good endeavor is obedience to God. Do it from the heart, rendering service with a goodwill. Secondly, your work serves others.

Maybe you drive a truck. That doesn't seem very godly. It doesn't seem very spiritual. It doesn't seem like it's a big service to anybody, but when you realize that your deliveries allow artists to create without fashioning their own brushes, and doctors to prescribe medications without having to synthesize and distill the chemicals themselves, we realize that our jobs actually matter quite a bit more than we thought.

Not only is your job honorable and God-honoring, but you're helping others, and you're helping others do the same. Third, Paul tells us that whatever good anyone does, this he will receive back from the Lord.

What does he mean by that? He's looking forward to the day when we will bring all of our labors to the king.

In Revelation chapter 21, we read that the new Jerusalem, our forever home, will be filled with the good work done in this life. We read, they will bring into the city the glory and the honor of the nations.

[28 : 59] Your contribution to the honor and glory of the nations, maybe that's a real estate agent helping people find a home that fits them well.

And you will see that again in heaven as a testament to God's good design for his people. Martin Luther summed it up this way.

The Christian shoemaker does his duty not by putting little crosses on the shoes but by making good shoes because God is interested in good craftsmanship. Our last verse, Paul turns his attention to the masters.

He says, 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. This last section deals with people who are in authority.

God doesn't care how much authority you have.

[30 : 02] You're still responsible to him. You may be someone's master with a little m but you both have a master with a big m in heaven.

You're accountable to him. And what standard does he hold you to? To treat those entrusted to your care just like he does. Paul says there is no partiality with God. that means he isn't impressed with status and titles. You could be a giant among men. You're faced on Forbes magazine. But in God's eyes the man and the woman that the world doesn't even notice are just as valuable because he made both of you in his image and that is far greater and a much higher honor than any human accolades.

before we close there's one more question we need to ask. What about when all of this goes wrong? What about tyrants who abuse their authority?

This passage talks a lot about obeying those in authority but what about a parent or an employer who tasks you with something sinful? Does Paul want you to obey?

[31 : 23] Or if you're being abused, does God want you to honor that person set in authority over you? In a word, no.

There is no God given authority to abuse your power and hurt someone else. That is a contradiction in terms.

God's plan for God's plan for human relationships. If we could summarize this passage, Paul's instructions and God's plans for human relationships is for people in authority to go out of their way to ensure the welfare of those entrusted to their care.

God's plan for God's plan for God. For a parent who nourishes a child to grow up in the Lord or a master who leads with the knowledge that his master is in heaven, God wants to protect vulnerable people.

people. So if you are being abused, please get help immediately. Talk to a teacher, police officer, a pastor, anyone who holds authority and uses it rightly.

[32 : 37] God wants what's best for you. So honor him in pursuing that. Finally, what should we say about this passage as a whole?

There are a lot of things we could say. We could say God cares about using authority well. It's pretty big here. We could say that God cares about our families because these happen in a household. We could say that God cares about our work because that's the outpouring of this. We could say that God cares about our relationships because every one of these items was a relationship. What does all of that have in common? What do we say? It's actually really simple.

God cares about all of our life. This religion is not just about having the right doctrines. It's lived. It's our worship songs come to life in our lives. So, will you put your faith in action? [33 : 44] Not just on Sundays, but on Mondays too. Pray with me. Father in heaven, you are the great God who turns great evils into great goods.

God bless you. And that is why we worship you. Lord, I pray that you'd help us to pursue you, the greatest good, every day, by doing the things that we have been instructed here today. For our good and your glory. Pray these things in Christ's name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.