

## Living Under the Lordship of Christ

*Ephesians 6:1-9*

### Introduction

Philippians 2:1-11

**M.P.S.** – Regardless of your place in life, you live under the lordship of Jesus Christ and should treat others with love and respect. In other words, your position, your status in society or in our community does not change your obligation to love your neighbors and your enemies. You are not so much worse or so much better than others that you have a right to treat others with cruelty or severity.

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### Ephesians 6:1-9

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

<sup>5</sup> Bondservants, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, with a sincere heart, as you would Christ, <sup>6</sup> not by the way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, <sup>7</sup> rendering service with a good will as to the Lord and not to man, <sup>8</sup> knowing that whatever good anyone does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether he is a bondservant or is free. <sup>9</sup> 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.

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### Exposition

#### **I. Whether in weakness or vulnerability, we are called to live under the lordship of Christ and honor those in authority over us.**

Ephesians 6:1-9 forms Paul’s conclusion to his take on the Greco-Roman household codes that were common in first-century ethical literature. While we might not realize it, Paul is doing something pretty radical in these verses. Instead of starting his address with the powerful people or the people who are in authority, he begins with those who are considered weak and vulnerable to the abuse of power. Paul elevates the weak and vulnerable to the same status of dignity as everyone else, which in the first-century, was almost unheard of.

Paul writes to exhort and encourage the weak and vulnerable in the church by encouraging them to live under the lordship of Christ. Notice how Paul speaks in verses 1-3: *Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. “Honor your father and mother” (this is the first commandment with a promise), “that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land.”* In these three verses, we find Paul exhorting children in the context of the early church to obey their parents “in the Lord.” It is important to note that this obedience is qualified. Children are to obey their parents “in the Lord,” meaning, their obligation to obey was contingent upon whether or not they were able to obey their parents in a manner that honored God.

Children were not expected to follow their parents into idolatry or other sinful actions that would be contrary to their calling in Christ. A parent's authority was a delegated authority which could be delegitimized if it was abused. In cases where parents were expecting their children to live contrary to the call of Christ, the child must obey God rather than man. However, if the child was able to "obey their parents in the Lord," then they should do so. God declares such obedience to be right and good.

In a parallel manner, Paul addresses bondservants, or slaves, in the context of the early church. Now, at this point, I need you to understand that when Paul addresses slaves and masters in the context of the early church, he is not condoning later practices of slavery that we read about in the antebellum South. First-century slavery was predominantly a matter of debt slavery or prisoners of war. With debt slavery, when a person could not afford to repay their debt to the lender, they would have to work off their debt. So, just imagine that you found yourself in a similar situation, unable to repay a loan, and instead of legal recourse, your lender acquires your services for a period of time in order to pay of your loan through your work. That would be a closer parallel to what was taking place in the first-century than to what we find in the race-based slavery that was practiced in the United States. Paul would not have condoned such slavery, for Paul believed that all people were created in the image of God and deserving of full respect and honor. Hence, in his writing, instead of prioritizing honor for the power people in the congregation, Paul goes out of his way to address the weak and vulnerable of the congregation to exhort them and encourage them.

So, now we look at verses 5-8: Bondservants, 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 bondservants 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 is a bondservant or is free. Paul, like with children and their parents, calls the bondservants to obey with fear and trembling, with a sincere heart, "as you would Christ." The slaves in the church in Ephesus though devoid of earthly freedom are called to live as men and women who are free to obey Christ in every circumstance that they find themselves in. If the master called them to worship other gods, the slaves did not have freedom in Christ to disobey Paul's instruction. The slaves had to be willing to suffer for what was true and right and not turn away from Christ. However, if their masters were harsh rulers, who mistreated them, Paul called them to obey until they could attain their freedom (1 Corinthians 7).

It is interesting to note too that Paul sees something about the bondservant's status as a teaching point for all Christians. Paul calls all Christians as "bondservants of Christ." Thus, Paul here again reinforces the significance of the transcendent lordship of Jesus for understanding how we are to navigate this world. For Paul, it didn't really matter if a person was a bondservant in the flesh or a free man or woman, what mattered to Paul was whether or not Christians recognized that they had been ransomed by Jesus Himself, bought with a price so that they are no longer their own, but slaves of Christ called to "do the will of God from the heart, rendering service with a good will as to the Lord and not to man."

How might this perspective change the way that we think about our own professions and vocations? Have you ever been mistreated at work? Have you ever thought, “Man, I sure dislike the people, the company, the boss that I work for. I wish I could find another job, then my problems would be solved.” Now, I’m not suggesting that God might not want to move you somewhere else at some point. I’m not suggesting that God does not want you to consider changing jobs or professions. No. Instead, I am saying that you will continue to be miserable in your job as long as you work ultimately for the “praise of people” instead of the “praise of God.” When we work “by the way of eye-service as people-pleasers,” we become functional slaves to others. But when we work as unto the Lord, we are free from the praise of man in order to live for the praise of God. And while it might be nice to think about how it would be good to have more recognition for all your hard work in this life, if you are a Christian, then the only recognition that really matters is the recognition of Christ, who we long to hear say, “Well done, my good and faithful servant, enter into your rest.”

Whether we are in positions of weakness or vulnerability, ultimately, we are still living under the lordship of Christ who intends to make us more like Him and promises that while we will endure light and momentary afflictions in this life, we can be sure that those difficulties are working for our good. It is realization like this that help us sing lyrics like, “Whatever my lot, thou has taught me to say, “It is well, it is well, with my soul.” Because Christ is Lord, we can trust Him, regardless of our circumstance. And because we can trust Him, we must obey Him.

T.S. – But what about those who are not in a position of weakness and vulnerability...

## **II. Whether in power or authority, we are called to live under the lordship of Christ and honor to those under our authority.**

Paul’s instructions to fathers and masters in our passage is quite striking. Let’s begin by looking at verse 4, “Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.” As I mentioned earlier, the authority of a parents is a delegated authority. For the father, it is an authority that is to be used to “bring a child up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.” We discipline our children not because we are mad or angry with them. We do not discipline to pay them back for their behavior. The goal is not punishment, but discipline, and the goal of discipline is growth in holiness and conformity to Christ. But discipline without instruction is nothing more than behavior modification.

When a parent disciplines their child without instruction, they will inevitably provoke their children to wrath. Practically speaking, this means a parent need to avoid discipline that is borne out of anger. They need to discipline with a level-head and with the intention of instructing their children in the things of God. This means that parents need to know the things of God. You will never be able to teach your children the things that you do not know yourself.

At this point you may say, “Well, it’s the church’s responsibility to teach my children the things of God.” Now, while it may be true that the church can help a parent in this manner, it is important to note that the discipline and instruction of a child is first and foremost the responsibility of the parent. Surely two hours of instruction a week is not enough for our children! They need to be hearing the truth and seeing the truth in their parents on a daily basis.

We must by the grace of Christ bring our children up in the fear and instruction of the Lord! Thus, the authority that God has given you as a parent is not primarily for the purpose of making a child do their chores. The purpose is for their instruction in the truths of God!

Now, moving from parents to masters, in verse 9, we read: 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. For a first-century audience, this verse would have been breathtaking. Masters treat your slaves with the same equity, fairness, kindness, and love that you want them to treat you. So, while the master-slave relationship did not end at this point in history, Paul expected the dynamic of the relationship to change because of Jesus' Lordship. Because the slaves ultimately belonged to Christ (as did the masters), Paul calls the masters to "stop their threatening." Why? Because the masters were slaves themselves! They had a master in Heaven. In other words, they had a Lord as well, and the Lord in heaven did not practice partiality. Instead, He was and is kind to those who belong to Him. Now, some of us are in positions of authority and power like these masters in verse 9. We have people who we supervise, guide, direct, and manage in our vocations. This passage teaches us that while our positions of authority and power might remain, God has called us to use it in a way that is beneficial for those under our authority. As a pastor, I have been given a certain authority by Christ himself to lead, guide, and direct His church. Yet, I am also told that I am not to use that authority to domineer or exploit God's people. In your jobs, God might have given you a certain degree of authority and responsibility over other people. And God intends for you to exercise that authority in a manner that honors Him.

That, of course, does not mean that you are never required to make hard decisions about personnel, that does not mean that you are never supposed to address a problem or that you are supposed to overlook incompetence, but instead, it means that you need to remember that you are a person who is also under someone's authority. You are under the authority of Christ, and you need to act accordingly.

Thus, masters and parents should take their cue from Christ. They should seek to exercise their position of power and authority for the benefit of those that they were responsible for in this life.

## **Conclusion**

Whether princes or paupers, whether masters or slaves, whether powerful or weak, ultimately, we are all under the lordship of King Jesus. And that reality, that reminder -- that we are all subjects of Christ -- must impact the way that we relate to and treat one another in our families and in our church.

As we close and move into a time of reflection as we prepare for the Lord's Supper, I want you to meditate on the benefits of Christ's Lordship for you. Christ has conquered sin, death, and hell for all who would trust in Him. Though He was king of Heaven, He came to this earth as a servant and laid His life down in the place of those who would turn from their sins and believe in His name. Christ used His authority and power to save those who were weak and poor. Let us thank Him and remember His work this morning.