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Children, Parents, Slaves, Masters

“Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. ‘Honor your father and mother,’ which is the first commandment with promise: ‘that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth.’ And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord.” Ephesians 6:1-4

In his discussion of submission to one another, Paul chooses three reciprocal relationships: husbands and wives, children and parents, slaves and masters. In each of these relationships, Paul begins each time with that group who are to submit or obey, and then he moves to a Godly response from those to whom the others are submitting or obeying.

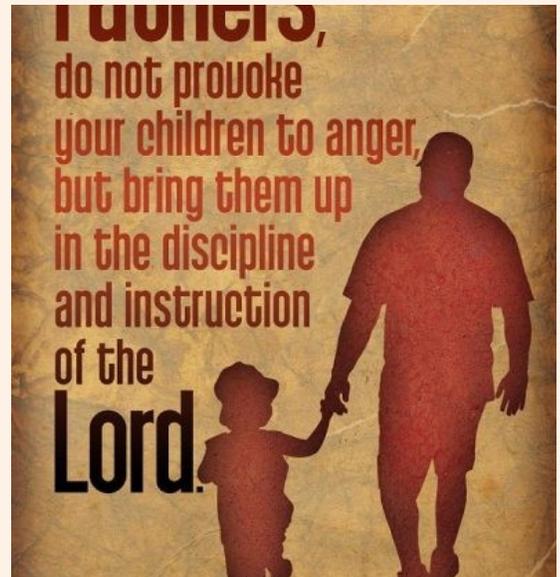
I read this story about Keeping the Roots Stronger:

Once upon a time, there were two neighbors living next to each other. One of them was a retired teacher and another was an insurance agent who had a lot of interest in technology. Both had planted different plants in their garden. The retired teacher was giving a small amount of water to his plants and didn't always give a full attention to them, while the other neighbor interested in technology, had given a lot of water to his plants and looked after them too well.

The retired teacher's plants were simple but looked good. The insurance agent's plants were much fuller and greener. One day, during the night, there was a heavy rain and a wind due to a minor storm. Next morning, both of the neighbors came out to inspect the damage to their garden. The neighbor who was an insurance agent saw that his plants came off from the roots and were totally destroyed. But the retired teacher's plants were not damaged at all and were standing firm.

The insurance agent neighbor was surprised to see it, he went to the retired teacher and asked, “We both grew the same plants together, I actually looked after my plants better than you did for yours, and even gave them more water. Still, my plants came off from the roots, while yours didn't. How is that possible?”

The retired teacher smiled and said, “You gave your plants more attention and water, but because of that they didn't need to work themselves for it. You made it easy for them. While I gave them just an adequate amount of water and let their roots search for more. And because of that, their roots went deeper and that made their position stronger. That is why my plants survived”.



Moral: This story is about parenting where children are like plants. If everything is given to them, they will not understand the hard work it takes to earn those things. They will not learn to work themselves and respect it. Sometimes it's best to guide them instead of giving them. Teach them how to walk but let them follow their path.

Submitting to Parents

Children are taught to obey their parents in the Lord. The word "obey" is a stronger word than the word to "submit." Strong's 5219 – *hupakouó* (hoop-ak-oo'-o); Definition: to listen, attend to Usage: I listen, hearken to, obey, answer. Word Study - 5219 *hypakouō* (from 5259 /*hypó*, "under" and 191 /*akouō*, "hear") – properly, to *obey* what is heard (literally, "under hearing"). / *hypakouō* ("obey") is acting *under the authority* of the one speaking, i.e. *really listening* to the one giving the charge (order). 5219 /*hypakouō* ("to hearken, obey") suggests *attentively* listening, i.e. fully compliant (responsive).

James M. Gillis suggested this program for the healing of modern society: "The salvation of society is in the family and the reconstruction of family virtues, parental authority, and filial obedience. The family is the nucleus of all society. You can have no prosperous state unless the family is healthy. You can have no effective church unless the family is sound ... The family is the organic cell from which all human societies are constructed."

There will never be a time when it is right for children to disregard, dishonor, and disobey their parents. "Parents give their children three things: they bring them into being, provide them nourishment, and afford them instruction" (Thomas Aquinas).

"There are three concentric rings describing the situations in which all people should learn discipline and obedience, these being the home, the

school and society. If one does not learn obedience at home, he becomes a troublemaker in school; and from there he soon graduates to the police court. A great deal of the world's sorrows could be prevented if all children were taught to obey their parents" (Coffman).

Paul has in view here Christian homes, and so the obedience is in the Lord. Paul did not teach children to obey principles which contradict basic Christian principles. Paul says that children obeying their parents in the Lord is right.

Strong's 1342 – *dikaios* (dik'-ah-yos); Definition: correct, righteous, by implication innocent Usage: just; especially, just in the eyes of God; righteous; the elect (a Jewish idea). Word Study - 1342 *dikaios* (an adjective, derived from *dikē*, "right, judicial approval") – properly, "*approved by God*" (J. Thayer); *righteous*; "*just in the eyes of God*" (Souter). See 1343 ("*dikaiosynē*"). ["Righteous" relates to *conformity to God's standard* (justice). For more on the root-idea see the cognate noun, 1343 / *dikaiosynē* ("righteousness").] 1342 / *dikaios* ("righteous, just") describes what is in conformity to God's own being (His will, standard of rightness); hence "upright."

So, this is what accords with God's will for children. Honor your father and mother is the 5th commandment in the Ten Commandments, so why does Paul say it is the first commandment with promise? It might best be understood that Paul means this is the first commandment for children.

The promise is that it may be well with you and you shall live long on the earth. We know this often to be the case. Often children disobey their parent's instructions about dangerous situations and find themselves in terrible trouble that sometimes results in death. This is not to be understood in the sense that an obedient child will not die of some disease or in an accident unrelated to obedi-

ence to their parents.

Parents and Discipline

Wives, children, and slaves had no rights in the society of Paul's day. This teaching was revolutionary and liberating. Fathers are singled out in this passage with an obligation to consider the feelings and limitations of their children.

All women, wives in particular, were in practical fact the chattels of their husbands, without economic or rights of any kind whatever, subject to divorce or abuse upon any pretext and without recourse or protection of any kind. What Christianity has done for women has been extolled in the songs and literature of all nations; but the same glorious transformation of the status of children and slaves was also achieved by those sacred Scriptures before our eyes in this very chapter. (Coffman)

Do not provoke them to wrath. Strong's 3949 – *parorgizó* (par-org-id'-zo); Definition: to provoke to anger; Usage: I provoke to anger, exasperate. Word Study-3949 *parorgízō* (from 3844 *pará*, "from close-beside" and 3710 *orgízō*, "become angry") – properly, rouse someone to anger; to *provoke* in a way that "really pushes someone's buttons," i.e. to "really get to them" in an "up-close-and-personal" way (because so near, literally "close beside").

How do we provoke a child? A good example might be to strictly forbid them to do the very thing that we constantly do in front of them. Smoking might be one example of this. However, this does not mean that a parent cannot discipline or train a child. For instance, a young child might have a bedtime of 9:00 p.m. even though the parents do not retire until 11:00 p.m. Those who have brought up children may be able to attest to the necessity of this in order to maintain one's sanity.

Parents are to bring them up in the training (discipline) and admonition (warning) of the Lord.

Strong's 3559 *nouthesía* ("warning through teaching") *improves a person's reasoning* so they can reach *God's solution* – i.e. by going through *His thought-process*.

Parents should be intentional and consistent in their discipline and training of their children. Someone said that parenting is mainly just informing kids how many more minutes they have left of something. However, it is a little more complicated and messier than that.

Ephesians 6:5-9

"Bondservants, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in sincerity of heart, as to Christ; not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, with goodwill doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men, knowing that whatever good anyone does, he will receive the same from the Lord, whether he is a slave or free. And you, masters, do the same things to them, giving up threatening, knowing that your own Master also is in heaven, and there is no partiality with Him."

Slaves (Employees) and Masters (Bosses)

The notion that a father had any obligation toward a child simply did not exist in non-Jewish elements of ancient pagan society. As a result of the prevailing attitude, many unwanted or despised children were exposed at birth to the elements, wild beasts, or other forms of horrible death.

It was exactly the same way with slaves. A slave is no better than a beast; the old and sick must be thrown out to starve; when a slave is sick, it is a waste to give him rations; masters had power of life and death over slaves; Augustus killed a slave for killing a pet quail; Pollio flung a slave alive to the savage lampreys in his fish pond because he dropped and broke a crystal goblet. One Roman nobleman's wife killed a slave because she lost her

temper. Slaves used as maids often had their cheeks torn, their hair torn out, or were branded with hot irons at the caprice of their heartless and cruel masters. (William Barclay, *The Letters to the Galatians and Ephesians* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1954), p. 208.)

Now, it was to a world which from the remotest antiquity had operated upon such principles as these, regarding wives, children and slaves, that the great apostle of Christianity thundered the mighty oracle of these magnificent chapters. In the name of Christ, he asserted the obligations of husbands, fathers and masters, thereby announcing the character of the basic rights of wives, children and slaves. In all literature apart from the word of God, where is anything that compares to what is taught here? No wonder this letter has lived two thousand years; and, as for the nonsense that it was not written by Paul, one may only ask, “Who, in the name of God, could have written it except Paul?” (Coffman)

The society of Paul’s day practiced ownership of slaves. However, Paul’s instructions here to slaves and masters in no way condones the practice. In fact, the principles to which husbands, fathers, and masters are called in this passage would eliminate any abuse of those who are called into submission in these relationships.

Wherever the truth of God’s word has been practiced in sincerity, it has led to freedom from abuse. It was Christian leaders who championed the abolition of slavery. The principles enjoined on both slaves and masters is to act as if you were serving the Lord in what you are doing. They were to serve from the heart as if doing everything for the Lord.

In the Book of Philemon, we have an example of a runaway slave, Onesimus, being returned to his master, Philemon. (Phile. 1:10-19):

I appeal to you for my child Onesimus, whose father I became while I was in chains. Formerly he was useless to you, but now he has become useful both to you and to me. I am sending back to you him who is my very heart. I would have liked to keep him with me, so that on your behalf he could minister to me in my chains for the gospel. But I did not want to do anything without your consent, so that your goodness will not be out of compulsion, but by your own free will. For perhaps this is why he was separated from you for a while, so that you might have him back for good—no longer as a slave, but better than a slave, as a beloved brother. He is especially beloved to me, but even more so to you, both in person and in the Lord. So if you consider me a partner, receive him as you would receive me. But if he has wronged you in any way or owes you anything, charge it to my account. I, Paul, write this with my own hand. I will repay it—not to mention that you owe me your very self.

These instructions to masters and slaves translate very well to relations between bosses and employees. When a Christlike spirit prevails in the workplace, it makes for better relationships and more productivity.

I want to conclude this study with a quotation from Coffman’s Commentary on Ephesians 6:9:

This is the oracle of God that turned the world upside down. All obligations involving human beings are a two-way street. Slaves have duties, but so also, do their masters! What an earthshaking concept that was and IS! Toward their slaves, masters were commanded: “Give them the same good will, love and loyalty that you hope to receive from hem.” Behind a commandment like this lay the infinite dimensions of those tremendous new value judgments which were brought to mankind from above by Jesus Christ the Lord. The infinite value of human life! Who ever heard of such a thing? It had never been heard of until the apostles

of Christ preached it in the heathen darkness, having themselves received it of the Lord. The mighty corpus of the ancient empire trembled under the impact of a shot like this verse which Paul launched from the end of a prisoner's chain; and when a shaft of light such as this penetrated the darkness, people knew instinctively that a new age had dawned.

However, it should be noted that it was not the truth alone which could change the world; it was the truth in Christ the Lord! The duty of masters to their slaves, fathers to their children and husbands to their wives, etc., was not just splendid theory. The living Christ at the right hand of God would require of every man an accounting of his deeds at the judgment of the Great Day. No man would escape it!

Shallow and unperceptive persons of our own times tend to be critical of New Testament teaching because no hard, definitive commands are uttered demanding the abolition of slavery; but it was clear to Christ and the apostles that laws never made people better; only an inward change could accomplish such a purpose as that. Paul's instructions here did not free slaves; but, as Dummelow said, "It freed slavery of its evils," and set in motion forces that would ultimately destroy, not only slavery, but other evil institutions as well.

In this connection, the resurgence of humanism in these times should be noted. Turning away from God, people are obsessed with the notion that, in themselves, they can make everything all right, with their laws, social gains and planned programs of all kinds; but it is no more possible to accomplish worthwhile human societies away from God than it is to produce a crop of apples from uprooted trees. "The New Testament presents the demands of the kingdom of God as prior to those of a utopian society on this earth ... Love of God is still the first and great commandment, love of neighbor second. Worshipping and serving the creature

more than the Creator, however, drowned the pre-Christian world in debaucheries; and, if indulged, it will do it again!"

L Scott Gage

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Sources: Burton Coffman Commentary

Thayer's Greek English Lexicon

Keeping the roots Stronger: <https://www.moralstories.org/keeping-roots-stronger/>

James M. Gillis, *The Ten Commandments* (New York: The Paulist Press, 1931), p. 49

William Barclay, *The Letters to the Galatians and Ephesians* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1954), p. 208.

Aristotle said that some people were only fit to be slaves. I do not contradict him. But I reject slavery because I see no men fit to be masters.

C. S. Lewis

Christian Homes

The apostle Paul, in his power-packed letter of Ephesians, continues to stress the importance of relationships in Ephesian 6. Earlier he has discussed the unique relationship we share as husband and wife in the Christian home. A relationship is based on Christ's love for the church and one that is a reflection of Christ and the church. Continuing in chapter 6, Paul discusses two other relationships common in the first-century Greco-Roman world. He discusses the relationships of children and parents as well as bondservants and masters.

Text & Background

EPHESIANS 6:1–9 ESV

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

As in the previous section (Eph. 5:22-33), part of the difficulty with this passage is the historical context. When looking at passages such as this, we should keep in mind the context in which Paul was writing, the culture of his day.

Paul is writing to a first-century Greco-Roman world. Where fathers were head of the household and had complete authority within it.

Each of these relationships, the relationships of children and parents and that of bondservants and masters, should be Christ-centered. Paul is advocating, in both cases, something that would have been unexpected in the first century. Each person in the relationship should treat the other as Christ would.

Application

The language can be shocking when reading through texts like this. Today, we can look back and ask questions of the Scripture or of Paul, that neither he nor the Scriptures are asking. “Why did Paul (or Scriptures) not utterly condemn the practice of slaves and masters?” is an often-asked question. Such questions can lead us away from the culture-shocking statements that are made. What Paul is advocating are Christ-centered relationships, a completely unexpected relationship within the First Century. Relationships of mutual respect, honor, love, and service centered on Christ.

Today, as we consider our relationships, are they Christ-centered relationships? As Christians today, in our homes and through our other relationships, Christ is to be the center. We, as Christians, should demonstrate His love, respect, honor, and sacrificial service.

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The Power of Words

“Then Jesus called to the crowd to come and hear. ‘Listen,’ he said, ‘and try to understand. It’s not what goes into your mouth that defiles you; you are defiled by the words that come out of your mouth.’” Matthew 15:10–11 NLT

A talkative woman once tried to justify the quickness of her own tongue by saying, “It passes; it is done with quickly.” To which the famous evangelist Billy Sunday replied, “So does a shotgun blast.” And such is the action of a quick tongue that it also leaves devastation in its wake!

We must make no mistake about it: our tongue, though one of the smaller parts of our body, is one of the most powerful forces for good or evil in our marriage.

I found this poem I wanted to share.

Power Of Words

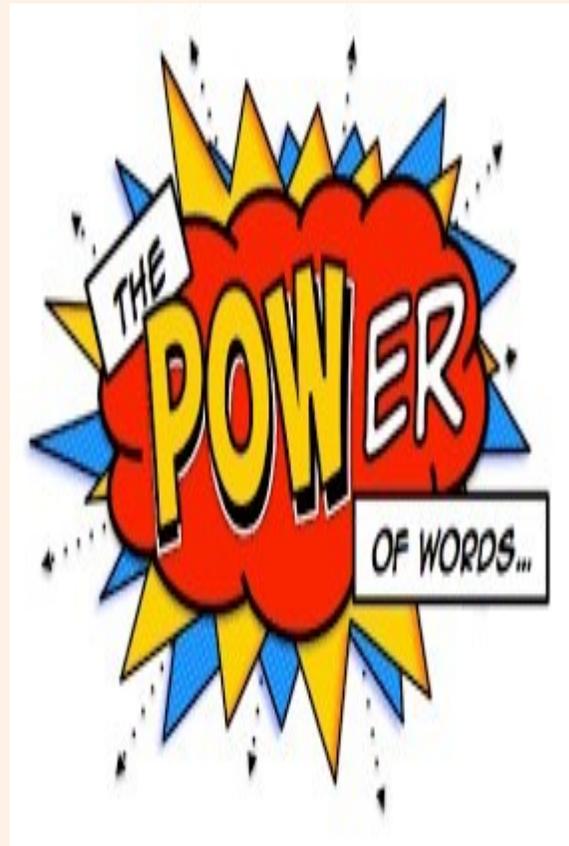
A careless word may kindle strife.
A cruel word may wreck a life,
A bitter word may hate instill;
A brutal word may smite and kill,
A gracious word may smooth the way;
A joyous word may light the day.
A timely word may lessen stress;
A loving word may heal and bless.

-Author Unknown

Proverbs 18:21 teaches us that “death and life are in the power of the tongue” (NLT).

Think about that: our tongue has the power to destroy or to give life; to curse or to bless; to tear down or to build up. And chances are the person that will feel that power most keenly – whether for evil or for good – is our spouse!

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