

**Series: What's the church?
"Biblical Respect for Authority"
Ephesians 6:1 - 9**

Big Idea – Respect for authority will bring harmony.

Not much harmony/peace in society today, is there?

Everywhere we look we see antagonism, division, and rebellion. Husbands and wives are divorcing each other; children are rebelling against their parents; and employers and employees are seeking for new ways to avoid strikes and keep the machinery of industry running productively.

Mankind has tried education, legislation, and every other approach, but nothing seems to work. Paul's solution to the antagonisms in the home and in society was regeneration—a new heart from God and a new submission to Christ and to one another.

"Place yourselves under each other's authority out of respect for Christ." (Ephesians 5:21)

"But every husband must love his wife as he loves himself, and wives should respect their husbands." (Ephesians 5:33)

Paul teaches us this spiritual harmony begins in the lives of Christians who are submitted to the spiritual leadership of Christ and love each other.

"Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds us all together in perfect harmony." (Colossians 3:14)

"So then, let us aim for harmony in the church and try to build each other up." (Romans 14:19)

*"Dear brothers and sisters, I close my letter with these last words: Be joyful. Grow to maturity. Encourage each other. Live in harmony and peace. Then the God of love and peace will be with you."
(2 Corinthians 13:11)*

Instruction for 4 groups of believers:

1. Children

Ephesians 6:1 Children, obey your parents because you belong to the Lord, for this is the right thing to do. 2 "Honor your father and mother." This is the first commandment with a promise: 3 If you honor your father and mother, "things will go well for you, and you will have a long life on the earth."

It is God's plan for His Word to be passed on from one generation to the next. And His primary agent is the family.

But from the time of the Fall the family has been plagued with problems of every sort that weaken, undermine, and threaten to destroy it. The first cause of those problems—as of every human problem—is the sinful nature with which every person is born. The curse of the Fall is built into the family. It is the curse that causes men to be chauvinistic, women to usurp the place of men, children to be disobedient to their parents, and parents to be abusive to their children. Only where Christ is in control as Savior and Lord can a family live up to the standards and fulfill the ministry that God commands.

So Paul gave kids four reasons why they should obey their parents.

1. They are Christians ("in the Lord," v. 1a). This argument is an application of the theme of the entire section, which is "submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God" (Eph. 5:21). When a person becomes a Christian, he is not released from normal obligations of life. If anything, his faith in Christ ought to make him a better child in the home.

To the Colossians Paul enforced his admonition with "for this is well pleasing unto the Lord" (Col. 3:20). Here is harmony in the home:

the wife submits to the husband "as unto Christ"; the husband loves his wife "even as Christ also loved the church"; and the children obey "in the Lord."

2. Obedience is right (v. 1b). There is an order in nature, ordained of God, that argues for the tightness of an action. Since the parents brought the child into the world, and since they have more knowledge and wisdom than the child, it is right that the child obey his parents. Even young animals are taught to obey. The "modern version" of Ephesians 6:1 would be, "Parents, obey your children, for this will keep them happy and bring peace to the home." But this is contrary to God's order in nature.

3. Obedience is commanded (v. 2a). Here Paul cites the fifth commandment (Ex. 20:12; Deut. 5:16) and applies it to the New Testament believer. This does not mean that the Christian is "under the Law," for Christ has set us free from both the curse and the bondage of the Law (Gal. 3:13; 5:1). But the righteousness of the Law is still a revelation of the holiness of God, and the Holy Spirit enables us to practice that righteousness in our daily lives (Rom. 8:1-4). All of the Ten Commandments are repeated in the New Testament epistles for the Christian to observe except, "Remember the Sabbath Day to keep it holy." It is just as wrong for a New Testament Christian to dishonor his parents as it was for an Old Testament Jew.

To "honor" our parents means much more than simply to obey them. It means to show them respect and love, to care for them as long as they need us, and to seek to bring honor to them by the way we live.

4. Obedience brings blessing (vv. 2b-3). The fifth commandment has a promise attached to it:

"That thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee" (Ex. 20:12).

This promise originally applied to the Jews as they entered Canaan, but Paul applied it to believers today. He substituted "earth" for

"land" and tells us that the Christian child who honors his parents can expect two blessings.

It will be well with him, and he will live long on the earth.

This does not mean that everyone who died young dishonored his parents. He was stating a principle: when children obey their parents in the Lord, they will escape a good deal of sin and danger and thus avoid the things that could threaten or shorten their lives.

But life is not measured only by quantity of time. It is also measured by quality of experience. God enriches the life of the obedient child no matter how long he may live on the earth.

Sin always robs us; obedience always enriches us.

So, the child must learn early to obey father and mother, not only because they are his parents, but also because God has commanded it. Disobedience to parents is rebellion against God.

The sad situation in homes today is the result of rejecting God's Word (Rom. 1:28-30; 2 Tim. 3:1-5). By nature, a child is selfish,

The Minnesota Crime Commission, demonstrating the truthfulness of the biblical view, issued a report which said, in part:

"Every baby starts life as a little savage. He is completely selfish and self-centered. He wants what he wants when he wants it: his bottle, his mother's attention, his playmate's toys, his uncle's watch, or whatever. Deny him these and he seethes with rage and aggressiveness which would be murderous were he not so helpless. He's dirty, he has no morals, no knowledge, no developed skills. This means that all children, not just certain children but all children, are born delinquent. If permitted to continue in their self-centered world of infancy, given free reign to their impulsive actions to satisfy each want, every child would grow up a criminal, a thief, a killer, a rapist."

In the power of the Holy Spirit, a child can learn to obey his parents and glorify God.

2. Fathers & Mothers

Ephesians 6:4 "Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger by the way you treat them. Rather, bring them up with the discipline and instruction that comes from the Lord."

Though *patēres* (fathers) usually referred to male parents, it was sometimes used of parents in general. Paul has been speaking about both parents in the preceding three verses, and it seems likely that he still has both in mind in this term in verse 4. The same word is used in Hebrews 11:23 to refer to Moses' parents.

Because a father was by far the dominant figure in the households of that day, he was the parent who would most often provoke his children to anger. But a mother is obviously capable of doing the same thing, and she is no more justified in doing it than is a father.

If left to themselves, children will be rebels, so it is necessary for the parents to train their children. Years ago, the then Duke of Windsor said, "Everything in the American home is controlled by switches—except the children!"

The Bible records the sad results of parents neglecting their children, either by being bad examples to them or failing to discipline them properly. David pampered Absalom and set him a bad example, and the results were tragic.

Eli failed to discipline his sons and they brought disgrace to his name and defeat to the nation of Israel.

In his latter years, even Isaac pampered Esau, while his wife showed favoritism to Jacob; and the result was a divided home. Jacob was showing favoritism to Joseph when God providentially rescued the lad and made a man out of him in Egypt. Paul tells us that the father has several responsibilities toward his children.

not provoke them.

In Paul's day, the father had supreme authority over the family. When a baby was born into a Roman family, for example, it was brought out and laid before the father. If he picked it up, it meant he was accepting it into the home. But if he did not pick it up, it meant the child was rejected. It could be sold, given away, or even killed by exposure. No doubt a father's love would overcome such monstrous acts, but these practices were legal in that day.

Paul told the parents, "Don't use your authority to abuse the child, but to encourage and build the child." To the Colossians he wrote, "*Fathers, provoke not your children to anger, lest they be discouraged*" (Col. 3:21). So, the opposite of "provoke" is "encourage."

Fathers provoke their children and discourage them in many ways:

by saying one thing and doing another—

by always blaming and never praising,

by being inconsistent and unfair in discipline,

by showing favoritism in the home,

by comparing them to their siblings,

by pushing unreasonable, often unreachable expectations on the child,

by making promises and not keeping them,

by not listening "slowly" to their children and

by making light of problems that, to the children, are very important, by using love as a reward or a tool of punishment.

Christian parents need God's help so they can be sensitive to the needs and problems of their children.

nurture them

The text reads, "*But nurture them in the discipline and admonition of the Lord.*" The verb translated "bring them up" is the same word that is translated "nourishes" in Ephesians 5:29. The Christian husband is to nourish his wife and his children by sharing love and encouragement in the Lord. It is not enough to nurture the children physically by providing food, shelter, and clothing. He must also nurture them emotionally and spiritually.

The development of the Boy Jesus is our example: "And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man" (Luke 2:52). Here is balanced growth: intellectual, physical, spiritual, and social. Nowhere in the Bible is the training of children assigned to agencies outside the home, no matter how they might assist. God looks to the parents for the kind of training that the children need.

discipline them

The word "nurture" carries with it the idea of learning through discipline. It is translated "chastening" in Hebrews 12. Some modern psychologists oppose the old-fashioned idea of discipline, and many educators follow their philosophy. "Let the children express themselves!" they tell us. "If you discipline them, you may warp their characters." Yet discipline is a basic principle of life and an evidence of love. "Whom the Lord loveth, He chastens" (Heb. 12:6). "He that spares him chastens him diligently" (Prov. 13:24, literal translation).

We must be sure, however, that we discipline our children in the right manner. We must discipline in love and not in anger, lest we injure either the body or the spirit of the child, or possibly both. If we are not disciplined, we surely cannot discipline others, and "flying off the handle" never made either a better child or a better parent.

Also, our discipline must be fair and consistent. "My father would use a cannon to kill a mosquito!" a teenager once told me. "I either get away with murder, or get blamed for everything!" Consistent, loving discipline gives assurance to the child. He may not agree with us, but at least he knows that we care enough to build some protective walls around him until he can take care of himself.

"I never knew how far I could go," a rebel teen girl said, "because my parents never cared enough to discipline me. I figured that if it wasn't important to them, why should it be important to me?"

instruct and encourage them

This is the meaning of the word "admonition." The father and mother not only use actions to raise the child, but also words. In the Book of Proverbs, for example, we have an inspired record of a father sharing wise counsel with his son. Our children do not always appreciate our counsel, but that does not eliminate the obligation we have to instruct and encourage them. Of course, our instruction must always be tied to the Word of God (see 2 Tim. 3:13-17).

When the Supreme Court handed down its ruling against required prayer in the public schools, the famous editorial cartoonist Herb Block published a cartoon in the Washington Post showing an angry father waving a newspaper at his family and shouting, "What do they expect us to do—listen to the kids pray at home?" The answer is: Yes! Home is the place where the children ought to learn about the Lord and the Christian life. It is time that Christian parents stop "passing the buck" to Sunday School teachers and Christian day-school teachers, and start nurturing their children.

3. Employees

Ephesians 6:5 "Slaves, obey your earthly masters with deep respect and fear. Serve them sincerely as you would serve Christ. 6 Try to please them all the time, not just when they are watching you. As slaves of Christ, do the will of God with all your heart. 7 Work with enthusiasm, as though you were working for the Lord rather than for people. 8 Remember that the Lord will reward each one of us for the good we do, whether we are slaves or free."

refers to Christian slaves, but we may apply these words to the Christian employee today. There were probably 6 million slaves in the Roman Empire in that day, and slavery was an accepted institution. Nowhere in the New Testament is slavery per se

attacked or condemned, though the overall thrust of the Gospel is against it.

Paul's ministry was not to overthrow the Roman government or any of its institutions, but to preach the Gospel and win the lost to Christ. Certainly the results of his evangelism ultimately led to the overthrow of the Roman Empire, but that was not Paul's main motive.

Just as the preaching of Wesley and Whitefield resulted in the abolition of slavery and child labor, the elevation of women, and the care of the needy, so Paul's ministry contributed to the death of slavery and the encouragement of freedom. However, he was careful not to confuse the social system with the spiritual order in the church (1 Cor. 7:20-24).

Reasons Paul told the servants to be obedient

1. they were really serving Christ. True, they had "masters according to the flesh," but their true Master was in heaven (Eph. 6:9).

The fact that an employee and his employer are both Christians is no excuse for either one to do less work. Rather, it is a good reason to be more faithful to each other.

Employees should show proper respect for employer, and not try to take advantage of him. He should devote his full attention and energy to the job at hand ("singleness of heart"). The best way to be a witness on the job is to do a good day's work. The Christian worker will avoid "eye service"—working only when the boss is watching, or working extra hard when he is watching to give the impression he is doing a very good job.

2. doing a good job is the will of God. Christianity knows nothing of sacred and secular. A Christian can perform any good work as a ministry to Christ, to the glory of God. For this reason, the worker must do his job "from the heart," since he is serving Christ and doing the will of God. There were tasks assigned to these slaves that they detested, but they were to perform them just the same, so

long as they were not disobeying the will of God. "Singleness of heart" and "doing the will of God from the heart" both indicate the importance of a right heart attitude on the job.

3. they will be rewarded by the Lord (Eph. 6:8). In that day, slaves were treated like pieces of property, no matter how well educated they might be. An educated, cultured slave who became a Christian might receive even harsher treatment from his master because of his faith, but harsh treatment was not to keep him from doing his best (1 Peter 2:18-25). We are to serve Christ, not men. We shall receive our rewards from Christ, not from men.

4. Employers

"Masters, in the same way, be good to your slaves. Do not threaten them. Remember that the One who is your Master and their Master is in heaven, and he treats everyone alike." (Ephesians 6:10)

Christianity does not bring about harmony by erasing social or cultural distinctions. Servants are still servants when they trust Christ, and masters are still masters. Rather, it brings harmony by working in the heart. Christ gives us a new motivation, not a new organization. Both employees and employers are serving the Lord and seeking to please Him, and in this way they are able to work together to the glory of God.

Note the responsibilities of a Christian employer to his workers:

seek their welfare. "Do the same things unto them." If the employer expects the workers to do their best for him, he must do his best for them. The master must serve the Lord from his heart if he expects his servants to do the same.

not exploit them. One of the greatest examples of this in the Bible is Boaz in the Book of Ruth. He greeted his workers with, "The Lord be with you!" And they replied, "The Lord bless thee!" (Ruth 2:4) Boaz was sensitive to the needs of his workers and generous to the stranger, Ruth. His relationship with his workers was one of mutual respect and a desire to glorify the Lord. It is no good when an

employee says, "My boss is supposed to be a Christian, but you'd never know it!"

not threaten. Roman masters had the power and lawful authority to kill a slave who was rebellious, though few of them did so. Slaves cost too much money to destroy them. Paul suggested that the Christian master has a better way to encourage obedience and service than threats of punishment. The negative power of fear could result in the worker doing less instead of more, and this kind of motivation could not be continued over a long period of time. Far better was the positive motivation of "that which is just and equal" (Col. 4:1).

Let a man share the results of his labor and he will work better and harder. Even the Old Testament gives this same counsel: "Thou shalt not rule over him with rigor, but shalt fear thy God" (Lev. 25:43).

submitted to the Lord. *"Your master also is in heaven" (Eph. 6:9).* This is practicing the lordship of Christ. The wife submits to her own husband "as unto the Lord" (Eph. 5:22), and the husband loves the wife "as Christ also loved the church" (Eph. 5:25). Children obey their parents "in the Lord" (Eph. 6:1), and parents raise their children "in the nurture and admonition of the Lord" (Eph. 6:4). Servants are obedient "as unto Christ" (Eph. 6:5), and masters treat their servants as their "Master in heaven" would have them do.

Everyone who is in submission to the Lord, has no problems submitting to those over him.

Jesus said the way to be a ruler is first to be a servant (Matt. 25:21). The person who is not under authority has no right to exercise authority. This explains why many of the great men of the Bible were first servants before God made them rulers: Joseph, Moses, Joshua, David, and Nehemiah are just a few examples. Even after a man becomes a leader, he must still lead by serving. An African proverb says, "The chief is servant of all." "And whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant" (Matt. 20:27).

A Christian employer cannot take privileges with God simply because of his position; nor should a Christian employer play favorites with those under his authority. Paul warned Timothy to "observe these things without preferring one before another, doing nothing by partiality" (1 Tim. 5:21).

One of the fastest ways for a leader to divide his followers and lose their confidence is for the leader to play favorites and show partiality.

If we are filled with the Holy Spirit and are joyful, thankful, and submissive, then we can enjoy harmony in the relationships of life as we live and work with other Christians.

We will also find it easier to work with and witness to the unbelievers who may disagree with us. The fruit of the Spirit is love, and love is the greatest adhesive in the world!