

# EPHESIANS | Work and Family

Rob Rogers

July 16, 2023

## Introduction

Last week Pastor Dave gave such practical insight into God teaches us about marriage, and it's one of the best teachings on marriage I've ever heard. So if you're married, or praying that one day you would be married, it's a message I don't think we could listen to enough.

**Today**, we're jumping into the final chapter of Paul's letter to the church in Ephesus. In verses 1-9 we're covering two enormous topics, Work and Family.

### Ephesians 6:1-9

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.

## WORK FAMILY

## Work

One thing we have to address first is the fact that Paul says:

### Ephesians 6:5

Bondservants, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling...

- And then verse 9 essentially says, "Masters don't abuse your slaves..."

When modern secular people read that or hear that they immediately say, "See, the Bible condones slavery! Paul doesn't condemn the practice of slavery therefore the Bible condones it."

- So, we have to address this first, because that idea couldn't be further from the truth.

When we think of slavery as 21<sup>st</sup> century Americans, the context we immediately have in mind is the horror of slavery in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. We can't help but think of people being kidnapped, taken from their homes, separated from their families, and being bought, sold, shipped, and traded as property, solely based on the color of their skin. When we hear the word slavery, that's what comes to mind for most of us. But we need to understand, that isn't the context that Paul is addressing in first century Roman culture.

1. Slavery wasn't race-based.
2. Slavery was temporary (*about 10-15 years*).

3. Slavery wasn't forced through abduction.
4. Slaves had rights and greater financial opportunity.
5. Slavery offered legitimate job security.

According to the Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary,<sup>1</sup> rather than going on day-to-day looking for work, people would often become indentured servants for 10-15 years, and gain more economic opportunity because of the relationships they would build, property they could buy, investments they could make, etc. They had rights to file complaints against an abusive master... they weren't viewed as a lesser class of people. There would have been no reason to rally and overthrow the institution of slavery in the first century — because the benefits and security that it offered was far better than many alternatives in that day and time.

This isn't to say that Paul, or the Bible is condoning slavery. It's just to clarify the context that Paul is writing into. And even though there are plenty of places in scripture that do address how Christians are to work to change social institutions, and what it means to be people who work for righteousness and justice. What Paul is doing here in Ephesians is addressing households, individuals who find themselves in these circumstances — and helping them understand, how to live as followers of Jesus in the midst of the institution of slavery in the first century Roman Empire.

***Do you see the difference?*** Paul is getting down in the granular, practical details of life — not how to change the social institutions of the Roman Empire.

On top of all of that, I have to point out that any honest secular historian, if you asked them — who was it that pushed for the abolition of slavery? Because historians would tell you that slavery was common practice in every single century throughout human history, they all accepted slavery in same way shape or form — where did the idea come from that it was wrong and should be done away with?

They would tell you, ***Christians***. The quakers, evangelicals, and Catholics were fueled by the biblical idea out of Genesis 1:26, that every human being, regardless of race, culture, creed is made in the image of God and worthy of the utmost dignity and respect.

*Now, with all that in mind, let's look at what Paul is saying through the context of our work, because we all are accountable to someone.* We all have bosses, or some form of accountability in our work, and many of us have people who work for us or who are accountable to us for their work. *What does Paul tell us about our work here?*

***How many of you would say that the calling of a pastor, or priest, a missionary, the work of the clergy is a holier work than other professions?***

Years ago there was a time when I thought the same thing. In fact, there are many people in vocational ministry that teach this to be true.

**But what Paul tells us that you're wrong.**

**All work is a calling.**

---

<sup>1</sup> David Noel Freedman, Editor. *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary* (Yale University Press, 2008)

Paul is writing to households... and he's giving household codes of conduct. And in the first century, no one would ever give servants a household code because their job was to simply do the menial tasks that their masters gave them. But here Paul addresses the servants, and what does he tell them?

### **Ephesians 6:5-8**

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,

*Paul is writing to domestic servants and he says that doing the dishes, cooking the meals, washing the clothes, managing the budget, every ounce of it is a calling from God.*

Martin Luther writes extensively about this. He looks at Psalm 145 where it says God feeds all his creatures. And we believe that — that's why we thank Him for His provision when we sit down for a meal. We're recognizing that ultimately, this sustenance comes from Him. But Luther asks the question, "How did God feed you? How did God provide for you? Did it just appear out of nowhere? Did He deliver it to you Himself? How did it show up?"

**No, God has chosen to accomplish His work through people.** It's through that work that God provides for the needs of the world. He uses the farmer to feed us, the tailor to cloth us, and the carpenter to house us.

*"God is milking the cows through the vocation of the milkmaid."<sup>2</sup>  
~ Martin Luther*

And if you broaden this out a little bit... what makes a city or community a good place to live? What makes it safe? Secure? Desirable? You have good laws established by good legislators, upheld by good lawyers. You have law enforcement, and good governance. You have city officials put in place to serve people. Anyone in those positions has been placed there by God to serve Him, and love their neighbor as themselves — through their vocation. It is a calling from God.

**All (moral) work is a calling from God.** That's why, no matter what your vocation is, you should do it with all your heart as serving the Lord. Serve with a sincere heart. This should change the way we *view* our work, even the way we *do* our work, our *motivation* and *HOW* we work.

**Why?**

### **Ephesians 6:5**

Bondservants, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, with a sincere heart, as you would Christ,

- Modern translation — serve your earthly boss wholeheartedly — with joy and eagerness, with fervor and intensity — as you would serve Christ.

**You've never met my boss!** It doesn't say work hard when your boss deserves it.

Some of us work for people that we would say deserve a hard day's work. They're qualified, competent, respectable, they lead and manage well. Others of us — we have a boss or work for a company that we would say, "Doesn't deserve our hard work," so we're just phoning it in, doing the bare minimum.

---

<sup>2</sup> Rob Fuquay. *A New Reformation: From Luther's World to Ours* (Abingdon Press, 2018)

***If that's you, you have an unbiblical view of work.*** If the basis of all moral work is God's work in the world, then God has delegated His work to you. Which means your real boss is not your boss, but the Boss above all bosses. ***He ALWAYS deserves a hard days work.***

***If you're working for Him, you'll bring your best efforts, you'll work diligently, you'll go above and beyond what is asked or required.*** If everyday you approach your work as to the Lord, a bad manager or coworkers that drive you crazy won't sway you the way they used to, because you're doing your work for Him.

If that's how you approach your work — always bringing your best to work for HIS glory, you know what's going to happen? You're going to have earthly bosses competing, trying to get you to work for them. Because when your drive to work isn't affected by the environment or people around you, no matter how competent your boss is or is not, when you do you work for your heavenly boss, you make yourself indispensable to your earthly one. ***So serve with all your heart.***

---

## Family

Paul is giving household codes to Christian families in the first century.

While this is not unique to us as 21<sup>st</sup> century Americans, we are living in a time where efforts to undermine and destroy the family unit are becoming far more prevalent and blatant. Especially as it relates to our children.

From drag queens chanting that they're "coming for your children..." to Disney's president of general entertainment committing to drastically increasing the number of LGBT characters in shows and movies... and a host of other efforts to destroy, confuse, and obliterate God's image in His creation. It is radically important that parents and parental figures step into the God-given responsibility to disciple our children in the ways of God. To bring clarity and certainty where the world assaults them with lies and confusion.

*As a pastor, I know God is faithful to His people, but I am concerned for the world our children will inherit one day.*

Any nation that undermines God's design for the family unit, for the institution of marriage, for parents and children, gender and sexuality — any nation that undermines God's design for these things will be a nation that will not survive for long.

I don't say this to instill fear. But I say this to light a fire under us — parents, grandparents, step-parents, spiritual parents — to step into your God-given responsibility to disciple your children, to disciple the next generation in the ways of God. To walk with those who are confused, to show compassion and kindness to those who've wandered and help them find their way back... to give your children, consistency and security, assurance and clarity in God's design for them, and for their future family. That's what Paul is urging us to do here.

### **Ephesians 6:1-4**

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.

Now this first part Paul is talking about little ones obeying their parents... again, *think households*.

Then Paul turns his attention to fathers. Both parents are involved in raising children... but Paul has a specific instruction to the fathers.

### **Ephesians 6:4**

Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger,

*Either Paul thinks that fathers are most responsible for what happens in the family, or he thinks fathers are the most likely to exasperate their children.*

Based on the enormous amount of research into the influence of fathers and the effects on the whole family, my opinion is both. But Paul says, don't provoke them, don't exasperate them, don't infuriate them.

We do this in two ways...

#### **1. Over-discipline**

Fathers, if you have overly harsh demands of your children, if you abuse the authority you have in their life, if you're nagging, condemning, even passively disappointed in them, if you humiliate them, if you're insensitive to their interests, their needs — that would make anyone in their right mind, exasperated, infuriated. Eventually, your children will resent you and rebel against you for it.

#### **2. Under-discipline**

Whether it's through lack of involvement to know how to discipline them, or if you're afraid of their disapproval and you indulge their every whim, or you're just tired and choose not to fight for them in those hard moments — one day they're going to get out into the world and realize that the world is not going to bend over backwards to serve them. Your child will be provoked to anger because the *absence of discipline means a lack of love*.

How do we know that?

### **Proverbs 3:11-12**

...do not despise the LORD's discipline, and do not resent His rebuke,<sup>12</sup> because the LORD disciplines those He loves, as a father the son He delights in.

This is why Paul says,

### **Ephesians 6:4**

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

To bring them up means to help them mature. To help them grow and flourish. To get them to a place where they're no longer dependent on you.

**PERSONAL:** We have four kids at home... and our oldest is about to head off to college next year. One of the shifts that Misty and I have made is allowing our oldest to run point on decision making, with guidance and support from mom and dad. We're intentionally not making certain decisions for

her, so she's increasing in responsibility over her life, as well as having additional freedom and independence that comes with that increase in responsibility. Why? Because don't want her to get out into the world and be shocked by the weight of responsibility, we want her to be able to wade into that water because the goal for our children is for them to mature, to become independent. We've done our best to teach her and model for her the ways of God over the last 18 years, and now we're learning to trust all those little investments we've made along the way. We haven't done it perfectly, and we're continuing to learn and adjust along the way, but we've done our best to bring her up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord, and she's a fantastic young woman that we have an enormous amount of trust in — and ultimately, we trust the Lord because, as much as she's our daughter, she's His daughter, and He knows far better than we do.

What's interesting is that many modern secular people would look at the way we've parented and say, *"That's wrong! You should NOT impose your views on your children. Give them the freedom to decide for themselves what is right and wrong... just nurture them and let them decide their truth, their reality for themselves...."*

Duke University professor Stanley Hauerwas wrote about this very idea.<sup>3</sup> This is a paraphrase, but he wrote that a mother or father might use their authority to teach their children something misinformed, and maybe the child will grow up and decide their parents were wrong, but if they grow up with the notion that anything goes, that right and wrong is completely arbitrary and subjective, they'll inadvertently learn that nothing really matters in life and that is the epitome of moral cowardice. The refusal to teach our children to believe as we believe, to live as we live, and to act as we act is a betrayal of our own conscience that is born from moral weakness and cowardice.

He says, what children need more than anything else is somebody who teaches and models, "This is right and that is wrong, and here is how you ought to live." If they grow up and they say, "I liked 80 percent of what Mom and Dad said or even 50 percent or only 20 percent," the point is you've brought them up. You've instructed them and that is your God-given responsibility. ***If you don't train them up, someone else will.***

Your influence in your kids' lives when they're small is positional. I'm bigger than you. You will go where I place you. But as they grow older... they care less about your position and more about your relationship. Do you see them? Do you care about what they care about? Do you delight in them? Do you enjoy them?

Do you delight in your children as the Father delights in you? Do look at them in wonder... do you make room to simply enjoy each of them, to be interested in what they're interested in? To be fascinated by what fascinates them? To make room to play with them, and pray with them, to laugh together. When the moment requires it, do you correct them? Not with rage, not with a short temper, but with gentleness, compassion, confession, and care for them.

- Even if you don't have biological children — everything we're talking about is all about discipleship. Bring a child up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord... it's discipleship language. It's coaching, counseling, instructing, guiding, supporting, caring. This applies to discipling relationships as well.

---

## Key to how we approach our work and our family

---

<sup>3</sup> Stanley Hauerwas. *The Character of Virtue*. (Canterbury Press, May 30, 2018)

Ultimately, what is the key to both how we approach our work and our family? What is the household code that Paul gives us here? How do you approach your work with joy and zeal, and how do raise your children in the ways of God?

**Ultimately you have to see that God, the King and Creator of the heavens and the earth, the master of all things, became a servant. The King who became a servant, and served to the point of His own death, so that we could be set free from slavery to sin, and we could become, not servants, but sons and daughters of a God who takes great pleasure and delight in His children.**

Only when you see that Heavenly Master became a slave, so that we who were slaves could become free. Only when you see, Jesus, the only true Son was rejected so that you and I could become children of God. Only then will the way we approach our work, and the way we love our families be deeply and radically transformed.

And church, the world needs men and women doing their work for God's glory, not their own. The world needs men and women that step into their God-given role and responsibility to disciple the next generation in the ways of God. And the world needs men and women that have been radically changed by the power of the gospel bringing the beauty of God's image into the world through our work and our families.

---

## Discussion Questions

1. What would you answer someone who says that the Bible condones slavery?
2. Do you, or have you ever, believed that the work of a pastor is holier than the work of other professions?
3. If "*all work is a calling*," how should my view and approach to my work or menial tasks change? How can I keep this in mind from day to day?
4. Discuss: how do you exasperate your children? How can you change that?
5. In what ways can I obey Paul's admonition to "bring up" my children (or the next generation) in the discipline and instruction of the Lord?

NOTES