

"Taking Care of Business At Home and At Work" Ephesians 6:1-9

Introduction

- One fall day, many years ago, my best friend and I headed down to my grandmother's cottage in Kentucky. We weren't up to no good, but we weren't little saints either. Now as Christian boys, our brand of trouble was tame compared to most teenagers, and this weekend was no different. All we wanted to do was set off as many fireworks as we could, stay up as late as we could, shoot whatever we could with my air rifle, eat whatever we wanted without anyone telling us what to do. And an isolated cottage on a lake in the hills of Kentucky seemed to be the perfect place to secede for the weekend and secretly rebel against the authority structures in our lives.
- Now before we headed out on our trip, my friend, who was by far a bigger trouble maker than me, had an idea. Looking back on things, he was somewhat of a bad influence. Anyway, my friend had heard about a book that explained how to make bombs and blow things up. Just the kind of stuff that guys are into but certainly a book that should not be in print. In fact, I am almost positive that this book is no longer in print, especially in this day and age. So we went to the local bookstore and to our surprise, they had a copy of this book. Turned out that in order to buy it, you had to give your name and address and social security number to the clerk so that they or the government or somebody could track every copy of the book. We weren't that committed to trouble making so we didn't buy the book. But we did sit there in the store, flipping through the pages trying to memorize all the different diagrams and recipes for making things that should not be made.

Transition

Because a book like that exists, it shows we live in a culture that despises authority and rules. It's not cool to follow the rules. Somewhere along the way we've come to believe that if you always do what someone else tells you, you're not an individual, you're not your own person. So no one must rule our lives except ourselves. Part of it is an inborn result of the fall and sin. Part of it, we're taught. The paradigm of child-parent relationships is Bart and Homer Simpson. Later on we express our autonomy and disdain for rules as teenagers by making ourselves ungovernable to our parents. Later on when we're working, our bosses drive us nuts, especially if they remind us that they're in charge. We get ticked off that the police pull us over for speeding. We bemoan the politicians who rule us. We're anarchists at heart. Even Christians have difficulties with authority. Sometimes people listen to the pastor, many times they don't. Anytime we read our bibles but don't do what it says, it shows we have a problem with authority.

You know what? It is simply a fact of life that there will be someone in our lives that has the right to tell us what to do. It might be a parent, it might be a boss. It might be the flight attendant on the airplane. It might be the principal or our teacher. Given that most of us dislike being told what to do, given that most of us would rather secede and establish our own kingdom, what's the best way to respond? What's the proper way to respond to authority?

Proposition

- **Obey those in authority as if you are obeying Christ**

Transition

The key to relationships and situations that require us to listen to the directions of others is our relationship with God. This is especially true if the person who directs us is difficult person, an abrasive person, a person who's hard to get along with. The key to these kinds of relationships is to listen, serve, and follow as if that person was really Christ himself.

Organizational Sentence

- **Ephesians 6:1-9 explains in two sections, first to children then to employees, how to obey those in authority**

Background/Setting

- Let me just remind you that one of the ways we can show that we are receptive to the Spirit's work in our lives is by following the rules. In fact, the section of Ephesians we are in has been labeled by some scholars and theologians the section of house rules; rules that organize and structure life within the home. So in 6:1, Paul turns his attention from husbands and wives, to two more sets of relationships that must be ordered by Christ and the Spirit's influence. What are they? The parent-child relationship and the employer-employee relationship.
- Let me say a brief word about the second relationship. The command in the text is actually for slaves to obey their masters, not employees. The reason I'm applying this command to the employer-employee relationship is because the slavery of the NT was very different than the slavery you and I are most familiar with, the slavery of the South. Let me also say that the bible does not condone slavery. It merely explains how to live in light of the realities of the day. It was Christian teaching from the bible about the worth and equality of mankind that led to the downfall of slavery in many countries around the world in the 18th and 19th centuries. But the reality was, until the 19th century every major culture had slaves. And there were many different systems of slavery: some were bound up with economics, some bound up with pillage and plunder, some were a combination of both, as in Roman slavery. Some slavery was one tribe against another or one race against another. But in ancient Rome, slavery was not tied to a particular race. In fact, Roman slaves weren't even limited to a particular profession or social class. "In cities throughout the ancient Mediterranean world, slaves were trained and served as physicians, architects, craftspeople, shopkeepers, cooks, barbers, artists, thespians, magicians, prophets, teachers, professional poets and philosophers. Some slaves could accumulate considerable wealth from their occupations. Larger Roman households even had slaves whose sole job was to fold fancy dinner napkins. Some held positions of considerable power not only over fellow slaves but also over freeborn people."¹ Yes, slavery could be harsh, slaves could be beaten and mistreated, but because slavery wasn't solely race against race and didn't limit the slave to one social class, the slavery Paul writes about was a fundamentally different institution than what we think of in the antebellum south. And it's because of these differences the analogy of the employer-employee relationship fits very well.

Transition

¹ DNTB, p. 1126.

Now to the first relationship addressed by this morning's passage. This is the first point on your outline. [Kids, obey your parents as if you are obeying Jesus.](#)

Main Points

I. Children, obey your parents (6:1-4)

A) Validation

- i) Kids, the best way you can love Jesus is by obeying your parents.

B) Explanation

- i) Listen to [verses 1-2](#). *Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. 2*

"Honor your father and mother"--which is the first commandment with a promise.

Kids, teenagers, what this means is that if you are still dependent upon your parents, if you need them for food and housing and to take you to the store to buy things, if you depend upon them for the car and for spending money, if you live under their roof, then God asks you to obey them. As soon as you are on your own and have a family of your own, you are free from this obligation. Your role changes to honoring and revering your parents as verse 2 says. But until then, God wants you to listen to your parents.

- ii) Now what does it mean to obey? It means that when they ask you to do something, you do it. It means not complaining and whining. It means doing what they ask with a good attitude trying to be as helpful as you can.

- iii) And why should you act this way? What's the motivation: *for this is right*. It's the right thing to do. You are to obey them *in the Lord* as Bible says. In other words, obedience is part of discipleship. You are not asked to obey simply because you have parents, but you obey your parents because you're a follower of Jesus. That's the motivation for cleaning out the garage when mom and dad ask. That's the motivation for cleaning the bathroom or helping out with the dishes. You are actually serving Jesus when you obey your parents.

- (a) Now there's also another motivation for listening and obeying your parents. Look at [verse 3](#). *"that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth."* What does that mean? Does that mean that every child who obeys their parents will automatically live to be 95? Probably not. But what it does mean is that what goes around comes around. Kids, teenagers, "The way in which you treat your parents [now and in the future] is the way your children will [one day] treat you."² If you listen and obey them while in the home and honor them when you are on your own, it will go well with you and you will enjoy children who will treat you the same way. Kids, obey your parents.

- iv) Now just in case parents might abuse the parent-child relationship, Paul has a word for parents as well. Fathers are specifically mentioned because they are the leaders of the home but this word applies to mothers to. Parents you have a positive and negative role in rearing their children. Listen to [verse 4](#). *Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.*

- (a) First the negative. Parents don't exasperate your children. Don't provoke your kids to anger. Don't make it too difficult for them to obey you. Don't be harsh with them. As [Peter O'Brien](#) says, "Effectively, the apostle is ruling out

² Lecture by Don Carson, *Acts and Pauline Literature*, 4/4/01.

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."³ In other words, are you consistent with your kids, can they meet your expectations and do you encourage and reward them when they listen to you?

(1) In *We Are Still Married*, [Garrison Keillor](#) tells the story of a man who exasperated his sons. He writes, "The town ball club was the Lake Wobegon Schroeders, so named because the starting nine were brothers, sons of E. J. Schroeder. E. J. was ticked off if a boy hit a bad pitch. He'd spit and curse and rail at him. And if a son hit a homerun, E. J. would say, "Blind man coulda hit that one. Your gramma coulda put the wood on that one. If a guy couldn't hit that one out, there'd be something wrong with him, I'd say. Wind practically took that one out of here, didn't even need to hit it much"—and lean over and spit. So his sons could never please him, and if they did, he forgot about it. Once, against Freeport, his oldest boy, Edwin Jim, Jr., turned and ran to the centerfield fence for a long, long, long fly ball. He threw his glove forty feet in the air to snag the ball and caught the ball and glove. When he turned toward the dugout to see if his dad had seen it, E. J. was on his feet clapping, but when he saw the boy look to him, he immediately pretended he was swatting mosquitoes. The batter was called out, the third out. Jim ran back to the bench and stood by his dad. E. J. sat chewing in silence and finally said, "I saw a man in Superior, Wisconsin, do that a long time ago. But he did it at night, and the ball was hit a lot harder." *Fathers, do not exasperate your children.*

(b) Now the positive. Parents you are to teach and train your children about the Lord. The primary responsibility of passing the Christian faith on to the next generation lies with you. The church can help and support, but ultimately it is your responsibility. "Ultimately [your] concern is not simply that your children be obedient to your authority, but through the godly training and admonition you give them, your children will come to know and obey the Lord himself."⁴ Good parents take responsibility for the spiritual welfare of their families. They speak the timely word of instruction. They remind their kids about what it means to follow God. They give a word of encouragement when needed. They correct when it is appropriate. They model for their kids and aren't spiritual hypocrites. They don't drop their kids off at Sunday school and go back home themselves. They don't ask their kids to pray or not lie and then do the opposite themselves. And all of this implies, kids, that you are teachable. Let your parents teach you. Let them do what God has commanded them to do. If you never let your parents instruct you, if you are so stubborn that you can't even listen to them then you are in the wrong. Have a teachable spirit.

C) Illustration

³ O'Brien, p. 446.

⁴ O'Brien, p. 446.

- i) In 1693, [William Penn](#), the founder of Pennsylvania said, “Men are generally more careful of the breed of their horses and dogs than of their children.”⁵

D) Application

- i) Penn’s quote generally seems true today as well. Parents today seem more interested in the quality of their car or their leisure pursuits than rearing their children. [John Stott](#) agrees. He says, “If parents but gave as much thought to the rearing of their children as they do to the rearing of animals and flowers, the situation in our world today would be very different.”⁶
- ii) Kids, one of the best ways that you can tell your friends about Jesus is by listening to and obeying your parents. Proverbs 4:1-4 *Listen, my sons, to a father's instruction; pay attention and gain understanding. 2 I give you sound learning, so do not forsake my teaching. 3 When I was a boy in my father's house, still tender, and an only child of my mother, 4 he taught me and said, "Lay hold of my words with all your heart; keep my commands and you will live.*
- iii) Kids, what do you do if your parents ask you to do something contrary to God’s word? Disobey them. If you parents ask you to lie or steal or not worship God, don’t listen to them. And just so you aren’t confused, Saturday morning chores are not contrary to the Bible.

Transition

Now to the second relationship addressed by this morning’s passage. This is the first point on your outline. [Employees, obey your employer as if you are obeying Jesus.](#)

II. Employees, obey your employers (6:5-9)

A) Validation

- i) People, one of the best ways you can love Jesus is by obeying your employer.

B) Explanation

- i) In [verses 5-8](#) Paul gives the command to slaves, that they obey their masters. We’ll extract some principles for the employer-employee relationship from these verses. Listen. *Slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ. 6 Obey them not only to win their favor when their eye is on you, but like slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from your heart. 7 Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not men, 8 because you know that the Lord will reward everyone for whatever good he does, whether he is slave or free.* What is so striking about this passage is that in everything that Paul asks of slaves they are to do it with an eye toward Christ. In other words, there is a spiritual component to everything, especially one’s work. It’s simply impossible to separate the sacred and the secular. Christ must invade the workplace. As [Peter O’Brien](#) rightly reminds us, “Any and every task, however menial, falls within the sphere of

⁵ William Penn, (1644–1718), English religious leader, founder of Pennsylvania. *Some Fruits of Solitude*, pt. 1, no. 85 (1693). *The Columbia Dictionary of Quotations* is licensed from Columbia University Press. Copyright © 1993, 1995 by Columbia University Press. All rights reserved.

⁶ Stott, p. 244 quoting Lloyd-Jones, *Life in the Spirit*, p. 290.

[Christ's] lordship and is done to please him."⁷ Let's look at some of the well-defined responsibilities that we have as employees.

- (a) *Serve with respect and fear.* Do you show reverence and respect for your employer? Do you serve them sincerely, just as we are serve and obey Christ?
 - (b) *Be sincere in you service just as obeying Christ.* Are you a people pleaser or are you sincere in your work? We are supposed to work just as if we are serving Christ himself. Are you winning your boss's favor by your honest hard work or by your cunning manipulation of the system? Those who advance this way work hard only when their bosses are watching. The word for "when their eye is on you" literally means eyeservice. It means "serving in a way only to attract attention to yourself."⁸ "It is labor when the boss is present, but relaxation and laziness as soon as he is gone."⁹ We might say today lip service. Do you give lip service to your boss's face but behind his back goof off and waste time and belittle him?
 - (c) *Do the will of God.* We are to work at our jobs as if we were doing the will of God. That brings great meaning to whatever we do.
 - (d) *Serve wholeheartedly.* Hold nothing back. Service is to be wholehearted and genuine. As Colossians 3:17 says, *And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.* Why are we to work hard? Because ultimately, the quality of our work will be judged by God. Employees will be rewarded on the final judgment day for the quality of their work.
- ii) Now just in case employers might abuse the employer-employee relationship, Paul has a word for employers as well. Look at [verse 9](#). *And masters, treat your slaves in the same way. Do not threaten them, since you know that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no favoritism with him.* In other words, in the attitude of your heart, your relationship to your employee is governed by your relationship with your heavenly lord. Treat them as the Lord treats you, in fact, as he treats everyone. So, employers, do you threaten your employees, are you inconsistent, do you withhold wages from them, do you have different policies and for different people depending upon how much you like them? You must not act this way. You must treat them well because both you and they have the same master. Both employer and employee have the same Lord. God is impartial in the way he treats us. He will judge rightly. You must treat your employees the same way.

C) Illustration

- i) Author and educator, [Howard Hendricks](#), sat in a plane that was delayed for take off. After a long wait, the passengers became more and more irritated. Hendricks noticed how gracious one of the flight attendants was as she spoke with them. After the plane finally took off, he told the flight attendant how amazed he was at her poise and self-control, and said he wanted to write a letter of commendation for her to the airline. The stewardess replied that she didn't work for the airline company, but for Jesus Christ. She said that just before going to work she and her husband prayed together that she would be a good representative of Christ." Hendricks writes, "Doing it for

⁷ O'Brien, p. 450.

⁸ O'Brien, p. 451.

⁹ Reinecker, p. 540.

Christ's sake adds another dimension to submission. You are submitting not just to your employer or husband or parent, but to the Lord, because of your love and gratitude for him.¹⁰

D) Application

- i) What this means is that there is dignity and worth in every profession that is not expressly against the commands of scripture. In the wise words of [John Stott](#), “It is possible for the housewife to cook a meal as if Jesus Christ were going to eat it, or to spring-clean as if Jesus Christ were to be the honored guest. It is possible for teachers to educate children, for doctors to treat patients and nurses to care for them, for solicitors 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.”¹¹
- ii) So often we fight to try to secure our own rights. We are not called to do this. Each side is to focus on their own responsibilities and trust God.

Conclusion

- The real joy of life is finding meaning in the routine. In the mundane work-a-day world. What God commands of kids and parents and employees and employers in this passage is what will bring satisfaction and fulfillment in this life.

¹⁰ Citation: Lorne Sanny, "The Right Way to Respond to Authority," *Discipleship Journal* (March/April 1982)

¹¹ Stott, p. 252.