

CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

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Series:	Ephesians		Pastor/Teacher
Number:	14		Joshua Walker
Text:	Ephesians 6:1-9		
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THE HOUSEHOLD CODE

To Children (6:1-3)

6:1: “Why does the apostle use the word *obey* instead of *honor*, which has a greater extent of meaning? It is because *obedience* is the evidence of that *honor* which children owe to their parents, and is therefore more earnestly enforced. It is likewise more difficult; for the human mind recoils from the idea of subjection, and with difficulty allows itself to be placed under the control of another.”¹

6:1: “The ‘children’ [Paul] speaks of are those who are still in the home. They are old enough to understand instructions from their parents and deliberate over whether they should obey or go their own way. They are still being ‘brought up,’ receiving instruction and correction from their fathers (6:4), and have not gotten married and left the home (5:31). This would most likely place the age range of the children from early elementary to the late teen years or early twenties. It is significant that Paul addresses them directly and not through their parents. This implies that they are present when the community assembles to worship, to hear the reading of the Word, and to receive teaching.”²

6:1: “Children are here addressed as responsible members of the congregations. They are to ‘obey’ their parents (though the corresponding expression in v. 4 is addressed to fathers only), and this is a further example of the submission within divinely ordered relationships as expressed in God’s new society (v. 21). This injunction to children, like that to slaves, is put rather more strongly than the one to wives: the verb [used here] is an active imperative of ‘obey’ and denotes absolute obedience. In Paul the term (and its cognate noun ‘obedience’) usually had reference to one’s submission to Christ, the gospel, and apostolic teaching. The obedience of Christian children to their parents is all of a piece with their submission to Christ: the additional motivating phrase, ‘in the Lord,’ is virtually synonymous with ‘as to the Lord’ or ‘as to Christ’ (cf. 5:22; 6:5) and indicates that their obedience is part of their Christian discipleship. [Their obedience] is not rendered simply because of their parents’ greater authority or status.”³

6:2-3: “Just as earlier in Ephesians and particularly at 5:31, Paul quotes an OT text to support his position without an introduction, such as ‘as it is written.’ What is unusual is that Paul adds a parenthetical remark in the middle of the citation about this command being the first with a promise. This is not unprecedented, however, since a similar thing occurs in the second recitation of the fifth commandment itself in Deut 5:16.”⁴

6:3: “To take this promise simply in a communal sense, indicating that a society where the elderly are cared for by their children is a stable one, is a ‘modern reinterpretation’ as Lincoln rightly observes. On the other hand, it is both unnecessary and incorrect to assert with Lincoln that these words could only have been penned by a Jewish Christian follower of Paul since the idea of ‘a longer period of the

church's existence on earth' was alien to the apostle, who expected an imminent parousia [(coming of Christ)]."⁵

To Fathers (6:4)

6:4 "This passage . . . teaches that fathers need to exercise a sensitivity and care in how they interact with their children, and especially in how they discipline them. Fathers should carefully weigh the potential impact of their words and actions before responding to their children. This passage effectively rules out reactionary flare-ups, overly harsh words, insults, sarcasm, nagging, demeaning comments, inappropriate teasing, unreasonable demands, and anything else that can be perceived as provocative. In his instructions to fathers in Colossians, Paul says, 'do not embitter your children, or they will become discouraged' (Col 3:21)."⁶

6:4: "In contrast to the norms of the day, Paul wants Christian fathers to be gentle, patient educators of their children, whose chief 'weapon' is Christian instruction focused on loyalty to Christ as Lord. Christian fathers were to be different from those of their surrounding society. Presumably, when these words from the household table were read to them, they had already heard and remembered what Paul had written earlier in the letter, namely, that their fatherhood was derived from the 'one God and father of us all' (3:14-15; 4:6), and that God's mighty work of reconciliation in his Son had been effected in order to form 'one multinational, multicultural family of God.' Let them as human fathers, then, 'care for their families as God the father cares for his.'"⁷

To Bondservants (6:5-8)

6:5: "Paul addresses the slaves in the Christian community of western Asia Minor as free moral agents capable of thinking for themselves and acting with moral responsibility. As others have noted, this was unprecedented in the ancient world. Given the context of Roman slavery, it is remarkable that Paul would address them at all. The fact that he does demonstrates that they were accepted members of the Christian community.

"Paul's remarks here addressing the attitude and motivation of believing slaves provide them with perspective on how to live as Christians in a socioeconomic context that would provoke them to be duplicitous, resentful, and cunning. It is not surprising that Paul enjoins them to obey their masters; this was expected of slaves anytime and anywhere. What is unique in this passage is the manner and motivations that should inform their relationship to their masters. Paul gives the same instructions to believing slaves in Colossians, but in that passage adds that their obedience to their masters should be 'in everything' (Col 3:22).

"The first attitude Paul commands is that they should obey 'with respect and fear' . . . second, slaves should also respond to their masters with a 'sincerity of your hearts.'"⁸

6:7: "Paul reiterates several of his earlier points (in vv. 5, 6) as he urges Christian slaves to obey their masters: they are to do so wholeheartedly and enthusiastically, showing that ultimately they are serving not human lords but their one Lord who is in heaven. The term which specifies the manner in which they are to serve appears only here in the New Testament and signifies 'zeal, eagerness, wholeheartedness.' Clearly their enthusiastic service will benefit their masters. But the slaves are reminded a significant reason or motivation for their conduct: they are serving the Lord and not simply humans. As they engage in wholehearted work for their masters, so in that very action they honor and glorify their heavenly Lord."⁹

To Masters (6:9)

6:9: "As Paul had done in the prior two household relationships in 5:22-33 and 6:1-4, he addresses both parties in the relationship with their mutual duties. In effect, masters are expressing their 'submission in the fear of Christ' (5:21) by treating their slaves with respect and 'practicing the same things for them.' This latter does not mean that masters obey their slaves but points back to

'performing the will of God' (v. 6) in relation to their slaves by treating them with respect as fellow creatures made in the divine image (Job 31:13-15). Christian masters and slaves have one Lord in heaven (cf. Col 4:1)."¹⁰

ENDNOTES

¹John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistles of Paul to the Galatians and Ephesians* (Baker Book House, 1998), 326-27. For Dan Depew.

²Arnold, Clint E., *Ephesians: Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Zondervan, 2010), 415.

³O'Brien, Peter T., *The Letter to the Ephesians: The Pillar New Testament Commentary* (Eerdmans, 1999), 441.

⁴Baugh, S. M., *Ephesians: Evangelical Exegetical Commentary* (Lexham Press, 2016), 507.

⁵O'Brien, *Ephesians*, 444-45.

⁶Arnold, *Ephesians*, 417-18.

⁷O'Brien, *Ephesians*, 447.

⁸Arnold, *Ephesians*, 422-23.

⁹O'Brien, *Ephesians*, 451-52.

¹⁰Baugh, *Ephesians*, 523.