

Gospel-Saturated Obedience & Authority – Ephesians 6:1-9

Five Points Community Church (6/7/15) Brett Toney

We have a Conqueror, and he killed the Dragon and got the girl. We've got to keep that in view as we look at our passage this morning. It is really easy to just focus on the relationships described here and look at what category you fit in. It is really easy to just talk about good parenting principles or how to relate to your boss at work. But we can't miss the forest for the trees. We've got to keep the big picture in view. So remember, you have a Conqueror, and he killed the Dragon and got the girl. That's the big picture of all of Scripture and the big picture of Ephesians. Jesus is your Conqueror who killed the Dragon of sin, death, and the Devil to claim you as his spotless and holy Bride.

This good news must seep into your bones. It must saturate your life. It must ooze from your pores. That is how radically you *have been* changed, how dramatically your identity *has been* transformed. And a significant part of being a Christian—of being saturated with and shaped by the gospel—is that all of your relationships are transformed. No longer do you *use* your relationships to get what you want—belonging, power, affection, praise, acceptance, status—but you see your relationships as a context for living like and commending Christ.

If you are being filled by the Spirit with all the fullness of God, your marriage will look different, your home life will look different, your work life will look different. It is almost as though Paul here is demonstrating that the very curses of the Fall are being undone through the work of Christ. In Christ, no longer will a wife desire to usurp her husband's authority and no longer will a husband harshly rule over his wife. In Christ, no longer will there be pain in child-rearing. In Christ, no longer will your work be toilsome and only reap thorns and thistles. In Christ, the Dragon has been killed and you, his Bride, are made new. Christian, your relationships are transformed as you live in light of who the Triune God has made you.

So we submit to one another out of reverence for Christ, which will look like letting your relationships of submission and authority be marked by a laying-down-of-your-life for the benefit of the other. We don't submit out of fear or passivity but in active obedience to Christ. We don't exercise our authority to get what *we* want or make sure others know their place but to make clear who *our* authority is. So whether it is in the home or society, God has established relationships of submission and authority that the gospel radically transforms. We saw last week what that looks like for wives and husbands, and this morning we will see what it looks like for children and parents, and slaves and masters.

Children, Obey Christ (v.1-3)

Paul continues the pattern of addressing first the group called to submission followed by an address to the group called to authority—thus, wives, children, slaves, and then husbands, fathers, masters. But he calls children and slaves to something different than wives. Rather than saying, “Children, *submit* to your parents,” he says, “Children, *obey* your parents.” I think the change indicates a shift away from an emphasis on the willing, self-imposed submission of wives to the obligatory position children are in under the authority of their parents. Such an obligation is grounded on the righteous command of God to honor your parents. And the motivation to honor and obey is for your own good as a child—“honor your parents *so that* it might go well with *you*.” God holds out reward for obedience, just like Jesus obeyed the call of the cross for a reward (Hebrews 12:2).

What we also see here is that the family is not to have the sole voice into children's lives. Paul writes this letter to the church of Ephesus to be read aloud when the church is gathered, and a part of that letter is addressed specifically to kids. Paul doesn't say, “Parents, instruct your children that I said they should obey you.” No, the local church has a significant role to play in

teaching children to obey all that Jesus commanded. That's why we have a Children's Ministry with a hundred-some volunteers seeking to do that well.

Now Paul's command to children could be twisted and misused in two ways, just like his command to wives could be. First, parents could twist this command such that they lord their God-given authority over their children. Parents could use this verse to exact obedience to something they have no business calling for. That's why Paul addresses fathers next. But children, if your parents tell you to do something that God clearly calls sin, you do not need to obey. And, like what Pastor JJ said last week, if your parents are hurting you in some way, we are here to help you. Talk with me or Pastor JJ or your Sunday school teacher. *It is not your fault* if you are being abused in some way.

The second way this could be twisted is by children—most likely older children—thinking they don't have to obey their parents because their parents are not Christians or don't love like God calls them to. Having ungodly authority is no excuse to dismiss the call to obedience of your submitted position.

So, children, let me speak to you specifically for a moment. Listen up, your mom and dad and everyone here at church—we care for you and want what is best for you. What we want most of all is for Jesus to be your Rescuer; we want Jesus to be your Treasure. Every day we try hard to believe in God to protect you. We do this because we know that you really are God's. He made you and you are his. We do this in the hope that you will belong entirely to Jesus Christ forever.

And, kids, God says your job is to obey. Your parents and this community will not always love you how God calls us to, but we will ask for your forgiveness and show you what it looks like to repent and trust in Jesus. But your job is to obey your parents. Your parents' job is

to obey God and help you obey. God says this is for your good. And what will bring your greatest good is joining us in loving Jesus more than anything.

Fathers, Exercise Christ-Like Authority (v.4)

As we continue and look at v.4, Paul shifts now to the one in authority. Note that in v.1 Paul calls for children to obey their *parents* but here addresses *fathers*. I don't think that means that mothers can provoke their children to anger. I think Paul means to underscore the leadership role dad is supposed to have in the home. Dad, the burden of responsibility to raise your children "in the discipline and instruction of the Lord" falls primarily on you. Mom, your job is to be a strong and robust helper. Just as Eve was to help Adam work and keep the garden, you are to help Dad fulfill his mission as relates to your children. That doesn't mean that Dad now stays at home with the kids or something—it means Dad sets the tone and direction of the home.

And a significant part of the tone of your home ought to be an encouraging one. Fathers, your position of authority is not *for* you or *about* you. God has put you in authority in your home in order to communicate what our Heavenly Father is like. So don't take the easy way out by being an oppressive, domineering dad. It is a much harder and higher calling to reflect God the Father to your children. Any dad can carry the rod, but it takes a dad filled by the Spirit with all the fullness of God to demonstrate why he is really called "Father." So in calling you to not provoke your children,

"[T]he apostle," as Peter O'Brien put it, "is ruling out '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' [Lincoln, 406]. Behind this curbing of a father's authority is the clear recognition that children, while they are expected to obey their parents in the Lord, are persons in their own right who are not to be manipulated, exploited, or crushed."¹

¹ Peter O'Brien, *Ephesians*, 446.

Regard your children as the divine image bearers they are and seek to raise disciples of Jesus, not polite and mindful kids. Your aim is not well-behaved children but sinners who have been redeemed by the Savior.

Father's Day is a couple weeks away. As your wife and kids make preparations to give thanks to God for your fathering, join me in evaluating how you are doing in that role and strategize how to do it better. Ask your kids and your wife, "How's dad doing? Am I an encouragement to you? Am I helping you know how and where to look to Christ? Is the tone of my fathering more that of provoking or encouraging?" I think a friend captured well what the tone of your fathering, and thus of your home, should be like in comparing it to God's fatherly care of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. God gave "one 'No' in a world full of 'Yes.'"² What's your bent? Do you try to say "Yes" whenever you can? Do you imitate the lavish love and generosity of God the Father?

On the flipside, if you do everything right and your kids don't "turn out," it isn't your fault. If you faithfully have family devotions and Scripture memory and never provoke them to anger and pray diligently, don't bear the guilt for their sin if they persist in rebellion against God. God never calls you to save your kids. He calls you to exercise your authority—this is true for dad *and* mom—in a way that is consistent with the person and work of Christ. So don't forget or cast away the sovereignty of God and the goodness of the gospel from chapters 1-3. Your only hope for your children's salvation is Christ alone, not yourself, a parenting methodology, or anything else.

Slaves, Obey Christ (v.5-8)

The final authority structure—the final example of what it looks like to submit to one another out of reverence to Christ (Ephesians 5:21)—relates to slaves and masters. Now the ESV

² Joe Rigney, "Why God Created *This* World," a sermon available at hopeingod.org.

does something here that I don't think is very helpful by translating the same words differently. So when you see in these verses the word "slave" and "servant," know that it is the same word. Similarly, when you see "master" and "lord," it is the same word. Paul is playing on these words to get his points across. He is saying, "Slaves, obey your *earthly* lords as you would Christ. Work as a slave with a good will as to *the* Lord. And lords, do the same to them, knowing their Lord and yours is in Heaven." So in this section, Paul is addressing an authority structure God has ordained in society, namely that in our vocations we work under authority and have authority. And he looks to slaves and masters because of the clear structure of those relationships.

As a side note, don't think of the horrendous practice of American slavery here. That is not the same context Paul is writing in. He is not condoning the slavery Christians like William Wilberforce rightly fought to abolish. He is just using a specific example in society of how Christians ought to submit out of reverence to Christ. And so I think it is right for us to see here application to our work, whether that is outside the home *or in it*.

Paul is saying that as you go about your work, your vocation, you ought to obey those God has put in authority over you. Obey them as you would obey Christ. You wouldn't obey Christ by just going through the motions, so why do that with your earthly overseers? When it comes to your work, don't be a people-pleaser—that is superficial and hypocritical. Don't act one way when the boss is around and differently when they're gone. The work God has called you to is one more avenue through which you are called to love God and love your neighbor. So love your neighbor—your boss, your company—love them well by working diligently and without guile.

And you can work like that because you know that your reward ultimately will not come from your work. Even though your vocation seems to be the thing that most readily identifies

you—“I’m an engineer, lawyer, banker, mother, etc.”—your identity is not rooted in your vocation. So no position, no paycheck, no world-changing purpose will be a satisfying reward. Rather, you are to selflessly go about your work diligently because you know your God is one who lavishly rewards his servants. You know that your identity is fundamentally found in Christ. So just as children obey, looking to the reward God will provide, so also as an employee, obey and look to the reward God will provide.

One significant thing to take away from these verses is that God has great concern for how you go about the work you will spend most of your waking hours doing. How you carry out your work communicates something about the Christ you profess. You don’t have different realms of life—you’re not a Christian at church and home but then you’re just another employee at work. No, you are one person called to many things and to carry out those things in accord with the gospel and the filling work of the Holy Spirit. That way, when you open your mouth to share the good news about a crucified and risen Savior with a coworker, client, or supervisor, that message won’t be contradictory with your life.

Lords, Exercise Christ-Like Authority (v.9)

Last, “Lords, Masters, do the same, ending your threats.” If the Lord has called you to a position of authority in your vocation, you are to carry out that authority in the same manner as husbands and fathers, recognizing that you too are under authority. You demonstrate authority like *your* Lord. Again, you aren’t given authority to carry out *your* will and have everything orient around *you*. You are given authority to be a blessing to those under your authority. You are given authority so that those God calls to submit to you might see and know what Christ’s authority is like.

That is why Paul says you are to “do the same to them.” Work and live as though you are working for the Lord. Oversee your employees, business, or household in a way that makes it

clear that you too are one living under authority. One practical way this is done is by not threatening those submitting to you. As a “lord,” you don’t lord your authority over people. Yes, there are consequences for actions that you at times must carry out, but those consequences aren’t perpetually looming over those under your authority.

After all, there is one Lord in Heaven, and you will not get better treatment because the position you hold in this life. The life of King Nebuchadnezzar probably illustrates this most clearly. He was the most powerful man in the world as the king of Babylon. His threats and self-importance were unending. Yet the Lord made abundantly clear to him that Nebuchadnezzar is not ultimately sovereign—God is. Before God, all men, women, and children stand in equal status and value. The different roles and responsibilities you are given in this life don’t change that. Those roles are intended *by* God to communicate great truths *about* God.

Living out these exhortations in all the nitty-gritty details of life is really challenging. That is why it is so vital for us to never lose sight of our identity in Christ. We can never look to marriage, family, parenting, or work to find our ultimate identity. All of those things will fail to provide that identity because we will all fail in those things. We have to go back up to 4:18 and see that because of our union with and identity in Christ, we are being filled by the Spirit. And a result of his filling work will be faithfully living out the relationships of submission and authority God has put us in. We have a Conqueror, and he killed the Dragon and got the girl. That good news must shape and inform how we go about this life, how we walk and navigate relationships and roles, whether they are as wife or husband, child or parent, slave or master.

The Lord’s Table

The remarkable thing about the gospel is its power to overcome any barrier to unite us together in a common purpose and around a common table. There is no “kids’ table.” There is no coach or first class seating. In Christ, we are coheirs together of all the benefits our one Lord has

purchased through his death and resurrection. So we come to one table as one people before one God in one hope: Christ and him crucified.