

Ephesians 6 ~ Scripture (NIV, 1984)

Children and Parents

¹ 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— ³ “that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth.”

⁴ Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.

Slaves and Masters

⁵ 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.

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.

The Armor of God

¹⁰ Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. ¹¹ Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes. ¹² For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

¹³ Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. ¹⁴ Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, ¹⁵ and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. ¹⁶ In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. ¹⁷ Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. ¹⁸ And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.

¹⁹ Pray also for me, that whenever I open my mouth, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, ²⁰ for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should.

Final Greetings

²¹ Tychicus, the dear brother and faithful servant in the Lord, will tell you everything, so that you also may know how I am and what I am doing. ²² I am sending him to you for this very purpose, that you may know how we are, and that he may encourage you.

²³ Peace to the brothers, and love with faith from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. ²⁴ Grace to all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with an undying love.

Ephesians 6 ~ Discussion Questions

1. Why should children obey their parents? Is this pleasing to the Lord? What does it actually mean to *honor* you father and mother? (6:1-2)
2. Do God's commands and promises to children hold true today? Really? (6:2-3)
3. What does God want fathers to do and not to do? Why? Can you really avoid exasperating your kids? Give an example of both.
4. If you were a slave, what's the worst part of being someone's property? How is it different and how is it the similar to being an employee?
5. Why did Paul tell slaves to obey their masters "with respect and fear?" (6:5) Why should slaves not revolt against the system of slavery?
6. How could slaves serve the Lord while working for their masters? (6:5-8) Does this apply today to students in school or employees on the job?
7. How do we enslave certain groups in our American society today? Examples please.
8. Do you tend to be the trusting type or are you suspicious of other people? Why? How do you protect your home, car, possessions, or yourself? Or do you?
9. What did Paul tell believers to put on? Why do we need God's armor? Can't we stand fast on our own? (6:11-13)
10. How should Christians be armed for battle? What six specific weapons or defenses did Paul tell Christians to take up in Verses 6:14-17?
11. What exactly is spiritual warfare? How often are you personally engaged in spiritual warfare? In what way is the Christian life like a battle? Why?
12. In verse 6:18-20, what last three specific instructions did Paul give his readers? When you pray, what do you most often pray for? What do you generally overlook?
13. Like most of his letters, Paul ended this one with a benediction (6:23-24). In what way do you need one or more of the four blessings Paul mentioned? How do people close letters or e-mails today? Do you think you would you be laughed at or would you feel funny closing with a benediction like Paul's?

Ephesians 6 ~ Discussion Questions

1. Why should children obey their parents? Is this pleasing to the Lord? What does it actually mean to *honor* you father and mother? (6:1-2)

The relationship between parents and children is to be a reflection of their devotion to the Lord. “In the Lord” in 6:1 means in fellowship with the Lord and in obedience to the Lord. Verses 6:2-3 quote the 5th commandment in Exodus 20:12 and Deut 5:16. Children who honor and respect their parents also honor and respect God himself, and blessings follow. The promise the Lord made in Exodus is actually, “that you may live long in the land the Lord your God is giving you” but that specific application was not appropriate to the Ephesians, so Paul changed it to the more general application, the you will have a long life here “on the earth.”

The word “honor” actually has 8 meanings as a verb as it is used here and 12 more as a noun. Probably the best two meanings are 1) to hold in honor or high respect or to revere and 2) to show a courteous regard for.

2. Do God’s commands and promises to children hold true today? Really? (6:2-3)

The commands and promises are as true today as they were 2,000 years ago. As we saw above, Paul modified the idea of the blessing to apply to life on the earth rather than just in the promised land. Paul saw no difficulty in applying a promise to Jews in Israel to Gentile believers in another part of the Mediterranean world.

It is interesting to find a phrase like this in Paul’s letter directly addressing children. Evidently they were regarded as responsible members of house churches where such a letter as this would be read out. That strongly suggests that parents today should teach their children the need for similar obedience and honor and not depend upon school and churches to convey these requirements.

3. What does God want fathers to do and not to do? Why? Can you really avoid exasperating your kids? Give an example of both.

The advice to fathers is stark. Only the father is addressed as in those days he had sole legal authority over his children and primary responsibility for their training, discipline, and instruction. At the same time, it was recognized that such power unwisely handled could easily provoke youths to a resentment which was destructive of household order and the family. Again, the Christian qualification is added, “the training and instruction of the Lord.”

The words used to describe the upbringing of children have changed over the years. Tyndale (1525) says “nurture and admonition.” The REB, ESV and others 400 years later had “discipline and instruction.” By the 1980s, it had been downplayed (NIV, Holman, etc.) to “training and instruction.” And then we have Eugene Peterson in *The Message* saying, “Take them by the hand and lead them.” So later translations really downplay disciplining children. But in fact, God expects parents to both instruct and discipline their children so they will learn a way of living that is good and pleases God. Discipline is not to be excessive, but loving and gentle so that children are drawn to the Lord.

4. If you were a slave, what's the worst part of being someone's property? How is it different and how is it similar to being an employee?

Many employers in previous centuries regarded their employees as slaves. They still do in many parts of Africa and Asia. Such employments and being a slave is humiliating and degrading.

In the ancient world slavery was simply an economic phenomenon, slaves being essential to the smooth running of the economy. Slavery only became a moral issue in the last two centuries as a result of the slave trade. Many slaves were quite content with their life and, in fact, chose to remain a slave even when they might go free. Exodus 21:5-6 – “But if the servant declares, ‘I love my master and my wife and children and do not want to go free,’ then his master must take him before the judges. He shall take him to the door or the doorpost and pierce his ear with an awl. Then he will be his servant for life.” (Also Deut 15:16-17).

So there is both good and bad to being a slave or an employee. As with children it is worth noting that slaves too are recognized as full members of the congregation and having responsibilities as Christians to discharge the duties which their status as slaves laid upon them. (1 Tim 6:1-2, Titus 2:9-10)

5. Why did Paul tell slaves to obey their masters “with respect and fear?” (6:5) Why should slaves not revolt against the system of slavery?

The exhortation recognizes the reality of slavery: obedience had to be unquestioning and orders carried out with fear and trembling (many masters did treat slaves harshly). But the thrust of the exhortation is to provide the slaves with the right motivation, so that their service might lose its servile character and become a way of serving the Lord with sincerity of heart, doing the will of God with a will and not as clock-watchers or solely to catch the master's eye or to curry favor with him. At the same time, slaves are reminded that their earthly masters are only that (6:5), and that both slave and free will receive from their heavenly Lord the appropriate recompense according to the good they have done (6:8).

As mentioned above, many slaves liked that life and chose to remain in it.

6. How could slaves serve the Lord while working for their masters? (6:5-8) Does this apply today to students in school or employees on the job?

“As slaves of Christ” (6:7) means as those who have been bought by the blood of Christ, believers no longer belong to themselves.

1 Corinthians 6:19-20 – Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body.

1 Corinthians 7:22 – For the one who was a slave when called to faith in the Lord is the Lord's freed person; similarly, the one who was free when called is Christ's slave.

These verses, especially 6:6-7 emphasize the idea of doing the will of God is that they honor God by serving their human masters faithfully, wholeheartedly, with enthusiasm just as a student or employee should behave today.

7. How do we enslave certain groups in our American society today? Examples please.

There continue to be many ways in which people are enslaved today. Here are a few:

Domestic Servitude – Employees working in private homes are forced or coerced into serving and/or fraudulently convinced that they have no option to leave.

Forced Labor – Human beings are forced to work under the threat of violence and for no pay. These slaves are treated as property and exploited to create a product for commercial sale.

Sex Trafficking – Women, men or children are forced into the commercial sex industry and held against his or her will by manipulation and/or force.

Bonded Labor – Individuals are compelled to work in order to repay a debt and unable to leave until the debt is repaid. This is the most common form of enslavement today.

Child labor – Children comprise the majority of slaves today. Most are domestic workers or work in cocoa, cotton or fishing industries. Many are trafficked and sexually exploited.

8. Do you tend to be the trusting type or are you suspicious of other people? Why? How do you protect your home, car, possessions, or yourself? Or do you?

9. What did Paul tell believers to put on? Why do we need God's armor? Can't we stand fast on our own? (6:11-13)

The final exhortation is one of the most vivid portrayals of the Christian life as a spiritual struggle, indicating the power of the hostile forces (6:10-12), the means of withstanding them (6:13-17), and the need for cooperative effort (6:18-20). Note that the metaphor is of warfare, not of a school debate, trial in court, or competition in business. As a piece, it is clearly constructed from a sequence of allusions to well-established Jewish motifs, particularly that of YHWH as the Divine Warrior. Isaiah uses the same depiction of YHWH's own armor as Paul does for ours.

Isaiah 59:17 – He put on righteousness as his breastplate, and the helmet of salvation on his head; he put on the garments of vengeance and wrapped himself in zeal as in a cloak.

This interesting view from the Oxford Bible Commentary: The spiritual opposition is described both as the devil (4:27 and 'ruler of the kingdom of the air' in 2:2) and as cosmic and 'spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms' (6:12). With this information added to that of earlier references to the heavenlies (1:3, 1:20, 3:6, 3:10), we are given a clearer picture of the heavenly regions—presumably as a sequence of heavens (see 2 Corinthians 12:2-3), in which the lower heavens (nearer to earth) are inhabited by hostile powers, and the upper heavens are where Christ is seated. Modern cosmology is quite different, but what matters is the recognition that there are forces active through human fear and greed which can captivate whole groups and even societies are wreak all forms of evil, from the most subtle (4:14) to the most inhuman. To designate them as 'spiritual powers' helps prevent such evil from being treated lightly or superficially (they are not merely 'flesh and blood').

10. How should Christians be armed for battle? What six specific weapons or defenses did Paul tell Christians to take up in Verses 6:14-17?

The appropriate and necessary response given the characteristic of hits evil is to seek a strength commensurate with and more powerful than that evil—a spiritual strength to match a spiritual crisis, a strength from God, the strength of God himself. Correlated with that strength is the equipment of the Divine Warrior. Only that equipment and that empowering will provide the fortitude and the means to withstand in a day when evil seems to be rampant and having done all within one’s power, still to stand one’s ground. The sign of God’s enabling is not so much clear-cut victory over evil, as the sustained will to resist evil, come what may.

The list of equipment includes:

- 1) the belt of truth prevents one from being caught out in deceit or falsification
- 2) the breastplate of righteousness expresses the thought that those who trust in God are secure in the face of hostile criticism,
- 3) readiness from the gospel of peace means speaking out about God to others; mission is the best form of defense; a church on the move will be more surefooted in facing the encroachments of evil
- 4) the shield of faith. Typically God is a shield (Gen 15:1, Ps 18:2, Ps 28:7, etc), but faith is appropriate too (1 Pet 5:9). Trust can be exposed to quite a battering, but trust sustained (faith) keeps inviolate the one who trusts.
- 5) the helmet of salvation (1 Thess 5:8). Salvation is still a future goal but we can be confident that it will be realized.
- 6) the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. Not just the written word, the believer being well-versed in scripture, but the Spirit is seen here as an inspiring force.

11. What exactly is spiritual warfare? How often are you personally engaged in spiritual warfare? In what way is the Christian life like a battle? Why?

Spiritual warfare is the Christian version of the concept of taking a stand against preternatural evil forces. The foundation for this ideology is having a belief in evil spirits which are able to intervene in human affairs. NT writers were convinced of the reality of evil and the dangers of the spiritual world. So they took the devil or Satan seriously as a real threat. The devil not only inhibits the work of God’s people (1 Thess 2:18, Rev 2:10), but he “prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour.” (1 Pet 5:8)

The entire unbelieving world is subject to the power of sin and the devil. As the “god of this world,” the devil can blind the minds of unbelievers. Although Satan opposes God and seeks to destroy his people, Jesus came to destroy Satan’s work.

Christians are to stand firm and resist the devil, praying for God’s deliverance and availing themselves of the armor that God provides for their defense. Those who yield to Satan’s influence suffer the consequences. But believers who walk with Christ are secure because they know that the cross has broken the devil’s power and the Lord protects them. They also know that the Holy Spirit within them is greater than the devil. By the word of God they can overcome the evil one.

Although believers need to be wary of the devil and protect themselves from his power, they need not live in fear. The power of the devil is no match for the power of

God. In the NT, the Christian life is not centered on spiritual warfare, but on a joyful life of obedience in the Spirit.

12. In verse 6:18-20, what last three specific instructions did Paul give his readers? When you pray, what do you most often pray for? What do you generally overlook?

Paul told his readers to 1) pray in the Spirit with all your prayers and requests, 2) pray for all the saints (other believers), and 3) pray for himself (Paul).

In 6:18 Paul contrasts purely mental prayer with “prayer in the Spirit” that arises from the Spirit of God within.

1 Corinthians 14:15 – So what shall I do? I will pray with my spirit, but I will also pray with my understanding; I will sing with my spirit, but I will also sing with my understanding.

Paul also says that believers are to make prayer a way of life and turn the whole of life into prayer—not just for themselves but for believers (saints) everywhere. Literally, we should pray continually for all of God’s holy people.

1 Thessalonians 5:17 – pray continually (NIV), Never stop praying (NLT), pray without ceasing (ESV)

This final stress on prayer is part of the continuing metaphor on spiritual armor and is vitally important in the spiritual warfare just described. Christian soldiers must never forget that they need continual help from God. The last imagery had been somewhat individualistic but this last addition helps underline the importance of cooperation and mutual support in the warfare. Also, praying should always look to the Holy Spirit for inspiration.

13. Like most of his letters, Paul ended this one with a benediction (6:23-24). In what way do you need one or more of the four blessings Paul mentioned? How do people close letters or e-mails today? Do you think you would be laughed at or would you feel funny closing with a benediction like Paul’s?