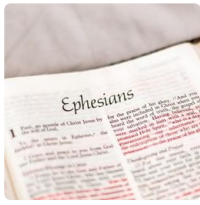


# OpenTheo

## Ephesians 6:1 - 6:9



### **Ephesians** - Steve Gregg

Steve Gregg shares insights on Ephesians 6:1-9 and reminds us that human nature tends to exploit submission. He notes that in the case of wives submitting to their husbands, the husband is also called to love his wife as Christ loves the church. Gregg emphasizes the importance of mutual respect and love in all relationships, whether it be in marriage or between employer and employee, and encourages us to honor God in these interactions.

### **Transcript**

Chapter 6, to which I would like you to turn at this time. If I were the person who put the chapter divisions in the Bible, I would have made a different decision, in this case, than was made by whoever did that. Because, back in chapter 5, verse 21, Paul said, submitting to one another in the fear of God, and then he talked about wives and husbands, and that occupied the rest of chapter 5, and then in chapter 6 he talks about children and fathers, and then also in chapter 6 he talks about servants and masters.

All of these are instances of cases where one class of Christians, one group of Christians, are called upon to subordinate themselves in ordinary functions of daily life to some other group of people. And, this is not a very popular concept today, but it is nonetheless what Paul is saying, and what is taught throughout the scriptures. Peter teaches the same thing, so it wasn't false.

But, when Paul said in chapter 5, verse 21, of Ephesians, to submit to one another in the fear of God, he laid out the special cases where persons are under obligation to submit to others. Of course, there is a sense in which all Christians ought to have a servant's attitude and be prepared to defer to other people. But, there are special relationships, special cases, which we call hierarchical relationships, where one party is required by definition to submit to the other.

Now, human nature being what it is, of course, there has always been a great deal of exploitation when this has been practiced. I shouldn't say always, but there has been historically exploitation. The fact that wives must submit to their husbands, children to

their parents, and servants to their masters, has not always been a very agreeable situation to those who were in that submissive role.

Because those who were over them, those to whom they were submitting, were not always very godly. And, by the way, in many cases, those who are doing the submitting, or are supposed to be doing the submitting, are not always very godly either. There is something in human nature, since the fall, that makes this a particularly difficult thing to manage without dissatisfaction.

On the one hand, those who are under authority often chafe under authority and wish that they could be out from under authority and be their own ruler. This is true of children, this is true of wives, this is true of servants in many cases. And, on the other hand, those who are in authority often do not have a godly attitude about the authority that they are in, and see it as a privilege to them to be used for their own advantage, and to use, strictly for their own advantage, the persons that are obligated to submit to them, and also, because they can sometimes get away with it, to abuse such people.

So that there are known cases, historically and in our own day, we know of cases of wife abuse and of child abuse. And, of course, we don't have servants in the sense that they had them back then, in the sense of slaves, but there is certainly abuse among the social classes from time to time. So those who are above others need to be sanctified in order to not abuse their privilege, or their position, I should say.

And those who are under authority must be sanctified in order not to chafe in the role that they have, when their human natural independence and rebellion would make them want to be out from under authority. And so Paul gives instructions to both classes of persons, to those under authority first, and then to those who are over them. In the case of wives and husbands, he speaks to the wife first, and indicates that the submission of the wife to the husband is to mimic the submission of the church to Christ.

And he tells the husbands that their love for their wife is to be like the love of Christ for his church. This is sort of following on what Paul had said at the beginning of chapter 5 and verse 1, and therefore be mimickers or imitators of God as dear children, and walk in love as Christ also loved us. So the imitation of God and the imitation of Christ is what those in authority are actually called to be.

And those who are under authority are called to act like those who, the church really. I mean, it's interesting here, since the book of Ephesians is about the church, that not only do these three examples of these three different institutions, that of marriage and of the family and of the master and servant relationship, not only do they give actual instructions to those people who are in those roles, but they tell us something about the church as well, because the analogy works both ways. In one way, in telling us that the marriage relationship is a picture of Christ and the church, it tells us something about how the husband and the wife should behave, but it also tells us something about Christ

and his love for the church, and the church and its submission to Christ.

I mean, if you have this analogy, you've got the husband and wife here, and you've got Christ and the church over here, they inform each other in the sense that a man who doesn't know how he should love his wife, or a woman who doesn't know how she should submit to her husband, can look at this thing that they're modeled after, and then say, okay, Christ loves the church this way, and that's how I should love my wife. The wife can say, okay, the church is to submit to Christ in such a way, that's how I should submit to my husband. But it works the other way, too.

If I wonder, how is the church supposed to submit to its head? You can look at a submissive wife and say, well, there's a model, there's a picture of how the church is supposed to be. How I, as a member of the church, I may not be a wife, but I'm a member of the church, and I am supposed to submit to my head, and a woman who rightly submits to her husband provides a visual pattern for all who behold it, how the church is supposed to be toward Christ. And the husband who loves his wife properly, and gives himself for it, provides a visual testimony to the world of how Christ also loves the church.

When someone says, well, Christ is like a bridegroom, Christ is like a husband to his people. And someone can think of a husband who is a good image of that. It reflects positively on Christ, so that the two sides of this analogy reflect on each other.

And in a sense, although Paul appears to be simply giving practical instructions to people who fit these different niches in social institutions, he's also telling us something about the church. When he gives us the husband-wife section, he reminds us that the church is the bride of Christ, and that we, as members of the church, whether we are wives or not, are to be like a wife to her husband, with reference to our submission to Christ. When he tells us about children and parents, he not only tells children what they should do, but tells us all what we as children of God should do, and what God is like as a father.

It's interesting, he doesn't address mothers. He says, you fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, in verse 4. So he, in a sense, tells us something about what our father is like, and what we as children are to be like, obedient to God. It's not only that the model of us being children of God informs the child and the father how they should behave, but what we already know about children and fathers informs us about our relationship with God as children of His, and Him as our Father.

Likewise with servants and masters. The servants are told to submit to their masters, and serve them obediently as unto the Lord. And the masters are reminded that they have a master in heaven too.

So again, there's this model of Christ and the church here, and the servants and the master. And the masters are supposed to model themselves after the way Christ is the

master. And the servants are supposed to submit themselves in the way that we submit to the Lord.

But in addition to informing the servants and the masters, the very institution of slavery informs us something about the church's relationship to God. In those days, of course, it was slavery that Paul was describing, where the servant wasn't really a paid servant or an employee, he was a slave, he was owned. He had no rights of his own.

And so these institutions, all three of them are hierarchical. Husband-wife, parent-child, master-servant. All of them are elsewhere in Scripture used, and even here are used as pictures of Christ and the church as well.

The church or the members of the church, each of us individually, are servants of Christ, of God. We are children of God. We are the wife of God.

The instructions here tell us all something, even if you're not a child under a parent or a wife under a husband, or a servant under a master, we are nonetheless all part of the church and as individuals. These instructions apply to us, at least with reference to our relationship to God. So, as I say, whenever you make this particular kind of analogy, each side of the analogy informs the other, and reflects on the other, and tells something about the other.

Now, he turns to the children here in chapter 6 and says, Children, obey your parents and the Lord, for this is right. Honor your father and mother, which is the first commandment with promise, that it may be well with you, and you may live long on the earth. And you fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and the admonition of the Lord.

Now, Paul gives two reasons to the children, two motivations to them, to obey their parents. And children need motivation to do that, because just like adults, children are born with a rebellion and a desire to be not governed by any but themselves. And so, incentives are given.

The first incentive is the most important. Do this because it's right. The second incentive is, there's a promise attached to this, there's a benefit in it.

Now, this is the right order to mention things in. When we're trying to get people to do something that they don't seem real eager to do, we will often mention these things in reverse order. This will be good for you.

Do what I'm suggesting because it'll be better for you. Even when we try to bring people to Christ, we are tempted to only emphasize how it will be good for them to become a Christian. They won't have to go to hell.

Their life won't be so messed up. They can get delivered off their sin bondages and so

forth that are ruining their lives. All of these things are true.

And these would be, in a sense, the promises attached to doing the right thing in terms of surrendering to Christ. And this is the way people motivate people. They hold a carrot out to them.

They offer them some kind of a reward. And the Bible does this too, even this passage does so, that it will be well with you. But it mentions first a more important and more fundamental reason to do it.

And that's because it's right. It's right to do it. And even if there is no attached promise, if there is no benefit to me, it is still the right thing to do and therefore I should do it.

The assumption is that a Christian has a different set of motivations, hopefully, than the unbeliever. The unbeliever is simply motivated by flesh gratification. And if they can weigh two options and say, well, this one's better for me, then that's obviously the choice I'm going to make.

The believer is not entirely free from considerations of this kind. Obviously, we prefer to have comfort than to have torture. We prefer to be secure than to be insecure.

I mean, there are things, fleshly things, that motivate us at some level as well. We have preferences. But there's something fundamentally different about the Christian from what he was before he was a Christian.

And that is, whereas before he was a Christian, he was motivated only by self-concern, the principle concern of the repentant part, the person who has actually turned to God, is not self. In fact, the turning to God is itself, first and foremost, a denial of self and a taking up of a cross. Now, why would anyone do that? Is that because of the rewards to it? Well, there are rewards to it, and the Bible is not silent about that.

That's not the only reason. And for the mature Christian, it certainly isn't even the leading reason. It's possible that when a person is first approached with the gospel, they are so self-centered that they can't be made to have any interest in that which they see no benefit to themselves in.

But it is a marked spiritual maturity, not even maturity, probably even... Any Christian can come to this point before they're mature. It is certainly the normal Christian mentality that we no longer are doing things because there's a promise attached to it. We're doing it because it's simply right.

We no longer are motivated by the desire just to do whatever is best for us, but whatever is best in the sight of God. Whatever pleases God most. Whatever is righteous.

We seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness. The other things are added.

And that's what Paul is saying here, too, about children.

You obey your parents just because it's right. This is agreeable with the righteousness of God. And you should be seeking God's concern, God's pleasure, God's kingdom and His righteousness.

Now, these other things, there's a promise attached. That'll be added to you, too. You do what's right.

And there are certain promises that accrue to those who do what is right. But the first reason for doing it is because it is right. Now, notice he's talking to children, and therefore he doesn't assume a high degree of spiritual maturity necessarily in order to be motivated by the desire to do what is right.

Do this because it's right, you tell a child. And it doesn't take a high sophistication. It just takes a pure heart to be motivated by the suggestion that this is the right thing to do.

And good character can exist even in a child, if it is trained. And character is simply the ability to subjugate baser desires to higher principles. A person of low character acts on impulse.

A person of high character acts on principle or conviction. And so even a child, apparently, it is assumed by Paul, can be motivated by conviction. This is what is right.

And we used to see far more than we do now, even among the unbelievers, that there is just a certain dignity of wanting to do what is right. Sometimes, I mean, even unbelievers, of course, they always have their selfish motives too, but there were more people, even outside the church in former days than there are now in the church, who would subjugate their baser desires because of some principle. They would not have an affair, because even though they might desire to, there were principles.

They made promise to their wife, and they wouldn't do such a thing. They might have had fear of man or whatever motivated them, but there was still a principle there that they would observe over impulse. And many other areas of life are necessary for the conviction above the impulse.

And what's interesting here is that Paul assumes even children can do this. Children don't want to obey lots of times, but they can be told this is what's right. And if they are children of pure hearts, they can do that.

My own children are quite young still, some of them, and yet I, and certainly they're not perfect children, but I've seen on many occasions where when they wanted to do what was right, and we told them that isn't right, even though we didn't immediately attach the threat of punishment to it, although they might have implied that in their minds, or inferred it, I should say, I could see they were motivated by the desire to do what's right.

They want to do what's right, they just need to be told what that is. People don't instinctively know everything that is right.

It's true we have consciences that tell us some things, but unfortunately the conscience of every person is molded lots by his environment, and he may think something is right or wrong because his parents thought it was right or wrong, or because his parents practiced or didn't practice it, and he'll be sensitive to something, like the Jews who thought it was wrong to eat meat, and thought there was no problem eating such meat, but if it bothers your conscience, don't do it. Well, why would it bother your conscience? Because they were raised in an environment where their conscience was sensitized to that, unnecessarily, unfortunately. So you can't always, and a child even, can't always trust his conscience.

It's never safe to ignore your conscience, but you can't always be sure that it's accurate. So people, children and other people, need to be told what's right. That's why Jesus said we have to go and disciple people, and teach them to observe the things Jesus commanded.

They don't automatically know these things. And so, Paul turns to children and says, Obey your parents, that's right. Now he says, your parents are in the Lord, and this has made some people speculate whether he means Christian parents.

If your parents are in the Lord, if they're Christians, obey them. And of course, if this is the way we take it, then it leaves open the possibility that if you have non-Christian parents, there's no obligation to obey them. And that's what some people point out, well, this just says obey your parents in the Lord.

My parents are not in the Lord, they say, and therefore I don't have to obey them. Well, realize that in the Lord can also be referring to the children. You children who are in the Lord, obey your parents.

In fact, remember throughout Ephesians, everything in Ephesians is in Christ, in him, in the Lord. And it's always the reader who is said to be in the Lord, in Christ. And the children here are the children who are Christians.

They're in the Lord. He wouldn't give such instructions, saying this is right and there's a promise from God, unless he was talking to people who had a conscience toward God. He's writing to Christian children.

Now, by the way, the word children here does not necessarily mean little children. And it raises questions as to how old a person becomes before there's no longer an obligation to obey parents. And that's not an easy thing to answer.

And it's also the case that when people are grown children, or young children for that matter, where there's the whole issue of obedience to authorities is somewhat mitigated

by the prior obedience obligation to God. Obviously, if parents tell their child, young or old child, to violate what God has said, that child or that wife or that servant or whoever is in subjection must stand against those instructions and not obey them. And like Peter said here, we must obey God rather than man.

And whether a child is young or old, they must not disobey their parents. I mean, they must not obey their parents if their parents are telling them to do something that is intrinsically sinful as defined by God in his word. However, we know that in the biblical culture, which Paul presupposed among his readers, essentially children were under their parents until they left home and were married.

They did not usually leave home unless married. There were exceptions, but it was the most typical arrangement that a child would be with parents until he or she left to be married. That's what it says in Genesis chapter 2 right from the beginning.

For this cause shall a man leave his father and his mother and be joined to a wife. The assumption is he doesn't leave his father and mother until he is joined to his wife. Now this is not necessarily a principle.

I mean, it could be argued two ways. One could argue that this is a principle that must be observed and therefore all unmarried people who are away from their parents are somehow in violation of this. But that's not necessarily something that can be enforced today.

There are many parents today who don't want their adult children living with them even though they're not married. There are adult children who are not welcome to live with their parents or whose parents do not care to have responsibility for their lives anymore because their parents either are not Christian or if they are Christian they're not very, perhaps, biblically informed. I forget what we were reading recently.

We were reading some story of some parents who were just... They were telling one of their adult children that it's time for them to go out and make their way in the world and leave home. And yet the child was not married. And I thought, well, we were reading this to the family.

We had to inform our children. We don't think this way. You don't ever have to leave home until you get married.

If you marry, then you'll leave home, though we hope you won't go too far unless God calls you somewhere far away. But to our children, we want them to know that we expect them... It's not so much that we can enforce this, but we're letting them know of our expectation that they will be home until they marry. And if they never marry, they can stay home.

That might sound weird and old-fashioned to some, but it's not at all impractical. It's not



at all as unsafe to their souls as the modern practice of just leaving home when you graduate from high school, which we all did. I left home when I graduated from high school when I was 17 and never went home again except for brief periods.

And I wasn't married at the time. And so, I mean, I did not follow in my youth the patterns that I think the Bible recommends, and that's only because I didn't know. I mean, I didn't read the Bible with the same eyes that I do now.

I was very much colored by my own culture. My parents did not necessarily expect me to stay home. They did not forbid me to leave.

They didn't tell me they'd prefer for me to stay home. And because of that, that's partly because of the way they were raised and their culture. It never occurred to me that staying home until married was a reasonable thing to do, but it did occur to people in Paul's day.

In fact, it was fairly assumed. And again, it's not as if the Bible knows of no exceptions. There are exceptions, but there is still a norm.

And it's possible that you single people, some of you here who are not married, have not been married. You may be those exceptions. You may be, you know, cases where God has truly called someone to be away from their parents' home, even though they're not married.

I mean, some of you might be called to be unmarried forever. Who knows? And your parents either being not Christians or simply not being of a mind to keep you at home, or the call of God on your life being such as would necessarily call you away from your parents, it may provide reasons for you to be an exception to the general pattern. But I personally believe that Christians should raise their children with the expectation that they are under their parents' authority and to remain in their home until they leave that in order to form another home, except for exceptions.

We've made that clear to our children that we're not assuming they will all marry. But we think they probably will, and if they don't marry, that's fine. I mean, but they're welcome to stay home until they are married, and that includes until they're very old.

I believe Bill Gothard, who's got to be, I imagine, in his 60s today. I've never seen the man, but he's been around so long. I imagine he's got to be in his 60s.

He does these huge seminars called Basic Youth Conflict Seminars. Real wonderful guy. I haven't ever gone to his seminars, and I don't agree with everything he teaches, but he's a real godly man, a real humble man, and has some very good principles he teaches, some of them.

But as I understand it, he never married, and he lives at home with his folks. I think he's

in his 60s, or he's got to be at least in his 50s if not in his 60s. But I guess he's always lived at home with his folks.

He just didn't buy into this worldly culture that you get old enough to be independent and take care of yourself, and you go away from home. God created homes as a place of protection for children, and part of that protection is that the parents not only provide a shelter, but provide some authority structure for the child. Now, I realize there are certainly cases that Paul probably does not have in mind here.

I'm sure that Paul is addressing principally in his mind as he writes, he's thinking of Christian children and Christian homes because he addresses the fathers as well and expects them to have the same Christian convictions that he expects the children to have. In all likelihood, there were probably few Christian children in the early church who didn't have Christian parents. Probably children who were Christians were Christians because of their parents.

There would be, again, some exceptions, but Paul's probably thinking of a normal, normative situation. So that Christian parents would be, of course, not giving instructions to their children that are unchristian or anti-Christian instructions. I'm sure Paul could imagine exceptions to this rule where parents are wicked, where parents abuse or misdirect children in the ways of ungodliness, in which case some of these instructions might have been worded differently, but Paul's addressing a certain situation here.

And that situation is children who are in the Lord, and in all likelihood their parents are in the Lord as well, because he expects the parents to bring up their children in the training and admonition of the Lord. He could hardly expect that of them if they weren't Christian parents. Now, these children are to obey their parents.

Now, I still didn't answer the question of how old does a child get before he doesn't have to obey his parents anymore. Well, I would believe that most parents will not ask for obedience very much after a child reaches a certain age, especially adulthood. By the way, if the child leaves home and marries, they don't have to obey their parents at all, as near as I can tell.

There might be good things their parents require of them out of honor of their parents, and they have no reason to disobey. They might continue to do what their parents said without being strictly under legalistic obligation to do so. It's always right to honor your parents, and the Bible makes it plain that honoring your parents, even the obligation to honor them, extends even until they're very old, and presumably you're old, because Paul indicates in 1 Timothy 5 that when aged parents have adult children who can care for them, the children should honor their parents by supporting them, and so forth, but not necessarily obeying them.

Honor doesn't always mean to obey, but at the same time, it should be thought that if

you have parents that you know would be greatly offended by some choice you make, and you don't need to make it, it is certainly more godly to defer to what your parents would prefer. It's hard for you, who have no children, and I mean, Kelly, you have children, but no one else here does, to relate how a parent feels toward the child, unless society has conditioned them to feel otherwise, and maybe your parents would fall into that category. But when children are raised by their parents, the parents have invested a great deal, not only the mother in carrying the child in her womb for nine months, but also during the child's total helpless years.

The parents make sacrifices so that the child will live, and they, back through the child's whole childhood, the parents make sacrifices so the child will not only live, but that they seek the well-being of the child. They're trying to launch the child with an advantage in the world, and great sacrifices are made, and a parent can hardly make those sacrifices without beginning to feel that they have something invested here, because they do have something invested in that child. Now, there are parents who don't invest much in their children, and we have to know that.

I mean, there are parents who just send their kids off to daycare and send their kids off to school and don't really get involved much in their raising, but I'm talking about normal parenting, according to the scripture. When godly parents raise their children, they invest a great deal. They invest the best years of their lives, as we sometimes hear the expression, and they are, in some respects, the best years of their lives.

Actually, I think the older years are perhaps the better years from a spiritual point of view, but in terms of ability to really make money and find personal gratification and so forth, the younger years, the 20s and 30s, when people are raising their little children, for the most part, in the 40s, are the years when they can, which they give up a great deal in terms of personal satisfaction. And it's right for parents to feel that they have some claim on these children. I mean, of course, when the children get married and leave, that's, of course, biblically, when the parents have no more claim on them.

And many parents, of course, will release their children without their children being married, long before other parents would. But it's not wrong. The child, of course, once grown, feels like, I'm my own person, my parents shouldn't have any claim on the way I think or act or what I do with my life.

But their parents have a hard time thinking that way, and I'm not sure that god's not on their side in the matter. I mean, we've got to deal with the fact that we are all naturally self-governing rebels. You know, that's what we are by nature.

And that something in our attitude might not be agreeable with what god views the situation as. The parents who have invested so much, if a child goes up and brings great heartbreak to their parents, not just with the life of sin and profligacy, but also just, you know, making decisions in life that the parents have counseled strongly against and the

parents can see further. In some cases, we're talking about godly parents here.

Non-Christian parents can hardly make decisions for an adult Christian's life since they don't know what the values are. I mean, a person has to leave, sometimes family, in order just to follow Jesus. But I guess what I'm saying is Paul doesn't address this merely to little children.

The word in the Greek for children doesn't necessarily mean little children. It means offspring. And so, it leaves open the possibility that even once a child has grown, unless there's some other condition that necessitates disobedience to parents, let's say marriage has come up or the call of god is so clear and the parents are not amenable to the call of god, there are times when a child must simply, you know, defy ungodly influence from parents.

But short of that, it seems that it's a wise and god-honoring thing even for grown children to do what pleases their parents. And once you are parents, if you become parents yourselves, you'll know why that's important because you'll know how parents feel and what they feel they have invested in and how much their life was just sacrificed for those kids. And if the children just bring grief to them later on or just point to them, it's a great tragedy in their lives and no child, adult or otherwise, should ever hope to bring such on their parents.

Now, there is this quote from the fifth commandment in verse 2, Honor your father and mother, which is the first commandment with promise, that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth. Now, that commandment actually in the Old Testament was that they would live long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you, meaning Israel, the promised land. And because of that, we need to understand the nature of this promise.

It was not necessarily a promise made of individual longevity. It's not a promise that if you honor your parents, you'll live to be an old person. There were many godly people, we assume parent honoring people, who died young.

Jesus was one of them, for example, and many others. Daniel, we may presume, was an obedient child, and yet he didn't live long in the land that the Lord gave him. He was taken into captivity and spent most of his life in exile.

So what does the promise here mean? It doesn't mean that if you as an individual obey your parents, that you individually will necessarily have the promise of a very long life, but rather, if the children of Israel would obey the parents, then they would secure the land in perpetuity or long term for their people, for their offspring, for their nation. That collectively, if the nation was a nation of parent honoring children, then that nation would be able to stay in the land that God was giving them and would have a long career there. Now this, I can say with a certain degree of assurance, because there are so many

things in the Pentateuch that God says to the nation as a whole that if they do certain things, their tenure in the land will be extended.

And if they do other things that are disapproved by God, then their tenure in the land will be shortened. And so also it seems very likely that this comment that if you obey your parents, then your life in the land, your abiding or staying in the land that God gives you will be prolonged. This is collectively.

But how does Paul mean it? Of course, we're not concerned about the promised land. We don't live there now. We don't plan to live there in the future.

So what do we care about living there? Even the Ephesians didn't live there. So he renders it that you may live long on the earth. Now of course the word earth, both in the Greek and Hebrew, can't be translated land, so even Paul could have meant it that way.

But certainly he couldn't have meant that the Ephesian Christians, if they obeyed their parents, would live in Palestine for a long time, nor even necessarily in Ephesus. But I think what he's suggesting here is applying the same principle as it applied to the Jews, to the Christians, that if Christian children learn the ways of their parents and do not rebel against them and follow their parents' instructions and obey the godly counsel from their parents, that the Christian movement, the Christian church, will have a long tenure in the earth, that the church will be perpetuated without corruption and defilement and so forth, because the purity of the early Christians would be passed down from parent to child, child to child to child, each generation, and if the children would honor the godly standards and obey the godly instruction of their parents, there would be a prolonging of the church's purity and of its existence. And Paul might be implying by this that if Christian children do not submit to their parents, it could bring about an early demise of the presence of the church on the earth.

Now, that's not to say that there will ever be a time where there's truly no Christians or no true church, but there have been periods of time in history where it would have been very hard to find it. And it did seem like the testimony of the church was almost blotted out for centuries at times. I won't say that this was directly the result of children not obeying their parents, but it certainly must... I mean, when you think about it, if godly parents teach their children godliness and the children obey that, then those children are going to be godly.

And if they teach their children godliness and their children obey that, then that next generation will be godly. Somewhere along the line, someone didn't pass it along. And when you see deterioration in the church or in a Christian movement ever, it is clear that someone has dropped the ball.

It is either that the parents have not brought up their children in the training and admonition of the Lord, as Paul tells fathers to do in verse 4, or that the children have

simply belled. Now, again, that too is at least in part a parental responsibility. There are circumstances that sometimes prevent parents from being able to raise their children properly.

For instance, a handicapped parent, paralyzed, can't discipline a wayward son quite in the way that an ordinary parent could, and therefore might lose the control. Or in a society like ours, the government itself intrudes into families' rights to discipline their children. And there are agencies in our government that will intrude to the point of taking your children from you if they think that your method of disciplining your children strikes them as cruel.

It just goes against their grain. Well, unfortunately, there are so many different degrees of sensitivity about disciplining children that you never can be sure that even saying no to your child or depriving them of TV for a week won't be considered cruel and unusual punishment by some social worker. And there are many parents living in fear of this, and therefore children go undisciplined many times.

Because, you know, if they do discipline their children, they may lose the opportunity to discipline them in the future because the parents may not retain custody of them. Because of a big brother kind of a state that wants to intrude in those areas. So, I will say this, that when children grow up, when Christian parents' children grow up badly, it's not always the parents' fault.

There are sometimes factors beyond their control, you know, but unusual factors. You know, I have a case, for example, where my first child was from a different marriage, and the wife ran off, never came back. And when the child was 16, she went to live with her mom, too.

And my daughter lived as a Christian when she was with me and made Christian professions and seemed to believe Christian things and appeared to have Christian convictions. But when she went to live with her mom, she very quickly ceased to appear to have those convictions. They probably weren't true convictions, or else she would have held on to them, I think.

But the fact is, there is a situation where, you know, in a split home, one parent might not have the power to discipline a child because the child is not in their custody. So we have many situations that may provide exceptions to the general rule. But the general rule is this.

I think if children grow up badly, it's the parents' fault. I've just tried to make as many exceptions as I can so that parents don't feel condemned unnecessarily. But it is nonetheless the case that most children who don't obey their parents could have been made to obey them if the parents had been better parents.

And it's better for the child to obey willingly, which is why Paul addresses the children. Then the parents have an easier job and if they don't obey willingly, it's a less painful upbringing. But if they don't obey willingly, parents are required, scripturally, to enforce obedience on their children because foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child, the scripture says.

And the child, unlike an adult... See, a husband doesn't have to enforce obedience on his wife. I need to make this clear. In that thing, it's not the obligation of the husband to discipline his wife into subjection.

And one reason is because she's an adult. It's true that she's supposed to submit, but she's not a baby. She's not a child.

Whereas a child has foolishness in his heart and will, as often do the stupid thing, self-destructive things. Things that will... You know, you have to control a child. There may be some wives who ought to be controlled, too, but you simply can't treat a wife the way you treat a child.

The child has to be taught as a young fool who doesn't know, intuitively, what will hurt him, what will hurt other people, what will damage property, and what will, you know, be wicked. They don't have all the intuitive knowledge about these things. And therefore, a child has to be made to obey.

And I don't say that as a harsh disciplinarian myself. I'm actually probably a little more lenient than I should be as a disciplinarian. It's not in my nature to be harsh.

And it's sometimes difficult for me to make myself discipline my children when they need to be. But I say that not as one who's saying that children have to be severely punished every time they do one thing wrong. That's not the kind of parenting I'm suggesting.

I'm just saying that parents know what the perimeters are that they can allow a child to walk into, keep on the path of godliness. And that parents must make sure that their children walk that path. Now, I have often told people that I don't believe that I'm qualified to be an elder, and I don't think I ever will be an elder, because my oldest child is not, at the moment, as far as I know, walking as a Christian.

And she might be, but I haven't heard from her, so I doubt it. I don't know if she is or not. I think she's not.

And because elders are supposed to have their children in order. Now, I've had people argue with me about this and say, no, you're not responsible for the most of the adults. When your child was young, you had her in order.

You had rule over your household. Everything was right. She behaved as a Christian.

And it's not your fault when she gets older if she departs from it. But I disagree with that. I mean, it's partly, I mean, in my own case, just to be personal, I don't think it's entirely my fault because I didn't have her under my care all the time.

Under the law, I didn't approve of the divorce. I didn't approve of the custody settlement. I mean, it was all done.

I didn't have the full opportunity to train her. But I did have some opportunity, and I don't want to cop out and say, well, you know, if I had had her all the time, she would have been a good Christian today. Because that may not be true.

I don't know. But I would say this, that parents can't just cop out and say, well, my kids turned out bad, but I kept them under control when they were at home, so it's not my fault they turned out bad. The Bible says if you train up a child in the way that it should go, when they're old, they won't depart from it.

And some people interpret that to mean that they will depart from it, but when they're old, they'll come back. Well, this is true in many cases. There's many stories of that very thing happening.

In fact, I personally hope that that will happen with my daughter, and I think it will. But that's not what that verse is saying. The verse doesn't say, even though they depart, they'll come back.

It says when they're old, they will depart. Even when they're old, they will stay on the path that you put them on. There's a sense of continuousness there.

You put them on the right path, you steer them, you train them in the way they should go, and they will stay on that path even until they're old. Now, some people say, well, that's just not realistic. Because, I mean, I can make my kids obey, but I can't make them want to obey.

I can make them go to church, but I can't make them enjoy church. I can make them say their prayers, but I can't make them really pray in spirit and in truth. I can't do those things.

All I can do is enforce outward obedience. But that's not necessarily true. Paul said to the fathers in verse 4, You fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and the admonition of the Lord.

The fact that you're not supposed to provoke your children to wrath tells you one thing very important about child raising, and that is that you are, in fact, a governor of their inner life as well. Wrath is an inward reaction. And you are not to elicit wrath from your children.



You have to govern their spirits as well as their bodies. I'm not saying this is an easy thing. It takes a very skilled technician to manipulate a spirit.

But, of course, little children don't have rule over their own spirits. And therefore, their parents must rule their spirits until they are old enough and mature enough to do it themselves. It's just like babies aren't born with bladder control or bowel control.

So parents have to rule that area for them, have to eventually teach them when to do that and where to do that and so forth, and not just do it everywhere and have to clean up the messes when the kids don't do it right. Eventually the child gets old enough that they have their own bladder control, and the parent doesn't have to do that anymore. Likewise, when a child is young and doesn't have rule over his own spirit, the parent must rule the child's spirit.

And eventually, of course, the parent must not try to impose dominion forever on the child. The parent has to be sensitive to know when that child has reached the point where they can rule their spirit wisely themselves, and then the parent doesn't have to do it anymore and should not do so. But Paul says, don't provoke your children to wrath.

Now, at one level this just sounds like he's just meaning don't be too harsh. Don't be unreasonable with your children. And that's a very important part of making sure your children grow up enjoying and buying into your values and not just being made outwardly to conform to them.

If parents are not sensitive to the children's temperament, not sensitive to the children's level of interest in spiritual things, and just impose outward religiosity on the children, it's probable that that child will rebel against it because they're not really rebelling against it when they get older. They were rebelling all the time when they were in it as a child. They just, when they get older, have freedom of expression more.

If you force a child against its will to be holy, and you do not teach that child how to will to be holy, you don't form that will, you just form the behavior, that will will remain rebellious in the heart of the child until that child grows old and has freedom to express it. You'll say, what happened? I did everything right. But it's possible for an overbearing father or an overbearing mother, through strict discipline, to intimidate a child to the point where that child will never step out of line.

But the child is inwardly seething with anger and rebellion. And that becomes clear when they have the freedom to express that later on. But it is also possible not to pressure children to the point of wrath.

It's possible to discipline the child and train them in the training and the admonition of the Lord without making them angry. And if you can do this without making them angry, this training is basically what, you know, they accept it. Anger is a reaction of rejection to

what you're trying to make someone do, what you're trying to make the child do.

If you can parent and not make the child unnecessarily angry, or when there is wrath, by the way, some children are, you know, have a shorter fuse than others. There's different temperaments right from birth. And some parents have children that don't get angry at all.

And others have children that get angry at the slightest provocation. And you can't, when he says don't provoke your children to wrath, he doesn't mean that you should never do anything that displeases your child. And if you happen to have a wrathful child, that you should never do anything that would possibly set the child off, when in fact the slightest control over their life may set them off.

You must control their wrath. If a child is wrathful, that child has no rule over his own spirit and needs to be brought, their spirit has to be warned. Now that needs to be done through a combination of discipline and of compassion.

Now, like I said, discipline kind of goes against my grain. And when I discipline my children, they don't like discipline. But they know, I mean, they absolutely know that when I discipline them, I have compassion on them.

I don't like to discipline them. The father, in the old days, used to say, this is going to hurt you, or hurt me more than it's going to hurt you. The children never really believed that.

But it's often true. A father who has compassion on his children, like as a father pities his children, so the Lord pities those who fear him. That father does not like to hurt children, does not like to displease them.

Jesus himself stated that the natural desire of fathers is to give good things to their children. If a child asks for an egg, he's not going to want to give him a scorpion. If he asks for bread, he's not going to give him a stone.

It's natural fatherly affection that wants to please the child, wants to say yes to the child. Doesn't want to hurt the child or deprive the child or say no. But the father has to have as much discipline on himself as he's expecting the child to have.

Because the child is made to obey even when the child doesn't want to. The father must train the child even when he doesn't feel like it. But he can train with compassion.

The easiest way to provoke your child to be wrathful is if you are wrathful. If discipline is done in wrath, there's a good chance that it will not be received well with a good spirit by the child. If the parent is angry, the child will learn the parent's angry habits.

If the parent is compassionate but disciplined by necessity, the child will sense that,

believe it or not. There are children who actually have come to appreciate being disciplined. Now I know it might seem hard to imagine that unless you've known children like that.

But I have some friends who are hippies and they became Christians and actually became Christians before they had children but they had several children eventually. And they became counselors to other hippies who had become Christians. They were kind of counter-culture Christians.

And a lot of the hippies didn't believe in discipline of children. They were just thinking and didn't have any good sense about raising children. And I remember once this couple that I knew was counseling another couple who were recent converts out of Hippiedom and had a very unruly son.

And they said, you need to discipline your son when he's like that. You can't let him get away with all this being a terror in the house. The parents were reluctant and they were afraid.

And one reason people are afraid to discipline their children is they're afraid of the disapproval of their children. This is, by the way, I want to interrupt this story to editorialize here. Parents need to make sure that they are not overly motivated by the desire to have the approval of their children.

That's a complete turnaround of things. Children should desire the approval of their parents, not vice versa. The children don't know what's right intuitively and therefore you can't count on them approving of you doing what's right.

You have to not make it your goal to make the children happy. You need to make it your goal to make them good and they will be happy in due time. And lots of people, especially single parents, single moms, I mean they indulge their children so much largely because they once found security in a marriage or in a relationship with a guy that isn't there anymore.

And now all they have left to be bonded to is this child. And if that child would reject them too, it would present such an emotional blow to them that they can hardly imagine it. So they do everything they can to avoid the rejection from their child.

And they'll overindulge the child. They'll just, you know, they don't want the child not to accept them. Like say a single parent is particularly susceptible to this because they've already experienced rejection by the child's other parent.

And now they'll do anything to avoid feeling rejection at a deeper level by being rejected by the child. This is bad. This is bad when a person is so dependent for their own emotional, they become neurotically parasitical emotionally on the child.

A child is not designed to provide a parent's security. It's the other way around. The child should find its security in the parent and should desire the parent's approval.

The parent has to be mature enough that if they're, let's face it, to be rejected by your child would be painful. But you've got to be able to take the pain of doing what's right. You need to find your security in the Lord so that if everyone else forsakes you, if your father and mother forsake you, or if your children forsake you, but you did what was right, the Lord will take you up.

And you'll just do what is right and not be motivated by fear of being rejected by your children. But there's these two ways that people can go wrong. One is by being too severe with their children.

And one is by being too indulgent with their children. Now, why would anyone be too severe? I already mentioned it. Even Jesus said, even earthly fathers who are evil love to give good things to their children.

Why would any parent, against their own instincts and nature, be overly harsh on their children? It's hard to say. I mean, maybe the parents themselves had bad role models in their parents and they're acting out what their parents did and it wasn't a good one and it's just all they've ever seen, all they ever know. They just have conditioned reactions based upon their vision of parenting they got from their parents.

That may be possibly the case sometimes. I suspect that in many cases parents are harsher than they should be on their children because of pride. Because a misbehaving child is an embarrassment to a parent.

And I think that there are many times when parents are embarrassed by their children's misbehavior, especially in front of other people, and then the parent sometimes gets angry out of hurt pride and ego and does not have the right spirit in disciplining the child and is harsh. You know, children are sensitive critters. They can pick up on whether a parent is disciplining because of hurt ego on the part of the parent because the kid embarrassed them.

And that often will make the child angry and have to want to embarrass them some more. But if the child senses that the parent is compassionate and does not enjoy disciplining and is not doing this out of really personal anger but out of concern for the child's development, and of course sometimes that can be explained to the child when they're old enough to have that explained, then the child often will not rebel against it. I didn't have my oldest daughter for her first three years.

Her mother had her. And those were important years. But she never, even when she was with me, she never had an overt rebellion against me.

And the first thing she ever did that I didn't want her to do was go live with her mom

when she was 16. But her mom talked her into it because she felt like she hadn't known her mom and wanted to, and so she kind of did what she wanted to do in that case, and that was not a good influence on her. But I never, although I disciplined my daughter, and although I made her live as a Christian, I never was harsh with her.

I'm not a harsh person. And she never seemed to rebel even inwardly against me. Even now, even though she may not be living like I'm living, the few times I've seen her, because she lives on the other side of the country now, and she's not regularly in contact with me, but the few times I see her, she's told me that she still believes everything I told her.

She doesn't obviously have the convictions to live it out. Well, maybe she does. I don't know what she's doing.

I just don't think she's been in Christian fellowship. That's my main indicator. But she's told me on many occasions that she still believes in the Father, and I'll ask her what she's been reading, and to my surprise, last time I talked to her, she had just finished reading C.S. Lewis's *Problem of Pain*, which I couldn't even read.

It was so difficult. And she's still reading Christian stuff. And so I mean, you might say, well, then why do you say she's not a Christian? I don't know.

Maybe she is. Maybe she is. All I know is that she's not in touch with me, and she's not in fellowship with other Christians in such a way as I would expect if she was really living the way that she knew pleased us.

But I can't make too many judgments here. All I can say is we didn't have an ideal situation because we had two parents with a tug-of-war over this child, and that does interfere with things. But I know that she never rebelled inwardly against me.

And one time when I hadn't seen her for years and I went to visit her, she took me around to meet all of her friends who were all a bunch of strange non-Christian people. But when they met her, they said, oh, so you're Gypsy's legendary dad. She's always talking about you.

So I mean, I know that even though she's not going overboard to please me, which I wish she could or would a little more, she at least is not rebelling against me in her heart. I mean, I think she's a compliant person is the problem. I think when she was with me, she bought into my system.

When she was with her mom, she bought her mom's, which is not good. I have a hard time interpreting that situation, to tell you the truth. But I will say this, that I don't sense any rebellion in our children that we have at home, including two that are teenagers.

I just see no rebellion in them against me or against the things of God. I see them on

their own, seeking to please God. They're not perfect, and they're not always wise, but they appear to me to be very sincere, and I think homeschooling parents can think of that better than even other parents can.

So I know it's not just, there's not such a thing as no-fault parenting. If children turn out badly and rebel, there has been some mistake made. It might have been an innocent mistake.

It might have been a defect that's caused by circumstances beyond the parent's control, like I say, state interference or something like that. But nonetheless, there is something imperfect that has taken place about that child's upbringing, and they've been left to themselves, and they bring their mother to shame, as the Proverbs say they will. But the parents, when there has been no interference beyond their control into the child's life by government or by some other factor, the parents must bear the responsibility if their children turn from God when they're older.

And fathers, therefore, are required to monitor the child's spirit as well and not provoke their child to rap, and to manipulate the child's spirit. We hate the word manipulation, because it's our own pride. It doesn't ever want to make us think we're being manipulator and resent people who seem to be trying to manipulate us.

But really, children's spirits need to be manipulated. If not by you, they'll be manipulated by someone else, by the media or by school teachers or by peers or whatever. Children are pliable little critters, and they get manipulated.

It is the requirement of the parents to manipulate their spirit toward godliness. This is not an exploitation or an abuse. This is simply a responsibility that's entrusted to a parent by God.

And this is how one brings them up in the training and admonition of the Lord. Now, training and admonition suggest that, again, when you train an animal, when you train a dog or a horse, you don't expect the horse to intuitively know what you want. You have to teach it.

And then you have to take it as an and exercise it in the direction that you want it to learn to go naturally. And habits, once formed, are not easy to break. Therefore, it's important for parents to train a child, just like you train a puppy or a horse or something else, although the child's not, of course, at the same level.

The child has a degree of free choice that does not exist for those animals. But the child can nonetheless be trained very much in the same way as an animal can be, to habitually have certain responses and habitually to obey and habitually to do a certain thing. Now, what I'm suggesting would be an anathema to the modern liberal thinker, where, you know, how dare you as a parent try to manipulate the way your child thinks.

I remember when Benjamin was very little, a baby, he was our only child. At the time, he was only about one or two. He was, like many babies, fat.

He thinned out, obviously, when he started walking. But he was a big, heavy baby. And it was not uncommon at all when people would see him and say, oh, he's going to be a football player when he gets bigger.

And we'd say, no, he's not. And most people were surprised that we'd say that because they thought they were complimenting him. But we'd be ashamed if our children thought it was important enough to go into sports as a career.

What a waste of a life that would be, even if he was the best at it. Of course, the world thinks that's crazy because they think sports somehow is important or has value. But we just said, no, he's not.

And one person in particular, a relative, said, well, how can you say whether he'll be a football player or not? You can't control him. I mean, by the time he's older, he can decide for himself whether he's going to be a football player or not. I said, well, it's true.

He will reach an age where I can't control him. But if he reaches that age and he wants to be a football player, I will have failed miserably in my training of him because I intend to impart to him values that are intelligent, values that are godly, and not values that are worldly. And if he chooses to become an athlete for a career or even it becomes an important part of his life, I don't mind him playing a game of baseball once in a while or a game of football once in a while.

I'm not anti that per se. It's just I see sports as an idol in our culture. And I think that athletes are treated as idols by our culture.

And I just think that's atrocious. I don't think there's any value whatsoever in sports except they're fun. And I don't mind a little bit of fun once in a while.

But when it becomes more than fun, you know, and becomes serious stuff, you know, and people, you know, ruins their whole day when their team loses or something. And you meet people like that. I think this is insanity.

The culture's gone insane. And so, I mean, if my child chooses to make more of sports than makes sense by the time he's older, then I will have failed to teach him how to be wise, to teach him what the Lord cares about. I mean, there are people dying without knowing God and there's people out there playing children for a living.

And zillions of people supporting them with big bucks to do it. What a waste of energy. What a waste of talent.

What a wasted life. And I personally feel that I can guarantee that none of my children

will grow up to be athletes. Part of that might be genetic, but part of that is in training.

And I don't think that any of my children will grow up thinking that athletics is of any value whatsoever. Because you train them. You teach them.

And you admonish them. Admonish means warn. The admonition of the word warning.

So you train them positively and you warn them negatively about negative behavior. And when children are brought this way, the scripture says they will not depart from it. Where you meet Christian families whose children have departed from it, of course it's not a very kind thing to say to the parents at that point, well, that's your fault, you didn't raise them correctly.

Because, you know, what's the point of doing that? They can't go back and do it again. You know, it just hurts. I mean, they're already hurting enough if their children aren't walking right, to just kind of add insult to injury is not really my idea of a sensitive thing to do.

But, I mean, honestly, a parent who is in that condition should never say, we did everything right, our children just turned out badly. How could that be? How could it be that parents did everything right? First of all, just that same way myself, how could it be that anyone did everything right? I didn't. And I've tried harder than most.

I'm more conscientious about it than most people I know. And I haven't done everything right. If my children turn out badly, I'm not going to say, I did everything right, they turned out badly.

I might say, I did everything I knew to do, or I was very conscientious about trying to do what was right. But, obviously, if they turned out badly, I did some things that weren't right. I made some mistakes somewhere.

I don't know if I made what they were. Maybe I can see them in hindsight. Maybe I don't even know what they were.

But I have to say, if they didn't turn out right, I didn't train them up in the way they should go. And that makes, since my children are not yet grown, and not yet, you know, the proof is in the pudding, but the pudding is not yet done in their case, I am more motivated to be conscientious and to give nothing a higher priority. It's, if, you know, we are, I run a school here every year for a few people like yourselves.

But, as you know, apart from teaching a few classes and having a few conversations with you, you don't see much of me. And you know why? Because I have a higher priority. If my kids were grown, I might spend all day down here and do nothing but disciple you guys.



But my kids are a higher priority. And they've got to be. Because there's no question as to my obligation to them.

Because if they turn out badly, it'll have been because of my mistakes or my wife's or both. Okay, so much for children and parents. Moving on to servants and masters.

It says, servants be obedient, verse 5, to those who are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in sincerity of heart, as to Christ. So again, just as wives are to submit to their husbands as to Christ, the servants, he doesn't say it as plainly here, but he implies it, servant-master relationship is a picture of Christ in the Church too. Just like marriage is.

So the servants should submit to their masters as to Christ. Not with eye service, as men please, but as servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart. With good will, doing service as to the Lord, and not to men, knowing that whatever good anyone does, he will receive the same from the Lord, whether he is slave or free.

And then he addresses the masters. But let me comment a moment about the slaves. Here, it is very common for commentators to take a passage like this and apply it to employees and employers.

And in measure, the application is just. There is, of course, an agreed upon obligation of an employee to do what he is hired to do, and to please his employer in that. But, of course, Paul was writing to a different institution of slavery, and the slaves had absolutely no opportunity to leave the employment of their masters.

There are cases where Christians today may find their work very objectionable, and without any offense to God, may well change jobs, because their employer does not assume that they must stay. I mean, the agreement they made does not require that the employee stay at that job for the rest of their life. Now, while working for an employer, an employee should behave just as a servant should, or a slave should act toward his master.

But there is a different dynamic there. The slaves in Paul's day didn't have any choice. They were owned.

They could not look forward to ever being anything other than slaves, unless the rare occurrence occurred that someone came and bought them out of slavery and just let them go. And so they all had to face the likelihood that their master, for better or worse, is going to be their master until they die. And they're just not going to live for themselves at all.

They're going to live for this other person. That's what a servant or slave is supposed to do. Now, they could chafe under that, and I'm sure many did.

Some people were made servants against their will. There were slaves that were captives of war, and they'd just as soon be somewhere else, and they had no love for their masters at all. There were others who, because of debt that they could not pay, had sold themselves into slavery.

And they probably didn't like it much better than the others, except they couldn't blame anyone but themselves for that. It's not like they were made captives by some aggressor. It's that their own circumstances and their own choice led them to be in slavery.

Whether a person was in slavery by choice or not by choice, probably there were certainly times when every slave wished he had his freedom. Though we may be assuming too much by my saying that. When we think of slavery, we think of something that's without question evil.

In fact, people are often amazed that Paul did not speak against the institution of slavery. Nor did Peter, nor did Jesus, nor did anyone in the Bible ever speak against the institution of slavery. In the Old Testament law, which the New Testament says the Old Testament law is perfect and righteous and just, the Old Testament law had laws about slaves and about treatment of slaves, and there was never any suggestion that people shouldn't have slaves.

And in the New Testament, there's no suggestion that people shouldn't have slaves. Now, it might be one thing to say, well, since people were slaves whether they liked it or not, Paul could tell slaves that they should be good slaves. He might still oppose the institution of slavery, but he had no power to release them.

But we also have Paul addressing slave masters, and he never tells the slave masters outright, release your slaves. And if Paul thought slavery an immoral institution in itself, he certainly would have done that. He would have said, you Christian men, what do you have slaves for? Let those slaves go this instant.

It's degrading, it's dehumanizing to have slaves. Now, that's the way we in our modern times think about slavery, but apparently Paul didn't. Paul just said, you masters, treat your slaves well, as we should see.

Treat them justly, treat them as brothers. But he didn't say let go. And that may surprise us, and it does surprise us, probably because when we think of slavery, we think of slavery in America.

The only form of slavery we have any kind of real graphic images of in our literature or in our movies or in our thinking. When we're raised in school or watch movies of the Civil War period and before, and we see, we are had portrayed to us a form of slavery such as was practiced in this country, where black people were taken against their will from their

homeland and shipped under horrible conditions over to this country, many of them dying under the conditions before they even got here, and then sold like animals on a slave market, which of course that was the case in biblical times too. They were probably sold like animals in the slave market.

But then in American slavery, we don't hear very often about the slaves that loved their masters. There were some in the South. There were slaves in the South who did not particularly look forward to being released, believe it or not, but you never hear about those.

If there's anyone who, you know, they'd be called Uncle Toms, you know. But we are made to assume that almost virtually all slaves hated slavery. And we do read and hear and see in movies instances of slaves that were very badly treated.

And certainly because they were slaves, they were susceptible to bad treatment. If they had a wicked master, a cruel master, then they could be very badly treated. And they sometimes were.

But rather than condemning the institution of slavery, we should condemn the behavior of those masters. You know, some fathers have been very hard on their children too, but we don't condemn the institution of family for that. Some people do, some modern liberals do, but we don't.

And some husbands have been very harsh on their wives, but we don't condemn the institution of marriage for that. What is condemned is the sinful behavior of those who abuse. If husbands abuse their wives, or parents abuse their children, or masters abuse their slaves, this is condemned.

This kind of behavior is condemned in Scripture. And a different model is given of Christ and how he treats those under his authority. But we have almost a gut reaction from our culture to think of slavery as necessarily bad and abusive.

But remember, there were people who were slaves by their own choice. And even after emancipation, in this country, there were some slaves that did not happily leave their masters. Because slavery also became an institution of security for some people.

There were the very poor and there were the very rich. There was very seldom a middle class. You see, we live in a society where we've always taken for granted there's a middle class.

And anyone who wants to, with a little gumption, could rise from very impoverished situations into middle class, which is relatively comfortable, or even through middle class to affluence. There are people who've been born poor and became very rich. But although most people don't expect that a poor person will become rich even by hard work, most people assume that a person can become middle class by hard work.

And the whole middle class is a phenomenon that we take for granted. I imagine every one of you expects to live more or less middle class, depending on how wide the range of that definition goes. Most of you may not intend to live in grueling poverty.

You might expect to live at the lower end of middle class, or even what the IRS would call lower class. I've always lived in what the IRS calls lower class. Until last year, I never had enough money come in that I ever had to pay taxes on, because I was called poor.

But let's face it, I'm not poor. I mean, I'm comfortable. I'm comfortable, I'm affluent, I have luxuries, I'm not as rich as Americans like to be mostly, but I'm not poor.

I'm more middle class. That's a term that was a bad word in the 60s and 70s, the middle class were the enemy, and the rich. Middle class was sort of the same thing as rich in the mind of the hippies.

But there was no middle class in most ancient societies. You were either poor, owning nothing, or rich, owning slaves and land and stuff. There were just certain conditions that you were either born into aristocracy, or by some unusual stroke of good fortune became rich, or else you were at the other end, and there was this huge poverty class.

And those in poverty often were done a service by becoming slaves of someone who was rich, because only in that institution could they be sure that they'd eat three meals a day, that they'd always have adequate clothing rather than rags to wear, that if there was any medical attention needed that they would get it, and it would be paid for, that they would have reasonably comfortable accommodations in many cases. Joseph was a slave in Potiphar's house, and it doesn't sound like he had a real bad situation until Potiphar's wife started bugging him. But he was comfortable there, I think, in terms of physical comforts.

And being a slave in a master's household often afforded the only comforts a poor man would ever have access to in his life. And many didn't want to leave. The Old Testament law makes provision that after every seven years of servitude, Jewish slaves were to be given their freedom, or offered their freedom.

But it says, if the slave says, I don't want my freedom, I love my master, I love my situation here, I want to stay here, then he could have that option. Now we can hardly imagine how any slave would ever make that decision. Why would he want to stay a slave forever? But apparently not all cases was slavery abusive.

Not all people abused their children, not all husbands abused their wives, and not all masters abused slaves. A compassionate man can provide security and well-being for his children, and his wife, and his slaves. Now I'm not arguing that we should go back to an institution of slavery.

I don't care one way or another. I would never want to own slaves. For one thing, I don't

ever want to be wealthy enough that I own slaves, and I always want to do things for myself anyway, rather than delegate them, even when I have people under me who should do them.

I just don't have any motivation to have slaves. I wouldn't want them. And I don't think I'd want to be a slave.

Being raised with the American independent spirit and so forth I was, I'd probably chafe under slavery. But what I'm saying is, in a culture where slavery was taken for granted, and many people just, it was their lot to be slaves, and it wasn't always uncomfortable. It isn't something that we, standing in our ivory tower in the 20th century, as if we are, we occupy the high moral ground over all ancient societies.

I mean, we don't have any room to boast in that respect. That we, you know, we passed out a condemnation on the institution. Why didn't Paul condemn slavery? Why should he? Slavery was in essence the survival of many, many people who wouldn't live as well if they weren't slaves.

And there's no reason why slavery had to be condemned as an institution. But it is true that the institution did deprive a man of freedoms to a degree that we would find intolerable with our upbringing. But that's our upbringing.

If a man was born a slave, or lived in a society where slavery was always something he considered he might someday be, he just lived with the condition that, well, if I become a slave, I don't have any freedom, but I have security. And, you know, it's a hard tradeoff to make. There's some people who will trade off their security for freedom, and others that will trade off their freedom for security.

It just depends on their own values. And so, I'd rather trade off my security for freedom. I'd rather have my freedom, and not have the government take that away in order to give me security.

You know, I'd much rather have my freedom than my security. But there are people, probably most Americans are in this class, especially those on welfare and who send their kids to school and things like that, who take government services, they lose control of some of their basic rights, but they do so so that they're more secure. That's a big dichotomy.

But we shouldn't assume that all people have to think like we do, and there were certainly people in biblical times who think like many Americans do, in the sense that I'd rather have the security than my freedom. And that's what leads, you know, our government, and I don't mean to get off on social commentary, but I mean, we realize our government is moving more in the direction that many socialist societies have, of people being willing to give up more and more freedom, so they have more and more

security provided by the government. That's what leads eventually to what we would call a slave state.

The government provides complete security, but takes all the freedom away. In order to, you know, it's a tradeoff. You give up your freedom, and we'll take care of you.

And, you know, in the worst of those kinds of states, you know, the communist states, they're very intolerable conditions by our free American way of thinking, but a slave state or a slave condition of an individual in biblical times is no different. There are some people who welcome that, and Paul knew that. Paul knew that slavery was probably good for some people, although he did say in 1 Corinthians 7 when he wrote slaves, if you can obtain your freedom, go ahead and use that opportunity so you can be more free to serve God.

But if you can't be made free, just accept it. Accept your condition. Now, what he says to slaves here is that they should serve their masters as if they were serving the Lord.

And the most important emphasis he places on this is that if you are serving your master to please God instead of to please your master, then you'll serve him faithfully even when he's not looking. He says you shouldn't do it with eye service, in verse 6, as men pleasers, but as servants of Christ doing the will of God from your heart. Now, this does apply, you know, of course, to employees.

Employees are servants certain hours of the day. They're not slaves in the sense that they're owned, but the employer certainly owns the hours of your life that you are under contract to work for them. And therefore, they have the right for you to serve them the same way a slave master has the right for the slave to serve him only for a shorter period of time of the day.

You have the right to change masters if you want to. That's something a slave can do. And you also have the right to punch a clock at the end of the day and say, okay, no more today for you, you know, and I served you these eight hours, but I'm not going to serve you any more for the rest of the day.

That's different for you than it was for slaves. But apart from that, during the hours that you are serving an employer, you are a slave in the sense that you are obligated before God to do what you are expected to do. And the employer provides benefits for you just like a master provides for a servant.

And employees today often take their employers to court or go on strike because they feel like they're not being treated fairly enough by their employers and so forth. And this is extremely contrary, in my opinion, to a Christian spirit. I don't think Christians should ever go on strike.

I can't think of anything that you go on a strike for except out of greed. Maybe I'm not

very well informed about those things, but it seems like whenever I've talked to people who are on a picket line, it sounds like they're just there because of greed. I think, you know, John Adams said to the soldiers, be content with your wages, you know, and I think that's good advice for everyone.

Be content with your wages. If you don't like the wages, find another job. Work harder.

Do something more. But don't tell your employer how he has to treat you. He's the boss.

He owns the company. He's doing you a favor by giving you a job. Don't tell him what he has to do.

If you don't like the conditions of work, go find somebody who gives you conditions you like better. That's freedom you have that a slave didn't have. Now, a slave didn't have that option.

If he was badly treated by his master, that was just tough luck for him. But he was still told, in any case, to submit to his master and serve him as he would serve the Lord. And if he had a master who was a Christian and rightly disposed, that master might be very much like the Lord, and it might be easy to serve that master as serving the Lord, just like for a wife to submit to her husband as under the Lord is easier if the husband is like the Lord.

But if he's not, the Bible makes it very clear that servants are still supposed to obey their masters, even when they have cruel masters. Now, they should do this as under the Lord. They may receive no reward from it, or recognition from their masters for it, but they will from the Lord.

He says, knowing, in verse 8, that whatsoever good anyone does, he will receive the same from the Lord, whether he be slave or free. So, you serve your employer conscientiously, even when he's not watching. You don't take longer breaks.

You don't try to find a way to look busy when you're not busy so you fool your employer. That's eye service, as men please. You go to work and say, Okay, God, I'm serving you 24 hours a day.

These 8 hours I'm serving you in this capacity as a servant to this employer, and I'm going to serve this employer as if it was you. The work I'm going to produce, I want to present it to you and say, How do you like this work, God? Whatever you produce for your employer, you should be able to present it to God without shame and say, This is what I produced for you, God. And if you are lazy, incompetent, careless, neglectful at your work, you're cheating your employer, and worst of all, you're cheating God, according to Paul.

So, you work for your employer as if he was the Lord. Now, by the way, being self-

employed is a lot nicer, but that's being in a position like the rich in the ancient times, rich and poor. The poor tend to be slaves, and the rich tend to be self-employed or not employed at all.

But the fact is, if you can't be self-employed, and not everyone apparently can be, then you should serve your employer as if he were a master. And you masters, verse 9, do the same things to them, giving up threatening, just like a father is not supposed to provoke his children to wrath, the master shouldn't threaten, knowing that your own master also is in heaven, and there's no partiality with him. Now, he said at the end of verse 8, that whatever good things anyone does, he will receive from the Lord, whether he's slave or free, and that transitions to the issue of the master.

You're free, but you also will receive judgment from the Lord, and there's no partiality in his judgment, so you treat your servants kindly, just like fathers and just like husbands are supposed to do. Anyone who is in authority over another should be sensitive to the fact that that person, though holding a lower status in society, it may be, in some ways, than you, is still a person, still a person with feelings, and still someone that God values as much as he values you, and that should color all of your dealings with persons that you may have as subordinate unto you, if you're ever in that position. Well, we're out of time here, and this is the turning point in the chapter.

We'll take the rest of the chapter next time, and we'll have to stop here because of our constraints on our schedule.