

## Ephesians 6:1-9

1. Marcus Barth spent nearly 150 pages on the section concerning husbands and wives and less than 5 on the dual section concerning parents, children, masters and slaves.
2. It's important to remember here that "children" isn't equal to our understanding of "minors". The point is the relationship between parent and child. Again in the Roman household these "children" could very well be adults of either sex. This passage may in fact be given primarily for instruction of adult children.
3. The word "obey" here is in the imperative and is echoed below in the section on slaves. The only other usage of it in the NT in the imperative is in the parallel passage in Colossians 3. It is built on the root word to hear.
4. The context of the obedience here is likewise "in the Lord". Paul is continuing his same application of the gospel to this realm as he did before. He also builds it (as he did before) upon the Old Testament witness.
5. "Promise" in a majority of its usages, the majority of which in the NT are found in Paul connect back to the Old Testament and touch on covenantal promises. The reward is broadened to be behind simply the promised land. Again, as we've seen before in the word to those in the subordinate position their salvation comes in their service to the others. For those in subordinate positions, their tasks and perspectives don't need as much addressing as those in the preeminent positions.
6. Fathers must not "provoke to anger" their children. This word is uncommon in the New Testament but in the Greek Old Testament it is most commonly used for what the evil kings of Israel and Judah and what the nation as a whole did to the LORD. He was often provoked to anger by their sinful and rebellious ways. Again, this is an interesting word in this context because we might expect an exhortation to the children "do not provoke your parents to anger just as Israel provoked the LORD to anger..." It is the opposite. Once again we see the upside-down nature of power "in the Lord" where those on top of the cultural structure are commended to use their position for the well-being of those they are called to serve.
7. The first word in the "instead of provoking them to anger do this..." phrase is "ektrephe" which is only found in the NT in 5:29 which means to nourish and cherish. This is the job of the husband before, and is here the job of the parents. "Nurture them in the training and instruction of the Lord." Again, as we've seen before, the job of the parent is to develop within the child exactly the characteristics of Christ which they should be modeling. Their job is to do what Christ does for the church.
8. As we transition into the slave section we should note that there is a temporality to this entire household section that is strongest in these two sections. Children do not always remain children, and the slave section notes that the present societal structure will not always be there. There is a coming day when the present arrangement of master/slave will end.

9. The first phrase already hints at the tone:

“The slaves, obey (upakouete) the according to the flesh lords with fear and trembling in singleness of your hearts as to Christ”

These “lords” that are over you currently are only so “according to the flesh”. “Flesh” is always a tricky word with Paul because it can have nuances of meaning. Clearly the notion here is that this arrangement is temporary and passing away and that the larger, truer, realer relationship is now holding sway. The slave serves his lord because he is a slave to Christ. Paul is clearly setting up the next section in which the lord will also be seen as a slave to Christ. Once again this very much echoes the Old Testament relationship that the earthly lords exercise their authority beneath the reign of God. Those beneath are accountable to God for their service but so are the lords.

A: “Not according to eye-service as one who pleases men, but as slaves of Christ serving the will of God

B: from the heart with enthusiasm serving as to the Lord and not men

C: Knowing that whatever good we do we will receive that again from the Lord whether we are slaves or free.

Again, the new relationship in Christ isn’t wacking out the present order but subverting the use of power itself for salvation in the same way that Christ does. Just as Christ wins by submitting so too the slave. There is ultimately one master and one reward for slave or free.

10. The word to the masters, as we’ve seen to the preeminent position holders in each case is utterly radical.

A: “Masters, do the same to them.

B: Stopping the threats

C: knowing that of them and you there is one Lord in heaven and partiality is not from Him.

Note the structural parallelism between the two sections.

A: The masters too are slaves to Christ.

B: The slave is told to serve enthusiastically, freely. The master is told to stop using threats.

C: The phrases repeat the construction in Greek. The slave is given the promise that their reward is not dependent upon their status as slave. They in Christ are free. The master is reminded that God is not seeing them through the filter of the flesh and both will be called to account for the service they rendered.

11. What we have here in theology is worked out in application in the book of Philemon. Both Onesimus and Philemon are members of one body. Slaves in Christ don’t respond to threat, they freely serve their masters. Masters don’t use threat, they serve their slaves. Without formally abolishing the cultural institution the gospel completely changes it.