

Fact Sheet for **“Two More Couplets”**
Ephesians 6:1-9

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We looked at Paul's first couplet last week regarding husbands and wives. Today we will consider two more couplets.

ESV¹ ¶ Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.

The word “children” in English has much of the same sense as the word had in Greek. Our most natural sense of the word is under aged children. This is the sense in Stephen's words concerning Abraham in Acts 7:5. But I can also say of Hazel Vaught, who died at the age of 100, that she was a “child” of God. This has the same sense as Paul's words about Timothy in 1 Corinthians 4:17. But which sense is meant in Ephesians 6:1? If the word “children” is referring to adult children in this verse, then everyone in this room needs to **“obey”** their parents! One verse from Solomon's pen may help us out. Look carefully at the wording of Proverbs 1:8. This doesn't exactly sound like obedience. It sounds more like wisdom, and the whole book of Proverbs bears that out. Our goal as parents should not be to become the patriarchs and matriarchs of our descendants, demanding strict obedience to our wishes. Instead, as our children are still under age we should help them develop the wisdom they will need to make wise decisions when they are adults. Now look at the next two verses in Ephesians 6.

² "Honor your father and mother" (this is the first commandment with a promise), ³ "that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land."

This 5th of the 10 Commandments tells us to “honor” our parents. It does not read “obey”. Obedience is one appropriate application of “honor” for an under aged child. There are other ways that under aged children should honor their parents, but this is only one of them. But here's a question. Does our responsibility to “honor” our parents drop off when we reach adulthood? Consider Mark 7:1-13. Because of their oral law the scribes and Pharisees enforced a grown man's lack of honor for his parents, thus, in Jesus' own words, breaking the 5th Commandment! Here's my point. The command to honor our parents does not come with the sunset clause “until we are adults”. We are called to honor our parents our whole lives. For children one application of that command is to obey their parents. Now questions will always be voiced at this point. “How can you honor a parent who is sinful?” The answer is that you can't honor them for their sin, but you can honor them in other very appropriate ways. Are children required by God to obey the sinful wishes of a parent? No, but they should be very careful of their thinking on this one. Another way that a child can honor their parents is to respect their authority. When Jesus was a 12 year old boy he did not go back to Galilee after Passover with his parents, but stayed behind in the temple. Mary and Joseph had to turn back and find him. After a brief discussion ensued Luke records Jesus' response in Luke 2:51. But don't miss verse 22! Here's one practical application for parents of under aged children. Don't just go after obedience. Go after honor. Here's one practical application for those who are becoming adults. Honor your parents by seeking their wisdom. Ask them for their thoughts. Seriously consider their advice. They have much more experience in life than you do. Then you make a wise decision.

Here are a couple all-to-common mistakes I see today. 1 – Many parents are not teaching their children all that it means to honor. They may enforce obedience while they are still able (that is

until the child rebels), but that obedience is often given without honor. This will come back to bite both the child and the parents! 2 – The interface between childhood and adulthood can be challenging for both teens and their parents. Here's a frequent mistake I see teens make all-too-often. They are so eager to be free from obedience to their parents, and to do what they want, that they totally abandon their parent's wisdom about how to live as a wise adult. They don't seek that wisdom. They don't want to hear it. They want to make their own decisions in their own way, now, and be free of their parent's control. This is not honor, and it often results in a life that is damaged for the rest of their sojourn on earth.

² "Honor your father and mother" (this is the first commandment with a promise), ³ "that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land."

The command to honor your father and mother is the 5th Commandment, found both in Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5. But it is the first commandment that has a promise attached to it, a good life and a long life. The words "your" and "you" in these two verses are singular, as they are in Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5. This promise is not that the Jews will enjoy the land of Israel, but that the individual who honors his parents will have a good life and a long life. Are there exceptions to this? Yes, God may have a specific purpose in these cases we do not know about. But these are exceptions to the rule, not the rule. Remember Ephesians 5:15-21? Children's obedience to their parents is one way that children can fulfill Paul's instruction in Ephesians 5:21 to submit to one another.

⁴ Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

The word "provoke" both here and in Colossians 3:21 means "to provoke to anger, exasperate, make angry". It has to do with a deliberate choice of a father to do this. The KJV uses the English word "provoke" in Hebrews 10:24. However, in that verse, "provoke" translates a word meaning "to stir up". And think about this. What about mothers? Is this something only for fathers to be careful about? Is it OK for mothers to provoke their children to anger? No! Think about it. These two couplets, and the one that follows, are only a few illustrations of how to apply Ephesians 5:21, "submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ". These are not the only ways to apply that verse! I can think of hundreds more. What about nurses and patients? What about teachers and students? What about sales personnel and shoppers? What about coaches and players? What about pastors and parishioners? Look at Paul's third couplet.

⁵ ¶ Bondservants, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, with a sincere heart, as you would Christ, ⁶ not by the way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, ⁷ rendering service with a good will as to the Lord and not to man, ⁸ knowing that whatever good anyone does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether he is a bondservant or is free.

⁹ Masters, do the same to them, and stop your threatening, knowing that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and that there is no partiality with him.

This couplet has to do with slave masters and their slaves, not employers and employees, but there are a lot of parallels between them.

These verses all go back to Ephesians 5:21 and "submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ."