

## STUDY ELEVEN | EPHESIANS 6:1-9

### CHILDREN + PARENTS / SLAVES + MASTERS

Today's section follows on from the instructions to wives and husbands, which is part of the bigger section introduced at 5:21, where Christians are called to approach relationships of authority and responsibility with a mindset of submission out of reverence for Christ. In today's passage two relationships are on view. Firstly, children and parents and secondly, slaves and masters. The instructions to children and parents refer back to the fifth commandment to honour your father and mother. There is connection between keeping this commandment and future prosperity in the Promised Land. We see in this little section another example of how the health of families in a society will shape the health of society as a whole.

#### A note about slaves and masters

When we read exhortations for slaves to submit themselves to their masters, we need to note a few important realities: First, slavery in the 1st century is different to modern day slavery and certainly different to the 19th century slave trade. Yet slaves in the 1st century were, like today, still regarded as 'second class citizens'. For them to be directly addressed in this letter is counter cultural for the time.

Second, the biblical exhortation for slaves to submit to their masters is not an endorsement of the institution of slavery itself (since we know from 1 Cor. 7:21 that if slaves were able to acquire freedom, they should do so).

Third, we should exercise caution in too quickly reading direct parallels between slaves and masters in Ephesians and employees and employers in 21st century Sydney. There will be some general similarities but there are also significant differences.

How, then, are we to understand this passage as God's word to us today, just as much as it was God's word to the original readers?

Paul is instructing Christians on how they are to conduct themselves in a context of service, where their service might feel compelled or that they have no choice about their situation. They are serving Christ by the way they serve others. In a similar way, those in positions of authority and power must be careful how they treat the people they are responsible for and not forget that they are accountable to their 'master in heaven' who won't show any favouritism to them because of their social status or position.

## A NEW HUMANITY

JULY 18

EPHESIANS 5:21-33 RE-ALIGNED

JULY 25

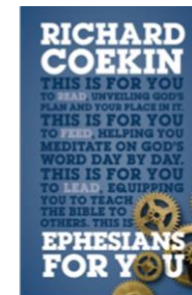
EPHESIANS 6:1-9

CHILDREN + PARENTS / SLAVES + MASTERS

AUGUST 1

EPHESIANS 6:10-24 RESIST

## RESOURCE



RICHARD COEKIN | EPHESIANS FOR YOU

(GOD'S WORD FOR YOU SERIES)

## GETTING STARTED

1. In what ways is the experience of being a child in today's world different from when you were a child? How is it different from when your parents were children? What about your grandparents? What accounts for these differences?

## INTO THE TEXT

### READ EPHESIANS 6:3-6

1. What do you think it means for children to obey their parents in the Lord? Is this a command for unconditional obedience?
2. What do you think is the connection between the commandment and the promise in v2 &3? What might this teach us about God's purposes for the family unit in terms of being a blessing to the church community and our wider society? How is this purpose being challenged today?
3. What might honouring your father and mother look like in these contexts? (choose one or two to discuss)
  - i. A child
  - ii. A teenager
  - iii. An adult, not married
  - iv. A married adult
4. Why do you think fathers are singled out in v4, even though it is assumed fathers and mothers share parenting responsibilities?(see v2)
5. In what ways can fathers provoke children to anger? What is the difference between this and bringing them up in discipline and instruction of the Lord?

6. What might this look like in your household?
  
7. In Paul's exhortation to slaves, what do we learn about the typical experience of slaves in the ancient world? How might these instructions to slaves help us know how to serve God, regardless of who our boss or authority figure is?
  
8. How might heeding the instructions in v9 protect people from abusing power in their positions of authority?

## PRAYER

In light of today's passage pray for the children and the parents in our church community. Pray also for those who are in positions of service and power, that they will honour Christ in their context.