

Ephesians 6A

- Today we reach the 24th lesson in the letter of Ephesians
 - We'll finish our study next Sunday, which means we have two weeks to study through Chapter 6
 - That's a little faster than I preferred but we'll make it
 - Today we're going to wrap up Paul's teaching on submission
 - Paul is in the midst of teaching the church about six relationships where submission is required
 - Everyone in the body of Christ will find themselves somewhere in this list
 - Paul moved into the subject of submission as part of his call to missional living
 - As we've learned, believers are called to get serious about living for Christ by serving Him through our godliness and service
 - The days are evil and the end is coming soon, so we don't have time to waste in foolishness or dissipation
 - And then Paul said God has placed spiritual authorities in our lives to help us stay on track
 - God places these authorities in our lives to teach, correct and encourage us to make the most of our days
 - The Lord works through these authorities regardless of whether they themselves are obedient or godly
 - Remember, the Lord causes all things to work together for good for those who love Him and are called according to His purpose (Romans 8:28)
 - So we are called to respect these authorities as a matter of faith and obedience to the Lord, even when we can't see how it will profit us
- We began this topic last week on Easter looking at the first two relationships: husbands and wives

- It made for a rather unorthodox Easter sermon, though we did see the message of Easter reflected in Paul's teaching
 - Paul said wives must submit to a husband's authority in the home
 - While a husband must subject his desires to the needs of his wife
 - Both are submitting to each other, though in different ways
- These relationships serve to picture the relationship between Christ and the Church
 - Christ sacrificed everything to bring us to holiness and so we obey Him faithfully
 - And Paul said we must live our respective roles in the marriage thinking of the mission, seeking to witness for Christ
 - So that marriage wasn't intended as an institution we would manipulate to suit our desires in life
 - Rather, it's an institution God designed to serve our holiness and testify to His grace in Christ
- And so now we move forward to the last four relationships in Chapter 6

[Eph. 6:1](#) Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.

[Eph. 6:2](#) Honor your father and mother (which is the first commandment with a promise),

[Eph. 6:3](#) so that it may be well with You, and that you may live long on the earth.

- If last week we began with the most controversial relationship in Paul's list, that of wives to husbands, then surely this week we move to the least controversial relationship
 - Children are called to obey their parents
 - Obedience means to heed the instructions
 - A child should take any instruction they receive from a parent and heed or obey that instruction
 - And in case adult children are wondering about their obligations to their older parents, the word child refers to someone under the parent's authority

- After all, we're talking about submitting to spiritual authorities
- A son is under the parent's authority until he establishes his own household at marriage
- And a daughter is under a father's spiritual authority until she marries
- Our obligation to honor our parents never ends, but our responsibility to obey them lasts until we move into a marriage relationship
- So children are to obey parents
 - But notice Paul adds "in the Lord"
 - That phrase modified the word obey, not the word parents
 - So Paul is saying "obey in the Lord"
 - He means obedience to parents is a directive from the Lord to all children
 - And he quotes the fourth commandment of the Law in v.2 to remind us that the Lord Himself has called all children to obey parents
 - As with the case of wives obeying husbands, the rule doesn't turn on whether the parents are believing or even godly
 - The law given to Israel didn't stipulate that children only obey godly or believing parents
 - God expects all children to obey their parents
 - Certainly, we can imagine exceptions to this rule, situations where disobedience to a parent's instructions might be necessary
 - But Paul doesn't raise any exceptions in this teaching
 - Because that would merely distract us from his larger point
 - Parents deserve the respect and obedience of their children
- This is an important testimony of any Christian home for both the parents and the children
 - First, Christian parents are living out a witness to Christ as they teach children to be obedient

- The Lord has set parents as spiritual authorities over children much in the same way that our Heavenly Father is our spiritual authority
- So like the Father in Heaven, we're called to provide our children spiritual direction and to correct as needed
- Our goal is to instill in the child an obedient and submitted heart
- So that even before we begin teaching our children to read the Bible or to pray, we're teaching them to obey a parent's word without question
- Obedience is a matter of training, for no child obeys a parent naturally
 - The natural state of every human heart from birth is rebellion
 - Anyone who has raised a child past the age of two knows this to be true
 - Children need to be disciplined...against themselves
- By the grace of God, every parent has the potential to raise a child who will be obedient if not believing
 - As Proverbs says:

**Prov. 22:6 Train up a child in the way he should go,
Even when he is old he will not depart from it.**

- Parents leading children is perhaps the clearest example of how God can use a spiritual authority to bring a person to greater holiness
 - Parents shape a child's heart at least to an extent
 - And the Lord promises that a faithful commitment to raising the child in this way will be met with a heart to accept authority
 - This is true regardless of whether a child ultimately comes to know the Lord by faith
 - Proverbs 22:6 is a call for all godly parents to train their children as a witness
- In our days, raising obedient children has become an even greater opportunity to witness to the world, because the world is moving in an opposite direction

- Because Paul says in 2 Timothy 3 that disobedient children will become a mark of the ungodly in the last days
 - As the world comes to tolerate rebellious children, our relentless pursuit of obedient children will become all the more notable
 - But we lose that opportunity if we don't make obedience a priority
- Parents, we must see our determination to raise obedient children as part of our mission to serve Christ
 - When you have to beg or negotiate with your young child to do as you require, you are forfeiting a piece of your Christian witness
 - When you turn a blind eye to a child showing you disrespect or ignoring your instructions, you're moving in the direction of the world rather toward Christ
- I know parenting isn't easy, and I also know we can't punish every infraction or react to every minor incident of disobedience
 - As my wife frequently counseled, we have to pick our battles
 - But the goal of obedience is unchanging and non negotiable
 - Don't let the world convince you that rebellious children are an inevitability
 - Or that once they hit teenage years, you can't expect them to do what they're told
 - Perfection isn't the expectation, but consistency is possible
- Secondly, obedience is an important blessing for our children, regardless of whether they are believing yet or not
 - Paul says in v.2 that as children keep the fourth commandment to honor parents they become eligible for a blessing
 - In the Law we read this:

Ex. 20:12 "Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be prolonged in the land which the Lord your God gives you.

- For Israel, obedient children would become cause for Israel to remain in the land of Israel longer

- That promise refers back to warnings Moses gave Israel before they entered the land
- Moses warned Israel that their disobedience to the Law would be cause for the Lord to set them outside their land
- Then in the fourth commandment, the Lord said that children who obeyed parents would be prolonged in the land, meaning they would remain until the end of their generation
 - This promise has a self-evident quality about it
 - Naturally, if children learn not to rebel against parents then they will also be less likely to rebel against the Lord
 - And if a generation of Israel were raised to obey the Law, that generation of Israel would escape the consequences Moses described
- But there is also a supernatural component to this promise
 - As the parents of Israel endeavored to raise obedient children, the Lord is promising to shine His favor on that generation
 - That's the way we should understand this promise to families today
 - We are not Israel and we don't live in the land
 - Nevertheless, when we serve God by raising obedient children, He delights to bring favor to our children
 - And since Paul has repeated it to the church in this letter, we know it is also a command to the believer as part of the Law of Christ
- Therefore parents, explain the biblical reasons for obedience to parents
 - Obedience is both right (righteous) and leads to opportunity for blessing
 - Children who obey parents will see peace and contentment in their life and in the home
 - And they are likely to see the Lord showing them favor in their lives

- While children with rebellious hearts will see the consequences of that rebellion over time
- Finally, for believing children, obedience to parents is a part of their own witness for Christ
 - We should emphasize this fact to our believing children
 - As we encourage them to obey us, remind them that they too are called to missional living, making their lives a testimony for Christ
 - They need to understand that even if a child attends church regularly, witnesses to friends, serves in the worship band, takes missions trips, etc....
 - But then routinely disobeys his or her parents, that child has no credibility in their witness
 - And they can become a negative reflection on the witness of the parents
 - Have you heard the term “pastor’s kids”?
 - It’s a term coined to describe a common problem seen in the church where the pastor’s kids are often the most rebellious in the church
 - It’s a stereotype, so it’s not always true of course
 - But if it has any truth, it’s only because men and women in pastoral ministry often get too busy solving other families’ spiritual problems at the expense of attending to their own
 - More importantly, it’s a good example of how failing to raise submitted children can detract from an otherwise good witness
 - So if you won’t discipline your children for their sake, do it for your own sake
 - Both for your sanity in the home and for your testimony into eternity
- As I said last week, each of these relationships has a reciprocal form of submission
 - So as wives submitted to husbands, so did husbands submit to wives

- And here again, we find Paul asking parents to submit to their children in a sense

Eph. 6:4 Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

- Obviously, we won't expect Paul to direct parents to obey their children, but that doesn't mean there aren't other ways in which parents have to show submission
 - In this case, Paul says a Christian father (parent) must show self-restraint in the way they chose to instruct and discipline their children
 - The father is not to provoke their children to anger
 - The words "provoke to anger" are a single word in Greek that simply means to make someone angry
 - We might say don't aggravate your children
 - You remember I said that Paul's instructions to husbands and wives were revolutionary for his day
 - Though some portray Paul as biased against women, in reality Paul was the true progressive
 - He elevated women in a Christian home to an equal with her husband in worth and honor
 - And here Paul is doing something similar with children
 - In both Roman and Jewish societies, a father had absolute, unchallenged authority over his children
 - He could discipline his children as he saw fit
 - Including taking actions that today we would consider abuse
- But Paul says parents can't provoke their children to anger
 - Paul is setting limits on parental authority in childrearing
 - A father may be the authority figure in the home, but he doesn't have absolute authority
 - His authority is checked by what is best for the child

- So just as a child submits to the authority of a parent
- So a parent submits to the best interests of the child
- The goal of every Christian parent is to raise a godly child, hopefully one that comes to know the Lord
 - To do that, we must guard against anything in us that would be counterproductive to encouraging the respect and obedience of our children
 - We're restricting our own authority in the sense that we exercise self-discipline and make sacrifices so we can focus on producing a godly child
 - That's missional living as a Christian parent
 - It means thinking carefully about the best ways to raise up children who will reflect Christ to the world
- Instead of putting roadblocks in your children's way, Paul commands parents to bring up children in the discipline and instruction of the Lord
 - Proper childrearing means first discipline and then instruction
 - You simply can't do the second without the first
 - A child that won't pay attention, sit still, and respond obediently to a parent or teacher isn't going to receive instruction very well
 - Certainly, your approach to discipline may vary from other Christian parents
 - But regardless of your method, every Christian parent must arrive at some form of discipline that results in obedient children
 - Permissive homes are a fast path to ungodly children
 - Then secondly, notice Paul says that the instruction is "of the Lord"
 - That is, Christian parents are called to teach children about the Lord
 - Chiefly, that means instruction in the word of God, regardless of whether they are believing or not
 - Start from an earlier age, even as they're still learning to talk
 - Make it a daily routine

- In fact, I challenge every Christian parent to make a goal for the entire family to study (or at least read) the entire Bible while all children are still in the house
 - Families that study the Bible together are families growing in the grace and knowledge of Christ together
 - Paul says that's the core mission of a Christian parent
- Certainly, a parent's approach to parenting has an influence on a child's character
 - Generally speaking, abusive parents will be more likely to raise troubled children rather than raising godly children
 - The same can be said for absentee parents who neglect their children
 - And overly-permissive parents who fail to discipline or set restrictions
 - Conversely, a parent who places the spiritual needs of a child above his own personal needs...
 - Who takes time to patiently teach his children the scriptures...
 - Who disciplines and encourages and counsels the heart of his child...that parent is more likely to raise a godly child
 - That's missional living as a Christian parent
 - Subjecting our personal desires to the needs of godly children
 - Not provoking our children to anger by seeming to care more about our career or hobbies or even our ministry outside the home than we do about their needs
 - Sacrificing the time and energy necessary as we invest spiritually into their lives
 - Like the account of James Dobson from Focus on the Family

When he grew up, James Dobson Sr. was a traveling preacher. He was pretty popular and requested to speak a lot. But that meant he was on the road a lot too. But because he was gone so much, James Dobson's mother asked the father to stay home and help raise their kids, which the father did. Over time he lost contact with his

preaching world, and they forgot about him too. Later once the children were grown and he could go back to preaching, there was no ministry he could go back to.

Some might see that Dobson Sr. sacrificed his opportunity to be involved in ministry simply for the sake of doing what his wife wanted. However the effect of that decision was he had a hand in raising James Dobson, who later started his own ministry whose reach far exceeded anything his father was doing. Dobson Sr. invested in his child's spiritual development, which resulted in God magnifying the ministry of James Dobson.

- So how much responsibility do Christian parents bear for how their children turn out as adults?
 - Certainly, it's wrong to suggest that a parent is completely responsible for a child's path
 - But I think it's equally wrong to believe that a parent's methods have no bearing on their children
 - Then we'd be saying that good kids are like hitting the lottery
 - Everyone plays...only a few win
 - But common sense tells us that parent style does matter
 - In fact, Paul's advice to parents is predicated on that principle
 - In fairness, all parents deserve more credit than we typically receive
 - And we deserve some blame for our children's shortcomings
 - Paul's asking parents to be submitted to the greater goal of raising a godly family because that glorifies Christ
 - And when children obey parents and parents submit themselves to serving the needs of their children, you find a peaceful home
 - You also have the best possibility to raise godly children who hopefully come to know Him personally
 - Our homes are our first mission field
 - And like any mission field, we must live with a purpose and in keeping with God's word if we hope to serve Christ well

- To end Paul's teaching on submission, we leave the family and move to societal relationships, specifically masters and slaves

Eph. 6:5 Slaves, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in the sincerity of your heart, as to Christ;

Eph. 6:6 not by way of eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart.

Eph. 6:7 With good will render service, as to the Lord, and not to men,

Eph. 6:8 knowing that whatever good thing each one does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether slave or free.

Eph. 6:9 And masters, do the same things to them, and give up threatening, knowing that both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no partiality with Him.

- Paul includes this relationship in his address to Christian families, because in his day most slaves served in homes
 - Slaves in this day were indentured servants, and therefore they were seen as an extension of the family though obviously they didn't share the same privileges
 - Some historians have estimated that upwards of one-third of the 180 million residents of the Roman Empire were slaves
 - They represented the lowest cast of society, and like women and children, they had no rights in society
 - Greeks and Romans thought of slaves as little more than "living tools"
 - While we don't have this kind of slavery around us today, we could equate slaves of this kind to anyone working under authority
 - Perhaps laborers in the field or in the factory
 - Or Christians incarcerated in prison
 - Or perhaps Christians in the military
- Once again, Paul raises the bar for this group as he addresses submission by and to slaves
 - First, Paul says those under a master's authority are to be obedient, with fear and trembling
 - Paul calls them "masters according to the flesh"

- He simply means that no earthly master commands our spirit
- So our ultimate obedience is to the Lord
- But we are obligated to obey our earthly masters so long as their commands don't contradict with the Lord
- The requirement to submit to our masters' authority is hardly revolutionary, but Paul adds an extra element
 - He says our obedience must be in fear and trembling
 - To be in fear means to be respectful of a master's power
 - And trembling means with great care and concern for failing to please the master
 - He means obey with genuine respect for their authority, not merely with eye service
 - Not merely as man-pleasers, which means seeking to win favor for our own benefit
 - We all know what this looks like, especially where children are concerned
 - It's a manipulative type of service
 - There is no true obedience to authority when our hearts aren't fully submitted, as Paul says
- Moreover, our submission to our masters must be in the same spirit and with equal fervor as we should serve Christ
 - Paul says to the slave, don't consider yourself a slave to a master but a slave to Christ
 - And therefore serve in your earthly capacity knowing you are doing the will of God
 - Paul's teaching a basic principle of Christian service, which is that all of us are ministers serving Christ
 - In your workplace, school, home or wherever, we serve Christ
 - Vocational ministry is no more service to Christ than serving Christ by doing your job well

- Therefore, Paul says in v.7 that with good will we are to render our service as if we were employed by the Lord and not by men
 - This verse should come to mind as you work in any position under authority
 - As you complete a work task, ask yourself would you do the job differently if your manager or sergeant were Christ Himself?
 - In a very real sense, Christ is your boss
- You're serving Him in your job as a witness in that place
 - And what kind of witness will you project if you do sloppy work or demonstrate a disrespect for management authority?
 - You are serving Christ with your entire life
- Once again, Paul is talking about missional living in your role as an employee
 - Serving in excellence is a part of your witness
 - Because as you show that excellent work in submission even to evil masters, you show Christ's love
 - And you bring honor to Christ's name
 - And then to add extra incentive for doing a good job, Paul adds that those who serve Christ well will receive back from the Lord regardless of our station in life
 - Paul is alluding to our rewards at the Judgment Seat of Christ
 - He's reminding us to live with eyes for eternity
 - Don't seek for your own benefit in your current job, but rather serve selflessly expecting a reward in Heaven
 - That's the proper attitude of a believer serving a master
 - It benefits the master, it will benefit you and it glorifies Christ
- Finally, the last relationship of submission is the counter for slaves and masters
 - In v. 9 Paul says do the same things to them, meaning seek also to please the Lord in how you manage those under your care
 - A slave submits to a master's authority and a master submits to the dignity of those under his care

- Notice Paul tells masters to no longer even threaten slaves
- No longer use intimidation or force to motivate
- The Lord will not show favor to masters simply because they were powerful or rich, so they had better not depend on such things
- This is the most countercultural command of Paul's entire teaching
 - Imagine a slave owner no longer being allowed to threaten slaves
 - Yet that's the expectation Paul says the Lord places on His people when they are in a position to control others' lives
 - So if you have charge over others, consider that you too serve Christ
 - Execute your responsibilities knowing you too will be judged
- As we've looked at all these relationships, there has been one common denominator throughout: submitting to authority to accomplish a mission
 - Respecting the authorities in our lives whoever they may be so that we stand the greatest possibility of serving Christ well
 - If you remember nothing else about this section of Paul's letter, remember that
 - You are called to live out a mission
 - And you do that best when you're serious and focused about it
 - Obeying the authorities in your life, wasting no time, living with eyes for eternity