

• *More on relationships – children, parents, workers and employers*

1. Christian children

• *Honour and respect for parents*

• *Obedience brings stability and joy*

• *A supreme command*

2. Christian parents

Paul continues to deal with different kinds of relationship. It is still the theme of Ephesians 5:18. The Holy Spirit will help is in having good relationships. The ‘fullness of the Spirit’ works itself out eventually in attitudes to husbands and wives, parents and children, employers and employees. These subjects are too vast to be dealt with in a few lines, but Paul gives us a few starting-points.

1. **He has a word for Christian children.** Paul’s instruction in 5:22–6:9 shows that he is concerned about Christian families. Paul had no family himself. If he was ever married, he was not married during the years of his ministry. Perhaps he was never married. Perhaps he was a widower. Perhaps his wife left him when he came to faith in Christ. One might feel that he was not qualified to speak on such matters. But the word of God is the word of God whether we feel qualified or not. In any case, who can feel himself to be an expert in such matters as these? Is there a perfect husband? A perfect wife? A perfect parent? Paul says, ‘*Children obey your parents, as something you do in union with the Lord; for this is right*’ ^{☐1}. Christian children must give honour, respect, obedience to their parents. As always there are limits. Acts 5:29 applies here as well. God created people to be in families. He expects the family structures to be taken notice of. People will suffer if they do not do so for this is how men and women were created. Honouring parents is right! ‘*Honour your father and mother. This is a supreme commandment with a promise: ☐2, that it may be well with you, and you live long on the earth*’ ^{☐3}. This verse is the only place where Paul explicitly quotes the Mosaic law in connection with Christian obedience. One must remember

(i) he is following up his call to be full of the Spirit ^{☐4}. Life in the Holy Spirit fulfils the law.

(ii) He is expecting us to look for the Christian equivalent of the law. The fifth commandment promised national stability and continuance in the territory of Israel if the Mosaic law were kept. There is an **equivalent** for this in the life of the Christian who obeys his parents. As always the law **fore-shadows** the gospel. The **exact** promise of the law does not apply (he does not have to live in Israel!) but there is a parallel. Obeying parents will lead to stability and joy in our life on planet earth.

People have been puzzled that the fifth command is said to be ‘the first commandment with a promise’. Is there not a promise attached to some earlier commandments? I suggest it should be translated ‘a supreme commandment’ and it means that it is one of the Ten Commandments, all of which are more serious than other commands. (We recall the discussions in the gospels about greater and lesser commands.) It is ‘a supreme commandment’ and it has a special promise of stability attached to it. It is fulfilled in a different way from its application in the days of the Mosaic covenant (for example, there is no death penalty for disobedience as there was then). But it is to be fulfilled by those who walk in the Spirit.

2. **Paul has a word for Christian parents.** ‘*And parents, do not make your children angry, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord*’ ^{☐1}. If children are to be obedient, parents are

☐1 6:1

☐2 6:2

☐3 6:3

☐4 Ephesians 5:18

☐1 6:4

• **Three forms of help**

3. Christian workers

• **Obedient**

• **Motivated by God's reward**

4. Christian employers

• **Preparing the way for the abolition of slavery**

• **The key for all – serving the Lord Jesus Christ**

to give them some help also, in three ways:
 (i) not being unfair so as to create resentment,
 (ii) giving them training,
 (iii) giving them kindly rebuke.

3. He has a word for Christian workers. *'Slaves, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, with straight-forward hearts, as people obeying Christ ^{□1}. And do it not to please people when they are watching you, but as servants of Christ, doing the will of God wholeheartedly^{□2}, working with enthusiasm as to the Lord and not to other people ^{□3}. You know that each person, when he does something good, will be recompensed for this by the Lord' ^{□4}.* Of all 'conditions of employment', slaves in the Roman empire had what must be among the worst! If Paul can give them some good advice, then no lesser hardships of employment are impossible to live with! To slaves he gives instructions that they should be obedient, straight-forward people, fearful of displeasing God. Their motivation should be God's reward.

4. Paul has a word for Christian employers. *'And you masters, do the same things to them, leaving aside the use of threats, knowing that both they and you have a Master in heaven, and there is no partiality with him' ^{□1}.* 'Do the same' means: obey God in the way you relate to the slaves. You too remember God is watching you. You too work for their good with enthusiasm. What the slaves have to do, you also have to do.

Paul does not tell the 'Master' to release his slaves. The Christian gospel works **slowly** in these matters. It gets large numbers of people to be Christians first, before it tries to change social conditions. Slaves and masters who obeyed Ephesians 6:5–9 had drastically changed slavery within their own households and turned it into something much more friendly. Eventually Christian opinion would lead to something better, an abolition of slavery. Where there is no Christian opinion, the reverse thing happens. Free people get so ill-treated and underpaid, they gradually become slaves. There is plenty of slavery in the world still! Ephesians 6:9 is still needed.

In all of these instructions within the six-fold relationships of 5:11–6:9, the key to the matter has been expressed six times^{□1}. It is to be consciously serving the Lord Jesus Christ.

□1 6:5



□2 6:6

□3 6:7

□4 6:8

□1 6:9

□1 5:22, 25;
6:1, 4, 5, 9

	<p>Dr Michael Eaton is highly respected internationally as a theologian, author, preacher and teacher. He lives in Kenya where he is one of the leaders of the Chrisco Fellowship. His <i>Preaching Through The Bible</i> (PTTB) books are highly popular worldwide. Michael Eaton puts the theological and practical meaning of the Bible in a clear and down-to-earth way so that what is written can be easily understood by the reader.</p>	
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