

# Filling our Nooks and Crannies

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Ephesians Chapter 6 verses 1 through 9

Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. Honor your father and mother (which is the first commandment with a promise), so that it may be well with you, and that you may live long on the Earth.

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

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; not by way of eye-service, as men-pleasers, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart. With good will render service, as to the Lord, and not to men, knowing that whatever good thing each one does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether slave or free.

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.

Soooo fellow church member, I'm not sure how you read and study the bible. But my default tends to be just straight acquisition of information. Read a verse, what does it mean, so what, next verse. Unfortunately, this leads to very basic understanding of scripture because you are constantly moving to the next verse, this can also lead to a very shrunk down and micro understanding of scripture. Our selection today is not immune to my own human shortcomings. And you may be out there thinking, but Alan, you are dressed all fancy, and you attempted to cut your own hair we had so much respect for you but you've opened your mouth and now we know you're the worst. So good, now we have that out of the way.

So in order to navigate through our own shortcomings we have to really look and really read the verse. I must have read this thing 22 times before I really even got into the study of it because it took so long for me to chip away at my own hurdles in was the verse says on the surface in 2020. This section is going to talk about

child rearing, honoring your parents, and the relationship between slaves and masters. So it's a tricky spot here, good think this is my 3<sup>rd</sup> time preaching here in the last 20 or so years so I have a lot of hermeneutical clout to fall back on. So my advice to you is this, when you read something or hear something from a sermon that doesn't sit well with you. I want you to really study it because the whole this might be a huge misunderstanding; ***did you hear him he just said slaves. I can't wait for him to defend slavery.*** I hear that, this passage was used to defend the use of slavery in the United States by the church. Plantation owners would have pastors preach this to their slaves in order to keep them in line, I have a feeling that the final component of this section was gravely underrepresented as scripture was leveraged as a move of power which is what Paul is using this whole section to preach against. So don't take anything a preacher says at face value, whether good or bad. Even if that person has not 1 but 2 piece of papers in frames!

So raise your hand at home, if you have heard of the Jefferson bible. Go ahead call it out, just kidding I can't hear you it's important for sermons to be participatory I gave it a shot. So Thomas Jefferson really liked Jesus as a moral teacher but didn't like the miracles quite as much. He couldn't come to grips with them so he just had them removed. The Jefferson bible is parts of gospel that is fleeced from the supernatural. On the one hand as a ministry leader, dude what? You know that isn't allowed right. But on the other hand there are times when I read scripture and I just don't want that part in there. I think this bible would be better if this part was just redacted. But it might be the parts that we do not like that we need to hear the most. I don't know, maybe let's do some exploring.

So this first section here, I feel really good about.

**Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. Honor your father and mother (which is the first commandment with a promise), so that it may be well with you, and that you may live long on the Earth.**

So as a Father of a 6 and 1-year-old I like that verse, obey me and honor me. This is one of the 10 commandments. Yes, so that it may be well with you, right listen to me cause I'm your dad and I'm super wise and it's in your best interest and that you may live long on the Earth. The power of my words keep you from running out on to Miller Ave or sticking your inquisitive fingers into the socket. But my hope is the more I read it, the more that God can speak to me through the verse and not me telling the verse what it should say. Because my next sedimentary rock layer of reading had me scratching my head on this blessing. So that it will be well with you and that you may live long on the Earth. The newborn wildebeest can run 10 minutes after it is born. My kindergartener isn't allowed to pour her milk in her cereal there is a definite survival issue here. And shelter in place is really magnifying the parent child relationship. In some ways it's really great, I've

started teaching Madison how to ride a bike. In other ways it's not so great and I'm ready to move her out, good luck charging your tablet in the play house, cause it isn't permitted for electrical. But so far, I'm only reading it in my immediate vicinity of my life, the life of shelter in place home school teacher, quarantine day care provider, the new reality of the COV-ID 19 parent. I don't think that Paul or Jesus would be satisfied with my first impression of this section so let's look a little deeper. So Paul here echoes back to the 10 commandments which is first found in Exodus and later in Deuteronomy as this reminder of the kind of people that the people of Israel will be when they do enter into the promise land. Here is another mention of it in

**Deuteronomy 11:9 so that you may live long in the land the Lord swore to your ancestors to give to them and their descendants, a land flowing with milk and honey!**

So it's not this promise of want to live to 85 or above, then obey your parents and you receive that. We can look at the longer history of the people of Israel and how obedience led them to thrive in the promise land and disobedience wandering away from God was just not as good. Is that it, did we just discover this eternal truth of life. Being obedient to God is just better than being disobedient which is just not as good. Boom, we did it guys. We don't have to do the rest. Oh, we have to do the rest, you know it's fine we can keep going, none of us really have anywhere to go except for further on into this verse! Is it just like hey it's just going to be better for you and your parent's relationship if you get along. If you strive towards peace rather than turmoil, life will just be better for everyone. As a kid I can recall so many times that it felt like my parents made certain decisions that were leading intentionally to my own demise. Like chores and requests being made just to torture me. If you cannot relate because your parents were perfect, but this young philosopher can,

**Here we have Calvin who might not have the whole picture of what this family trip is going to be and his father who is goal seems to build up the character of Calvin.**

But hey whoa Alan isn't there a next part to this verse. Paul says right here that Calvin's dad should not put him in these precarious family bonding situations under the guise of building character. Okay fine, because echoing back to the verse from last week Paul has this rhythm of addressing instructions for both the powerless and the powerful. The wife powerless in the cultural structure. The husband powerful. Children powerless, parents powerful. And later, slaves powerless and masters powerful. They all have instructions on how to let the gospel be transforming them in every aspect of their lives in all that they do. So yes, Calvin's dad also has instructions as well.

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

Okay, so don't tease your kids, or frustrate them or cause them unnecessary strife. Welp, it turns out that's my love language. I had picked this verse cause I gravitated towards this importance of the child being obedient, but when I got to this part it was that feeling of waking up and remembering that the science fair is today. So you are scrambling around the house trying to get ready for school looking for science stuff that you just have around the house, no mom it's today. It's today, do we have anything? Right, what's this pearl of wisdom that I can show as to how great of a father I am. Where are my 12 disciplines and instructions that I use to bring up my children in the Lord, because it's due today. Unfortunately I'm closer to the kind of father that overpresses you to overcoming the mild symptoms of shortcomings that I myself have struggled with through my life in hopes that I can fix you so that somehow you end up a better person than me but it only results in me responding to your negative behaviors and glossing over the positive ones, yup that has me written all over it. And maybe you are in the same place, ***oops I was supposed to do that, I have failed. It's too late. I can't now. Maybe 10 years ago, maybe 25 years ago, maybe 40 years ago, but it's too late.*** Well I have good news and bad news and it's the same news, it's not too late. You can start to-day. You can start today. Right with my 6 year old it's about listening and asking her questions. If you've ever met my 6 year old, she will dominate a FaceTime call for 90 minutes and if you start talking she will set you down and walk away. She is the worst. No it's fine, she's not watching Dad's sermon she's probably dancing to trolls right now. Monica sent out a little cartoon about the crucifixion and the resurrection that we couldn't get to work over the zoom call. Right a 6 minute video, cool let's watch it together. It turned into a 45 minute conversation, ***hold on your question was actually addressed earlier here in the video just watch. I don't know why they would want to make a dead body that is going to smell bad smell good if no one is going to open the tomb to smell him, I don't know.*** Right, so this feels a little obvious, but Paul here doesn't say love your kids, don't provoke them to anger and bring them up in discipline and instruction in the Lord. But if we just love our kids like Christ loves us I think that could cover up a lot of our shortcomings. You know if we just love them in an impossible way, well I guess impossible if it's just us. If we are transformed by the gospel the way that Paul talks about earlier in this letter then we CAN love them in this way. We have to let God work through every crack and pore in our life in order for this to work. Are we identifying the take-home yet?

Okay so here's another one, cause not only are we working the building up of our children. But maybe provoking them to anger and a little bit of a lighter transition connection as we enter into this next section about slaves and masters. Alan you are a super genius!

So last chapter in verse 21 submit to one another out of reverence to Christ. This is the last verse that sets up this whole section of challenge in marriage, challenge in parenting, and here next the master slave relationship. How we live in society is done out of our response to the gospel, a gospel of submitting to others.

Who we are in Christ effects how we live in this world, there is no relationship too small or a task too insignificant that God does not notice. The gospel changes the way that we live in this world.

So this next section is going to feel like a left turn thematically from where we were, but I promise you it's not it falls into this power-less and powerful responsibility pattern.

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; not by way of eye-service, as men-pleasers, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart. With good will render service, as to the Lord, and not to men, knowing that whatever good thing each one does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether slave or free.

This is the part where I wish that Paul would go a little further with what he is saying here but I have the privilege of thousands of years of historical perspective and in the context that would be present in Ephesus this would have been closer to a contractual relationship like indentured servitude. I still don't think that it makes it right, but it was not an inhumane slave trade image that we quickly conjure. If you are interested in Paul and slavery I would point you to Philemon, it's a fast read. I think for us this is the employer/employee relationship, how are we Christ followers at work, in how we work, how we treat others, and how we serve. And this is not easy right now, either as an essential worker or as a person at home working or not working. How do we let the gospel transform us when we know that everything that we do we are doing to Christ? We can say nothing is too big for God, but also nothing is too small for God. No offering, no action, no gesture is too small for God.

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.

Who in your life do you have authority over, maybe you're a boss, maybe you're a client, or maybe you're a patron of a restaurant. Remember restaurants guys, the best. God cares about how families raise their children and how children respond to their parents. We have authority placed in our lives, but how do we live, how do we respond to Christ as our ultimate authority. Paul pushes back here a hierarchy of humanhood. There is no one higher or lower than you, we are all under God. All of us serve Christ. There is no nook or cranny in our lives that the gospel doesn't need to leak and soak into. Our ultimate audience in all of this is

Christ. Our response to the gospel is fleshed out by how we respond to earthly authority. How we respond to leadership and how we lead. Amen