

BEING RESPECTFUL

Ephesians 6:1-9

Years ago, I started to college and I can still remember the treatment to which almost all the freshmen were subjected. I guess it was a form of hazing or it was considered an initiation into college life. The first thing was that the guys had to have all their hair cut off and had to wear a beanie cap with the words “Dawg Name” written on the bill of the beanie. The ROTC marched the guys around the campus and took them to various venues where we were given a series of entrance tests and subjected to lectures about what to expect in college. One of the expectations was that about half of the freshman class would flunk out over the course of the next four years. I can also remember the treatment that students were subjected to by arbitrary rules and harsh penalties that had no appeal or presumption of innocence. I remember the merchants that operated close to the campus treating the students as if they really did not care of the student did business with them or not since they sort of had a monopoly being close to campus. I thought that was just the price one had to pay to get a college education.

I also remember the elation I had the day I graduated and was headed away from that place. At that point, I still did not know that there were colleges that provided a nurturing environment, encouragement rather than discouragement, a place that would implant the possibility of doing great things rather than the likelihood of failure. I had never experienced a situation with a merchant that really wanted my business and treated customers as if they really mattered. Now that I know there **were** alternatives that I just did not know about, I have gone beyond the condition of just being glad to be away from it, to the point of realizing that I was robbed of a good and healthy experience that could have made a world of difference in my life and the lives of many others who were too poor and ignorant to know how much they were being disrespected as human beings. This situation still bothers me when I think about. I have a chance to think about it every so often when the alumni association calls me and asks for a contribution.

The message that was communicated to me was “you are of no value, you really do not matter.” Unfortunately, that is the message the world has for most people. That is completely opposite to the truth of the gospel that begins with “God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believe on Him might not perish but have everlasting life.” Those who have experienced and benefitted from that love see the value in Paul’s exhortation to respect one another. He did not use the word “respect” but said that we should be subject to one another out of respect for Christ. Whether we are dealing with others in the local body of believers, or in the home or the workplace, respect for one another always works. Although Paul does not address this, respect for others works very well at the supermarket, in the parking lot, on the highway, talking on the phone or communicating via email.

We have looked at the relationship of mutual submission in the husband-wife relationship. Since the family is so important to the health of a society, we will examine the opportunities that exist between parents and their children.

Respect for Parents - 6:1-3

¹ Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. ² HONOR YOUR FATHER AND MOTHER (which is the first commandment with a promise), ³ SO THAT IT MAY BE WELL WITH YOU, AND THAT YOU MAY LIVE LONG ON THE EARTH. Ephesians 6:1-3 (NASB95)

The child has responsibility in this relationship. The meaning of the word translated “obey” is very close to the meaning of the word translated “hear” in Deuteronomy 6 which say

“Hear, O Israel.” It is almost an oxymoron to mention *child and responsibility* in the same sentence. Irresponsibility and immaturity sort of go hand-in-hand. The only hope that a child has to overcome the plague of irresponsibility is for the parent to teach the child how to be responsible. (There is a basic assumption here in that the parent is assumed to be responsible and mature. The children of parents who have never grown up are disadvantaged in the world.)

The first lesson that a child needs to learn is to pay attention to and obey what his or her parents tell them. Sometime this means that the parent has to get the child’s attention. Failure to accomplish this leads to overall failure. In order to get a child’s attention, we must appeal to his or her basic selfish instincts. It is the question: “What’s in it for me?” This can take the form of “avoiding something very unpleasant” or “participating in something that’s fun.” Depending on the child and the circumstances, both can be effective. The more responsible and mature the child becomes, the less such incentives are needed and less effective they become.

The Proverbs have much to say regarding heeding and honoring parents.

Pr 1:8 My son, hear the **instruction** of thy father, and forsake not the law of thy mother:

Pr 6:20 My son, keep thy father’s **commandment**, and forsake not the law of thy mother:

If you were to give these two verses to many children they might tell you, “I’m listening but I don’t hear anything. I don’t know what I’m supposed to do.” This situation points back to the responsibility of the parent in setting the environment so that the child can and will listen and follow what is taught.

Respect for Children - 6:4

⁴ Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. Ephesians 6:4 (NASB95)

There is a warning to “not provoke to wrath or anger” which has at least two facets. First, and most obvious, is to not treat children in such a way that they must rebel to survive. We should never be harsh. We should never smother them so much that we quench their personality development. (A book that was popular several decades ago was titled *I’m OK, You’re OK*: the author observed that sometimes children, if treated harshly, will conclude, I’m OK and you are not. This can lead to serious antisocial behavior.)

The second, and less obvious, way to provoke children to wrath is to “teach them to be wrathful.” We do this by example, by the philosophies we share with them, and by allowing certain behaviors.

Examples We Set: My mother had a phrase she would often say with regard to behavior of children: “Boy, they got that honestly.” The implication was that the child was behaving exactly as their parents behaved. My mother was convinced that such similarities were genetically transferred. She had never heard of DNA, but she was convinced that people were genetically disposed to certain behaviors. While there is some truth to this concept, most of the behavior patterns of our children are learned and they will learn **by example** if they do not learn any other way. *The people children are around the most during the formative years are the ones they will emulate the most.* It used to be that the question we needed to ask was, “What kind of example are YOU setting for your children?” In today’s culture, we need to add another question and ask “Who is setting the example for your children and what is that example?” If you are going to use “day care,” then it is essential that you choose a facility that will set the right example for your children.

How can we provoke our children to wrath by example? I really don’t need to give you a list, you can develop your own. However, several things come to mind: Losing your temper, never making a decision and/or never sticking with a decision once it is made, griping and

complaining, criticizing others, always looking on the dark or negative side of things, never giving an affirmation, etc.

Philosophies We Share: Teaching our children to “get even” when they are wronged and teaching them to “hit back,” to stand up for their “rights” and to “win at all costs” are ways that are sure to provoke them to a wrathful lifestyle.

Things We Allow: A well-proven way to provoke our children to wrath is to set them down in front of a violent movie or to let them play violent filled video games. Letting children view movies of questionable “adult content” is another way to provide them with a pattern of bad behavior.

As every parent knows, children will do unacceptable things without having been given a bad example, without having ever having learned a “bad philosophy” or without having seen violence in the media. Such things as greed, anger, and rebellion will surface as a child develops. The tendency of most of us is to think “Now, isn’t that cute.” The problem is that such “cuteness” can become acute and chronic behavior that will cause grief in your life, the life of the child, the life of public school teachers, friends of your children, employers, spouses and their children. Allowing such “natural tendencies” to go unchecked is an all-too-common situation in many families.

The other side of the coin of “not provoke to wrath” is the positive command to bring them up in the nurture and admonition (discipline and instruction) of the Lord.

How important is it to God that we bring up our children in the proper way? The most famous “father figure” in the Bible is Abraham. Let’s look at what Moses wrote concerning Abraham and God’s choice of Abraham: Gen 18:19

For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the LORD, to do justice and judgment; that the LORD may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him.

Simply stated: God recognized that Abraham would be the kind of father that would train his children and raise them correctly.

It begins with a decision of what kind of family life will you have. Choices we make, make a difference. Look at what Joshua told the nation of Israel as they were going into the promised land.

And if it seems evil unto you to serve the LORD, choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD. Jos 24:15

Once you have made such a decision and have purposed in your heart to make it happen, then the things you do in your family ought to be influenced by this decision. We should ask the following question so as to evaluate every alternative or choice we have in life: “*Will this result in my serving the Lord more or less?*”

Respect for Employers - 6:5-8

⁵Slaves, 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; ⁶not by way of eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart. ⁷With good will render service, as to the Lord, and not to men, ⁸knowing that whatever good thing each one does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether slave or free. Ephesians 6:5-8 (NASB95)

The longest set of instructions given by Paul is to slaves. Part of the socioeconomic culture of that era was that many people found themselves in bondage to others. Some people were hired servants, some were indentured servants who were paying off a debt over a set period of time, and some were captives resulting from wars or criminal activity. It was not a desirable situation and those who were in such bondage were looking for ways to become freemen. At one

time in Athens there were twenty thousand freemen and four hundred thousand slaves. Paul did not tackle the morality issue of such a social order, but, instead, addressed how people could live out their salvation relationship with the Lord in such an environment.

We can be very thankful that such practices are no longer acceptable in nearly all cultures. We have employee-employer relationship to which we can apply the basic teachings of Paul regarding servant-master relationships.

Basically, Paul taught that a worker's motivation and his standards of workmanship are to be the best possible, since they are done for the sake of Christ. Christian employees are to accept their position as hired workers and *obey* (harken to with an intent to carry out the instructions of) their *earthly employers in everything*. Their service is not to be superficial or performed so as to attract attention; instead, they are to work *with sincerity of heart, i.e.* conscientiously and out of pure motives. As they carry out the duties of their job, they need to realize that God is in control and that the actions they take are ultimately serving the Lord. The employer might use negative or positive rewards or payments to motivate, but our true Master gives as his reward an eternal inheritance of life. The question we always must ask is "Who am I really working for?"

Respect for Workers - 6:9

⁹And 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. Ephesians 6:9 (NASB95)

The same things (attitudes, diligence, sincerity) are to be practiced by those with the positional or financial power as they relate to those who do are not as privileged. This is a good place for the words of Jesus regarding our behavior toward others should be as we would like them to behave toward us. Paul pointed out a specific difference that might characterize the behavior of an employer that would probably not be present with an employee. That difference is in the use of threats. Threats are many times emotional overstatements of dreadful consequences that are meant to frighten people into "good" behavior. Paul's advice was "Don't do that!" He could have given the same advice to parents and school teachers in dealing with children.

The reward-punishment model for motivation is a poor model to follow. If it is used, then the "motivatee" will concentrate on how to play the system to maximize the reward and to minimize the punishment. A better model for motivation is to concentrate or focus on the objective or the principle that needs to be achieved. When that happens, then the parent and the child or the teacher and the student or the employer and the employee can work together with the same objectives.

Paul pointed out an additional reason to show respect for workers and that is because God does not show partiality in evaluating how we behave in our interpersonal relationships. We are to walk in His way of self-sacrificing love whether we are child responding to a parent or a parent responding to his child. It also applies to an employer being fair to an employee or an employee being fair to his employer.

If Paul's clear teaching about the privileges of, and demands upon, the Christian household were taken seriously by contemporary Christians, then personal relationships within families and households would truly be a foretaste of heaven. In the meantime others, seeing how these Christians love one another, may well be attracted to the one whom they own as Lord. The same can be said of the workplace or the shopping mall.