

## **Ephesians 6:1-9**

### **The Kingdom takes root as the Spirit transforms our relationships.**

I have been cutting back on carbs, so I have been thinking more about bread! I don't often make bread, that is more Ewen's gig around the house, but I do know you need the yeast to make sure the whole thing rises. When it rises there is lightness, a texture improvement...

As I was pondering, getting a bit hungry, I pictured a misshapen loaf. One where yeast worked in part but not the whole.

And as I studied Ephesians 6 I thought of the totality of the call to life here. That the redeeming work of Jesus and his kingdom was not just for some of life, but to raise all of it. The gospel is our leaven.

**Matthew 13:33** “He told them another parable. “The kingdom of heaven is like leaven that a woman took and hid in three measures of flour, till it was all leavened.” (ESV)

Surely, the kingdom can start from something small and grow. But also it infiltrates, affecting all the flour. Faith like a sourdough starter...

The pervading reality of the gospel - of Jesus' reign as king in our lives.

“There is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over all, does not cry, Mine!” – Abraham Kuyper

Not only created world but your heart and life! The cry of “mine” extends, and His kingdom, the place of our citizenship and eternal hope, takes more territory as His Spirit fills us.

There is no area of life too big or too mundane that the person and work of Christ cannot sanctify and empower it. The Christian gospel is not an exquisite formula unrelated to daily living. The gospel informs and transforms all of life.

This truth comes up against cultural preference. We tend to prefer a Jesus that covers the check but doesn't tell us what to order! A savior to permit me to live as I see fit and solve eternity for me.

The message of Scripture though is that your calling to be children of God, to live rescued by Jesus, comes with a way that is right, a way that begins to look like Him. The leaven is to impact the whole loaf. Your whole heart is to lean into this living and it will leave nothing unchanged.

We've seen it already in how the body of Christ seeks unity; in the putting on of our new humanity; in turning from sexual immorality and idolatry; and in how we live our marriage covenant. All of it, the way of life that matches our calling while being filled with the Spirit of God.

A filling that works in the fullness of Christ, that makes us more like Jesus.

As Paul finishes the household code for Christians, we catch more proof of what this intended transformation looks like, impacts our families and our work.

Take them in reverse order this morning.

### **The Kingdom takes root as the Spirit transforms our relationships.**

#### **1) Our work is done as servants of Christ.**

Paul gives instruction to slave and master here, so right away we need to address whether Christianity endorses slavery.

Two things toward this end. While he doesn't take the opportunity to abolish slavery, Paul does elsewhere in Scripture instruct believers to not become slaves, and he encourages slaves who are able to obtain freedom to do so (1 Cor 7:21, 23). So its mention here is more of a nod to "this is the economic reality for many of the readers and their faith informs it."

Secondly, we have to recognize that being a bondservant's experience in the Roman context does not match what we think of "slavery", influenced by images and reality of American slavery.

It has been estimated that there were some 60,000,000 slaves in the Roman Empire and that as many as one third of the population of large cities such as Rome, Corinth, and Ephesus were slaves. Most often this slavery was not harsh and dehumanizing. Slaves shared their master's status. Was not racial in nature, not lifelong (many being free by 30) and was a normative economic reality. Some in the Ephesian church were masters, as was Philemon in the Colossian church. Many in the church were either slaves or ex-slaves (called "freedmen"). And some were slaveless citizens who, because of their lack of servants, were often poor. So virtually everyone in the Ephesian church had an interest in the Christian household code for masters and slaves.

While acknowledging substantive differences with the ancient world, we can cautiously apply the general principles from this passage to our various socioeconomic authority structures, such as the workplace.

Bondservants were coming to faith in Christ, but they still worked and this is an answer to how they were to do that - how those relationships were to be shaped.

**Ephesians 6:5–6** “Bondservants, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, with a sincere heart, as you would Christ, [6] not by the way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart,” (ESV)

It would be natural for Christian bondservants to despise their earthly masters in the name of their heavenly one; however, fulfilling one's earthly obligations is, in fact, service to the Lord.

We face the temptation to have what I call a siloed life. All parts separated to themselves. Faith, work, family, rest and relaxation! Following Jesus though results in the integration of new life, gospel reality into every sphere of life. Blending together.

Serving as you would Christ. Not following sinful or illegal orders. But serving with a whole-heartedness that sees our work as being done for the Lord.

This comes in four consecutive bits of advice that are summarized in four adverbs. Slaves were to obey and serve their masters respectfully, sincerely, conscientiously, and pleasantly.

Likewise it is how we work. As people of integrity, engaged, valuing our labors.

Modeled by Jesus who, even as the creator of the universe put himself under authority.

**John 6:37–40** “All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out. [38] For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me. [39] And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. [40] For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.” (ESV)

**John 14:10** “Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority, but the Father who dwells in me does his works.” (ESV)

**John 14:27–31** “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid. [28] You heard me say to you, ‘I am going away, and I will come to you.’ If you loved me, you would have rejoiced, because I am going to the Father, for the Father is greater than I. [29] And now I have told you before it takes place, so that when it does take place you may believe. [30] I will no longer talk much with you, for the ruler of this world is coming. He has no claim on me, [31] but I do as the Father has commanded me, so that the world may know that I love the Father. Rise, let us go from here.” (ESV)

Like Jesus, we obey and serve those in authority over us, bosses, teachers, those in position to direct our work, as we would serve Christ.

And it’s not merely a task to accomplish or a way of earning what is needed to live.

Your work matters.

“Here is what he says, two things that are really, really radical about work. The two things are work is all divine calling and work requires all of your heart.”  
Timothy J. Keller

All work is God’s way of meeting your needs and giving you life through the work of other people. We should think of it that way!

Against mere performance for appearance sake or approval, we take on our work as a purposeful calling, to bring the kingdom to bear, shalom (peace) wherever we are.

Doing the will of God from the heart is not a restriction to stay where we don’t belong, but as far as it is in our ability to give ourselves to a vocation, whichever it may be, for the glory of God.

We can be hampered by small thinking that suggests doing the “Lord’s work” means being in a ministry role of some sort. Pastoral ministry is wonderful. But it is not the individual call for all of us, and this exhortation from Paul supports the claim that whatever your work is, it should be done as a servant of Christ.

Not only servants and freemen working as to the Lord - masters, bosses as well. In how they relate to staff, coworkers, servers, all of it is to reflect life under God... where there is no partiality.

How should I lead, like Jesus. How does he treat those under his rule? With grace and forgiveness. With empowerment, with mercy. He is direct, calls his disciples to do his commandments, to love.

**Ephesians 1:21-22** “Jesus is now the biggest boss. He is bigger than all the other bosses everywhere, and he is bigger than all the spirits everywhere. He is the big boss over everyone in this world now, and he’s the big boss over everyone in the world that will come later. Not one of them is stronger than Jesus. Only Jesus has God’s power. 22God made Jesus the boss over everyone. It’s like everything is under Jesus’s feet. And God made Jesus the leader of his people. Those people are his church.” (Plain English Version)

So we work as unto Jesus, not begrudgingly, but with purpose, with full, whole hearts. It won’t always be easy, but Jesus will always have you in the midst of it.

Let his renewing work remake how we relate in our work, in the economy. Knowing His Kingdom is expanding in and through us.

Knowing it may be what brings Jesus to someone.

“Knowing that whatever good each one does, slave or free, he will receive this back from the Lord.” We know what is meant by putting heart into all we do. Let us explain it by our lives. A work that is to be accepted by the Lord must be heart-work throughout—not a few thoughts of Christ occasionally and a few chill words and a few chance gifts and a little done by way of convenient opportunity. But as the heart beats, so must we serve God. It must be our life.” Spurgeon

Work as unto the Lord. Let the Spirit transform those relationships.

## 2) **Our families reflect Christ’s service to us.**

Where the section started. “Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.”

Under Christ’s reign, his place in your life, from there, obey your parents. It is a command but also a best practice. This call is rooted in God’s lasting call to his people.

**Proverbs 6:20–22** “My son, keep your father’s commandment, and forsake not your mother’s teaching. [21] Bind them on your heart always; tie them around your neck. [22] When you walk, they will lead you; when you lie down, they will watch over you; and when you awake, they will talk with you.” (ESV)

**Ephesians 6:2–3** “Honor your father and mother” (this is the first commandment with a promise), [3] “that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land.” (ESV)

Where the world says despise parents and their rules. When you feel boxed in. Where you are testing the boundaries of your own authority - obey your parents, honor them.

Jesus, even as a child was still God, all was to be put under his feet, yet he obeyed His parents.

When he was twelve, we are told in Scripture that His family traveled to Jerusalem for the Feast of Passover. Likely in a big group. But Jesus stays in Jerusalem when the group leaves to go home and for three days they don't know where He is... they eventually find Him in the temple sitting with the teachers listening and asking questions. His parents don't quite understand at the moment why he had to be in His "Father's house." But he goes with them.

**Luke 2:51–52** "And he went down with them and came to Nazareth and was submissive to them. And his mother treasured up all these things in her heart. [52] And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man." (ESV)

"God submitted to man. The God-child obeyed his mere human parents. And in doing so, he dignified the most basic, and enduring, of everyday relational dynamics. In our modern age, taught to despise the ideas of submission and obedience, the Son of God himself, worthy of limitless worship and praise, shatters our shallow conceptions of value and worth. Jesus's obedience to his parents challenges the insecurities in us that often make us averse to submit and obey." David Mathis

"What is required to "obey your parents in the Lord"? The Greek word translated "obey" is very helpful because it comes from two words meaning "under" and "to listen"—so that it literally means to listen under. Obedience involves conscious listening. If you do not really listen, you cannot really obey. That is why parents are always saying, "Listen to me!" The idea is to listen under with the intent to understand and do it. This does not mean that a son or daughter is to obey if the parents ask him or her to do something that is morally wrong or goes against Scripture or Christian conscience. Children are to obey parents "in the Lord"—that is, in those things that are consistent with Christ and his Word." Hughes

A command that persists beyond being under their roof - in adulthood there is not a lot of space for obeying - but certainly honoring.

That it may go well with you. Reflecting Jesus' submission to the will of the Father, as the way.

The responsibility is not only on Children here...

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

Mothers don't as often need the exhortation but it still applies to them. Headship continued, loving, leading the family in discipline and the instruction of the Lord.

As the Lord's agents, parents are to raise their children according to his mandate. And the way we do this matters.

In ancient times fathers literally owned their children. They were their property, and they could do anything they wanted to them. They could even kill them. Therefore, in the old household codes of the pagans, they would say, “Fathers, take charge. Show them who's boss. Take over. Be a disciplinarian. Let them know.”

Andrew T. Lincoln, a commentator on the book of Ephesians, who knows something about the Greek word, looks at this word and says what Paul is ruling out here when he says, “Don't infuriate your children,” is “... excessively severe discipline, unreasonably harsh demands, abuse of authority, arbitrariness, unfairness, constant nagging and condemnation, subjecting a child to humiliation, and all forms of gross insensitivity to a child's needs and sensibilities.” All that will make your child perpetually angry over excessively severe discipline.

Instead, bring them up...

Calvin translates “bring them up” with the words, “let them be kindly cherished.” In the discipline and instruction of the Lord. Putting guardrails in their life for their flourishing. Teaching them the grace of Christ, the treasure to be sought with all of who you are. Pursuing their sanctification as you experience yours.

“What does “bring up” mean? It means get to the place where they don't need you anymore. Really mature them. Really make them self-sufficient. Make them



co-adults with you. That doesn't happen through just being firm or just loving them but teaching them what's right."

It will take effort, from both children and parents. It will require our whole hearts. It will mean repentance when we get it wrong, forgiveness along the way, but it is for our good. It will reflect how Jesus served us, obeying, teaching, giving himself away for us.

In giving all of who we are, whole-heartedly, to the way of Jesus, we live the manner of life that matches who he says we are.

Living like Jesus, having our families transformed. Gathering, nurturing, protecting, bringing up in the instruction of the Lord.

**Luke 13:34** "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!" (ESV)

Why live as unto the Lord as children and parents, servants and masters?

[Because the ultimate Son lost the love of the ultimate Father so we could have the love of the ultimate Father so we could love our children and we could love our parents rightly.

Because Jesus is the one Master ... He was the Lord who became a servant.

Why? So we could become saved, we could have our sins forgiven, so he becomes the one non-oppressive Master there is. If you are working today mainly for self-esteem, mainly for approval, mainly for power, mainly for status and not for God, mainly because you want to feel good about yourself and not for God, you're slaves.

Your work will drive you into the ground. You'll always be unhappy. You'll always be frustrated. You'll always be driven, but if you know who you are in Christ, then you work not because you're trying to feel good about yourself or whatever. The work becomes something you just do as a delight to serve God and to serve the people around you, and you're no longer a slave. You're liberated.

*If you only see your family as a means to an end, an inconvenience to be suffered, authority to reject, or see your children merely as projects to mold with force and intimidation, to prove something about yourself. You will live clinging to the idol of self and miss the love you were intended for, maybe even ruin that which you hoped to shape.*

Only when you see the ultimate Master who became a slave so you who are slaves can be free, only when you see the ultimate Son who lost his heavenly Father's love so we who should be orphans have become children of God, now and only now can we really from the inside out live our lives in our family, live our lives in our workplace as we should. Jesus changes everything. The gospel changes everything.]

Will you live it?

**The Kingdom takes root as the Spirit transforms our relationships.**

**1 Corinthians 10:31** “So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.” (ESV)

***Work as a servant of Christ*** - This exhortation doesn't prevent you from gaining freedom, work that matches God-given passions, gifts, and skills. But it does mean you do your work serving or leading as unto the Lord.

***Commit your family to Christ*** - Whether a child, obeying, honoring. Or as a parent, teaching, protecting. Determine to have your family reflect Christ.

The leaven of the gospel is for the whole loaf. For all of life - your work, your family, all for His glory and our good. The Kingdom taking root, expanding right in our homes, in our offices, in the fields, wherever we are, filled by His Spirit.

May it be so among us.