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Main Idea: A call is made for children to listen and obey our parents, because we need to be cared for and to learn. Who better than those who are in the Lord and love us and who are family? We need to respect our father and mother; we may experience less harshness of the consequences of our bad choices. If we listen to wise instruction--what to do and not to do--things go better for us. A call is given to parents not to abuse, harm, or frustrate their children; parents are called to love, protect, and raise children right in the Lord, and give them proper instruction in God's precepts. A call is given to employees to be the best workers possible as we are working for our Lord as witnesses for Him. A call is given to people who employ others, to treat them as real Christians, with care, not to abuse or frustrate; employers are to treat workers well as this reflects glory to the Lord (and creates a better workplace, too). How we work is a reflection of our relationship with Christ; our work should reflect caring to those around us.

Contexts and Background:

In context, this passage unlocks the secrets to a happy, fulfilling and contented marriage that has love and respect. This translates into the home and workplace. The word *slave* may freak people out today; however, in this context, "slave" mostly means "workers". Whether "slave" means refers to workers or otherwise, the Bible's point is that all are human and are deserving of rights. The point is what it means to be in a healthy relationship with God and others.

A family is a microcosm of the Church all united in Christ; and, a church is a collection of families with gifts and responsibilities united not only in blood and bond, but in the greater connection of who we are in Christ! How we are in our relationships is the power indicator of how we are in our relationship with Christ. Family is not about power and control, about fears, usurping authority or rebelling from it. It is about His love and respect in each of the members, all in unison. This does not mean we do not have our ups and downs and problems. It does mean we can create an atmosphere of trust and love as well as encouragement and support (Col. 3:18-21)!

Commentary—Word and Phrase Meanings:

- *Children.* Jewish and Roman children were expected to submit and obey by obligation. Paul says to do it with desire and then one will have a more joyful and contented life (Deut. 21:18-21; Rom. 1:30; 2 Tim. 3.2).
- *Obey.* Meaning to "listen up," a call to have respect for authority. This is a call to submit to those in authority and to value and respect them, enjoy orderliness, and learn from them. In contrast, a person with a lack of faith will not respect others because the emptiness where faith is supposed to be is filled with pride and even self-destruction, worry, and stress that lead a person nowhere good. Submission is respect; submission should not exceed the parameters of the will of God or of love and righteousness. To be in leadership is not an excuse to batter or put wives, children, workers or anyone down in any way. This does not mean we submit to dictatorial or dysfunctional family members or any form of bad leadership (Psalm 119; Isa. 21:8; Jer, 23:4; Ezek. 3:17; 33:6; 35:7; Hab. 2:1; Acts 20:28; Col. 18-22; Heb. 13:7; 1 Pet. 5:2-4; 3 John 9-10).
- *Parents... bring them up.* This is for those in authority, entrusted with a great and precious responsibility, with a call to nurture, shape, and train so children flourish to come into their own. All who are in the family must participate in the love of a home by obeying and respecting. Churches and parents must teach and model character. God's precepts are for our benefit and protection, and are what is best; loving parents are the example. It is a love of self-sacrifice and response. It is a love that is not earned; rather, it is given freely (John 21:15).

- *In the Lord/in reverence for the Lord.* Christ loved the church, not *because it was holy, but in order to make it holy* (Eph. 5:22-6:9; Col. 3:18-4:1).
- *Honor your father and mother.* The Fifth Commandment. The home is the cradle to learn faith, worship, and God's instructions. Parents are to represent God's authority by honoring God by to instructing, protecting, nurturing, and representing the faith; children are to respect, listen, and pass it on. When we disrespect our parents, we disrespect our Lord. This does not mean taking abuse. The purpose is to honor the family, and preserve their reputation and the nations and showcase the goodness of God to the world. When the Israelites failed at this, a generation was lost, and they were invaded by foreign kings or had bad kings. Most of the ills and dysfunction in the world are because parents did not do as God said, and the children become pagan and corrupt and pass on more dysfunction and hurt. The breakdown of the family comes before the breakdown of a nation; the strength of the family creates the strength of a church and a nation (Ex. 20:1-3, 12; Deut. 5:16; Matt. 15:1-20).
- *Commandment with a promise... go well... enjoy long life.* Our ethics translate into how we live, success and consequences. Long life as a reward because when we listen, we learn and make fewer mistakes and do better in life. The Jews, as an ethnic group, have stayed tighter and together through the centuries, through prosperity and travesty, better and longer than any ethnic group in recorded history (Ps. 119:71; Isa. 57:1; Col. 2:13-17).
- *Exasperate/embitter/provoke/goad/irritate... discouraged/disheartened/lose heart.* Jewish and Roman fathers and teachers would beat their children to teach them to be tough. Here, the Bible advocates the nurturing approach to child raising that is far more effectual and successful than creating resentment and passing on dysfunction (Rom. 10:19).
- *Instruction of the Lord/nurture and admonition.* Training and learning so it is put in the mind. Allowing the Word--Christ's presence--to dwell in us, and learn His instruction, our spiritual growth, to know Christ and trust in Him alone (Prov. 3:11; 15:6; Eph. 4:17-32; 6:4; 2 Tim. 3:16)!
- *Slaves/Servants.* This referred to household slaves or hired workers similar to rich people in the nineteenth century and some places today who have household servants. They were much like the butlers and maids, except that they were usually obligated or owned by another person. Many of these slaves had bad attitudes which made their situation worse. Some could have saved their money and bought their freedom; most did not as their lifestyle was better than it would be if they were on their own. However, even the best-treated servants were subjugated to extreme prejudice. Others were in hopeless situations. They were being encouraged to obey and allow their virtue to win others over. The stoic philosophers also taught this. The flipside is slaves and servants were to be treated with respect and dignity, never mistreated, and always as spiritually equal before God (1 Cor. 12:13; Gal. 3:28; Eph. 6:9; Col. 3:11; 4:1). Paul and the Bible are neither condemning nor condoning slavery, just stating it as a matter of fact. Paul urges them to learn to live with it and reform it by good character and the Gospel (Deut. 24:1-4; Matt. 19:8; Eph. 6:5; Philemon). Slaves were also encouraged to seek their freedom through legal means (1 Cor. 7:21-24; Philemon; 1 Peter 2: 18-25). (I firmly believe if we had done that in the U.S., we would not have had our heinous civil war and the ongoing racial bigotry that we have in the U.S. I write this as a man who is descended from an African slave and European ancestry.)
- *Masters.* This refers to being a guardian and protector--like a sentinel. This was the husband or a hired worker who protected an estate or farm, and served its owners. The point is to treat people as you want to be treated, because your situation can easily change and you could be the slave and your slave could be your master, which could happen through wars and uprisings. Our Master and Overseer is Christ (John 10:1-18)!

- *Respect.* We are called to recognize and respect those in authority (Ex. 22:28; 1 Kings 21:10; Prov. 24:21). We are also called to recognize, respect the significance, and value the personhood of all people--regardless of race, color, or creed (Prov. 1:7; 8:13; 16:6; Rom. 2:11; James 2:1)! As human beings, we are all the same, and we bear the image of God (Gen. 1:27; 6:9; 1 Pet. 1:17; 2:13-17)!
- *Fear.* To people in authority, means respect to build an effective, strong relationship. To God, meaning a reverent, wondrous admiration and awe as well as worship of God, with the knowledge of His Holiness. When we fear God, as in having reverence for Him, we have no need to fear our fellow man or our circumstances; we too can grow a great faith (Ex. 2:11-15; Prov. 1:7; 3:5; Acts 7:23-30).
- *Obey Christ.* Keeping our minds on Christ as Lord, is faithfulness; it is not about education, intelligence, or skill. Rather, it is accepting the task He gives us and doing it. It is taking what He has given, then replicating, increasing, and using it for the benefit of others--as well as for our own growth--for His glory (1 Cor. 4:2).
- *Serve wholeheartedly/heartily.* Meaning to work from your heart using the best of your abilities to bring out the best in yourself and others. We glorify God when we endure with our faith and character--no matter what we might face or experience (Luke 22:42; John 17:22; Eph. 4:1-16).
- *Work.* Work is to be done with our best efforts, but is not our identity or our worth! What we do for a living is not to define us, regardless of what our society may imply. What we have in Christ is so much more! Even though this may be the first question we ask someone new to us, or that is asked of us, our work is what we do, not who we are (Eccl. 2:4; 4:7-8).
- *Serving the Lord/Working for the Lord.* This means that to be conscious of God is an act of humility and submission; we should focus on our duty and respect authority because it is for God. This is about being good workers as our work reflects God (1 Cor. 7:20-22; Eph. 6:5-8; Col. 3:22-25; 1 Tim. 6:1-2; Titus 2:9-10).
- *Inheritance/reward.* Meaning we will be paid in full--in abundance. We receive our heavenly reward as a recompense for all that we have done and endured for Christ and His children and the opportunity He gave us. This is what we look forward to and what can also motivate us in the here and now (1 Cor. 4:5; Rev. 22:12).
- *Treat your slaves/right and fair/equal.* Referring to equality and fairness being impartial to one's status, wealth, heritage, and ethnicity and treating others as you want to be treated (Philemon 16).
- *Favoritism.* The Bible declares that there is equity of all peoples, and we are all equal in God's sight. Paul wanted to fix the problem, but he could not. So, he called slaves and the slave owners and everyone else to a higher standard so this heinous situation could be livable until slavery was abolished. Paul is also reinforcing what he stated in his letter to Philemon that may also have been sent alongside this letter to Colossae.

Devotional Thoughts and Applications:

The mandate to love, an extreme wakeup call that commands each family member to thoroughly exhibit all of the qualities of biblical character in their relationship with one another (1 Corinthians 13:4-7).

The chief purpose for Christians, above all else, is to glorify God. Christ is our great example of respect and endurance; He endured and suffered for you, He took your place in God's wrath, and as a sinless, innocent person, went to the cross for us all. We then follow in His steps--not for our salvation, as it has already been given to the Christian--but to show another picture to those who are watching us. We exemplify Him by being a good example! Why? He has healed and saved us, so we need to trust Him

out of our gratitude, and allow Him to be our Shepherd, Guardian, and Lord over all. So, how will we play this out on our families and work (Gen. 1:26-27; Lev. 19:18; Mark 12:29-31; Luke 6:31; 22:42; John 17:22; Eph. 4:1-16; 1 Pet. 4:11)?

Church Leadership Tip: Love, Lead, Offer, Value and Equip. Commit to building Christian values and principles that show Christ's value and theirs that lead the people in your church to quality and beneficial relationships at home and at work.

The Essential Inductive Questions (for more Inductive questions, see Inductive Bible Study):

1. What does this passage say?
2. What does this passage mean?
3. What is God telling me?
4. How am I encouraged and strengthened?
5. Is there sin in my life for which confession and repentance is needed?
6. How can I be changed, so I can learn and grow?
7. What is in the way of these precepts affecting me? What is in the way of my listening to God?
8. How does this apply to me? What will I do about it?
9. What can I model and teach?
10. What does God want me to share with someone?

Additional Questions:

1. In what ways have you seen children frustrated, even exasperated? What does that do?
2. What does this passage tell us about commitment?
3. What does this passage tell us about family relationships?
4. How successful has favoritism been in your observations?
5. What kind of commitment did you think the Christian life is about before becoming a Christian? What about now?
6. From this passage, what are the ingredients to build a better home and or workplace?
7. Why is it important that children participate in the love of a home by obeying their parents and respecting them?
8. What works better, to threaten and abuse a child or worker or to train, equip and nurture?
9. Family is not about power and control, so what can we do to not let our fears and usurping authority or rebelling from it take root?
10. How we respond to Christ with love and service because of His free gift of grace. So, who should you respond to others, especially family and church members?
11. What can you do more to allow Christ's love infuse you so you can love and your family? If you are not marred how can this help prepare you?
12. What can you and your church do to help people deal with anxiety and stress?