

6:1 Obeying Parents in the Lord

The Sequence Comes to Children.

Chrysostom: Paul has spoken first about the husband, second about the wife; now he moves along this path to children. The husband is responsible for the wife. ¹ Both the husband and the wife are responsible for the children.... He speaks to children in an infant voice. He is well aware that if husband and wife are well disposed according to the commands he has laid down, there will be little difficulty in eliciting the cooperation of children.... But what if the parents command foolish things? Generally parents do not command foolish things. But if they should, the apostle has a remedy when he says that parents are to be obeyed “in the Lord.” They are to be obeyed in whatever way they are not offending against God. Homily on Ephesians 21.6.1–3.2

Submit in the Lord to Those Who Gave Us Birth.

Jerome: It is not clear whether this saying means that children are to obey their “parents in the Lord” or that in the Lord children are to obey their parents. I take it both ways. We are to obey those parents who gave birth to us in the Lord, as through Paul and the apostles they were spiritually born, and do what they say. And we should submit in the Lord to our own parents, from whom we were born according to the flesh, performing all their commands that are not contrary to the Lord’s will. Epistle to the Ephesians 3.6.1.4

6:2 Honoring One’s Parents

The First Commandment with a Promise.

Jerome: A promise is attached to this commandment.... It is found in the Decalogue. It is the first command in the second table of the law. It was given to the people as they were leaving Egypt. Epistle to the Ephesians 3.6.1.7

6:3 *Being Well, Living Long*

A Spiritual Interpretation of the Promise.

Jerome: What is promised in honoring one's father and mother is not intended for the Jews alone, nor was it intended as an outright financial exchange.... For there surely have been many who, even while being obedient to their parents, died abruptly. Others who have been irreverent to their parents have reached extreme old age.... Rightly interpreted, the command looks for the land that the Lord promises to Israel. It is offered to those who have left the spiritual Egypt. It calls us to patience as we traverse the vast and terrible wilderness of this life, as we overcome great challengers whom the Lord strikes down and as we enter into the Judea that flows with milk and honey. Epistle to the Ephesians 3.6.1.8

6:4a *Not Provoking Children to Anger*

Do Not Provoke.

Chrysostom: He does not say, "Love your children." Nature itself takes care of this by implanting this in us even against our will. So that interpretation would be superfluous. Instead, what does he say? "Do not make your children angry." So many parents do this. They do this by depriving them of their portion of the inheritance and their promises, by oppressing them with burdens, by treating them not as though they were free but as slaves. Homily on Ephesians 21.6.4.9

6:4b *The Discipline and Instruction of the Lord*

Tracing the Motive of Obedience Back to Its Source.

Chrysostom: Then he explains the all-important thing about parenting: how children are to be brought to obedience. He traces the motive of obedience back to its source and fountain. He has already shown how the husband's behavior elicits the wife's obedience when he spoke primarily to the husband, advising him to draw her to him by the bonds of love. Similarly here also he shows how the parents' behavior elicits the children's obedience, saying, "Rear them in the instruction and discipline of the Lord." Do you see how, when the spiritual motives are present, the physical effects will follow along? Do you want your son to be obedient? Rear him from the outset in the teaching and discipline of the Lord. Never regard it as a small matter that he should be a diligent learner of Scriptures. Homily on Ephesians 21.6.4.10

Educate Children in Christian Doctrine.

Jerome: Instead of asking parents to give their children a fancy education in secular literature, instead of making them read comedies and recite the obscene writings of the theater, he asks the Ephesian laypersons, many of whom, as is common in a population, were engaged in the ordinary occupations of this life, that they should “educate their children in every doctrine and counsel of the Lord.” Overseers and elders ought to take note of this. Epistle to the Ephesians 3.6.4.¹¹

6:5a *Obedience to Earthly Masters*

6:5b *With Singleness of Heart, as to Christ*

The Brother of Servants.

Chrysostom: Paul instructs those virtuous servants who contribute so much to the organization and protection of the household. He does not overlook them. Though their instruction comes last, because they are last in dignity and rank, he addresses them at great length. He does not speak to them as children but in a far more advanced manner. He does not make this-worldly promises to them but points directly to the world to come. He instructs them to love wisdom. In this way he raises up and soothes their wounded souls. He counsels them not to grieve that they have less status or honor than others. Their brief earthly submission is for a time only. Whatever power their masters might have remains transient and brief and subject to the vulnerabilities of the flesh. All that is carnal is fleeting. It is “in fear and trembling” and that they are learning obedience. He does not call for the same kind of reverence from the servant as from the wife, who is called to reverence her husband. Rather he heightens the expression in saying that it is “in sincerity of heart” that they are to serve, “as if serving Christ!” He is speaking concisely here. Just what are you saying, blessed Paul? Here is one who has become the brother of servants, living himself the servant life, as they live. He is their brother, facing the same limitations, contributing to the same body. His servanthood is understood in relation to the Son of God. He is not his own master. He has entered into the life of the serving Son. Out of this assumption he calls them to “be obedient to earthly masters with fear and trembling!” Why? He is in effect saying: “How much more powerful is the ministry to those who are already servants, more than to those who are free men. How much easier do they learn the life of obedience in their reverence for God.” They are not entering into a lower status but into the highest status when they learn how to yield to their neighbor, how to become meek and how to be humble. Homily on Ephesians 22.6.5–8.¹⁴

6:6 Doing the Will of God from the Heart

In Serving Freely from the Heart One Is No Slave.

Chrysostom: Serving Christ comes “from the heart and with good will.” The goal is not merely to serve sincerely and do nothing wrong. It is rather to serve with all one’s might. Paul does not call servants simply to do what is barely due but to serve abundantly out of ardor, not from necessity. Serve on principle and by choice, not under compulsion. If you serve freely in this way, you are not a slave. If your service comes from your free choice, from good will, from the soul and on account of Christ, you are no slave. Homily on Ephesians 22.6.5–8.16

6:7 Rendering Service with Good Will

6:8 Receiving Good from the Lord

Regardless of Social Location, Whatever Good One Does Will Come to the Lord’s Attention. Chrysostom: Regrettably it is the way of many unbelieving masters to feel no shame when they fail to keep faith. They do not give any just return to their slaves for their obedience. Paul comes to comfort these servants. They should not look for retaliation but be fully confident about their ultimate compensation. Those who receive benefits but make no just payment to their servants are putting themselves in debt to God, ultimately. If your master receives good from you but does not treat you fairly, you do well to serve him all the more earnestly. You have all the more compensation stored up finally. For God is watching these transactions. Your time of compensation will come. Homily on Ephesians 22.6.5–8.18

6:9a Masters, Forbear Threatening

The Master Has a Master.

Jerome: Serving is to be done “in singleness of heart.” One is called to “do the will of God” and to do it “with a good will,” that is, with benevolence from the heart. Everyone will finally receive just judgment from the Lord for whatever good he has done. If he has served as a lowly one in the household, he will be judged justly according to his responsibility. The master of the household is not to be overbearing, not quick to punish. He should know that he too has a master in heaven who will judge justly, who will judge fairly according to our own willing, who will judge by deeds, not status. Epistle to the Ephesians 3.6.9.20

6:9b No Partiality with the Heavenly Master

Slavery Begotten by Sin.

Chrysostom: Society arrangements, like laws made by sinners, acknowledge these distinctions of classes. ²¹ But we are all called to accountability before the law of the common Lord and Master of all. We are called to do good to all alike and to dispense the same fair rights to all. God's law does not recognize these social distinctions. If anyone should ask where slavery comes from and why it has stolen into human life—for I know that many are keen to ask such things and desire to learn—I shall tell you. It is avarice that brought about slavery. It is acquisitiveness, which is insatiable. This is not the original human condition. Remember that Noah had no slave, nor Abel nor Seth nor those after them. This horrid thing was begotten by sin. It does not come from our earliest ancestors. We pay our ancestors no respect by blaming them. We have insulted nature by this system.... Note how Paul connects everything to the idea of headship. As to the woman he says to the husband: "love her." ²² As to children he says to parents: "you are to rear them in the instruction and discipline of the Lord." ²³ As to slaves he can only say: "knowing that you too have a Lord in heaven." In this light be benign and forgiving. ²⁴ Homily on Ephesians 22.6.9.25

6:10 Be Strong in the Lord

The Strength of His Might.

Origen: To be "strong in the Lord" is to be strengthened in word and wisdom and the contemplation of truth. All these qualities are encompassed in the titles applying to Christ. The greatest of these is the strength of his might, which is stronger than all human virtues combined. Moral corruption lacks power in his presence. This one virtue, being strong in the Lord, is inconceivably powerful. Those who are wise in these matters call it the strength of his might. It has some analogy with bodily might but far exceeds it. This strength is beautiful, as a strong body is beautiful. Epistle to the Ephesians.¹

The Climax.

Chrysostom: This is the rhetoric Paul always employs when he is about to conclude his discourse. Did he not already indicate at the very beginning that every person's house is a bit like a military camp? Now you see he has drawn up every regiment ready for battle. He is ready to arm them and lead them into the struggle. Homily on Ephesians 22.6.10.²

6:11 *The Whole Armor of God*

The Devil's Wiles.

Chrysostom: The enemy does not make war on us straightforwardly or openly but by his wiles. What are the devil's wiles? They consist in trying to capture us by some shortcut and always by deceit.... The devil never openly lays temptation before us. He does not mention idolatry out loud. But by his stratagems he presents idolatrous choices to us, by persuasive words and by employing clever euphemisms. Homily on Ephesians 22.6.11.3

Christ Himself as the Armor of God.

Jerome: From what we read of the Lord our Savior throughout the Scriptures, it is manifestly clear that the whole armor of Christ is the Savior himself. It is he whom we are asked to "put on." It is one and the same thing to say "Put on the whole armor of God" and "Put on the Lord Jesus Christ." Our belt is truth and our breastplate is righteousness. The Savior is also called both "truth" and "righteousness." 4 So no one can doubt that he himself is that very belt and breastplate. On this principle he is also to be understood as the "preparation of the gospel of peace." He himself is the "shield of faith" and the "helmet of salvation." He is the "sword of the Spirit," because he is the Word of God, living and efficacious, the utterance of which is stronger than any helmet and sharp on both sides. 5 Epistle to the Ephesians 3.6.11.6

6:12a *Contending Against Principalities*

It Is Not Flesh and Blood That Deceive.

Jerome: The battle is not against flesh and blood or ordinary temptations. The scene is the war of flesh against spirit. We are being incited to become entrapped in the works of the flesh. 8 ... But this is not merely a physical temptation. It is not merely the inward struggle against flesh and blood as such. Rather Satan has cleverly transformed himself into an angel of light. He is striving to persuade us to regard him as a messenger of goodness. This is how he throws his full might into the struggle. He employs deceptive signs and lying omens. He sets before us every possible ruse of evil. Then, when he has so ensnared us that we trust him, he says to us, "Thus says the Lord." This is not flesh and blood deceiving us. It is not a typical human temptation. It is the work of principalities and powers, the ruler of darkness and spiritual wickedness. Epistle to the Ephesians 3.6.11.9

6:12b Against Powers and Rulers of This Present Darkness

Paul's Unique Term: World Rulers of This Present Darkness.

Jerome: We have elsewhere read the expression world rulers nowhere in the Old or the New Testament—only here. Paul the apostle employs this name because it was necessary for him, in addressing the Ephesians, to apply new terms to new and invisible subjects. Epistle to the Ephesians 3.6.11.10

6:12c Spiritual Hosts of Wickedness in Heavenly Places

Hosts of Wickedness.

Origen: From what ancient Scripture is Paul drawing when he speaks of “the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places?” My conjecture is that it comes out of the narratives written in Israel about wars and particular combats, like those of David and Goliath, and about the battles of the children of Israel against their enemies.... In each of these narratives there is some implication of the vanquishing and overcoming of demonic spiritual powers. Epistle to the Ephesians.12

Iniquity in High Places.

Origen: Some spiritual creatures have sinned in heaven. It is against these that we now struggle, “against the spirits of iniquity in high places.” They first sinned in heaven. Now they are doing it again on earth. Palestinian Catena on Psalm 118.119.13

Whether Demons Could Reside in the Same Heaven with God.

Jerome: “Hosts of wickedness in heavenly places?” This does not mean that demons dwell in heaven but that the air above has received this name, as birds who fly through the air are called “fowls of heaven.” 14 ... It is indeed impious to suppose that the spirits of wickedness in the heavens occupy the same heaven of which God says, “It is my throne.” 15 Epistle to the Ephesians 3.6.11.16

6:13 Being Able to Stand

What Is Meant by “the Evil Day.”

Jerome: The “evil day” may arguably signify the present time.... But the better interpretation is that “to stand in the evil day” is a reference to the final consummation and judgment. Then the devil, our enemy

and our adversary, will struggle to keep us in his clutches. Who will be freed from him? One who understands what is said of the poor and needy: “the Lord will deliver him in the evil day.”¹⁷ ... Still another interpretation, however, expounds this more simply: The Ephesians are now being encouraged to prepare for future temptations and persecutions. Paul the apostle in his prophetic spirit saw them as coming at a later time. They are being counseled to do anything they can that might enable them to stand in the faith of the gospel and not to lapse under persecution. Epistle to the Ephesians 3.6.13.¹⁸

6:14a *Girding One’s Loins with Truth*

Why Begin with the Girdle?

Chrysostom: The first art in tactics is to know how to stand firmly. From this firmness all else follows.... He is not speaking here of a literal girdle. He is setting in contrast, by this metaphor, the soldier who is slack and dissipated in his appetites, who lets his thoughts creep on the ground.... He speaks here of the loins. Just like the keel of a ship the loins are the central balancing support of our whole body. They are a kind of foundation. All is built up from them.... The girdle is used in combat to bind and hold together this foundation of ours. That is why we are also girdled when we run. It secures the strength within us. Homily on Ephesians 23.6.14.²⁰

6:14b *Putting on the Breastplate of Righteousness*

Righteousness Lives by Faith.

Marius Victorinus: Faith lives in righteousness. Faith remains the fountain of all the virtues, as Paul has often stated. Righteousness is not as strong as faith because “righteousness lives by faith.”²¹ But the effect of righteousness is accomplished by faith. So in this battle we must strive toward righteousness. Faith is proven to be true faith when we live righteously. Then faith is seen to be useful to us, as the righteousness that accompanies faith is useful. Epistle to the Ephesians 2.6.13–14.²²

Why Is It Called a Breastplate?

Jerome: One who has put on a sturdy breastplate is difficult to wound. Especially well-protected are those essential parts of the body upon which life depends. So put on the breastplate. Strap it together by iron rings and insert the hooks in their place. One protected by such a breastplate of righteousness will not be

like a vulnerable stag that receives the arrow in his liver. He will not lapse into rage or lust. Rather he will be protected, having a clean heart, having God as the fashioner of his breastplate, since he fashions the whole armor for every one of the saints. Epistle to the Ephesians 3.6.14.23

6:15 Shod with the Equipment of the Gospel of Peace

What Is the Significance of Feet?.

Marius Victorinus: The gospel is to be carried abroad. It is to be preached among the nations. Wherever, then, it is preached, it must be heard. But so that all may hear, one must use one's feet to travel. And so do we travel with haste and urgency. Epistle to the Ephesians 2.6.15.24

Having Shod Your Feet with the Equipment of the Gospel of Peace.

Jerome: It is asked whether he says "the gospel of peace" to distinguish it from another gospel. Or is it rather the distinguishing property of the gospel that it may be called "the gospel of peace?" If anyone therefore has peace, he is shod with the gospel of Christ. With this footwear he is prepared to walk. Being prepared, however, he does well not to imagine himself already perfect. Rather he merely is prepared to press on and by pressing on hopes to arrive at the goal. Epistle to the Ephesians 3.6.15.25

Only by Battling the Demonic Do We Receive Peace with God.

Chrysostom: This war against the demonic puts an end to the previous war against God. As we are making war with the devil, we are making peace with God. Have no fear, beloved, the victory is already won. This is the good news. Homily on Ephesians 24.6.14–17.26

6:16 Taking the Shield of Faith

The Capital Virtue.

Marius Victorinus: He returns to that capital virtue, the shield of faith. It contains all the other virtues and brings them all to fulfillment. Unless we are armed with this shield we will not have the strength to battle courageously and resist all these deadly powers. But with the protection of faith we repel all these blows and whatever attacks come from the whole host of powers. Epistle to the Ephesians 2.6.16.29

Quenching Fiery Darts.

Chrysostom: By “his darts” Paul means both temptations and perverse desires. He calls them fiery because that is the nature of the appetite. Faith is capable of commanding hosts of demons. How much more is faith capable of ordering the passions of the soul? Homily on Ephesians 24.6.14–17.³¹

6:17a *Taking the Helmet of Salvation*

The Helmet Guards the Head.

Marius Victorinus: It is Christ indeed who is the author of salvation. He is our head. He descended to us and redeemed us by his own mystery. It is he indeed who guards the heads of the faithful. Therefore he is the “helmet of salvation.” He is the Word by which the adverse powers are overcome and taken captive.... Christ, who is the Word of God, was sent to overcome all corruption and wickedness and even death itself. It is in this sense that Paul refers to “the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God.” Epistle to the Ephesians 2.6.17.³²

The Helmet of Salvation.

Jerome: Because of this helmet of salvation all the senses in our head remain intact. It especially protects the eyes. Solomon in Ecclesiastes 33 notes that “the eyes of the wise are in the head.” Paul understood the importance of headship. He knew why the eyes are located in the head. If Christ is the head of a person of faith and “the eyes of the wise are in the head,” it follows that all our senses, mind, thought, speech and counsel (if, that is, we are wise) are in Christ. Epistle to the Ephesians 3.6.17.³⁴

6:17b *Taking the Sword of the Spirit*

The Sword of the Spirit.

John Cassian: This is the sword that for our health spills the noxious blood that animates the matter of our sins, cutting out and excising whatever it finds in our soul that is carnal or earthly and, once it has made us dead to vices, causing us to live to God and flourish in spiritual virtues. Conferences 20.8.11.³⁵

6:18a *Pray at All Times*

The Inner Man Is Praying in Spirit Even When Not Praying Aloud.

Marius Victorinus: This means that we should not say or utter particular words or recite them in our prayers as though they were premeditated or written down. We are to pray “in the spirit” and “at all times.” Let your deep affections enter into your praying. The inner spirit, that is, the inner man, is making his prayer with intense desire. He is praying all the time, so that even when he is not praying aloud he is still praying in the spirit. Epistle to the Ephesians 2.6.18.1

Distinguishing Prayer and Petition.

Marius Victorinus: When he says “through every prayer and petition,” I think he has this distinction in mind: It is a prayer when we speak the praises of God and recount his great works and when we give thanks and worship him. It is a petition when we pray to God either to pardon our sins or to offer his grace to us. Epistle to the Ephesians 2.6.18.2

Calling upon the King.

Chrysostom: See how clever this blessed author is. He has armed them with the utmost protection. So now what remains? Only to call on the king and urge him to extend his hand. Homily on Ephesians 24.6.18–20.4

6:18b *Making Supplication for the Saints*

With All Perseverance.

Marius Victorinus: Some might think that the phrase at all times means only the daytime. But, so that he could amplify the force of “at all times,” what does he say? “With all perseverance.” This calls us to a certain persistent disposition of the mind. We do not pray as if we were asleep. This is what some sound like who pray by reciting or reading familiar phrases or uttering them routinely from memory. Epistle to the Ephesians 2.6.18.5

Supplication for All the Saints.

Marius Victorinus: The saints themselves, with the bishops and apostles and elders, are called to pray on behalf of the faithful and the catechumens and all the other members of the body. It is typical of Paul to

make mention of the whole people of God in prayer. He also calls upon the whole people of God to pray on behalf of their leaders, bishops and saints, and then he adds: "Pray for me too." Epistle to the Ephesians 2.6.18–19.⁶

6:19a *Praying for Paul*

Those Whom He Admonished He Now Asks for Prayers.

Marius Victorinus: Isn't this wonderful? From those whom he himself has just now admonished, those whom he has instructed, to whom he has preached the gospel, he now asks for help. He is asking them for their prayers. He goes on to explain what he is asking them to pray for: "that utterance may be given to me." His prayer is definite and specific, that a particular profit may accrue. Epistle to the Ephesians 2.6.18–19.⁸

6:19b *Boldly Proclaiming the Mysteries of the Gospel*

Only with Purity of Heart Is the Mouth Opened Boldly.

Origen: Boldness of speech is a possibility only and always for those who have a heart that does not condemn them ¹⁰ ... and therefore the one who boldly makes known the mysteries is rare, because those who have boldness before God are rare. Epistle to the Ephesians.¹¹

Let the Treasuries Be Opened.

Jerome: This is to be understood as if he said, "Let the treasures be opened. Let the promises hidden from ages be revealed. Let the Spirit enter to bring forth those things that have been concealed." That this is indeed the meaning of this passage ... is clarified by what follows: "in confidence," he says, "to make known the mystery of the gospel." Epistle to the Ephesians 3.6.20.¹²

6:20a *An Ambassador in Chains*

6:20b *Asking for Boldness to Speak*

Petition for Boldness.

Marius Victorinus: Boldly means “so that I may not fail to accomplish it fully and that my chains may not so work on my mind as to prevent my accomplishing it, the task of expounding the mystery, as I ought.”

Epistle to the Ephesians 2.6.20.14

6:21a *Making Known Who Paul is and What He is Doing*

Why Tychicus Was Sent to Ephesus.

Jerome: This might be understood in two ways: Either Tychicus was sent to Ephesus to announce to them that Paul’s chains had become famous in the whole praetorium and his imprisonment had been profitable to the faith of the gospel ... or Tychicus was sent to tell them more about Paul’s life and daily work, of which they were not aware, so as to give them a clearer pattern of how to live. Epistle to the Ephesians 3.6.21–22.16

6:21b *Tychicus Will Tell Everything*

Minister in the Lord.

Marius Victorinus: Note that Tychicus is described not as a minister to Paul but as a minister in the Lord with regard to the gospel and the mystery. Epistle to the Ephesians 2.6.21.18

6:22 *Sent for This Purpose*

Sent for This Very Purpose.

Marius Victorinus: Tychicus is sent to give the Ephesians instructions not on his own accord. Rather he was sent by Paul for this purpose. Such was Paul’s concern for them and his desire that they should be well informed. Epistle to the Ephesians 2.6.22.19

6:23 Peace and Love with Faith

To Overcome Discord.

Marius Victorinus: The last part of the letter is a petition. His prayer and desire is for peace to the brethren, also love and then faith. For above he has already noted that there was discord among them. Now he adds thanks to those who display faith and who love our Lord Jesus Christ. Thus all is concluded with peace against discord, love eliciting concord and faith in God. Epistle to the Ephesians 2.6.23–24.20

With Faith.

Chrysostom: In saying “peace be to the brethren and love with faith,” he speaks comprehensively. He does not speak simply of love as such or faith as such but love with faith. He means either this or that they are to have a faith that will make them confident about good things to come. The peace is toward God and so is the love. For where there is peace there also will be love. This love is always “with faith,” for there is no good in love without faith. Love cannot even exist without faith. Homily on Ephesians 24.6.23.22

How Peace Encourages Faithful Love.

Jerome: There are many gifts bestowed by God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ, but of all these peace has a crucial place. This peace passes all understanding. It preserves the body and mind of the saints. It is a certain serenity and tranquility of a mind at rest. It is protected from the universal storm and maelstrom of perturbations. So also is “love with faith,” which at the same time is given to us by God the Father and the Holy Spirit, so that we may love God from the whole heart and our neighbor as ourselves. Epistle to the Ephesians 3.6.23.23