

## INTERNATIONAL BIBLE LESSONS.

## SECOND QUARTER: THREE MONTHS' STUDIES IN THE ACTS AND EPISTLES.

A. D. 62.]

LESSON V.

OBEDIENCE.

[May 3.]

Eph. 6. 1-13. [Commit to memory verses 1-4.]



1 Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right.

2 Honor thy father and mother; which is the first commandment with promise;

3 That it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth.

4 And ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

5 Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of your heart, as unto Christ;

6 Not with eye-service, as men-pleasers; but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart;

7 With good will doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men:

The book of the Acts leaves the apostle Paul a chained prisoner at Rome, but gives no hint of his history after two years. We find, however, in the sacred canon four letters which manifestly were written near the close of this period of imprisonment. Three of them were addressed to churches—Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians, and one to Philemon, a friend of the apostle living at Colosse. They were all written at the same stage of Paul's history, and may have been dispatched to these churches by the same messenger. Of these, the most lofty in its strain of thought, is the Epistle to the Ephesians, characterized by Coleridge as "the divinest composition of man." Its theme is the *Church of God*, and in plan, in thought, and in language, it reaches the highest realm. Our lesson is taken from the closing chapter, containing some specific applications of the great principles in the epistle. Addressed

## General Statement.

to people dwelling in a civilization where woman was despised, it presents a noble conception of the relation of husband and wife. Chap. 5. In an age when childhood received no recognition from thinkers and philosophers, it presents the mutual duties of children to their parents, and of parents to their children. In a state of society where half of the population were slaves, unprotected by law or custom, under an absolute domination of their masters for life or death, the apostle Paul sets forth the great principle that bond and free stand equal before the Lord, and should fulfill the same duties of charity and fidelity toward each other, in view of a judgment where the conduct of both shall be reviewed. He lifts the veil of the unseen, and shows to us the spiritual personalities which exercise their malign influence over us, and against which we must stand in conflict, armed with the panoply of God.

## Explanatory and Practical Notes.

**Verse 1. Children.** As this letter was written to be read at the public assembly of the Church, it is evident that children were expected to be present to hear it. (1) *The many-minded Paul did not forget the children, and preachers of the present should not.* **Your parents.** Children are placed in families for training, and their parents, as their natural guardians, are entitled to love, honor, and obedience. **In the Lord.** That is, children should obey, so far as their parents' commands are in accordance with the law of Christ, but not when required to do an act manifestly wicked. **This is right.** That is, such obedience is not only natural and proper, but more especially, it is in accordance with God's law, as shown in the next verse. (2) *Parental authority lies at the foundation of all social and moral order.*

**2. Honor thy father and mother.** Hold them in loving reverence, and speak to them and of them with respect. **The first commandment with promise.** First and only commandment which is distinguished by a specific promise, showing that it is invested with special importance. Notice that the apostle quotes the decalogue as well-known to his readers. (3) *We should have God's law on our tongues and in our hearts.*

**3. That it may be well.** Every one needs for his well-being and success a training in obedience and character which only the home can supply: hence submission to that training will greatly promote true prosperity. The most successful men have come from good homes. **Thou mayest live long.** For virtuous habits and a conduct that tends to length of days are the result of obedience to parents. (4) *God does not forget to teach over the children who obey their parents.*

**4. And ye fathers.** If children have duties toward their parents, parents in turn have duties toward their children; and this injunction is addressed to the father as head of the household. **Provoke not.** By unreasonable requirements, by undue severity, by fault-finding and temper: sins which are too common with fathers. **Bring them up.** The word in the original has a kindly meaning, "nourish them." **In the nur-**

**ture and admonition.** One word in the original means general training, or the bringing up of a child; the other means, "training by word." **Of the Lord.** It is not the parent's will which should be made the law of the family, but the will of the Lord, who stands above the parent. (5) *Children trained for the Lord are well trained.*

**5. Servants.** The word means "bond-servants," or slaves, as these were very numerous in the Roman Empire, and were among the earliest members of the Christian Church. **Be obedient.** The Gospel was not intended to be revolutionary, breaking up existing relations, though its influence insensibly wrought at a great social revolution, and finally made slavery impossible. **Your masters according to the flesh.** That is, those to whom they found themselves outwardly subject, though in spirit they were bondsmen to Christ alone; as Paul in many epistles called himself "the slave of Christ." **With fear and trembling.** Not the fear of terror, but an anxiety to do their duty. **Singleness of heart.** With no pretense of faithfulness, but with honest, sincere fidelity. **As unto Christ.** Fulfilling even the humblest tasks for their masters with the same conscientiousness as they would show if performing a service for the Lord Jesus himself. (6) *Let each one look on his task as one allotted to him by his heavenly Master.*

**6. Not with eye-service.** Work performed only while under the eye of the master; whether that of a scholar at school, a clerk in a store, or a child at home. **But as the servants of Christ.** Serving their earthly masters with the fidelity that marks those who are true servants of Christ. **Doing the will of God.** Carrying into every act the aspiration that we do God's will in the minutest matters of life, an aim which will make even the most limited sphere beautiful. **From the heart.** Not rendering an unwilling and unhappy service, but a hearty, loyal endeavor to do one's best.

**7. With good will doing service.** With the same regard for the true interest of the master and employer

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