

Broomfield



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Children: Blessing or Curse?

The Christian Family, Part 3

Psalm 127:3-5, “Lo, children are an heritage of the LORD: and the fruit of the womb is his reward. As arrows are in the hand of a mighty man; so are children of the youth. Happy is the man that hath his quiver full of them: they shall not be ashamed, but they shall speak with the enemies in the gate.”

Passages like this one has lead many to the conclusion that children, in and of themselves, are a blessing. However, this conclusion is wrong. When we look at God's word we discover that the testimony of Scripture is not that children are a blessing, but that they can be a blessing.

Proverbs 10:1a, “A wise son maketh a glad father.”

Proverbs 23:24, “The father of the righteous shall greatly rejoice: and he that begetteth a wise child shall have joy of him.”

And yet, there are many passages of Scripture that testify to the very opposite; children can also be a curse!

Proverbs 10:1b, “But a foolish son is the heaviness of his mother.”

Proverbs 17:21, “He that begetteth a fool doeth it to his sorrow: and the father of a fool hath no joy.”

Proverbs 29:15, “The rod and reproof give wisdom: **but a child left to himself bringeth his mother to shame.**”

Now, all of this — the potential that children have to their parents of either being a blessing or a curse — is but one perspective. There is a flip-side. To rear our children according to God's plan is not only to enjoy the “blessing” of children, but also to SOW A BLESSING in the lives of our children! That is the point of Ephesians 6.

Ephesians 6:1-2, “Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right. Honour thy father and mother; (which is the first commandment with promise.)”

Notice the last phrase in verse two: “which is the first commandment with promise.”

What a glorious truth! If a child obeys and honors his parent he will receive a promised benefit! And yet there seems to be a problem in what Paul says here, the Fifth Commandment: “Honor thy father and mother” is not the first commandment with a promise, the Second Commandment is Exodus 20:4-5.

Exodus 20:4-5, “Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me. And shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments. “

Now this appears to be a problem because Paul says that the Fifth Commandment is the “first commandment with a promise.”

Is Paul wrong? Or what does he mean by this?

The answer is found in understanding what Paul wrote in Ephesians 6. Paul's words here could be better translated this way, “which is a commandment of extraordinary significance having this promise.” In other words Paul is not saying that the commandment for children to honor their father and mother is the first commandment given with a promise but rather that if a child honors and obeys his parents he will receive an incredible blessing.

What is this blessing?

What are the blessings that flow from Biblical parenting?

Paul gives us the two-fold answer in verse 3. Notice that the first of these is a qualitative blessing.

Ephesians 6:3, “**That it may be well¹ with thee**, and thou mayest live long on the earth.”

This promise originally was given to the people of God at Sinai.² This promise given to a people about to enter the Promised Land³ involved many tangible, physical, and earthly blessings such as safety, health, good harvests, and freedom from oppression.

Now notice, the manner with which Paul references this commandment in our text. He shows us that the promise of Deuteronomy 5 also extends to believers today! In Deuteronomy 5 Moses qualified this promise.

Deuteronomy 5:16, “Honour thy father and thy mother, as the LORD thy God hath commanded thee; that thy days may be prolonged, and that it may go well with thee, in the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee.”

¹ ευ eu

² Compare Exodus 20:12

³ Compare Deuteronomy 5:16

Yet through inspiration, Paul has clarified what God meant thus extending the promise to ALL redeemed children today!

Ephesians 6:3, “That it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth.”

What then does this mean for our children and our parenting? The answer is derived from Paul's wording.

The word *well* refers to that which is good or noble. Now in the context of the Pauline corpus *well* has a specific connotation. Throughout Paul's writings — and even in this epistle — the Old Testament promises regarding prosperity and land are seen as fulfilled ultimately in the salvation provided in Christ.⁴ From this perspective, *well* has a soteriological element to it. It references that which makes a man's salvation complete or whole! For example in 1 Timothy 4:7b-8 Paul in writing to Timothy exhorts this:

“Exercise thyself rather unto godliness. For bodily exercise profiteth little: but godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come.”

Godliness holds promise for the present life and using the words of Ephesians 6:3, godliness makes us *well* in this present life.

In 1 Timothy 5:6, Paul references the state of a believer in a rather peculiar way, “But she who gives herself to wanton pleasure is dead even while she lives.” When a Christian devotes themselves to earthly things they “dead even while they live.” Or in the words of our text, they are not “well.”

In 1 Timothy 6:19 Paul talks of God's people this way: “[taking] hold of that which is life indeed.” In this age, it is possible to be redeemed by the Cross of Christ and yet still lack!

What is it the believers lack? They lack the temporal benefits of salvation. David prayed that God would restore these benefits.

Psalm 51:12, “**Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation;** and uphold me with thy free spirit.”

God's people suffered spiritual emaciation.

Psalm 106:15, “And he gave them their request; **but sent leanness into their soul.**”

Paul describes the believers in Corinth as suffering from a stunted faith.

1 Corinthians 3:1-3, “And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ. I have fed you with milk, and not with meat: for hitherto ye were not able to bear it, neither yet now are ye able. For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men?”

In this context, *well* is a description of spiritual health or well-being. *Well* describes one who appropriates the benefits that flow from Christ. And thus, we can conclude that where parents raise their children in the Lord to honor and obey, Christ promises a rich, God-given satisfaction when it comes to the child's relationship with God. In other words, the state of our children will be *well*. Our children will know no want in their walk with God! WHAT AN INCREDIBLE BLESSING!

⁴ Compare Galatians 3 and 4; Romans 4 and 8; and Ephesians 1:14; 3:66

In light of this truth it is tempting to say or think, “Come on, you mean just because my children honor and obey me their spiritual state will be well? ISN'T THIS A LITTLE SIMPLISTIC?”

One must remember that parental authority is an “office’ in the family ordained by God.⁵ It is through the parents that God leads His children. So when a child “honors” his father and mother, they honor God. And when a child rebels against their parents, they rebel against the Lord!

Leviticus 19:1-3, “And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto all the congregation of the children of Israel, and say unto them, Ye shall be holy: for I the LORD your God am holy. Ye shall fear every man his mother, and his father, and keep my sabbaths: I am the LORD your God.”

Parental authority is not inherent, but derived! It is not legislative but declarative! It is not monarchical, but representative! And thus, the honoring of a parent goes hand-in-hand with honoring God on account of the divinely delegated authority that parents hold in a family.

Think of it this way: How would you estimate the state of Christian's soul who willingly and flagrantly lived in sin? What would you say about a Christian who said, “I don't care what God says; I'm going to do my own thing?”

If they truly were children of God you would probably say this, “It isn't well with that man's soul! God is going to humble them greatly!”

Now parents, you must see that when your children dishonor or disobey you, they are no different than the Christian we just described-. The seeds of rebellion are growing in your children now. And thus, to overlook a child's rebellion (whether in their conduct or attitude) is to set them up for great grief later on!

To rear our children to honor and obey us is to train them to be sensitive to the Lord and His authority and right to be honored and obeyed. It is to teach them reverence and fear of the Lord. Teaching them this way is to allow the Lord to use you as a conduit for blessing your children. This gives the parents and the children God-given satisfaction when it comes to our children’s relationship with God. Bless them such that they know no want in their walk with God!

WHAT AN INCREDIBLE BLESSING! And yet, it doesn't stop here...

A Quantitative Blessing

Ephesians 6:3, “That it may be well with thee, **and thou mayest live long⁶ on the earth.**”

Again, this has direct reference to living long in the Promised Land. In fact Deuteronomy 5:16 reads accordingly.

Deuteronomy 5:16, “Honour thy father and thy mother, as the LORD thy God hath commanded thee; that thy days may be prolonged, and that it may go well with thee, **in the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee.**”

And yet as we have seen, by divine inspiration Paul lifts this promise out of its theocratic context and

⁵ Compare Romans 13:1-2

⁶ μακροχρονιος makrochronios

places it in the general context of life. The child who honors and obeys his parents has the promise of a full life on the earth!

Now, this verse has caused many a commentator to back-pedal or spiritualize this text to avoid dealing with the obvious difficulty. Is Paul talking about a long life on the earth? Experience shows that many a disobedient child prospers and becomes very old, while many an obedient child dies at a young age.

How can this verse make such a promise?

The answer really is quite simple. In view of the teaching of the rest of Scripture we conclude that by “living long on the earth,” Paul is saying that for the child who honors and obeys, his lifetime will be the full measure that God intended rather than being cut short. Or conversely, to the child who is not disciplined to honor or obey, the number of days allotted to him by God may be cut short!

Proverbs 10:27, “The fear of the LORD prolongeth days: but the years of the wicked shall be shortened.”

Psalm 55:23, “But thou, O God, shalt bring them down into the pit of destruction: **bloody and deceitful men shall not live out half their days**; but I will trust in thee.”

God has allotted to every man a certain number of days. (For some it is 100 years, for others it is but a few.) It is possible to shorten even these days through rebellion. And that leads to the second blessing that results from Biblical parenting: The preservation of the days allotted to our children by the Lord.

You say, “How does this fit in view of the Doctrine of God's Eternal Decree?”

Recall, that before the world began, God planned everything that would occur — including the length of a man's days. And thus we read these words:

Hebrews 9:27, “And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment.”

According to God's predetermined plan, our days are set/numbered!

Psalm 139:16, “Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being unperfect; and in thy book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them.”

So God has ordained the number of our days. Yet how does this fit with the many passages which speak about “shortening” our days?

While God has planned all things — including the number of days a person will live — He also rules by precept which involves blessings and curses and the element of secondary causes — the fact that what we do does effect what happens to us! For example if we do not ask, we will not receive.⁷ If the righteous do not pray, things will not take place.⁸ If a person is called to marriage and yet declines, he will continue to “burn” in the words of Paul.⁹

⁷ Compare Matthew 7:5-6, and James 4:2-3

⁸ Compare James 5:16

⁹ Compare Genesis 2:18 and 1 Corinthians 7:9

In Acts 27 we read about Paul being transported by ship to Rome to stand trial for treason against Caesar. During the voyage, a fierce storm arose and beat the ship for over fourteen days. After about a week, Paul stood up and encouraged the men of the ship with these words:

Acts 27:21-26, “But after long abstinence Paul stood forth in the midst of them, and said, Sirs, ye should have hearkened unto me, and not have loosed from Crete, and to have gained this harm and loss. And now I exhort you to be of good cheer: for there shall be no loss of any man’s life among you, but of the ship. For there stood by me this night the angel of God, whose I am, and whom I serve, Saying, Fear not, Paul; thou must be brought before Caesar: and, lo, God hath given thee all them that sail with thee. Wherefore, sirs, be of good cheer: for I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me. Howbeit we must be cast upon a certain island.”

Now after about another week, it was discovered that the ship was nearing land. Fearing that the ship would strike rock, the sailors began lowering the “life rafts” to abandon ship. Now notice what Paul says:

Acts 27:31, “Paul said to the centurion and to the soldiers, Except these abide in the ship, ye cannot be saved.”

Now wait a minute! I thought God informed Paul that according to divine decree, no man on board would die! Yet here Paul says “Unless these men remain in the ship, you yourselves cannot be saved.”

Which way is it? Will the men die? Or will the men live? Has God appointed the time of their death to be now or later?

From this account we observe two seemingly contradictory doctrines: The doctrine of God's eternal decree which determined that no one on the ship would die and the doctrine of secondary causes which says that God works His will through the choices of men — and the consequences of their choices.

While God had determined before the world began to save all the men on board the ship we also note that IF the men left the ship they would have died EVEN THOUGH GOD HAD GONE ON RECORD TO SAY THAT HE HAD ORDAINED OTHERWISE!

You say, “This doesn't make sense! How can this be?”

The Response? AMEN! Yet this should not bother us. For if we could understand the Lord in His entirety — if we could plunge the depths of His wisdom, ascend the heights of His love, grasp His holiness, and understand His eternal, infinite, and unchangeable nature GOD WOULD NOT BE OUR GOD BUT OUR CONTEMPORARY! And so there will be mystery when it comes to the finite seeking to understand the Infinite and the creature trying to comprehend the Creator! Yet our task remains always the same: To speak where God has spoken, and to remain silent where He has remained silent

And so this morning we must speak and accept the plain teaching of this text. When a parent raises their child to honor and obey, as difficult as it may be to comprehend in light of God's Sovereignty, they insure a physical blessing for their child. The child’s lifetime will be the full measure that God intended — whether one year or a hundred years. His days will be full, rather than being cut short like that of Ananias and Sapphira.¹⁰ Or that of certain members of the church at Corinth.¹¹ Or that of the foolish of

¹⁰ Compare Acts 5:5-10

¹¹ Compare 1 Corinthians 11:30

the Proverbs¹² and the Psalms.¹³

This is the second blessing of Biblical parenting. Our children will experience the fullness of their days. This is why we read this:

Proverbs 13:24, “He that spareth his rod hateth his son: but he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes.”

Indeed, the parent who truly loves his children will discipline them, labor to cultivate in his child a heart of obedience and reverence for God! And will understand that his primary responsibility to his child is that of discipleship. Therefore endeavor to consistently apply the rod of reproof that he might save his soul from hell.

Don't ever forget that lying in the balance is NOT our reputations, convenience, or pleasure but the eternal soul of our children! Let us prove faithful to the command before us. Let us lovingly discipline our children for acts or attitudes of rebellion. Let us give our children a gift that will profit them in this life, and in the life to come!

And yet, it should be obvious that Paul knew that what was commanded here would be difficult.

As a parent- and having counseled many parents regarding child training- it is no surprise that most parents do not enjoy disciplining their children. Nor are they very good at it. When we should discipline them we don't. When we do discipline them, often times we do so incorrectly. In fact, we read a passage like Ephesians 6 and see our call to disciple our children unto their obedience and reverence, but fail to realize how essential this passage is to our children's soul.

We think that I may not be the best disciplinarian, but as long as I “love” them and cultivate a good relationship with them and give them what they want this surely will make up for any failure on my part when it comes to Ephesians 6. We tend to believe that this passage is an optional suggestion.

Ephesians 6:1-3, “Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right. Honour thy father and mother; (which is the first commandment with promise ;) That it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth.”

All the supposed “love” in the world will not help our child if we neglect the call of this passage to raise them to obey God cheerfully. In other words, what we have in this text is not a suggestion, but the essential elements to the health of our children's soul! Neglect this passage, and you will have neglected your child!

In light of all of this — knowing what lies in the balance, your child's soul — let us make effective and consistent parenting one of our highest priorities. Let us set a godly example and so strive ourselves to be a child of God who lives by grace, is spirit filled, and willingly and joyfully submitting to the will of the Lord.¹⁴

We have never heard a dying saint lament that He didn't spend more time on the golf course. Or that he

¹² Compare Proverbs 9:11, and 10:27

¹³ Compare Psalms 55:23

¹⁴ Compare Ephesians 5:14-21

didn't earn more money in his life. Or that he hadn't spent more time in the office. But you and I know of people who died regretting the condition of their household.

Let us live to know Christ and to make Christ known to our children. Let us live that in glory we might together serve the King!

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About the Preacher

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