

EXPOSITION OF EPHESIANS

Message #18

Ephesians 6:1-4

One of the greatest privileges in the entire world is the privilege of having a child. But a big problem we have right now is one in which parents and children are losing perspective of how things are to operate. They aren't getting much help from schools and sadly they aren't getting much help from homes. Since careful, systematic study of God's Word is being replaced by other things, many are not getting this truth from church. We are living in a world that promotes the rights of the child and at the same time promotes the non-directive rights of the parents.

We are in a context that deals with the family. Last time we saw that wives were to submit to husbands and husbands were to love their wives. Now we turn to the children.

GRACE AGE CHILDREN ARE TO DEMONSTRATE THEY ARE GRACE AGE CHILDREN BY THEIR ATTITUDES TOWARD THEIR PARENTS AND GRACE AGE FATHERS ARE TO DEMONSTRATE THEY ARE GRACE AGE FATHERS BY THEIR ATTITUDES TOWARD THEIR CHILDREN.

The emphasis now shifts from husband and wife to a home with children. There are two domestic contexts that are specifically developed.

**DOMESTIC CONTEXT #1 – Children are to have proper attitudes toward their parents.
6:1-3**

It is evident from the opening words here that Paul expected that children would be in church to hear the instruction given to them and they were old enough to understand it and he also expected that children would view this instruction as coming from God to them.

Attitude #1 - Children are to obey their parents. 6:1

The plural word "children" literally "the children" (τα τέκνα) speaks of a young child. The word covers both boys and girls. We may assume that the child is old enough to understand this command, which is they are to obey their parents. The actual word "parents" (γονεῦσιν) refers to the ones who generated or gave us life. Christian children, who are in the Lord, are to obey their parents because this is right.

The command to the children is that they are to "obey" their parents. Now the verb "obey" (ὑπακούω) means to carefully listen and give attention to and submit and obey your parents (G. Abbott-Smith, *Greek Lexicon*, p. 457). This is a very strong Greek verb. But, as Dr. Walter Liefeld said "The command to children is strong, but it is not harsh" (*Ephesians*, p. 151).

The idea behind the word "obey" is to carry out the orders or do what you are told to do (Harold Hoehner, *Ephesians*, p. 786).

Now you will notice that the obedience is to your parents “in the Lord.” This prepositional phrase “in the Lord” is not “in God.” To have a relationship with God, one must be in the Lord. Let’s face it; if the children in the first century world were in church to hear this, it stands to reason that the parents are believers in Jesus Christ. The assumption Paul makes is that children will be in church when this letter is read and they will realize when you obey your parents, you are obeying the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now the reason given for children obeying their parents is because it is right . The word “right” is a forensic term and it means that this is that which conforms to the righteous standards of God. The righteous thing for children to do is to obey their parents.

Some believe that children are born with a natural “right” inclination to obey their parents. It is a universal axiom that the right thing for children to do is obey their parents. This would mean that this is not simply a Christian ethic.

However the word “right” (δικαιος) is one used in Scripture to refer to that which is right and righteous according to God’s Word.

Even though this is the right thing to do in any culture, the fact is no unbeliever can please God so the believing child is the one in position to obey in accordance with the righteous standard of God.

It is revealed that in the last days of the Church Age, one of the things that will characterize the age will be a “disobedience to parents” (II Tim. 3:2). The child who will purpose to obey his or her parents will become an amazing grace reflecting light in a very dark world.

Attitude #2 - Children are to honor their parents. 6:2-3

John Calvin asked the question why did Paul start out with obedience first and not honor first? His answer was that obedience is the real evidence of honor (*Epistle to the Ephesians*, p. 327). However, it is possible to obey a parent and not honor a parent. Who of us have not inwardly rebelled a time or two against a parental mandate and said “I am only doing this because you are making me.” We may have obeyed, but we didn’t do it with honor. There is obedience without honor.

Children are to honor their father and mother. This theme is seen over and over again in Scripture. It is found in the famous Ten Commandments (Ex. 20:6; Deut. 5:10). Anyone who strikes or curses his or her father or mother was to be put to death (Ex. 21:15, 17). Anyone who dishonors his or her father or mother would be cursed by God (Deut. 27:16). Any stubborn or defiant or disobedient son or daughter was to be killed (Deut. 21:18-21). Mothers and fathers are to be honored and even revered (Lev. 19:3).

That word “honor” (τιμαω) means to honor something by esteeming it as highly valuable, costly and precious (*Ibid.*, p. 446). Children are to view their Christian parents as something of high value and precious. A child is to obey his parents and view them and their guidance as something precious and of high value.

Paul qualifies this by saying this is the first commandment that contains a promise and that promise is if you do honor your father and mother it will be well with you, and you will live a very long life on the earth.

Now one problem that has arisen concerning this statement is that in the listing of the commandments, this is not the first commandment and this does not appear to be the first one that carries a promise. For example, in the Exodus listing God commands Israel not to go into idolatry because He is a jealous God and will visit the iniquity of the fathers on the third and fourth generation of those who hate Him (Exodus 20:4-5). In commandment #3 God says do not take His name in vain because He will punish those who do (Ex. 20:7).

Various views have been presented to try to solve this:

- 1) This is the first of the Ten Commandments that deals with people relationships, not God relationships. The first five deal with relationships with God and the second with people. Problem is the Law is not really broken down this way.
- 2) This is the first commandment with a specific promise of long life and not a general promise. Problem is if all the others are general, then this is the only one, so the first makes no sense.
- 3) This is the first commandment children are to learn. Problem is it does not say it is the first that children are to learn.
- 4) This is the first and most important commandment. Problem is Jesus taught this wasn't the most important commandment—Mt. 22:36-40
- 5) This is the first commandment which is difficult to keep, so it has a promise with it. Problem is nothing in the context would even suggest this.

I believe the solution is seen right in the text and that is that this is the first commandment that has far reaching Grace Age, Church Age application. Now I want you to notice that the statement in Exodus 20:6 says to Israel you may live “long in the land ” and the statement to the Church is that “you may live long on the earth.” Clearly Paul is thinking Grace Age application here. We do not live in the Promised Land, we live on the earth. So this is the first commandment in which the promise of a long, productive life for honoring parents still holds true. This promise has universal application.

The Law shows us all that we are guilty. Every one of those Ten Commandments proves that. However, one of those commandments has amazing Grace Age ramifications and this is the first one that does. Those children who honor their fathers and mothers will tend to live a long productive life as a direct result of a blessing of God.

Charles Baker said “Disobedience to parents usually results in disobedience to civil law, which eventuates in crime, violence, imprisonment, and premature death” (*Understanding the Body of Christ*, p. 59).

Now the obedience to the parents is “in the Lord.” What I understand that to mean is if the parents asked the child to do something that was against God, the obedience is not demanded. In fact, Jesus said that there would be times when a commitment to Him would cause problems in the family relationship.

He said “I came to set a man against his father and a daughter against her mother and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law and a man’s enemies will be the members of his household” (Matt. 10:35-36).

Clearly, there are times when parents should be disobeyed; when they are trying to turn a child away from Jesus Christ and His Word and will. In that case, God will bless the disobedience, but in most cases God will bless obedience to parents.

One other point and that is how long is one considered to be a child? When are we no longer children? At what age is one no longer subject to this mandate? If one is out of the home is he free from the command? If a child is married is he exempt? If one is 25, 35, 45 or 55 is the restriction eliminated?

In the Roman world, a son was always a son as long as his father lived. It didn’t matter if he was 50 or 60; if the father was alive he was still responsible to his father. S. Lewis Johnson said there are some parts of Asia that still maintain this idea. Even though one may be 40-50 years old, if the parents are still living, he is still subject to the parents (*Ephesians 6:1-4*, p. 7).

In our sophisticated country when a child is 18 or 21, they pretty much can do what they want and the parents cannot say much about it. However, the child who will reflect grace will be one who will do his or her best to honor his/her mother and father.

DOMESTIC CONTEXT #2 – Fathers are to have proper attitudes toward their children .
6:4

We are living in a time when, because of broken homes, children are being raised in a matriarchal society and not a patriarchal society. God wants fathers actively involved with their children. Children need their dads.

One question that comes to mind is why is the father addressed here and not the mother? The answer is the subject matter. Obviously, one reason is that mothers don’t need this instruction as bad as fathers do. Most mothers do not struggle with the attitudes described here. I realize this is not always true, but it certainly generally speaking can be true.

Fathers, in ancient times, had extraordinary control over their children, especially as they got older. In the ancient world, mothers were very much involved in the education of the child until they reached what we would consider to be “school age.” Then the father would continue the education, which would include learning a skill or trade.

Fathers can be much more susceptible to harsh, severe anger than mothers. It was not uncommon for a father who didn’t get a son, to actually take his daughter out in the elements to dispose of her.

Attitude #1 - Fathers are commanded not to provoke their children to anger. **6:4a**

First of all, this verse is not saying that children do not need a strong and disciplined father at the helm of the home. The fact is, our present culture is falling apart and in many cases it is the mother who is forced to try to raise the children. So this admonition is not one against strong leadership.

The word “provoke” (παρογιζω) means to irritate and stimulate and provoke one to anger (p. 346). The verb is present tense, which means continual action. So the command to the father is not to continually irritate and stimulate the children to the point in which you are always making them angry. Paul said in Colossians that fathers should not cause their children to “lose heart” (Col. 3:21). John Calvin said treat your children in a kind and liberal way and “let them be fondly cherished” (*Ibid.*, pp. 328-329). William Hendricksen said: “Rear them tenderly.”

I was deeply moved by the words of Dr. S. Lewis Johnson on this point and cannot do better. This admonition exhorts fathers not to make “irritating and unreasonable demands on your children.” “Allow for their inexperience and immaturity. Don’t be harsh with them. Don’t exercise favoritism. ... Don’t ridicule them. Don’t have arbitrary discipline—that’s the kind of discipline that exasperates. Give encouragement. Remember, they are little people and they should have the same consideration that people have... you are the custodian of these lives of the future” (*Ibid.*, p. 8).

Attitude #2 - Fathers are to bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. **6:4b**

Notice the conjunction “but” that starts the clause. In contrast to a father provoking his children to anger, he needs to bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

Now the verb “bring them up” (εκτρέφω) means to nurture them and nourish them. The sphere is in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. Now the word “discipline” is a word that emphasizes training and learning instruction that is disciplined (p. 333). The word “instruction” refers to exhortation and admonishment (p. 305).

So Paul is saying that fathers need to continually see to it that their children are exhorted and admonished in learning things about God and His Word. It is an education that points one to the Lord. This is not just Christian versus non-Christian education; this is education that points one to a personal relationship with the Lord.

How can a father do this? 1) Read the Bible to your children; 2) Pray for and with your children; 3) Be an example and take them to church; 4) Be open and honest and let them see what Jesus Christ is doing in your life.

I want to speak to those of us who are fathers tonight. We have a big job and probably in some ways there isn't a man here who in some way thinks he has failed as a father. I know I do. But having said this, we must not ever surrender our fatherly responsibility to our children. We must never surrender our fatherly responsibility to a school. We must never surrender our fatherly responsibility to a church.

For those of us who are fathers and know the Lord, we must do our best to love our children, nurture our children and point them in the ways of God. We fathers who know the Lord need to emulate this grace ideal to our children.

May God help us all as men and women and children to reflect the fact that we are His beloved Grace Age family.