

Scripture Reading: Ephesians 1

“1 Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, To the saints who are in Ephesus, & faithful in Christ Jesus: 2 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, 4 just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, 5 having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, 6 to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us accepted in the Beloved.”

6:1 “Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. 2 “Honor your father and mother,” which is the first commandment with promise: 3 “that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth.” 4 And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord.”

“Importance of Children & Parents”

As we move on into chapter six,

Lord willing this morning we will consider three important lessons:

- The position of our children
- The responsibility of our children
- The responsibility of the parents

As we do so, we will continue to remember the two overriding principles we have kept in mind as the Apostle teaches us to walk as children of the Light.

First as we have moved through men & women, marriage & the Church, and now parents & children we have kept in mind the Apostle’s command that we are to always be “submitting to one another in the fear of God.”

- We are to see the glory of these relationships as they relate to God’s Nature and the work of Jesus, and yes, that is the only way we can be the light we are called to be in a dark world.

And second, we can have no real discussion of men & women or children and parents if we do not know, understand and believe what God reveals to us about their origin: There in Genesis we have man and woman, male and female, called to be married and fruitful!

- ALL made in the image of God, so we begin to understand the importance of submitting one to another no matter what are various stations or duties might be in life!
- And of course we have not overlooked the Fall of man in Genesis 3, knowing that Adam’s rebellion brought a curse on God’s good creation, which is why we need ALL these instructions in the first place!

Thus, we are all born as those made in the image of God, able to reflect His glory and in Christ be light to the world. But also born in the image of Adam, fallen creatures in need of God’s mercy and salvation!

With all that in mind the Apostle goes on to teach us about children and parents with three important lessons in just four short verses where we will learn:

- The position of our children
- The responsibility of our children
- The responsibility of the parents

The first lesson is one that can easily be overlooked which is why I returned to how the Apostle opened this important Epistle. Paul is writing to the Church at Ephesus and opens with these words: “To the saints who are in Ephesus, & faithful in Christ Jesus:

2 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”

The Church at Ephesus that Paul writes to is a part of the Body of Christ, that glorious Bride we studied last week! And yes, that is also how as any other local visible Church should be seen, assuming they have what are considered the marks of a True Church:

- The preaching of the Word.
- Administration of the Sacraments.
- And exercising Church discipline.

No local church is a perfect church as we can clearly see in the New Testament when you consider the problems at Galatia and Corinth, as well as several of the churches addressed in Revelation.

And yet we should not fear to address local churches just as the Apostle Paul does in all of his Epistles.

- So with that introduction, we should ask who is Paul addressing?

Some would argue that He means to speak to only those who are truly converted. The problem with that is just how would we know that? Should we not call Judas a disciple of Jesus because he was not faithful in the end? Now we have to rightly assume that the Apostle is addressing everyone in the local church at Ephesus and that is where we have our lesson about the position of our children: Here in chapters five and six, Paul begins to address specific groups at Ephesus, and yes he includes the children.

As we move into our second lesson we must first see that the Apostle is now addressing the children in the Church directly: He does not stress that parents must teach their children to obey, rather he says “Children obey your parents!”

As we often stress, it reminds us that our primary obligation to the children God blesses us with as parents, and as a congregation, is for their discipleship and not merely evangelism. We are raising Saints in the fear and admonition of the Lord, not just trying to get them saved with a point-in-time conversion.

This is why we baptize our children and bring them to the Table with the other members of the visible Church AND why our 2nd lesson is so important for them!

- Now we can ask, what is the responsibility of our children?

Speaking to them directly, the Apostle Paul says, “Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. 2 “Honor your father and mother,” which is the first commandment with promise 3 “that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth.”

- Paul speaks of obedience and honor as well as a command and a promise.

Note again that because the Apostle is addressing our children as Saints, he can say they are to obey their parents in the Lord.

We had some fun in past weeks at the world’s expense speaking about how they cannot even be sure about whether one is a boy or a girl. We face some similar craziness when it comes to obedience:

- The Apostle says it is right and our world today says it is oppressive.

To much of the world, having children obey their parents is a small step above slavery where you would in the end crush their individuality and creativity.

To me it is a very sad sight to see a modern woman in the mall bending down to a two or three year old trying to explain to them why running away or speaking badly to mom is not good behavior and how they should work together to make better choices in the future.

- Paul say that obedience is right because it is not only good for the character building of the child but for society as well, just as we saw with marriage last week!

Perhaps the best example here again is that three year old throwing a temper tantrum in public with no consequences, who you just know will not much later in life become the delinquent who always wants his or her way.

Now I am going to turn to the responsibility of parents in our final lesson where I will remind them about how they are to train you to be obedient, but all of you children must remember that the Apostle Paul is speaking directly to you when he says, obey your parents in the Lord! And obedience should be right away, all the way and with a smile! [mention the garbage can example]

But we should also notice that Paul brings in the 5th Commandment and speaks of honoring our parents. Now even the youngest of our children can honor their parents with simple obedience, but we must also remember that this command has no end point in our lives.

There will come a time as our children grow where their obedience to parents properly transitions to obedience to God: Mom will not always tell you what you must wear and eat, and this is an important transition because Lord willing you will one day have your own home & family and the various relationships they will deal with in their adult lives!

However, there never comes a day when you no longer have an obligation to honor your parents. Yes, even fallen parents who have not been the best of parents.

- Notice that you are to show such honor not just for their benefit but for your own because that command carries a specific promise! Showing such honor goes on even after their deaths. [mention my parents]

So now, let me turn to our parents and our final lesson from the Apostle:

- The responsibility of parents!

We should first note that when the Apostle says in verse 4: “And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord.”

- Paul is NOT giving moms a pass!

As we will see as we sing Psalms 127 & 128 as our hymn of response to this message, having Godly homes is a family affair! Mothers are also called to bring their children up in the training and admonition of the Lord, and they can also provoke them to anger.

- I suspect that Apostle focuses on the Fathers, because we can too easily put all that training stuff off on mom and sadly we are often much better at provoking our children.

So Dads, how are we doing on those two fronts? Have you provoked any of your children to anger lately? IF you think you are doing OK because they have not been angry with you, remember that such anger could be aimed at others or manifest as a simple temper tantrum.

So here are two pretty simple rules to live by if you want to win the respect of your children as you raise them in the Lord:

- You CANNOT properly discipline your children and teach them obedience if you have no discipline in your life! [let me repeat that]

- For example, how can you expect them to honor you as a parent if they see you disrespecting your mother or father, or even their mother?
- Can you expect them to take seriously their training & studies, if they cannot remember the last time they saw you with a Bible in your hand or reading a serious book?

The second simple rule is to be what I would call a predictable parent! There is nothing that will provoke a child to anger more quickly than not knowing what is expected:

If dad is strict one day and Laissez faire the next it simply drives them to anger. This is why it is absolutely necessary to have both mom & dad on the same page when it comes to training & discipline.

We must remember that our blessed covenant children are still fallen creatures and thus they will exploit whatever divisions and/or weaknesses they find in your parenting styles or methods.

- If mom is not strict and dad is tough, who do you think they will go to to get what they want?

No two homes will be the same when it comes to how they handle schedules, discipline, education and the training of their children, but we are all obligated to follow the wisdom given to us in the Scriptures and to be united and consistent.

Here again I think we can and should look to Jesus as our example for both parent and child. If you children question the need or wisdom of obedience you have the example of Jesus: We are not told a lot about the childhood of the Son of God, but notice the precious truth we are given by Dr. Luke after Jesus visits the teachers at the Temple in Jerusalem: Luke 2:51 “Then [Jesus] went down with [His parents] and came to Nazareth, and was subject to them, but His mother kept all these things in her heart. 52 And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.”

- Yes, the Incarnate Son of God, Who laid aside His glory to be our Savior provides the example for all our children!

And parents have Him as their example both with how Jesus treated children and how He trained and nurtured His chosen disciples.

Jesus received and blessed children many times in His ministry and sadly His disciples often wanted to turn them away because there was more important work to be done, which I will also address at the Table this morning.

- There certainly was LOTS of other work for Jesus to do, and yet He gives us the example of remembering and taking time for the children.
- This can be especially important for Dads because they often have so many obligations that can take them away from the responsibility they have for the care of their children.

And I would encourage both Dads and Moms, and even better if together, to take a journey through the four Gospel accounts with this in mind: Focus on how Jesus treated and trained his disciples.

See how He loved them, how he instructed them, how patient He was with them but also how strict He could be at times.

- And yes, please notice how often it was over meals and how He understood the power of stories or parables to teach great truths.

When we first entered these instructions I mentioned how we all move through life, going from childhood to adulthood and then old age [and yes we must reject the world’s concept of adolescence, which now often stretches into their 30’s]

Both children and parents should see the changes that take place and the older folks are there to assist.

- **A child goes from utter dependence and obedience to adulthood in just a few short years and both parent and child must understand the importance of that early training when it comes to living as mature Christians.**

King David reminds us about how important this is in Psalm 32 where he recounts the Lord saying: “I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will guide you with My eye. 9 Do not be like the horse or like the mule, Which have no understanding, Which must be harnessed with bit and bridle, Else they will not come near you. 10 Many sorrows shall be to the wicked; But he who trusts in Jehovah, mercy shall surround him. 11 Be glad in Jehovah and rejoice, you righteous; And shout for joy, all you upright in heart!”

Proper nurture & discipleship can bring obedience at a young age, where mom or dad can come to guide them with a simple command or even with their eyes! That stands in stark contrast with parents who yell and scream or use various punishments to achieve their goal.

Where do we learn those proper ways? The Book of Proverbs of course!

Children raised in this Godly manner will become mature adults who can rejoice and shout for joy as Jesus guides them with His eye rather than leading them around with a bit & bridle [which He will do if necessary!] As the writer of Hebrews reminds us, “Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.” [Hebrews 12:11]

Thus, in those short four verses we have found three important lessons that we can all spend a life time learning...

- **The position of our children**
- **The responsibility of our children**
- **The responsibility of the parents**

Each could have been a series of sermons unto themselves, but I wanted to lay them out together and encourage all of us to be good stewards of the Word of God as we mature and grow in the faith.

We must also remember the importance that God places on the discipling of our children as demonstrated by Psalm 78:

“Give ear, O my people, to my law; Incline your ears to the words of my mouth. 2 I will open my mouth in a parable; I will utter dark sayings of old, 3 Which we have heard and known, And our fathers have told us. 4 We will not hide them from their children, Telling to the generation to come the praises of Jehovah, And His strength and His wonderful works that He has done. [those mysteries we discussed last week]

5 For He established a testimony in Jacob, And appointed a law in Israel, Which He commanded our fathers, That they should make them known to their children; 6 That the generation to come might know them, The children who would be born, That they may arise and declare them to their children, 7 That they may set their hope in God, And not forget the works of God, But keep His commandments!”

Communion Meditation: Luke 18

“13 And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me a sinner!’ 14 I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be [d]humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.” 15 Then they also brought infants to Him that He might touch them; but when the disciples saw it, they rebuked them. 16 But Jesus called them to Him and said, “Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of God. 17 Assuredly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will by no means enter it.””