

The Book of Ephesians

Ephesians 6:1-4

Session 55: Obligations of Children and Parents

I want to say a word here at the outset for anyone who is listening to this and thinking that there isn't much here for you either because you are not married, or because you do not have children, or because your children are grown.

First of all, saints who have made the cry of "Abba, Father," should always be interested in doctrinal truth. These verses may not directly apply to you, but perhaps you know people who are married or who have children. Is it not within reason that if you know the doctrine, you might be able to help someone else when they encounter trouble?

Ephesians 6:1 Children, obey your parents in the Lord: **for this is right.**

Paul says that children obey their parents because it is the right thing to do. What does that mean? It means that obedience to parents is the right thing to do for every family, not just Christian families. In other words, it isn't just the godly thing to do, but it is the right thing for everyone to do.

When Paul says for children to "obey your parents...for this is right," he is saying that for children to obey parents is right, in and of itself. In other words, God has ordained that all children obey their parents, whether they are saved or not. God means for every family unit to be preserved because without family, there is no civilization. But for Christian families, Paul means for them to understand that this is part of their godly labor. But, no matter if the family is saved or lost, obeying parents is always the right thing to do.

Children being under the protection and authority of their parents is part of the order of nature and it has been that way from the beginning. Parental authority is a basic rule of life for even the animal world, but especially for the human world, as the human family is meant to be a picture of God's family.

By instructing children to obey their parents in the "godly labor" section of the book of Ephesians, Paul is saying that young people can have a tremendous affect

on the unity of the family. If you are a teenager, you can labor with God by obeying your parents. By being obedient, you are preserving the family unit, which is the foundation for the society in which you live. Satan, of course, is the author of rebellion against authority, so you should be aware of any thoughts which are tempting you to disobey.

Ephesians 6:1 Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right.

² **Honour thy father and mother;** (which is the first commandment with promise;)

In verse 1, we have the commandment to obey our parents. This applies to children who are living in the home who are not considered to be independent adults.

Verse 2 is instructions for how we are to treat our parents no matter how old we are; we honor our father and mother. And we should do this, not just because we love our father and mother, but because we understand that by doing so, we are laboring with God in the divine institution of family. The fact that this is an opportunity to labor with our heavenly Father ought to mean something to us.

The reason that saved children obey, the reason that saved teenagers obey, is not because they like the rules, but because they love God and they desire to do His will.

When a teenager, 1) understands that his personal rebellion against his parents is actually damaging a divine institution, when 2) he understands that by disobedience he is going down a path which Satan has charted, when 3) he understands that how he responds to his parent's authority in his family will greatly impact his future family, when 4) he understands just how critically important the family unit is to the nation as a whole, and 5) when he understands how necessary the family unit is to what God desires to do in the world, then he will gladly labor with God by his obedience to his parents. But, until he understands these things, he will not possess the godly thinking necessary to labor with his heavenly Father.

It is therefore the job of the parents to instill within the children a knowledge of the divine institutions and how necessary they are to the whole world, saved or lost. It is the job of the parents to educate their children concerning Satan's tactics in rebellion, disobedience, delayed or partial obedience.

Parents should inform their children that the things we do now will have an impact on us down the road. The law of sowing and reaping is true in every dispensation. Parents should demonstrate that personal righteousness has an effect on the nation, even though it is hard to perceive in the overall nation or in a short period of time. And lastly, a concern for God's will to be accomplished should be installed in the mind of the children from an early age.

All of these set the stage for a family unit which is able to preserve its community, and impact the nation.

Ephesians 6:1 Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right.

² **Honour 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.

While obedience is the requirement for those children which are not yet independent adults, honoring our father and mother is something we never outgrow. It is the duty of every saint to honor their father and mother, no matter if the parents are saved or not.

Honor thy father and mother is the fifth commandment, and when God gave it, it was nothing new. God's commands to, not kill, not bear false witness, not steal, and not commit adultery were already understood by the world to be wrong actions before the Law of Moses was given. What I am getting at is that God could have said, "thou shalt not kill, because killing someone is wrong," or "thou shalt not steal, because stealing is wrong." The world at large understood these things from the beginning.

What does it mean to "honor" our parents? In a nutshell, it means to show great respect, esteem and reverence for them. And how is this done? It is done by honoring them in thought, word, and gesture. They are to be highly thought of

and esteemed. They are to be spoken to, and of, with great veneration and to be behaved toward, in a very respectful manner. They are to be relieved, assisted, and maintained in a comfortable way when aged, and in circumstances of necessity.

Jesus recalls this commandment in Matthew 15.

Matthew 15:3 But he answered and said unto them, Why do ye also transgress the commandment of God by your tradition? ⁴ For God commanded, saying, Honour thy father and mother: and, He that curseth father or mother, let him die the death.

To *honor* is to speak kindly to, to speak and think well of. To *curse* is to disobey, to treat with irreverence, *to swear at*, to speak ill of, to think evil of in the heart, to meditate or do *any* evil to a parent.

So what is Jesus referring to when He says, “let him die the death?” This is a Hebrew phrase, the same as saying, *let him surely die*. The Jewish law punishes the crime of cursing parents, with death.

Ephesians 6:2 Honour 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.**

All my life I have heard preachers preach that the promise is that if you honor your father and mother, you will live a long life on the earth. The teaching essentially says, if you honor your parents, God will supernaturally protect you so that you live a long, prosperous (it may be well with you) life.

There are at least two things wrong with this understanding. Firstly, not everyone who honored their parents lived to a ripe old age. Secondly, God is not miraculously intervening to extend your life span or to give you a certain quality of life. So, I think this verse has been largely misinterpreted.

So, what does Paul mean when he talks about the promise? Again, there are two things to look at: 1) this is not a promise as a statement of fact; “if you honor your

parents it will be well with you (whatever you think that means) and you will live a long life.” The verse doesn’t say “will,” it says “may” and “mayest.”

This brings us to the next issue, 2) this promise is not a result of God’s supernatural intervention, but the obvious protective results of obedience and honoring parents. This second issue has two subparts: 1) there is a natural protection and provision offered to children who obey (in their younger years) and honor (the whole life) their parents, and 2) there is a natural benefit that comes from preserving the divine institution of family, because if the family crumbles, the whole of society sinks into destruction and chaos.

Let me use a couple of examples to illustrate my meaning. How does obeying parents or honoring parents serve to lengthen the life of their children? A mom is coming out of the grocery store with her child. As they walk across the parking lot, what does she say? Don’t run ahead, you might get run over by a car, hold my hand and let’s walk together.

Here is another one, when a parent says not to allow yourself to indulge in addictive behaviors which can destroy your life. But a young man who is living out on his own decides to drink too much and drive. If he had honored his parents by listening to them, it “may be well with him, and he may live a longer life.” In 2023, do you realize that there were 95,000 alcohol-related deaths in the U.S.? That averages 260 a day and 11 an hour. How about drug overdoses in 2023? There were 105,007 deaths, of which about 1/3 were female.

Parents not only give us life, but they help preserve our life. It is the job of parents to provide for children and protect children in the physical realm. Also in the spiritual realm, it is the job of parents to protect their children from sin.

Ephesians 6:4 And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

Verse 4. *And, ye fathers* is a command addressed particularly to *fathers* because they are at the head of the family; but that does not excuse mothers from the instruction. Paul is teaching parents that their reasonable and proper commands should be easily obeyed.

But I think there is something else here besides that. The relationship between parents and children is meant to be a picture of our relationship with God as He is our Father, and we are His sons and daughters. A good parent/child relationship paves the way for a good relationship with God.

If children are required to obey, it is reasonable that the child shall not be discouraged in his attempt to obey. It is the duty of children to obey a parent; but it is the duty of a parent to exhibit such a character which requires obedience to commands which are reasonable and proper.

How can parents provoke their children to wrath? This can be done by the words they speak, such as: by unreasonable commands, by inappropriate language which is dismissive or a reproachful, by public chidings, or by indiscreet expressions of anger.

Another way to provoke children to anger is by deeds such as: preferring one child above another, by denying them the necessities of life; by not allowing proper recreation, by severe and cruel treatment, by excessive and inappropriate physical punishments.

Yes, parents are the God-given authorities in the home. Even so, they are accountable to God for their conduct. Yes, parents ought to correct their children when needed, but care should be taken not to provoke them to wrath.

Just as an aside, there are three great gifts that parents can give their children. When parents have a great, intimate relationship with God, and a commitment to God's word working in them, that is a gift beyond compare.

The next gift is the gift of a great marriage. When parents love each other and give themselves to each other unreservedly, that provides the kind of security every child needs as they are growing up. I cannot overestimate the value of children seeing in their own parents, the model for how marriage is supposed to be.

The third gift is for parents to love their kids unconditionally and demonstrate it by all they say and do toward their children. Let me say it this way, when children know their parents love them desperately; when they see that honesty of heart in their parents, it will be difficult to provoke these children to wrath.

When children know the Lord and see Him at work in their own family; when children rest in the security of their parents love for each other; and when children live in the light of their parent's love for them, these parents are well on their way to obeying verse 4. And guess what? As parents deal with their children with godly wisdom, they are laboring with God in their family, right along with the children who obey and honor their parents.

When the commands of a parent are unreasonable and severe, the spirit of a child becomes irritated, and he is "discouraged."

Colossians 3:21 Fathers, provoke not your children *to anger*, **lest they be discouraged.**

When a parent is evidently *excited* when he punishes a child, the child then feels that if his father is angry, it is not wrong for him to be angry. The very fact of anger in a parent kindles anger in children, just as it does when two men are contending.

If the child submits, only because the parent is the *strongest*, not because he is *right*; then even though the child yields to power, the child cherishes anger. Therefore, it is important that a father should command his own temper when administering discipline.

A father should not punish a child because he is *angry*, but because it is *right*; not because it has become a matter of personal contest, but because the welfare of the child demands it. The moment when a child sees that a parent punishes him under the influence of anger, that moment the child will be likely to be angry too. One more thing, in the home, it is the fathers who are more likely to be too severe, and the mothers are more likely to be too lenient.

When it comes to discouraging our children, a good rule to follow is to make our praise to criticism ratio, 10:1. Find something to genuinely praise your children for and do it constantly. Then, when correction is warranted, it will have more of its intended effect of helping, instead of discouraging.

But all of that was for the parents. Now, let me address the children. What are you to do when you have been provoked to anger? What about when the

unreasonableness of your parents has discouraged you? What does God expect of you?

He expects that His grace is sufficient for your sufferings just as it is for anyone else's. In other words, unless your parents' instructions are for you to sin, to commit moral wrong, or to engage in illegal activities, God expects you to obey your parents. Why? Because the preservation of the family unit is more important. That is why this is a godly labor. Your heavenly Father is counting on you to do your part, regardless of what others do.

Don't make the mistake of being motivated by external means. Be motivated from your inner man, by what you understand from God's word. Make a sonship decision to obey the doctrine of Ephesians 6, even when it is not convenient or comfortable. Take comfort in the work which is being done in your inner man to conform you to image of God's Son.

Hebrews 5:8 Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered;

Just as Christ learned obedience through the things which He suffered, we also learn through the things which we suffer.

And what about those adult children who have their own families, but do not think their parents are worthy of honor? For example, some Christians who have unsaved parents might think them unworthy of honor, but the command is the same; honor your father and mother. The best opportunity to win them to Christ will be by sons and daughters who choose to love them and honor them. And if by your godly actions, the time comes when they ask you why you are treating them the way you do, do not fail to take advantage of that opportunity to present Christ as the reason.

Ephesians 6:4 And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: **but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.**

In this phrase we have the two elements of education. "Nurture" means "to support and raise to maturity, to care for and encourage the growth or

development of, to cherish and treasure.” There is a way to rear children in the nurture of the Lord by teaching them sound doctrine from an early age.

“Admonition” means an instruction, exhortation or warning, a rebuke, or a reprimand. And to rear up children in the admonition of the Lord requires all of those things in our definition. Suffice it say that everything from the instructions to the rebukes are done in a loving way, and for the purpose of benefitting the children.

The end of verse 4 tells us that we are to bring up our children by teaching them the sound doctrine which pertains to them in this dispensation of grace, along with the instructions and exhortations, as well as any necessary corrections or rebukes.

Rearing up our children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord is the godly labor of parents within the family.

Major Points from the Lesson
