

EPHESIANS

LIVING (THE) GOSPEL

Week Commencing 03 June 2018

Notes for next Sunday's sermon on Ephesians 6:1-4 "Children-parents"

Week 10: CHILDREN-PARENTS

Paul now turns from the relationship of husbands and wives, to that of parents and children. We note in passing, that he therefore sees the congregation as a 'church family', consisting of both sexes and of all ages. Since he addresses children directly, he evidently expects whole families to be together in the gathering, listening to the letter being read. Jesus of course had already taught: "Let the children come to me, do not hinder them; for to such belongs the kingdom of God." It was a radical change from the callous cruelty which prevailed in the Roman empire in which unwanted babies were abandoned, weak and deformed ones killed, and even healthy children regarded by many as a nuisance because they inhibited sexual promiscuity and complicated easy divorce!

DAY 1: Read Ephesians 6:1-4

Children, obey your parents... Here is another example of 'submitting to one another' of v21. In this context, the submission of children to parents will involve obedience. Wives were not told to 'obey'; the old prayer book service ought never to have included that word in the bride's vows. The concept of a husband who issues commands and of a wife who gives him obedience is simply not found in the New Testament. To recap; a wife's submission is something quite different from obedience. It is a voluntary self-giving to a lover whose responsibility is defined in terms of laying down their life for their wife. It is love's response to love.

Children, however, *are* to obey their parents. He gives two reasons. (1) It is right (or righteous). Virtually all civilisations have regarded the recognition of parental authority as indispensable to a stable society. (2) It is God's will, as expressed clearly in the 10 commandments. Paul has used both Exodus 20:12 and Deuteronomy 5:16 to include the promises that 'it may go well with you' and 'that you may live long on the earth'. Under the old covenant, Israel's possession of the promised land was conditional upon their obedience. Under the new covenant, Paul now relates this promise to long life 'on the earth' - not 'in the land'. Honouring of parents, is good for life and society!

So, Paul highlights obedience to parents as part of their duty to God. During our childhood, our parents represent God to us and mediate his authority and love. Children give their obedience and love and respect. Reverence for parents was an integral part of reverence for God.

If parents who aren't believers, command or expect something of their children which is against God's will, this situation has to be negotiated with love and respect. Let's say non-Christian parents forbid a teenager to attend church or be baptised. The teenager must work at open and honest dialogue and show by such means, a heartfelt desire to obey their parents. There may however, be circumstances whereby a teenager will have to choose to put Jesus first. If they are to obey as 6:1 says *in the Lord*, this doesn't mean in everything without exception, but in everything which is compatible with their primary loyalty, namely to their Lord Jesus Christ.

DAY 2: Read Ephesians 6:1-4

Who are these 'children'? When do young people cease to be 'children'? Does Paul mean to include all young people who still unmarried and living at home even though they are now adults? In most western societies, 18 years of age is the time when young people can drive, drink, vote, marry without consent and make decisions for themselves. In Rome in the 1st century, the power of a

Roman father extended over the child's whole life, as long as the father lived; children never came 'of age'. In some cultures today, a similar custom prevails. Christians should not defy cultural norms in these matters. So long as they are regarded in their culture as children or minors, they could continue to obey their parents.

Yet, even after we are no longer under the direct authority of our parents, we must still continue to honour them. Our parents occupy a unique position in our lives. If we honour them as we should, we will never neglect or forget them. Some eastern cultures take care of their older people far better than the individualised culture of the west!

That little phrase 'in the Lord', means that this obedience of the child, arises out of their own personal relationship with the Lord Jesus. It is God who created and established order in family and society. All our relationships are transformed precisely because they are *in the Lord*. They are purged of self-centredness and infused instead with Christ's love and peace. Obedience to parents is not grudging acquiescence to parental authority. Rather, children learn to obey with gladness, 'for this pleases the Lord'.

DAY 3: Read Ephesians 6:1-4

As Paul turns to parents, he does not urge them to *exercise* their authority, but rather to *restrain* it! The picture he paints of fathers as self-controlled, gentle, patient educators of their children is in stark contrast to the norm of his own day. William Barclay comments: "A Roman father had absolute power over his family. He could sell them as slaves, he could make them work in his fields even in chains, he could take the law into his own hands and punish as he liked, even inflicting the death penalty."

The Christian father was to be completely different, caring for their families as God the Father cares for his. (And mothers are included, as the original word used here could be used for 'father and mothers'.)

Negatively, they are told *do not exasperate your children*. Parents can easily misuse their authority, by making irritating or unreasonable demands which make no allowances for the inexperience or immaturity of children, or by harshness or cruelty. Discipline should not be arbitrary or unkind. Here Paul recognises that children are little people in their own right They are to be respected and on no account, exploited, manipulated or crushed.

DAY 4: Read Ephesians 6:1-4

Now Paul complements his negative instruction re parents not provoking their children with this positive exhortation: *bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord*. We are to deal gently with our children, or as someone said, 'rear them tenderly'. Here is in an understanding, centuries before modern psychology emphasised the vital importance of the earliest years of life, that children are fragile creatures needing the tenderness and security of love.

Parents need to jealousy guard this responsibility. *In the training and instruction of the Lord* means teaching and demonstrating to the child what it means to be in a relationship with Jesus and all that that entails.

For most of our friends and colleagues, their aim for their children is that they have the best education so that they can have the best jobs and meet the best people. By contrast, as a follower of Jesus Christ your aim for your children will be that they grow up followers of Jesus Christ; so you will skew the whole of your life so that you model to them what it means to be a follower of Jesus Christ, so they see in you something so remarkable, so life changing, so transforming, so different that they know there is something different about you, and they'll look at you and know what it means to have had an encounter with the living God and be changed.

May the Lord give us grace to see how these verses apply to our present context; to love and raise our children with wisdom and support and encourage our grown-up children, as they raise theirs!

References: The message of Ephesians, John Stott