

Opening Words

It is a remarkable fact that Paul even addresses children. In the ancient world, wives, children, and servants were not worthy of being spoken to. But in God's kingdom, everyone has value.

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Have any of you heard someone say, "How I wish I could go back and relive those moments. The choices I made earlier in my life were so catastrophic and if only I had chosen differently." I'm sure you have. I know I have, and in addition to hearing it from others I have said it myself. As I have looked back on my life, I have seen bad decisions for which I paid a heavy price.

Today, I am going to speak to you on a new topic, the topic of children and parents and we are going to answer a lot of questions including, "Should Children Really Obey Their Parents in Everything?" But first, let me get back to what I said just a moment ago. When I talk about looking back and regretting decisions, I must admit, some of my worst decisions were when I did not actively seek and listen to the counsel of my parents. I know I did not respect my father the way I should have when I was a teen. And, of course, people will say, "that's typical of teens" and I will answer, "Yes, in our culture it is, unfortunately," but it has not always been that way, and I knew better. I was a Christian and I knew enough of God's word to know that I was to honor, respect, and obey my parents, and while I was not a wild, rebellious type person involved in drugs, alcohol, and wild parties, I did have rebellious attitudes that were lodged deep in my heart.

Well, today is not confession day for me, and I will also say that my parents were patient and committed to me, and I learned to respect and honor them in a biblical way. How grateful I am for the way they brought me up. God has also been gracious and has worked out so many things for good in my life as I have sought him. I made the messes and God cleaned them up and reworked his plan in me.

All of this is to introduce these messages I am going to bring you today and the following day on Ephesians 6:1-4 which is about children and parents. As you know Paul has been talking about how to live the faith in the family. This is the primary place where we are to put our faith into practice. We are not to be one hour a week Christians where we gather with others to confess our faith and then live by different values when we return home. We are not even to be ten hour a week Christians. By that I mean Christians who are involved in their church. In addition to Sunday services they attend a couple of Bible studies and are involved in some type of ministry but when they return home they live by different values. We are to apply our faith all the time, everywhere and we are to apply it first, at home.

There is a great verse on this 1 Timothy 5:4 which says that children and grandchildren are to practice godliness, living out their Christian faith, at home *first!* And if that is true for them it should also be true of parents and husbands and wives. We must practice our faith at home – first!

We also remember that this section in Ephesians 6 blossomed out of Paul's admonition to be filled with the Spirit of God and one of the marks of the filling of the Spirit is submission to authority. We usually want the filling of the Spirit to be about ecstatic experiences or powerful ministry, and it may be that way at times, but usually the filling of the Spirit is about our attitudes towards others that we display in daily living. One of the chief evidences that reveals if God's Spirit has filled and controlled us is our humble, submissive attitude.

In Ephesians 6, we find Paul providing an application of that in the home as Paul tells children in the church to obey their parents in the Lord. Let's look at the verses, Ephesians 6:1-4.

Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. Honor your father and mother (which is the first commandment with a promise), so that it may be well with you, and that you may live long on the earth. Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

There is so much to say about this. We better jump right in.

First, I want to point out that it is a remarkable fact that Paul even addresses children. As I said recently, in the ancient world, those who were under authority, wives, children, and servants were often not considered of much value. But in God's kingdom, everyone has value. Authority structures still exist, but they are intended to build up everyone because everyone matters to God. And surely, a big reason for this was Jesus' attitude toward children.

I'm sure you remember the story when people were bringing their children to him, and the disciples, trying to protect Jesus who had unbelievable demands upon his life, rebuked the parents for doing this. Jesus didn't have time for children. Jesus had enough on his plate with all the demands of people for healing and teaching and the pressure that came from the political rulers and the religious rulers of his day. But when Jesus saw and heard what his disciples were doing he was indignant toward them and said, "Permit the children to come to Me; do not hinder them; for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. Truly I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child will not enter it *at all*." And He took them in His arms and *began* blessing them, laying His hands on them.

Paul, in the same way, wants to speak to the children and influence them to live in a godly way. He addresses them directly. I am sure that many of you have been in churches or are in churches where there is a special time for the children, during the worship service, where they are addressed. This is an attempt to follow Paul's example and Jesus' example of speaking directly to children. And while I am on this topic, I want to add one more point. When churches would assemble in the first century, they would hear Scripture read from the prophets. They would hear letters read from apostles and there would be an exposition of these letters and of the writings of the prophets. And when the apostles, including Paul, wrote them and wrote words to children, we can assume that he expected the children to be seated with their parents in the time of worship. The entire family came together for worship.

This care that Jesus and Paul displayed for children was in stark contrast to the ancient world and to many places of the world today. In the Roman world, parents would sometimes abandon their

children. If their children were weak, or deformed, or disabled in some other way, they would sometimes kill them or put them out on the hillsides to be devoured by wild animals. I know that is hard to imagine, but it was the reality of that time. Sometimes parents looked upon their children as a nuisance because their presence hindered them in their pursuit of immorality or hindered them if they wanted an easy divorce.

Some of these ancient attitudes towards children sound all too familiar in our day. We have a mixed-up society for while we have entire hospitals devoted to children, we also abort them, and we have so simplified divorce that children by the millions have suffered psychologically from the breakup of the family.

As Christians, we must learn to live our faith in the home, to raise healthy, godly children and to be a bright light to our lost and family-fragmented world.

Paul tells children to obey their parents in the Lord. He grounds the obedience in three things. First, they are to obey because of natural law. Second, they are to obey because of God's revealed law to Moses. Third, they are to obey because of the Gospel. Let's look at these.

Paul says children are to obey their parents in the Lord, for *this is right*. Paul is saying that there is a built in sense among all humanity that children should obey their parents. This idea is not unique to Judaism and Christianity. One can observe it universally. The ancient Greek and Roman writers and cultures taught that children should obey their parents. The ancient philosophy of Stoicism taught the same. When we look at the cultures of Asia, we see strong familial bonds and we see a strong loyalty of children to parents, a loyalty and bond that is far stronger for them than it is for families in western culture! The reason we see this emphasis throughout the world is that it is written in the hearts of mankind. It is part of our make-up, part of the image of God that is still partly operational.

Sometimes cultures go into deep rebellion against God and the breakup of the family occurs. Paul explained this in Romans 1. You know what I am talking about. It is Paul's classic passage on how the ancient world refused to honor God as God and refused to give thanks. They turned away from the knowledge of the true God, and they started inventing their own gods and religions. Then they engaged in sexual immorality which became increasingly decadent and despite God's appeals and warnings they continued to rebel. So, God had no choice but to give them over to this kind of behavior. Paul, then, describes these wild, rebellious cultures. He gives a long list of the many sins that find expression in these cultures and in the middle of a long list of sins, he includes this one, "disobedient to parents." It almost seems out of place in this list of sins. Here are some of the other sins mentioned, "wickedness, greed, evil, envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice, hating God, being arrogant, inventing evil, disobeying parents."

It's shocking isn't it. Remember, this is the passage that talks about extreme sexual sin and we like to get on the bandwagon and preach against extreme sexual sin and these other vices and then Paul pops this sin in the middle of the others – disobedient to parents. You can find that in Romans 1:30.

I think this show us how important obedience to parents is in the eyes of God. Disobedience is a mark of a rebellious culture. Obedience shines a bright light and honors God and there are many

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blessings that come with this. We'll get into this more in our next lesson as we continue this series, The Faith in the Family and "Should Children Really Obey Their Parents in Everything?" I hope you will join us.