

EPHESIANS 6:1-3

INTRODUCTION

Having considered the duties and responsibilities of both husbands and wives within the family relationship Paul now considers the role and responsibilities of children and Parents. Now it is important to note that Paul addresses the children with the church he does so because the church at Ephesus would have been made up of all ages including children and so he obviously expects the children to hear and obey God's word just as the adults were to do so.

He expects them to obey God's word just as he expects husbands and wives and Parents to obey. In other words God does not make allowances for people we should never say well they are only children we can't expect them to repent and obey God's word. Why not they are sinners just as much as adults are and they need salvation as well as adults.

There is no biblical position of innocence, all are guilty and are condemned unless they come to God for salvation. I am not talking about children who simply are too young to understand or mentally retarded and therefore unable to understand or respond. That is a completely different issue. But the point is that every child has a responsibility to hear and obey God's word. The second thing I want to say in way of introduction is that we need to realise just how radical Paul's teaching was when taken within the Roman culture of the time. If you remember when Jesus walked the earth he took time for children and if you remember his disciples even tried to stop little children from coming to Jesus (Matthew 19:13-15). Why? Because in the first century Roman world; children were viewed really as things.

They were often abused by fathers and were used for the benefit of others. Unwanted babies in the Roman world were simply abandoned and left to die, weak and deformed ones were killed and even healthy children were regarded as a nuisance and an inconvenience because they inhibited sexual promiscuity and they complicated easy divorce. It sounds very much like Britain today doesn't it?

This is why the place where children should be shown dignity is in the church, the place where they should be allowed to be children is in the church, the place where they are shown love and value should be in the church. So we need to remember that when they get in our way and are a nuisance to us. The church's attitude to children should be completely different from the attitude of the world.

Children should love coming to church because this is where they can be truly themselves and loved and accepted for who they are.

1. THE DUTY OF CHILDREN

If the word for wives is 'submit' and the word for husbands is 'love' then Paul gives us a word for children it is 'obey.' Now the word obey is stronger than the word submit, wives are never asked to obey their husbands but they are to submit to them which will of course involve obedience.

As we have seen submission means a willingness to submit to the God given authority of her husband by giving him his rightful place and by accepting his care for her. But Paul is using a word that literally means to obey the commands of someone else.

Paul restricts Parental authority and guides it, as we will see when we get to verse 4 yet it is still true that the Parent's authority over children is different than the husband's authority over his wife. Paul does not just say to children obey your Parents because I say so but he gives three clear reasons why they ought to do this:

a) It is right (v 1) – God has built within us an ability to know what is right and what is wrong. Even in our own perverted society we all deep down know what is right and what is wrong. We may not always be able to explain why we know something is right or wrong but we all have a natural or God given instinct to know what is right and wrong. This is what Paul is talking about here he says we all know that children ought to obey their Parents.

When we go shopping we do not expect to see Mum and Dad following after the children simply obeying their every word. We do not expect to hear children tell Dad to be quiet. We do not expect a daughter to send Mum to her bedroom for being cheeky to her.

No the world has a God given order, and that order includes children obeying their Parents. So children obey Mum and Dad because it is right to do so. You might not agree with them you might not even understand why they are asking you to do something but you must obey for this is right. If this is the case then it is no surprise that one of the marks of a decadent and a God forsaken society is disobedience to Parents (Romans 1:28-30 and 2 Timothy 3:1-2)

b) It is commanded by God (v 2) – The fifth commandment tells us to honour our Parents. To honour implies that we acknowledge the God given authority of our Parents and therefore we give to them not only love and respect but that we seek to obey them. It is because Parental authority is divinely delegated authority that respectful obedience to Parents was invested with such great importance in the life of God's people within the Old Testament (Leviticus 19:1-3). Reverence for Parents was an expression of their reverence of God. This is why that in the Old Testament economy death was the penalty for anyone who refused to obey their Parents. By doing so they were in fact refusing to obey God (Deuteronomy 21:18-21).

Paul however prefers to enforce God's command to obey Parents not with a threat but with a promise, the promise of prosperity and long life. Now this little statement needs some explaining to us for the commandment was made in the Old Testament and was part of the law of the land of Israel and we live in the New Testament period when God's people are no longer a nation but is in fact the church.

You see in the Old Testament when the nation of Israel was a theocracy God's promises were closely tied to the Promised Land and to safety health and good harvests etc. But now in the New Testament God's way of dealing with people has changed. No land today is a theocracy for God's people now make up the church and so come from all nations and cultures and languages.

In the Old Testament God's blessings were often physical and tangible but now in the New Testament age they are mainly spiritual they are blessings in Christ. But that does not mean that there are never physical blessings for obedient Christians here on earth. Paul has actually changed the promise from referring to the Promise Land to apply it to the earth in order to make a fresh application to the church of today.

We can say that there are physical blessings for obeying our Parents. I don't think we can apply this verse individually because it was made to a community of people. So although it is not true to say that every child that obeys his Parents will enjoy long life however it is true to say that generally speaking where children obey their Parents within any society then there in that society you will find social stability and a healthy community.

This alone brings tremendous blessing. Surely you can expect greater stability and longer life in societies where obedience to Parents is observed. For when you find a society that has children obeying their Parents then you will find a society that will also seek to live by God's moral standards for remember this command is a reflection of one's reverence for God. It is any wonder in our own society that there is great instability.

Who knows but perhaps in years to come there will be shorter lives as sin grabs hold of our society? The cause of such a deteriorating society is the breakdown of the family unit.

No Government can seriously expect their nation to prosper when they give such little regard to the God ordained pattern of the family unit at the core of every healthy society. This is why we must pray and seek to influence our government to enhance and encourage the family with laws rather than encouraging its demise, which is what is currently taking place in Britain today.

c) It is our Christian duty (v 1) “in the Lord” namely in the Lord Jesus. Now although this little phrase often is used to qualify what is meant by obedience to our Parents? For example that we can only obey them if it is in line with our Lord’s teaching and we will come to that use of the phrase in a minute but there is I believe a much fuller meaning of this little phrase. This phrase brings obedience to Parents into the realm of specific Christian duty.

We are to obey our Parents because we have a relationship with the Lord Jesus. If God as our creator established the order in families and in society then because we are Christians we should seek to maintain and encourage such order in our own lives, families and communities. Because we are His children we should show the world what God’s original intention was for the family by living according to the laws and principles that are God ordained.

So Christian children should show the rest of society what God means when he tells children to obey Parents. In the same way Husbands should show society what loving our wives is all about and wives should show what it means to submit to our husbands. If we who are ‘in the Lord’ don’t obey his commands then how will anyone else do it? If we don’t show the full intent of God’s commands and demonstrate how they are worked out and how they benefit families and societies then who else will teach society.

Why do you think there is an increase in Parent classes in our society? It is because Parents are keen to get it right and they don’t know how to go about it. Well surely as Christians we ought to teach them by our lives how to love our wives, submit to our husbands and how children should obey their Parents.

This brings me to some practical questions that we might have about how to apply this instruction about obeying our Parents. Many Christian young people who have a real desire to follow their Lord struggle with this requirement of obedience. For example are children to obey their Parents in absolutely everything? What if Parents are not Christians and are not keen to encourage their child in Christian things? What if what they are being asked to do is unhelpful at best and sinful at worst?

There are no easy answers to question like this and many others. We all need wisdom when dealing with children and young people who have such questions. I think as a general rule that while we are still under the age where we do not have freedom to do as we wish; in this land it is under 18 then I think that obedience to our Parents should be the norm and disobedience should be the rare exception. So when we are 14 and our Parents tell us to be home for such a time we ought to be home for such a time.

If a Christian young person wants to be baptised but his Parents who are not Christians refuse to let him. Then I think it is wise to simply show our love and respect to our Parents and not go through the waters of baptism until we are of that age when we can do so without our Parents consent.

However if Parents simply do not allow their child to follow Christ as Saviour and forbid them from reading their bible and praying etc. then no child could obey such a command. In such

circumstances however painful it might be our loyalty to Christ must come first. If we love our Parents more than Christ then we are not worthy of him according to the teaching of Jesus (Matthew 10:34-39).

Of course we should never seek family conflict or be guilty of causing it on the contrary we are called to be peacemakers and to live at peace with everyone as far as it depends upon us (Romans 12:18). However there are times when tension and conflict cannot be avoided. The command to obey our Parents is qualified with the words "in the Lord." Children are not to obey their Parents in absolutely everything without exception but are to obey them in everything that is compatible with their primary loyalty, namely to our Lord Jesus Christ.

Let me finish by encouraging children to take to heart God's word, to obey your parents for they have been given God given authority to teach and discipline you (v 4). Therefore obey them because it is right, it is commanded by God and if you are a Christian then it is your Christian duty to obey.

You will never do that without God's grace within your life. By nature we are all disobedient, we simply rebel against Parental authority therefore children just like adults need God's grace to enable them to obey especially at times when it seems that Parents are being unfair and illogical. Finally for those of you whose children have grown up and are married or left the family home and have no longer an obligation to obey in the same way as younger children have then please pray for your children who are married and have their own children as they seek to be Parents to your grandchildren and pray for those grandchildren that God will enable them to obey their Parents.

Pray also for the children of our church that they may obey God's word and pray for those of us who are Parents of young children that the Lord may enable us to be Parents who can correctly discipline and instruct our children in the things of God.

Amen.