

Ephesians 6:1-4 "The Role of Parents & Children In The Family"

EPH 6:1-4 "Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. 2 "Honor your father and mother" -which is the first commandment with a promise 3 "that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth." (Deut. 5:16) 4 Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord."

What we've seen over the last few weeks is Paul's concern that believers in the body of Christ faithfully represent our Lord in every area of life, particularly in the relationships we have with one another.

You see, relationships with other people often reflects the kind of relationship we have with Jesus Christ. And it is the relationship with Jesus Christ that Paul wants to shine forth in our lives that shows wisdom founded on God's truth which then translates to action and obedience that brings glory to God.

EPH 5:15-17 "Be very careful, then, how you [walk] - not as unwise but as wise, 16 making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. 17 Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is."

Wisdom and foolishness are defined by the truth and the will of God found in His written word. And so, when Paul sheds light on the family of God, or the family of believers in Jesus Christ, the source is always the same. And this is why Paul can begin the 6th chapter the way he does when speaking of the relationship children must have with their parents.

EPH 6:1-2 "Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. 2 "Honor your father and mother" -which is the first commandment with a promise - 3 "that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth." (Deut. 5:16)

There are a variety of things which we need to look at here, not the least of which is the fact that Paul is addressing a particular segment of the body of Christ. He is addressing a group of young people he considers to be sharing in all of the blessings found in the same church their parents share in.

In the sense that they are part of a family whose parents, or at least one parent is a believer, they are considered to be part of that church sharing in many of the N.T. covenant blessings of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul points this out in 1CO 7:14 "For the unbelieving husband has been sanctified through his wife, and the unbelieving wife has been sanctified through her believing husband. Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy."

Paul is not talking about a sanctification or holiness which produces salvation. The believing parent cannot believe for his or her spouse any more than they can believe for their children. But the idea here is that if one parent is a believer then the others in the household are set apart to share in the blessings God has for the believer.

For example, the unbelieving husband has a great opportunity through his believing wife to come in contact with the gospel of Jesus Christ. He also has the opportunity to come into contact with the truth of God's word together with the love of Jesus Christ being shed abroad in her heart as she submits to her unbelieving husband.

Peter, writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, shows how God can use the love of the wife in that type of situation as she is loving the Lord Jesus Christ.

1PE 3:1-2 "Wives, in the same way be submissive to your husbands so that, if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without words by the behavior of their wives, 2 when they see the purity and reverence of your lives."

Here, the unbelieving husband has been given the privilege, by God Himself, to be united to this believing woman, and in that sense, he has been sanctified, where he is set apart in a unique way, to have a special union with the person in that relationship, who knows the living God, and whose responsibility it is to represent God in that relationship where there is an unequal yoke.

What Peter is not saying is that an unmarried believing woman should go out and seek a non-believing man and hope he comes to Christ.

2CO 6:14-15 "Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? 15 What harmony is

there between Christ and Belial? What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever?"

And so, the point Paul makes when declaring that the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the believing wife is that God has allowed him to come into contact with the truth. In a similar way, the children of that relationship are holy, in that they too share in the covenant blessings that have been given to the believing parents with the express purpose of leading them to Christ.

Does this mean in our text that every child being addressed here is a believer in the church? Well, it would be going beyond a true N.T. faith, for example, to suggest that an infant, could understand the gospel and therefore repent of their sin and embrace Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. It would also be presumptuous to suggest that every child being addressed by Paul, who could understand the gospel, has embraced it by faith.

Keep in mind that Paul is speaking in general terms. He's not addressing every situation of the child-parent relationship. He's painting with a broad stroke here so that children in a home, with one or both parents who are believers, will understand what God Himself desires of those children in that home, which is ultimately to come to Christ by faith.

You'll notice that, unlike the wife who is commanded to submit to her husband, and the husband who is commanded to love his wife, the children have a little different relationship to their parents. They are not commanded to submit or love, though both are certainly inferred.

Rather, they are commanded to obey. The word "obey" in the Greek gives the idea of listening and harkening to what they hear. And so, there is instruction involved on the part of the parents so that children know how and what to obey. Children must obey, but it is assumed their parents are instructing them as unto the Lord.

Some have taken the phrase, "children, obey your parents in the Lord" to mean, "children obey your parents if, and only if, those parents are in the Lord." This is not what Paul is saying. The idea here is that the design of God is for children to obey their parents. And so, "in the Lord" means according to the Lord's will, or according to what pleases the Lord.

It would be similar to the command in EPH 5:22 "Wives, submit to your husbands *as to the Lord*." This in no way suggests that wives only submit to those husbands who are in the Lord.

And so, for children to obey their parents, God is saying that this is His design. It may be true that society as a general rule expects children to obey their parents, but it is God who established the way in which a home is to run, with the children obeying their parents. This is why Paul adds, "for this is right."

What makes it right? The fact that God deems it right and no man has the option to change the will of God which is always good. And so to sum up, what parents and children need to understand is that this is a God-ordained way in which to rear our children. The children may not always agree, but as parents are loving their children they must expect obedience from them.

But, I believe it is vital for parents to convey to their children the responsibility as well as the privilege of serving and loving God as they fulfill their duty to their parents. This means giving them the big picture of God's love for us in Christ and helping them see how we can respond to that love in faith as we inspire faith actions in them.

Some of the ways we can do that is to show them how forgiveness works when we sin. None of us are above asking for forgiveness from one another and there may even be times when we need to ask forgiveness from our children if we sin against them as we restore that relationship.

This way our children begin to see that our faith isn't just something we practice on Sunday, but that it's a real part of our lives as we are real with them, expressing our faith in Christ by the way we live our lives in their presence when no one else is around.

When all of these things are happening in the context of each member loving God with all their heart, soul and mind, the family unit will then be seen as a haven for Christian love and growth and service. Children must be taught that it pleases Jesus when they please their parents.

What this does is to take obedience out of a sterile "cold hard rules" atmosphere and place obedience back into a love relationship atmosphere, where the children are loving their God and out of love for Him they understand that love and obedience for their parents springs from that.

And so, what this does is that when the child disobeys his parents, he must be helped to see that he is actually disobeying Jesus Christ who loves him and desires for him to obey the Lord as he obeys his parents. This puts God back in the middle of the family where His will is to be sought and where His will, according to His word, is the main objective.

But Paul continues by helping the parents help the children understand where this command comes from.

EPH 6:2-3 "Honor your father and mother" -which is the first commandment with a promise - 3 "that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth." (Deut. 5:16)

Once again, Paul is bringing the word of God to bear on this particular relationship between parent and child. This particular command is actually found in the 10 commandments which Moses delivered to the Israelites.

It's found in DEU 5:16 "Honor your father and your mother, as the LORD your God has commanded you, so that you may live long and that it may go well with you in the land the LORD your God is giving you."

This is commonly referred to as the 5th commandment. What's interesting about this is that Paul is saying quite clearly that the moral law is still in effect. God has not abolished every aspect of the law, He has simply fulfilled it in Christ, which is to say that Christ fulfilled the law perfectly through His obedience to it.

And so, we don't want to use the law as a means of attaining our salvation, because salvation is found only in Christ. This was the point Paul made to the Romans.

ROM 7:4-6 "So, my brothers, you also died to the law through the body of Christ, that you might belong to another, to him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit to God. 5 For when we were controlled by the sinful nature, the sinful passions aroused by the law were at work in our bodies, so that we bore fruit for death. 6 But now, by dying to what once bound us, we have been released from the law so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code."

In other words, we died to a system of law which produced nothing but death. The wages of sin is death, but only because the law deemed it worthy of death. And that law was given by God Himself which is why we are accountable to Him according to His

law. It's only when we've been released from what the law demands of us that we are set free to know God, and that is only through Christ who kept the law perfectly and then became our substitute as He died in our place taking our penalty.

But does this mean that the law is somehow evil? Well, Paul immediately answers that question in ROM 7:7 What shall we say, then? Is the law sin? Certainly not! Indeed I would not have known what sin was except through the law. For I would not have known what coveting really was if the law had not said, "Do not covet."

And so for Paul to take an O.T. commandment and bring over into the N.T. experience, he is not negating N.T. faith in Christ. Rather, he is establishing God is the same yesterday, today and forever when it comes to what His will is according to the 10 commandments.

I don't think a Christian would argue that worshipping only the true God and having no false gods before Him is a bad thing. Neither is it out of place not to make idols or to take God's name in vain, or not to remember to set a day aside to worship God. It wouldn't be out of place for N.T. Christians to abstain from murdering, committing adultery, lying or stealing. And so, it's certainly not out of place for Paul to command children to honor their fathers and mothers.

The word honor, as Paul uses it in our text, is the Greek word *timao*, and it means to estimate or to fix the value of something. And so, what this means is that the value which children are to fix on their parents is a value which God has established.

God is the one who deems parents worthy of receiving such honor. Children do not determine this. It is not up to the child to say, 'I do not deem my parents worthy of such honor and therefore I am not obligated to honor them.'

It's not for them to decide. Neither is it for the parents to decide that they should expect such honor. It is simply a given because God has decreed it. And so for parents to allow children not to honor them is to deny what God has already established as true and good. As Paul says in verse 1, "this is right".

However, it's important to understand how this honor works as far as the child is concerned. To honor one's parents does not mean that by simply obeying them they are being honored. Obedience can be merely an outward thing, going through the motions. What

God wants is the heart of the child honoring his parents in a way that expresses love to God.

"Selfish obedience or reluctant obedience or obedience under terror is immediately ruled out." Selfish obedience will often be manipulative where the child will obey simply to get something from you, be it a special treat or whatever. A reluctant obedience obeys after the second and third warning and then only because they don't want to suffer some consequence which might cramp their style. Obedience under terror doesn't allow for any faith or love to express itself.....

..... To honor [in obedience] implies to love, to regard highly, to show the spirit of respect and consideration. And this honor is to be shown to both of the parents. As far as the child is concerned they are equal in authority." (William Hendrickson)

Now this doesn't mean that parents can act anyway they want and expect their children to automatically want to honor them and obey them. And we'll see this in a moment.

But what's interesting about this 5th commandment from God is that it comes with a promise. Paul says it's the first commandment with a promise. Some have argued that Paul is wrong here because it's not the first commandment with a promise. The second commandment actually has a promise which states that if you make idols God will visit subsequent generations with judgment who continue in that practice. But that those who love Him and obey Him He will visit with love.

Paul is not wrong in saying that the fifth commandment is the first with a promise. Often times the word first is not talking about numerical sequence but rather its rank as being important. That's why when a scribe asked Jesus, "which commandment is the first of all?" he didn't mean, "which commandment is mentioned first?" but, "which is first in importance?"

And so, for Paul to say this is the first commandment with a promise he is simply stating that as it relates to the relationship that people have with other people this is the first with a promise. The second commandment was the first with a promise as it related to relationships between God and man.

But what is this promise? EPH 6:3 "that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth." (Deut. 5:16)

This seems to be a strange promise in light of the fact that many children who obey their parents may not live long lives. It is tragic and yet we know that there are children who may have their lives cut short for a variety of reasons beyond their control. Traffic accidents, sickness, brutality in the world all lend to cutting off the lives of children.

So, what does this mean? First of all, a promise of this nature, even from God, is not necessarily a guarantee. Again, if this were the case God would be proved a liar. For example, King David's first son to Bathsheba did neither good or bad and yet the Lord took him home in infancy due to sickness.

Some would say he was conceived in adultery and that was the reason for the child's death. But the adultery was David's sin, not his son's. We have the death of all the male children, two and under, in and around Bethlehem after the Magi came to Herod to announce they were there to worship the King of the Jews. Were these toddlers and infants deserving of death and not a long life promised to them in the fifth commandment?

And what about Jesus Himself? Was there anyone more deserving of a long life than the one who obeyed His parents perfectly? He died in His prime. The promise given in the fifth commandment is a promise that obedience leads to blessings, generally speaking. The blessing is that to obey your parents is to follow their lead in gaining wisdom and knowledge, to grow in wisdom and to use all of these things to not only walk with God but to interact with society to where you are a blessing to them.

In doing so, your chances of living a long life are pretty good all things considered. But it must also take into account the curse of sin and the sinful nature of man. If you run with a crowd which does not seek God and practices ungodly behavior then there will be consequences. How many teenagers are killed each year from their friends driving drunk?

How many people contract AIDS from the kind of practices which put them at risk? Could many of those people have been the types who honored their mothers and fathers in their youth? Of course.

If you pollute your body with poisons (ie. drugs, tobacco, alcohol) and yet you were the type of child who honored your father and mother, should you expect a long life? God wants us to know that He personally tells us that to live in this world, with any expectation of living to the fullest, the first thing we should do is to

know the One true God through faith in His Son. And parents have the responsibility to lead their children to the throne of God.

But, children have the responsibility to follow God as they honor and love their parents in their obedience. It's similar to the relationship we have with Christ. As we love Him and honor Him with our lives we will obey His will as we seek to please Him.

But I want to quickly touch on the parents' responsibility in cultivating this honor among their children. Because if we expect to receive honor and yet we do not love our children we will be sadly disappointed. This is why Paul continues in our text.

EPH 6:4 "Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord."

Fathers are mentioned here in verse 6 and yet it must be noted that mothers must heed this command as well. But, what does it mean to exasperate your children? The NAS uses the phrase, "do not provoke your children to anger."

Again, the responsibility falls on the shoulders of the parents to help their children in this goal. This doesn't mean that after having pursued and practiced this that children may not turn for a time to their own ways. Train up a child in the way he should go and he will not depart from it may be a promise, but it's not a guarantee.

And yet, it is a hope that we hold to by faith that even a prodigal child will come back to what he's learned about his God and Savior. The chances certainly increase the more faithful the parents are with their responsibilities.

But how can a parent exasperate his children or provoke them to anger? First, this doesn't mean that children won't get angry with you on occasion even when you do the right thing. This exhortation has more to do with bringing them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord in love.

So, how do we exasperate them? Over-protection can accomplish this. "Don't go here and don't go there. Don't do this and don't do that." We can give so many rules to our children that they're afraid to make a move without wondering if the ax is going to fall. It's like, 'don't venture into the water until you've learned to swim.' (Hendrickson)

Give them the truth and help them make the right decisions, but let them make some decisions based on what they've learned from you

and know for certain that they will not always make the right ones. Being there for them when they fail is part of the learning process. And just let your faith in Christ be real. Children pick up on hypocrisy in a heartbeat.

Don't show favoritism. Isaac favored Esau above Jacob. Rebekah preferred Jacob. It divided the family and drove the two brothers apart to become enemies for most of their lives. No matter how many children God gives you love them each and give each the time you give the others.

By the way, children don't know the difference between quality time and regular time. They just want your time. And I know how this can be difficult, especially when everyone else wants your time, but try to plan for this and the chances of exasperating your children will be lessened.

William Hendrickson makes the comment that you can avoid exasperating your children by "allowing for the fact that the child is growing up, and has a right to have ideas of his own, and need not be an exact copy of his father or mother to be a success."

Don't neglect your children. In the quarrel between David and his son Absalom, was the fault entirely on Absalom's side? We read in 2SA 14:28 "Absalom lived two years in Jerusalem without seeing the king's face." Don't let the sun go down on your anger, and don't wait two years before making things right between you and your children if a problem arises.

Bringing up our children in the discipline and instruction of the Lord is to be modeled in the way Jesus disciplined the 12. He always gave them the truth and He always gave it in love. He spent time with them and was always there when they didn't understand or when they made wrong decisions.

But moms and dads, one of the best ways to encourage your children in the Lord is through your relationship to one another. Let the children see your affection toward one another as you kiss your wife good-bye before you go to work or when you come home. Let them hear you say to each other, 'I love you.'

There is nothing like stability in the home to promote peace and security among the children. They are much more likely to listen to you and follow your lead as you are seeking after the Lord and walking in His ways.

Children are not stupid. They see the way we act at home and they compare that with the way we act outside of our homes. Are we setting the example for them in every arena of life? Nothing will exasperate a child more than to think that the rules change depending on the circumstance.

Always be there for them. Always love them even when they don't come up to what we expect. Don't belittle them in public if a private rebuke can be used. Children are not our equals when it comes to authority and must be dealt with accordingly, and yet they are still people, little people at that, and must be treated with love and respect.

We do our best as unto the Lord and spend a great deal of time in prayer, as well as instructing, encouraging, loving and leading. Parenthood is not always easy, but when we follow God's prescription we can be assured that He will use it to bring our children to the point of coming to Him, as to a Father who loves them, and desires for a personal relationship with them.

All of us should never forget that we in Christ are all referred to as children. None of us have arrived, we're constantly learning and growing in Christ. But what an awesome thing to know that our Father created this universe and has every intention of bringing us home. Until that time, let's all honor our heavenly Father as we honor each other in our respective roles in the family in which we find ourselves.

Wives, husbands, fathers and mothers, children. We're all in this together and only the grace of God found in Christ will enable us to be more than conquerors for Him, not only in our families but in our communities as well, as we bring them the life-giving message of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, inviting them to become part of the family of God.