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**C0518 -- May 4, 2005 – Ephesians 6:1-4 – Children, Obey Your Parents**

We have dealt with Divine Institution #2: Marriage in the context of being filled by the Spirit (5:18). The context of being filled by the Spirit is “Walking in Wisdom” which began in 5:15 and closes at 6:9. The next circle of context is the application section of Ephesians in chapters 4-6 which aptly follow Paul’s doctrinal discourse in chapters 1-3. So, we’re in the section of Ephesians which reveals the logical outworking of the doctrine. Right doctrine is crucial but as we learned when we studied Revelation 2:1-8 the church at Ephesus had grown cold in its orthodox doctrine. They had left their first love which signals that they were not applying doctrine. We must ever guard against rigorously holding to sound doctrine and not living out that doctrine. However, the bigger problem the church is having in our day is simply the study of Bible doctrine. Apart from this crucial fact there can be no genuine Christian living. The doctrine is what renews our minds and transforms us to Christ (Rom 12:1-2). But today Christianity is going through an intellectual slump. In the late 1800’s and early 1900’s Christians gave every area of life over to the secular world and reserved only faith for Christianity. They supposed that the public education system could educate our children in the various areas of life and the church would simply focus on the gospel. Well, they cut themselves off. With the decline of rational thought in the secular world came relativism and with the depraved mind’s dichotomy of rationality and faith Christianity became just another of the many world’s religions; considered by many a supernatural crutch for weak minded individuals. Because of Christianity’s departure from rational thought Christianity has being taken over by the modern Charismatic movement influenced strongly by the eastern religions and has become a subjective experiential religion. To our great dismay Christian minds in America have closed. The world’s greatest academic institutions used to be Christ-centered universities like Princeton and Harvard. Now these are the centers of left-wing secular humanism. Christianity has moved from the center of rational thought to a mysticism through the infiltration of every wind of doctrine. Faith is no longer considered a rational entity but a blind leap. But the Bible insists it is no such thing! Faith in Jesus Christ and His word is the most rational thing a person can do because you are trusting in a content that reveals

the ultimate seat of rationality, Jesus Christ. Paul, one of the most brilliant men ever, came saying *For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified.*” (1 Cor 2:2) and *“For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, <sup>4</sup> for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses. <sup>5</sup> We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ,”* (2 Cor 10:3-5). We are to walk by the Spirit taking every thought captive to Christ which brings us once again to the principle in Eph 5:18; being filled by the Spirit. Upon which we now depart into a study of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Divine Institution: Family. In particular, the child-parent relationship. Once again, Paul addresses the submissive party first, children in 6:1-3 and then the father in 6:4. If you’ll notice there is three times more information for the children than for the parents in this section. The parallel passage is found in Col 3:20-21 which we will reference shortly.

Those who delve deeply into the Scriptures are considered Bible worshipers rather than Christ worshipers. But this is far from the truth. The real issue is that these people are lazy believers or professing believers. They don’t want to think but the Lord Jesus Christ said to love Him with our whole being; heart, mind, soul and spirit; not just with emotions and words. The anti-intellectual climate of Christianity is causing Christians to come to church and expect to check their brains at the door.

***Greek Text 6:1 Ta tekna hupakouete tois goneusin humon [en kurio] touto gar estin dikaion.***

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

First we have the present imperative command **Children, obey your parents**. The word **children** is not *brephos* which would refer to “infants” and it’s not *neaniskos* which would refer to “young men”, but the word is *teknon*, a neuter, broad range word referring to girls and boys who are still living at home, dependent on their parents, and old enough to understand instruction. The reference to **children** denotes a closer relationship than son because **children** are totally dependent on their parents whereas **sons** (*huios*) have some independence. **children** need the guidance of adults. They should never be taught that they themselves are the criterion. They must be taught that God is the criterion by which all things must be measured. This begins with Christian parents who have learned this principle themselves. The present imperative **obey** is *hupakouo* meaning “beneath, to hear” or simply “to obey”. This is the same word used in 1 Peter 3:5-6 where Sarah “obeyed” her husband. We learned then that the wife’s submission to her husband includes “obedience”. “Obedience” is one aspect of biblical submission. In the same way, **children** are to **obey**

their **parents**. Notice **children**...you are to **obey your parents**. What this means is that if another parent tells you to do something that **your parents** told you not to do then you do what **your parents** said and not what the other parent said. However, I might add that it is a wise thing to do what another parent says to do if your parents have not instructed you otherwise. You, as a young person must also respect your elders and submit to them. It is in this area that we see a lot of rebellion today. For example, in the area of the educator-student relationship on a school campus. The rebellion on these campuses is reaching record levels. **Children** don't recognize that other adults have authority over them (Read from the Texas Law Handbook).

## **Texas Law Handbook**

### **Subchapter F. Special Relationships**

#### **9.62 Educator—student**

The use of force, but not deadly force, against a person is justified:

- (1) if the actor is entrusted with the care, supervision, or administration of the person for a special purpose; and
- (2) when and to the degree the actor reasonably believed the force is necessary to further the special purpose or to maintain discipline in a group.

Returning to our context, **your** responsibility is to **your parents**. Since this is a present imperative, **children**, you are to continually be obedient to **your parents**. We might add that you cannot fulfill this command unless you are filled by the Spirit. Turn to Eph 5:18. Do not be drunk with wine but be filled by the Spirit. Wine does one thing to all people...it controls them. In the same way when we are filled by the Spirit He controls us. Young people, you must learn to let your will be controlled by the Lord's will. It is His will that you **obey your parents** all the time. You say, "that's impossible." Sure, you can't do it, but when you yield your will to the Lord's will then the Spirit can control you and enable you to **obey your parents**. It is imperative for young people to learn to walk by the Spirit at an early age. This implies that they have become believers. If they don't their egos and their wills get too big to suppress. So, parents, you want your children to obey you. Focus on teaching them to be filled by the Spirit. How often have we taught our children that the only way they can be obedient to us is by being filled by the Spirit? How many times have we taught them that obedience requires absolute dependence on the Spirit? But just as importantly as teaching them this, have we demonstrated it in our marriage? Why do you think Paul mentioned the wife-husband relationship before the child-parent relationship? Because, each partner in marriage must learn to be filled by the Spirit so they can take their biblical role in order to model to their children what being filled by the Spirit looks like.

Children learn by what parents say AND by what parents do. Teaching your children to be filled by the Spirit is not enough. Parents must also demonstrate it their marriages and church relationships. Another implication here for why Paul talked about marriage first and then children is that marriage should always precede having children. There should not be children outside of wedlock. Children need consistency and stability in order to develop self-discipline and responsibility and the best place to develop that is within a biblically structured family where mother and father are fulfilling their biblical roles. Husbands being masculine leaders and wives being feminine responders; both filled by the Spirit. This will form a model for how our children should walk (by the Spirit) and thus a means of victory in the home.

Paul goes on to say **obey your parents in the Lord**. This describes the attitude **children** are supposed to have in obedience. They are to have an attitude that they are being obedient to the Lord. They are not to do it with a bad attitude. What is the reason? Paul says, **for this is right**. In the OT there are several important passages commanding children to obey their parents (Exod 20:12 and Dt 5:16). In fact, under the Mosaic Law children who struck or cursed their parents were to be put to death (Exod 21:15, 17). You say this is too harsh; capital punishment for striking or cursing a parent? It is not. Your mom and dad are your parents by God's design and purpose. To strike them is to strike at God Himself. Further, rebellious children are irresponsible and lack self-discipline and eventually cause societal problems. When this happens on a large scale (as in the 1960's) a nation can border on collapse (anarchy). So, the reason **children** should **obey** their **parents** is because **this is right**. Col 3:20 says it a bit clearer. It says "for this is well pleasing to the Lord". But what is **right**? Does *might* make **right**? How do we define **right**? What makes something **right**? Is something **right** in and of itself? No, God's righteous character is the standard for what is right and wrong everywhere in the universe all the time. Anytime anyone makes any kind of value judgment (should have, that's right, that's wrong, he's a good guy, etc...) they imply that there is an absolute standard. All denials of an absolute standard are themselves absolute standards (e.g. everything is relative, everything is evolving). Absolutes are unavoidable because that's the way God created the universe and the absolute standard itself comes back to God's righteous character. So, a child's behavior can be measured only by whether it complies with God's righteousness or not and the only way for a child's behavior to comply with God's righteousness is if it's done under the filling of the Holy Spirit since then the Spirit controls their actions.

*Greek Text 6:2 tima ton patera sou kai ten metera, etis estin entole prote en epaggelia,*  
**Translation 6:2 Honor your father and mother, which is in fact the first commandment with a promise**

The motivation for **children to obey their parents** is given next in 6:2-3 where Paul quotes from the LXX of Exod 20:12. Paul is citing from the 10 commandments or what is better called the “Decalogue” (“Ten Words”). The Decalogue is a summary of the entire Mosaic Law which has 613 commandments. The Church is not under the Mosaic Law as a rule of life but often its commandments are repeated for the Church. In fact, nine of the Ten Commandments are repeated for the Church. The sole commandment not repeated is the fourth commandment: “Remember the Sabbath, to keep it holy”. Yet here is one commandment which has been covered in the Mosaic Law. The Decalogue can be divided into two sections: commands 1-4 and commands 5-10. Commands 1-4 deal with a person’s relationship to God and commands 5-10 deal with a person’s relationship to other human beings. The command here is “HONOR YOUR FATHER AND YOUR MOTHER”. What does this command encompass? Since the Decalogue is a summary of the whole law we find the details of this commandment within the rest of the Mosaic Law. Honoring father and mother includes

- Anyone who strikes or curses his father or mother shall be put to death (Exod 21:15, 17)
- Anyone who dishonors his father or mother shall be cursed (Dt 27:16)
- Any stubborn, defiant, disobedient son shall be killed (Dt 27:18-21)
- Everyone shall revere/fear his mother and father (Lev 19:3)

Obedience to one’s parents is therefore included in the 5<sup>th</sup> commandment to HONOR YOUR FATHER AND YOUR MOTHER. To obey your parents is to honor them, to disobey your parents is to dishonor them. Notice that even though the husband is the head of the wife and the leader of the family the children are to be obedient to both mother and father. In this respect the mother is equal to the father and has full claim to the obedience of the children. This is an important principle. As I’ve mentioned before, the home is the first school. Home is the first training ground for our children. If a child is trained to obey and honor the parents this becomes the first step in their learning to honor and obey God. If a child dishonors and disobeys his parents he or she will most likely have this same rebellious attitude toward God. But what about after marriage? What is the parent-child relationship like after they marry? Because the husband is to leave his father and mother and be united to his wife (leave and cleave) he may no longer be required to be obedient to them but he still has to honor them. While obedience and honor are inseparable under the Mosaic Law they are slightly detached in the Church. Paul adds a motivation for **children** when he adds, **which is the first commandment with a promise**. The command to honor your father and mother is the 5<sup>th</sup> commandment of the Mosaic Law but some have argued

that the 2<sup>nd</sup> commandment has a promise attached to it. How can this be the **first commandment with a promise** when the 2<sup>nd</sup> commandment has promises attached to it? The best answer is that the 5<sup>th</sup> commandment is the first commandment to have a *specific* promise attached to it. The 2<sup>nd</sup> commandment has a *general* promise attached to it but it is applicable to all the commandments, not just the 2<sup>nd</sup> commandment. The 5<sup>th</sup> commandment is the first of all 613 commandments to have a *specific* promise attached to it. And what is that promise?

*Greek Text 6:3 hina eu soi genetai kai ese makrochronios epi tes ges.*

**Translation 6:3 so that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth**

**SO THAT IT MAY BE WELL WITH YOU, AND THAT YOU MAY LIVE LONG ON THE EARTH.** This is the result of being obedient to your parents. The promise is two-fold. First of all, **so that it may be well with you** and second, **that you may live long on the earth**. The specifics of these promises are difficult to ascertain because we have limited revelation on them. In the OT, under the Mosaic Law, one was promised long life on the condition of keeping the law (Dt 4:4; 5:33). In Dt 5:33 God attaches the promise of long life in the land. The “land” had reference to the Promised Land of Israel (the borders of which are outlined in Gen 15:18 and Ezek 47:13-48:35). The “long life” is not really defined in the OT. Perhaps the best clue to what the OT meant is found in the cases where a child *dishonored* his parents.

- A son who persistently disobeys his parents is to be stoned (Dt 21:18-21)
- a child who strikes or curses his father or mother is to be put to death (Exod 21:15, 17)

These two clues imply that a child who honors his parents is not punishable by death and can expect physical well-being and a long life.

The promise **that it may be well with you** probably refers to stability and discipline necessary to function well within the family and society.

Obedience/Honor

- Self-Discipline: responsibility, productivity, efficiency
- Stability: consistency, order, reliability
- Longevity of life: extended life
- Well-being: strong mental & spiritual health

Disobedience/Dishonor

- Lack of Self-Discipline: irresponsibility, not productive, not efficient
- Instability: inconsistent, disorder, unreliable
- Shortened life: shortened life
- Lack of well-being: poor mental & spiritual health

It should be added that these are generalities and that there are always exceptions (e.g. Job 21:7; Jer 12:1-3) but the exceptions should not prevent children from obeying this commandment. These are, most commonly, the results of “obedience/honor” and “disobedience/dishonor” of one’s parents. The principle of this OT commandment can be applied to the NT children who live under grace. Children who obey their parents are more likely to exhibit the good qualities listed above than the bad ones. The only difference between the OT and NT commandments is this, and it is a crucial one; the promise to the Israelites pertained only to those who trusted the Lord and lived in the Promised Land. The Church does not have a Promised Land and is not Israel so our promise simply refers to the earth. Wherever the Lord has placed an individual on this earth, if he is obedient to his parents then he will have a long life. The extended life here does NOT refer to eternal life. That is spiritualizing the passage. If it meant eternal life then that would mean salvation was conditioned upon a child obeying/honoring his parents and trusting Christ is the sole condition to receive eternal life. The word for **live long** is a word that means “a long time” and not eternal. Also, the text says **on the earth** and not in heaven. So, the long life here does not refer to eternal life but to physical life on this earth.

This promise of long-life does not destroy the imminency of Christ’s coming. It is a general promise to **children**. Just because Christ’s coming is imminent does not preclude Paul or other believers making long-term plans. Paul planned to go to Spain but this did not change the fact that he hoped Christ would return in his lifetime but he was uncertain that it would. The core idea of imminency is “certain to occur but uncertain when it will occur”. Imminence does not mean that it is “near” but only that it can happen at any moment. “Consequently, this encourages one to be prepared as if it could occur at any moment.”<sup>i</sup> Therefore, children should **obey their parents for this is right**. Yet it is the child who is filled by the Spirit who will respond in obedience to this command.

*Greek Text 6:4 Kai oi pateres, me parorgizete ta tekna humon alla ektrephete auta en paideia kai nouthesia kuriou.*

**Translation 6:4 And fathers, do not make your children angry, but bring them up in the training and correction of the Lord.**

Verse 4 gives the responsibility of the father. It is interesting that Paul referred to the **parents** in v. 1 but now singles in on the father. Paul makes this shift because he recognizes that although the mother and father are equal in terms of their children's obedience the father is responsible for the whole family. The father took a unique role in the patriarchal family of Israel. Negatively, the father

- Had absolute control over his children even after they were married if they lived with him
- He could stone his brother, sons, daughters or wife if they enticed him to idol worship (Dt 13:6-11)
- He was able to sell his daughters into slavery (Exod 21:7)

Positively, the father

- Was responsible for the education of his children (particularly his sons) in terms of the Lord and the history of the nation of Israel (Exod 10:2; Dt 4:9; 6:7)
- Physical discipline was a part of this education process (Prov 13:24; 22:15; 29:15, 17; Dt 8:5)

In the Greek, Hellenic Judaism, and Roman societies all gave an extreme amount of power to the fathers over their children. Fathers could lock up their children, scourge them, shame them, sell them, execute them, etc...but this passage gives fathers a new perspective on treatment of their children. The father's responsibility is stated, first negatively and second positively.

Negatively, **do not provoke your children to anger**. The word **provoke** is *parorgizo* and is used only here and in Rom 10:19 (noun used in Eph 4:26). The word means "to irritate". Fathers **do not irritate your children**. The contextual use in Romans 10:19 gives some clue as to what is meant. God is presently using Gentile salvation to provoke Israel to burn and to believe in the Messiah. It irritates Israel that Gentiles claim their God. The Gentile Christian is to come alongside Jewish unbelievers and cause them to burn with envy for their Messiah. When we apply this to fathers this is what we come up with in the real world. Fathers, do not praise other children and run your child down. e.g. "Why can't you hit the baseball like Johnny over there?" "Well, Becky gets all A's. What's wrong with you?" This kind of comparing really **irritates** your children and it may cause the **children to become angry**. Their anger, no doubt grows out of the frustration of not being able to please their fathers.

- Father nags or demeans child



- Child becomes frustrated because he/she can't seem to please his/her father
- Child becomes angry

Problem is not with the children but with the father.

Instead of nagging or demeaning your children fathers are given a positive command. Fathers are told to **bring them up in the training and correction of the Lord**. The command is to **bring them up**. This is the Greek word *ektrephe* which Paul used in 5:29 to describe how people generally take care of their own bodies. They “nourish” them. Fathers are to “raise up, rear” their children in two spheres: sphere of **training** and sphere of **correction**. These two words overlap in meaning but there are some slight nuances. The word I've translated **training** is *paideia* and *paideia* means “education or training, instruction” in a body of knowledge in connection with discipline or punishment. So, *paideia* means that fathers are responsible for educating their children with a specific body of knowledge. Israelite fathers educated their children with respect to two primary objectives: the Lord and the Lord's miraculous dealings with the nation of Israel. This type of training would include a study of the history of Israel and the surrounding nations that came into contact with her. It would warn against idolatry. It would emphasize the sins of the fathers and the faithfulness of the Lord. It would lay out a way for them to walk and a living God whom they should follow. Fathers, you might educate your children with respect to two primary objectives: the Lord and the history of the church. This again would involve study of history beginning in the gospels and Acts and through church history. This will give your children a way in which they should walk and a living Christ whom they should follow.

The second word **correction** (admonition) is *nouthesia* which means “to place in the mind” “to exert influence on the mind” particularly with respect to correction. This is verbal correction that is done in such a way that it does not provoke or embitter your children. As a part of instruction the father is to warn his children about false paths. The **training** and **correction** is to be in connection with **the Lord**. This means the entire **training** curriculum ought to be Christ-centered (Christocentric) rather than Man-centered (anthropocentric). All subjects ought to be taught in connection with Christ. In the OT the Israelites were to “*teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up*” (Dt 6:7). In the NT Paul says, “*For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified*” (1 Cor 2:2). Paul did not mean that he wasn't interested in boxing, mathematics, or biology. What He meant was that he never entered into study of any area of life independent of Scripture. Since every area of life is ultimately a creation of God then God

has necessarily spoken through these areas of life. **Psalm 111:2** “*Great are the works of the LORD; They are studied by all who delight in them.*” Therefore, we should never study mathematics, science, law, art, politics, etc... without reference to Christ. And by the way, Paul is not talking about tacking Christ on at the end of the curriculum but integrating Christ into every class in the curriculum. Tacking Christ on the end makes Him just an addendum, but integrating Christ puts Him at the core. And that’s what Paul is after with father’s here. If we don’t do this as Christian fathers then we are subconsciously teaching our children that Christ has nothing to do with these areas of life; that Christianity doesn’t interact with the real world. And, unfortunately, that’s how most Christians live today. They are never able to figure out how Christ connects with the real world. Christ is an other worldly ‘beyond’ to them. So, Paul is training and correcting us in how we, as fathers, ought to train and correct our children. He’s giving us a *methodology* that places Christ at the core of reality so that we and our children are never tempted to think about any area of life as independent from Christ (idolatry). And our instruction must also include correction. A method of teaching that only praises our children will only lead them to thinking they are “alright”. But the word of God says our children are not “alright” at all. It teaches that they are lost, depraved sinners who are at enmity with God and that even while we were yet sinners Christ died for us and therefore we must personally receive Christ in order to be restored from our lost estate and renewed unto knowledge. Therefore, we must have a method of training that puts Christ at the core of every discipline and one which involves punishment or correction.

I’ll conclude with a reminder to both parents and children. Parents, the power of the Holy Spirit is the means by which you can fulfill your responsibilities to your children. Children, the same is true for you. To obey and honor your parents requires that you do it by the power of the Holy Spirit. All parties must yield their will to the Lord’s will and trust the Lord for the results.

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<sup>i</sup> Hoehner, Harold, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002), 794.

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