

Parents and Children

Introduction

a. objectives

1. subject – Paul commands submission of children to parents as examples of true faith
2. aim – to cause us to seek to raise our children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord
3. passage – Ephesians 6:1-4

b. outline

1. The Premise of Children (Ephesians 6:1)
2. The Promise to Children (Ephesians 6:2-3)
3. The Parenting of Children (Ephesians 6:4)

c. opening

1. the **pastoral concern** about children entering an *anti-Christian* world
 - a. **remember #1**: Paul was writing to a church, and that church sat in a culture that was openly hostile to the faith – those who worshiped together did so at great personal cost in their *conversion*
 - b. **remember #2**: the church at Ephesus had children participating in it – parents undoubtedly brought their children into worship for their edification (just as happens today!)
 - c. we are no longer living in a Christian or post-Christian society, but one openly hostile to Christianity
 1. **i.e.** every week another story of hostility (**e.g.** California and pro-life centers)
 - d. therefore, children “leaving” their parents tutelage within the church and entering adulthood will face the open hostility of secularism at university, career, etc.
 1. **i.e.** a pastoral concern for how to help them face that worldview without losing their faith
 - e. one issue addressed by Paul here in the beginning verses of **Ephesians 6**
2. the **context** of this passage within Ephesians
 - a. Paul is using various human relationships common to believers to illustrate what he means by the concept of “*mutual submission*” in **5:21**
 - b. this mutual submission is a part of what it means to be “*filled with the Spirit*” in **5:18**, which is the result of using the time wisely (**see 5:15**), and not be caught up in the debauchery starting in **5:1**
 - c. **IOW**: Paul is explaining how we are to *walk in love* (the theme of **Ephesians 4-6**) – instead of being filled with sin, we are to be filled with the Spirit, mutually submitting ourselves to one another in our various roles, even as we do in marriage (for example)
 1. **e.g.** a wife submits herself to her husband to demonstrate genuine faith in Christ
 2. **e.g.** a husband loves his wife self-sacrificially to lead her to become all that Christ would have her to be, just as Christ draws a bride from the world and sanctifies “her” to himself
 3. **i.e.** in every role in the church, we serve the body *submissively* to advance its cause (**e.g.** elders are *symbiotic* in leading the church and serving the body in its spiritual growth)
 4. (**now**) parents and children are used by Paul as another example of this mutual submission that characterizes the entire body of Christ

I. The Premise of Children (Ephesians 6:1)

Content

a. the obedience

1. “*obey*” – a present, active, imperative = to do what is commanded; to acquiesce to another; to submit
 - a. **i.e.** an *on-going* (active) submission to the will of another; an *uncompleted task* – the *process* of doing what is required *moment-by-moment* without fail (**e.g. as is faith**)
2. “*parents*” – the human beings who gave you life (or, in adoption, *preserved* and *extended* your life)
 - a. **lit.** your father and mother; the two persons from whom you are directly descended
 - b. this is the fundamental relationship at the core of **human civilization**
 1. the first command given to the human race was to “*multiply and fill the earth*” (**Genesis 1:28**)
 2. the objective of marriage (then) was to take dominion over Creation through **procreation**
 3. however, when a secularized culture dismisses this fundamental relationship (and the attendant reality of procreation), it dooms itself (**e.g. Toys R Us**)
 - b. this is the most **fundamental relationship** that you have – you are the product of two people; you are the genetic and experiential offspring of two specific human beings

3. the command to obedience is specifically addressed to the relationship of children to parents, which Paul assumes as the fundamental connection that every person possesses
 - a. true, in **adoption**, the *biological* connection is replaced with a *legal* one, but from a Christian worldview, that connection is *no less* fundamental to the relationship – this is at the heart of the adoption of believers *by God*; we are considered *no less* to him than his own Son (1:5)
- b. the object (in the Lord)**
 1. **principle: Paul is not intending here for obedience to be only in regards to moral behavior, but is (instead) commanding an obedience to the leadership of parents in the Christian faith**
 - a. specifically, the *danger* of these words is to assume that Paul simply wants children to “be good”
 - b. **quandary:** how to raise children to be morally upright, and (yet) somehow avoiding them concluding that their good behavior is what *makes* them a Christian
 1. the *de facto* religion of the American teenager: moralistic therapeutic deism (Christian Smith, 2005, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers*)
 2. fundamentally, the belief that “being good” is the very definition of Christianity; that the church is simply a *therapeutic* resource to counter bad behavior (or to help raise “good kids”)
 2. “*in the Lord*” = in the things of the Lord; in matters of faith; to obey parents as they guide you towards faith in Christ *within the framework* of all that is necessary to grow up and become independent
 - a. certainly, Paul expects children to be obedient to *everything* a good parent requires
 - b. however, Paul *also* expects that believing parents will guide their children to faith in Jesus Christ as the *primary* goal of their upbringing (**see below**)
 - c. thus, this command to children is *probably* to heed their parents as they attempt to teach the faith
 1. **i.e.** listen closely to your parents as they labor to teach you a biblical worldview
- c. the objective (as what is right)**
 1. this phrase points to the above conclusion, since even *unbelieving* families understand that good behavior is essential to a successful upbringing – Paul is pointing to *something else* as being “*right*”
 2. and, the next two (2) verses help to solidify his point ...

II. The Promise to Children (Ephesians 6:2-3)

Content

a. the quotation of the Fifth Commandment

1. Paul quotes the first commandment of the second half of the Decalogue (**Exodus 20:12**)
 - a. the first tablet (1-4) contains the *vertical* commandments – how we relate to God
 - b. the second tablet (5-10) contains the *horizontal* – how we relate to one another
 - c. but, the Fifth Commandment **transitions** between the two tablets
 1. **remember:** the *fundamental nature* of humanity as male and female is to “parent” (procreate)
 2. all horizontal realities begin with an essential element of the *Imago Dei* (from the vertical): **personal relationship**, born out of the very nature of God himself and placed in our nature
 3. parenthood, and the relationship of children, is *key* to understanding the world God created

b. the promise of the Fifth Commandment

1. Paul divides the Fifth Commandment and inserts a comment
 - a. this is the “*first*” (**only!**) command with a “*promise*” – **i.e.** this command *is so important* that God linked a specific promise to it when he gave it to the Israelites
 - b. the promise is to “*live long in the land*”
 1. the success of the Israelites in the Promised Land would be directly related to how well they understood the relationship between parents and children (**the original promise**)
 - a. if the Israelites disregarded the creation mandate of procreation and dishonored the nature of parenting, they would (as a nation) be weakened by a falling birthrate and an internal strife, thus becoming easy prey for hostile nations (**e.g.** Europe and now America)
 2. the success of the church is also directly related to how well it understands the relationship between parents and children (**the promise applied by Paul**)
 - a. “long life” is not geographical, but *spiritual* – to follow the instruction of Christian parents as they seek to develop faith in their children is *precisely* what will lead to *everlasting* life
2. **Paul is commanding children in the church to submit to the leadership of parents in the Christian faith, for that is the sure way by which they find everlasting life**

III. The Parenting of Children (Ephesians 6:4)

Content

a. the object of the command

1. “*Fathers*” – Paul addresses fathers specifically, because he recognizes the importance of fathers as the leaders of the home – this is *not* to assume that this applies *only* to them, and not to mothers
 - a. to highlight the reality of the Creation ordinance and the leadership of husbands in their families
 - b. to highlight the importance of fathers in the household *in regards to faith*
 - c. to highlight the truth that the church is only a *part* (or tool) used by parents to raise their children

b. the *negative* command

1. not to “*provoke your children to anger*” = not to a) create an environment where rebellion becomes the norm or b) fail to demonstrate that you practice what you preach when it comes to faith

c. the *positive* command

1. the “*instruction*” (“*nurture*” KJV) = the *work* of teaching, exempling, and holding accountable
 - a. **(again)** notice the phrase “*of the Lord*” – instruction *specifically* intended to teach biblical truth towards the goal of creating true faith in Christ in the child
2. the “*discipline*” (“*admonition*” KJV) = the *drive* towards completeness, robustness, and defensibility
 - a. **(probably)** not discipline in the *corrective* sense, but rather in the *accomplishing* sense
 - b. a desire that the instruction results in what is necessary for true faith to *survive* – a disciplined approach to learning that creates a complete, robust and defensible faith in the child
 - c. **e.g.** to answer my ***pastoral concern*** above: a vision of a church-wide, biblically-centered, Christ-exalting, faith-producing, highly-apologetic, age-cascading, family-supporting catechism
3. **Paul is commanding parents in the church to submit to the needs of their children in the Christian faith, for that is essential to them coming to faith and remaining in that faith**
 - a. note the ***mutual submission*** on display here