

A Word For The Children

Ephesians 6:1-3

In the closing verses of Ephesians 5, Paul began to deal with the Christian relationships in the home, and the difference Christ should make in a household ruled completely by Him. Today we turn to the opening verses of chapter six to find God's instructions for the children in the home. It is important to remember that these words are for Christian children. These words make no sense whatsoever without the presence of Christ in the home. Paul was writing to Christian people, so the only place you can fully apply what he taught is in the Christian home.

God is always clear about what He wants His people to do and be. We can argue and rationalize about what God says, but the truth will never change. His commandments for us will never change. We are to follow them in faith, just as we first asked Christ to enter our lives by faith.

It is interesting that Paul should begin a section on the Christian home by first speaking to the husband and wife. This is so important to realize: the relationship between the husband and wife will determine the other relationships in the home. So now the second relationship Paul turns to is that between children and parents. Paul was saying, quite rightly, that even the relationship between children and their parents should fall under the Lordship of Christ.

In Paul's day, there was a custom among the Romans known as "patria potestas," which means "the father's power." The father had absolute control and power over his wife, his children, and his entire household. He could sell anyone as a slave, or work them in the fields in chains. He could even order them killed as punishment. When a child was born, it was placed at its father's feet. If the father picked up the child that meant that he acknowledged the child and wished to keep it. If he turned his back and walked away, the child was to be thrown out or sold at auction.

So when Christ came into the world, what He taught was completely opposite. He taught that children are just as important in the eyes of God as the adults are, which was a hard thing for the disciples to understand. Jesus gave a new meaning to the importance of children, and He gave new meaning to the responsibility a parent has in raising children. Let's take this brief passage in Ephesians 6 to find just a small sampling of what the Bible teaches. Today, we look at what God expects of the children.

There are actually two words in vv. 1-3 that describe the responsibility of the Christian child toward his or her parents. One word applies to the child who still lives at home, and the other word applies to the grown child, who is out on his own in the world with his own household.

1 The word for the younger child is “obey.”

“Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.” “Obey” is a simple word; it is a word that we can all understand. Here it means “to listen and obey.” It doesn’t need much *explanation*, but it does need a lot of *application*. In the New Testament, the word “obey” means to “listen and do.” It means to pay attention to what someone tells you or shows you, so that you may obey their instructions.

Children, that is God’s word for you to live by. I believe this word “obey” is directed to children who are still under the care of their parents. God wants you to obey your parents, plain and simple! You’re not always going to agree with what they tell you to do, and it may not always make sense. But God wants you to obey your parents, not because they are your parents, but because you have made a commitment to Jesus Christ, and He knows that being obedient to your parents is only one way to express in your life what you say you believe in your heart.

You see, God knows your relationship to Jesus is only going to be right as long as your relationship with your parents is right. If you’re mad and fuming at your parents, you won’t have any peace with Jesus. And when you disobey your parents on purpose, your relationship with Jesus will be clouded. You’ll begin to feel that God doesn’t hear your prayers, and you won’t have any peace or guidance in your daily life if you refuse to obey your parents.

When my own daughter Jennifer was very small, I led her in saying her prayers every night. If she had been real good during the day, and she knew it, she would say her prayers just as sweetly as a little girl could say them. But if she had been cranky all day, or began to be upset when bedtime approached, she would say, “I can’t say my prayers. You say it.” I think something deep down inside her told her that when she had been bad and had disobeyed, saying a prayer is not the most appropriate thing to do. Perhaps she realized that God wanted her to obey her father, and if she didn’t, she wasn’t obeying God, either.

You can fuss about it, and fume about it, but your relationship with Jesus will be no better than your relationship with your parents. They are not perfect, but the older you get the more you will realize how much they love you and care for you. You are not going to love and obey Jesus any more than you love and obey your parents.

2 The word for the older child is “honor”

This is what we see in verse two: *“Honor your father and mother.”* We recognize that, don’t we? It is taken from the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20. The original commandment way back in Exodus was addressed mainly to older children, and they are told to show a sense of responsibility for the welfare of their parents who are growing old. And this

seems to be how Paul used the word “honor” in Ephesians. The word means “to hold in respect, esteem, or to have high regard for.”

Paul is not saying that the child who has grown up and moved out of his parents’ house to begin a life of his own is to obey his parents in everything. But what he is saying is that even though they do have lives of their own, they are still responsible as children to honor their parents, to hold them in respect, to care for them. While we may no longer be obliged to *obey* our parents, we are never exempt from *honoring* them. Ephesians 6:2 is a quotation from the Ten Commandments, but then we are told that this is “*the first commandment with a promise.*” Then verse three tells us what the promise is: “*that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth.*”

Honoring our parents can be expressed in many different ways. The way we speak to them shows either honor or dishonor. Remembering birthdays and other special days is certainly one way we can honor our parents. Showing patience when our parents don’t say or do the things we think they should, or when they don’t act fast enough, are ways that demonstrate honor toward our parents. We have to remember that one day we will be there, too.

Two older men were sitting on a park bench, enjoying the sunshine. They had often visited this way over the years, and enjoyed each other's company. One morning, one of the men turned to the other and said, “I’m embarrassed to tell you that after all these years I just can’t remember your name. I was talking to my granddaughter the other day, and I mentioned you. But I couldn’t remember who you are. Please, tell me again, what’s your name?”

The other man turned and stared at him. After a moment a blank look, then a look of despair came across his face. After two full minutes of silence, he replied, “How soon do you have to know?”

That would sound funnier if it didn’t hit so close to home! But when our parents get like that, it’s important that we demonstrate honor toward them by being patient.

The time may come when you honor your parents by taking care of them, by doing for them what they cannot do themselves. It may mean commitments of time or money, but it is an honor for an adult child to care for an aging parent.

I’ve got to include this one: we can show honor to our parents by picking up the phone and calling them every once in a while, just to check on them and say hello. It would mean so much to them if you called for some reason other than birthdays or Christmas or because you want something. I can’t begin to tell you the number of times I’ve wished I could pick up the phone and call Mom or Dad, just to run something by them and see what they thought about it and get

their advice. I can't do that now, and I regret that I didn't do it more often when I could. Don't make that mistake—if your parents are still living, call them! Go see them! Do what the Bible says and *honor them!*

So there are two words that describe the responsibility of the child. The word for the younger child is “*obey*” and the word for the older child is “*honor*.” Depending upon where you are at this stage in your life, God says that you are to either **obey** your parents, or **honor** your parents. And you are to do it not just because they are your parents, but because Christ is your Lord!

Perhaps today you would like to publicly recommit your life as a younger child or as an older child as you strive to live by what the Word of God says. I invite you to come forward to make sure that your first steps in this new stage of your life are made before God and others in His family.