

Authority, Fruitfulness, and Freedom Eph. 6:1-4

Introduction

The Bible teaches that justification by faith alone is the foundation of all social and political freedom and flourishing (Rom. 5:18, Jn. 8:36). But one of the first fruits of that salvation is the restoration of the family: “And he will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the earth with a curse” (Mal. 4:6). This is the restoration of the blessings that flow from keeping the fifth commandment. All of the commandments describe the path of freedom for a free people (Ex. 20:1, Gal. 5), but the fifth commandment is the one with the specific promise of prosperity in the land and public square.

The Text: “Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. Honor your father and mother, which is the first commandment with promise: that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth. And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord” (Eph. 6:1-4).

Summary of the Text: Paul here addresses children in particular (Eph. 6:1), and this is a reminder that children are welcome in the assembly of the saints because Jesus welcomes them as citizens of His kingdom (Mt. 19:14). If the Lord is building the house and the city, children are arrows in the hand of mighty men and speak with enemies in the gate (Ps. 127). But the command is clear: children must obey their parents in the Lord. Obedience is right away, all the way, and cheerfully. This obedience is owed to both father and mother (Prov. 1:8). This means that God has given parents true authority, and therefore obedience to parents is a righteous and just thing. But this obedience is *in the Lord*, under the authority and checked by the authority of Christ Himself, as all earthly authority is. Paul reviews the fifth commandment, specifically drawing attention to the promise of land and long life (Eph. 6:2-3). This is significant since Paul is writing Ephesian Christians, which would have included gentile converts, indicating that the Abrahamic promises now apply to Gentile children. Paul is taking the promise of Canaan to Israel and expanding it to include all the nations in all the lands throughout the whole world, as was always in view (e.g. Gen. 22:18, 26:3-4). Finally, Paul addresses fathers, making it clear that it is their particular responsibility to see that their children are brought up obeying and understanding this promise (Eph. 6:4). The warning for fathers is that they not use their authority to provoke their children to wrath, but rather to use their authority to feed/nourish their children with the culture and counsel of Jesus (Eph. 6:4, cf. Eph. 5:29).

The Goodness of Hierarchy & Inequality

Going back to the garden of Eden, we know that dominion and rule and authority are good things (Gen. 1:26-28). Biblically speaking, rule and dominion are the means to fruitfulness. To rule well is to serve and guard (Gen. 2:15). If Adam had served and guarded the garden well, it would have flourished and matured into greater glory. When God took dominion of what He had made, He worked it and re-worked it and filled it and blessed it (Gen. 1). So too, when God took dominion of the man-all-alone, God cut him open and then fashioned the woman out of his rib and brought a glorious woman to Adam (Gen. 2:21-23). God’s authority in this was good. Adam’s submission to God in this was good. And Eve’s difference from Adam was very good. This is what biblical dominion does. This isn’t a cloning process (as evidenced by the creation of the woman), but a unity with diversity, a family resemblance with new glory. This is the goodness of hierarchy and the goodness of difference and *inequality*. We have been trained to think that inequality is a bad thing, but inequality is the basis for all fruitfulness. The Bible

requires equality before the law, and the promise of salvation is equal for all who trust in Jesus (Dt. 1:17, Gal. 3:28). But most inequality simply means we are different and better at different things and therefore responsible for different things. A race of clones or robots would act and think in the exact same ways and progress would be absolutely grinding. This is one of the great ironies of “progressives” who claim that the way to progress is absolute equality. No, absolute equality is the way to certain stagnation and regress. It is gratitude for difference and inequality, and those resulting gifts and responsibilities that are the path of biblical progress, fruitfulness, and therefore, freedom. Biblical dominion studies the differences, rejoices in the inequalities, and then serves and guards what God has made, seeking to maximize every creature’s greatest potential, and this is true freedom. True authority sets men free. Fathers and mothers exercise godly dominion over their children as they study them, feed them, teach them, train them, feed them, challenge them, correct them, and feed them. Fathers tend to exasperate and provoke their children by neglecting them or by demanding what they have not been prepared to give.

A Race of Immortals

C.S. Lewis says somewhere that we have never had dealings with “a mere mortal.” Every person in this world is immortal, destined for eternal horror or eternal glory. Every person we come in contact with will one day be a creature that will cause us to recoil in disgust or tempt us to fall down and worship. The human race was created to be a race of kings and queens, a race of lords and ladies, imaging the Living God who is infinite intelligence, wisdom, creativity, ingenuity, hilarity, power, beauty, and love. People are the most valuable resource in the universe. This is why the stakes are so high in marriage and parenting. This is the center of making these vastly powerful, valuable creatures. Moderns balk at adultery being punished by the death penalty (Lev. 20:10) or the death penalty for a rebellious son (Dt. 21:18-21), but this is because we have such a low view of marriage and family. When the Old Testament closed with the promise of salvation, the promise was summarized as turning hearts of children to their fathers, and hearts of fathers to their children, lest the land be cursed (Mal. 4:6). This is much of the curse that is on our land: the curse of broken marriage vows, sexual immorality, and fatherlessness. But the reverse is clearly implied: where children obey their parents, and where parents invest in the task of training up children in the Lord, the land is blessed. This means thinking of the family more like a small business organization. And this tends to answer a number of questions like why God assigns responsibility for the enterprise to the husband/father or what work a woman does.

Conclusion

Freedom is doing what you were made for to your greatest potential. Sin is not merely *like* slavery and death; it *is* slavery and death. This is the first and greatest freedom: freedom from guilt and sin and death. Has Jesus set you free? If not, get free. Call on the name of the Lord.

If Christ has set you free, then you are free indeed. And the first application of that freedom is wherever you are today: your marriage, your parents, your family, your land, your work. That is your place of authority and dominion, and he who is faithful in little will be faithful in much. Give authority/submission a good name. Make the world love hierarchy, inequality, authority, and obedience by how you lead and submit. Make them wish they had your Lord. Make them wish they were free.