

Children, Listen Up! – *Ephesians 6:1-3*

Introduction – First of all, this is a sermon about children, but it is *especially* a sermon for children. Second, children here are being addressed in the same context that wives and husbands were being addressed. This means that these commands also must be obeyed by Spirit-filled little ones, overflowing with music, thanksgiving, and mutual deference to one another (Eph 5:17ff). They are not moralistic exhortations telling our young saints to simply “be good.”

Children, Obey Your Parents in the Lord, for This is Right (v1) – Paul turns and addresses the children in the congregation now (this letter was intended to be read during the gathering of the saints in worship). The context and the direct exhortation means Paul expected the children to be in the worship service and that they could be regenerate at any age; as he addresses the entire congregation, I believe he assumes that the children are. As God’s people, we rejoice in the sounds of infant and children’s voices in the congregation. This is the sound of covenant blessing, of His kingdom extending to generations, and of ongoing discipleship and nurture. And it scares God’s enemies (Psalm 8:2).

Obey – The Greek word is a combination of two words, “listen,” and “under,” as in “listen with a demeanor prepared to act.” It is similar to when a parent says, “now, listen up!” If we look at Prov 1:8 and 6:20 we can see the direct connection from listening and obeying.

Obey Your Parents – God has delegated your parents that kind of authority. You should obey them “*in the Lord*” which means, among other things, that they do not ever have the right to command you to disobey the Lord. It also means that you should learn how to obey your parents by watching how they obey the Lord – and then imitate them.

For This is Right – The first reason you are to do so is because it is right, and another way of saying this is that it “*is righteous*.” The reason is not because they are bigger or stronger (because they may not be one day). In a Christian society, all authority is delegated authority. We also learn in Col 3:20 that obeying your parents “*is well pleasing to the Lord*.” He loves it, and it is what Jesus did when He was a child (Luke 2:51).

The Fifth Commandment and the First with a Promise (vv2-3) – Paul now quotes the Fifth Commandment (Deut 5:16). In some ways, this is not an additional commandment to children but another reason for his command to “obey” in verse 1. But our obedience is to be rendered with honor, and Jesus taught us that this command is to be applied even by adult-children and not with occasional sentimental cards, but with financial support (Matt 15:1-9).

The Glorious Promise – For the little kids, the promise means simply this – obey your parents and it will go well with you; that means no spankings. For all the rest of us older kids, the importance of this promise quoted to Ephesian Gentiles is enormous. First, your Gentile children are just as much a part of the New Covenant administration as the Jewish children were in the Old. Second, the promise expands just like the covenant, from only the land of Palestine to the entire world. Actually, that was always what God had in mind, and even Abraham grasped that (Rom 4:13ff). It will go well for Christian children on all the earth which the Lord is giving us through Jesus Christ. “*Blessed are the meek; for they shall inherit the earth*” (Matt 5:5).

What Does This Obedience Look Like? – How we define and live out this obedience matters to the Lord, and matters to Him very much.

Heart Obedience (Deut 6:4-5) – God not only wants us to obey Him, but to love Him in that obedience with all of our hearts. A child’s obedience towards his earthly father and mother must also be from the heart and manifests his loyalty to his heavenly Father.

Delayed Obedience is Disobedience (Matt 21:28-32) – Do not be like the second son who said he would obey and then does not. Godly obedience is immediate obedience.

Grumbling Obedience is Disobedience (Phil 2:14-16) – God wants us to obey Him with an attitude of rejoicing that flows from trust in the One who has authority over us. Muttering, grumbling, and complaining about obedience or while obeying is disobeying. And He has told you, children, to obey your parents in the Lord.

Disrespectful Obedience – How you speak about your obedience to your parents, or to others, including your tone and the rolling of your eyes, matters. God commands hearts that are always thankful for all things, including the things your parents have instructed you to do.

Dealing with the War Within (Gal 5:16-17) – We mentioned the parable of the two sons (Matt 21:28-32), and we should note the normal struggle of the first son who won this war. The struggle to obey is a work of warfare within each one’s soul. It always will be in this life. Obedience can only be manifested and maintained by the Spirit, which is to say by grace through faith.

Back to Ephesians – And so, even for the kids, we must grow deeper and deeper in our understanding of who we are and what we’ve been given in Jesus Christ (Eph 1-3). We must understand that we have been saved by grace and not by works, and that those works of obedience have been prepared by our loving Father to walk in with Him and never on our own (Eph 2:8-10).