

“Children, Obey Your Parents in the Lord, for this is Right”

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Read Ephesians 6:1-3

When the family unit is viewed as a body or an army, I believe it changes our perspective as to how each part works for the common good. Just as a husband and wife are crucial to the overall health of a body, so also the children. Together each part forms a link in an unbreakable chain forged by a common commitment to the Lord and to each other. The family’s “victory” is no less attributed to the contributions of the child as are those of the mother and the father. Each individual part must play its role.

Although no one might desire to be the “water boy” on a team, or the one who hands out towels in the locker room, or simply participates as part of the “practice squad,” each role is still a part of one team, and it is the entire team working together for the common good. A child’s responsibilities might seem insignificant to the child, but they are crucial to the coach and to the other players. The Psalmist captures this idea in Psalm 127.

³ “Behold, **children are a gift of the LORD**, The fruit of the womb is a reward. ⁴ Like arrows in the hand of a warrior, So are the children of one's youth. ⁵ How blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them; They will not be ashamed When they speak with their enemies in the gate” (Ps. 127:3-5).

Here he also duly notes how God and God alone and only is the sole means of causation and enablement for a families overall health and victory (Psalm 127:1, 2). It is against this biblical background that we return to Ephesians 6:1-3.

Why might children obey their parents? Because their obedience to the instruction received enables the entire family to function well in their collective pursuit of God and for their common good. Why does such obedience honor their parents? It honors the parent by enabling the family “body” to live in and work toward health. It allows those within the various ranks of the advancing army to maintain and gain ground from their common enemy.

I wish for us to consider the idea of children obeying and honoring as found in Ephesians 6:1-3 within this context. There are several aspects to this. First, I would like to consider the child as found within the wisdom literature of the Old Testament. Second, I would like to consider the child as found in the New Testament. And finally, I would like to consider the child within history and then within our current culture.

- Children within Wisdom Literature in the Old Testament.

Here I will limit our study just to the Psalms and the Proverbs. Children are contrasted with the elderly (Pss. 37:25; 148:12). Youth or children are considered “simple” and “void of understanding” (Prov. 7:7). It is this “foolishness” that is to be driven from children (Prov.

22:15; 23:13; 29:15). The process of driving it from a child can be fierce. Yet in the absence of this aspect of parenting, children will bring “shame to their mother” (Prov. 29:15).

This idea must be taken seriously as it relates to how our children socialize with other children. Our children should not be seeking “counsel” from their peers. Peer counsel among children is a genuine pooling of ignorance. No one enjoys “disciplining” an older child and such action must be age appropriate, but let us not think that their innate foolishness will simply vanish without our direct and immediate intervention. There is never an occasion for exploitation or abuse. None of this type of activity is justifiable, and it is always sinful to take advantage of and mistreat a child, any child.

Children are capable of having character (Prov. 20:11) and not simply being “characters”. It is as parents note this character within the child that they are to nurture and cultivate this quality in order to solidify it and embed them in it (Prov. 22:6).

Children are always considered “gifts of the LORD” (Ps. 127:3). Their presence is a sign of blessedness (Ps. 127:5). They are a part of the various ranks within the army of righteousness in the battle for good and against evil.

In commenting on this idea, Adam Clarke notes how “Each child will, in the process of time, be a defense and support to the family, as arrows in the quiver of a skillful and strong archer; the more he has, the more enemies he may slay, and consequently the more [formidable] shall he be.” (Adam Clarke on Psalm 127:4).

Let me note in passing how just as no one is without headship or oversight, so also no one is without defense or strongholds. God is always and foremost our head and stronghold. This is clear from the Scripture and He has written into the Script other elements such as the government and the church as secondary means of support apart from the marriage covenant or that of children.

Throughout the Proverbs of Solomon, sons/daughters are called upon to listen and obey the instruction of their fathers/mothers (Prov. 1:8, 10, 15; 2:1; 3:1, 11, 12, 21; 4:1, 3, 10, 20; 5:1, 7, 20; 6:1, 3, 20; 7:1, 7, 24; 8:32; 10:1, 5; 13:1, 24; 19:18, 27; 23:15, 19, 26; 24:13, 21; 27:11; 28:7; 29:17). This is normal and to be expected; **just as a parent is to instruct, so also a child is to obey. Foolishness is found in the absence of either.** If you as a parent are not talking to your child and your child is not actively listening, then you have a breach in your wall.

When children are either left to themselves or reject the counsel of their parents, they will become a source of “heaviness” (Prov. 10:1), “scorn” (Prov. 15:20), “grief and bitterness” (Prov. 17:25), “calamity” (Prov. 19:13) and “shame and reproach” (Prov. 19:26) to his parents and to society at large. Such a child will have his eyes plucked out by the ravens of the valley and the young eagles shall feast on them (Prov. 30:17). However we might take such warning, it does not sound good.

- Children within the New Testament.

Children should expect their parents to care for them (Matt. 7:11; 2 Cor. 12:14; Eph. 6:4). A child should feel protected, purified, provided for and prized. What if every child experienced a love without condition, acceptance without requirement, forgiveness without limit, favor without merit and served without reward? What positive imprint would such actions leave on them? Fathers should expect their children to obey and do what they ask (Matt. 21:28-32). In parenting a child, obedience is not optional.

It is interesting but throughout the New Testament the Lord takes precedence in relationships over that of even one's children (Mark 10:29, 30; Luke 18:29). In an unbelieving culture, children are often viewed as commodities to be gained, and/or discarded if necessary. In our current evangelical culture there is a tendency to worship children and thus place the child above all other relationships, but this is not to be. God takes precedence even over our children. The same kind of imagery found throughout the Proverbs is equally used by the apostle Paul in 1 Thessalonians 2:11.

¹¹ “just as you know how **we were exhorting and encouraging and imploring each one of you as a father would his own children**, ¹² so that you would walk in a manner worthy of the God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory” (1 Thess. 2:11, 12).

A child's unruliness is cause for caution when selecting those who would rule within the local church (1 Tim. 3:4, 12; Titus 1:6). Adult children are to care for widows within their “blood line” (1 Tim. 5:4). Thus, both the Old and New Testaments have much to say as it relates to this vital area.

As this point our information is pretty straight forward. As we start considering what this might mean for us there is always a real threat of adding a burden to parenting that is not ours to bear. I have no desire to make any parent feel worse than they already might at the struggles they have with their teenage child. So I would invite you to read the following and see what the Holy Spirit is calling you to ponder.

- Children within the historical culture.

For most of the world and history, all children regardless of age often worked alongside the parents in the providing for basic needs. Their contribution to the total family was notable and marked. Seldom did any child have the abundance of time and resource to use (and perhaps squander) as our current place in history allows us in our present culture. Children were given significant responsibility and expected to work toward the common good of the entire household.

- Children within our current culture.

I have attempted to look at various sources as it relates to the adolescent. Adolescence is marked by the onset of puberty (i.e. roughly around the age of 10 for girls and 12 for boys) and runs up to the ages of 17 to 18. After that they are considered adults. Today our culture has created an entire category called “adolescence” whereby nothing is expected of our children apart from them staying out of our “hair”. As a result of this lax approach to parenting and the teenager, we encounter such phenomena as childhood obesity, runaways, rebellion and depression becoming standard fare. Why is this so prevalent in our current American culture? I would suggest one reason is the failure of parents to engage and come alongside their teenage children.

Not all children, but a significant majority of children squander their energy and time with trivial activity and baneful attitudes toward those in authority. Our teenage years are filled with low standards and non-existing “goals”. It is not my intent to encourage exploitation or abuse. It is, however, my intent to say we need to recognize that children are to contribute to the overall common good of the home. Inviting children to contribute to the overall well-being of the whole is not cruel. Parents need to be careful they do not provoke their children to wrath, but we equally should not allow them to squander their energy and time in inconsequential, non-productive activity.

Think about how children interact socially. Why do we allow our children to gather with their peers, who are equally foolish, without adult supervision or direction? Such gatherings should be significantly monitored and chaperoned. Each child as a free agent is fully culpable before God, but the parent is equally and also culpable before God for the child. You and I are culpable for our children, and should they marry and have children, we are culpable for the development and training of the grandchild in a secondary manner. It is foolish for us to think otherwise. I would no more abandon my grandchildren to the wolves than my children. I would and will fight “tooth and nail” for the well-being of each and all in the pursuit of the common good. This is not only for their protection from sinful harm, but in the pursuit of spiritual good.

In the days ahead our desire as Elders of this local assembly is to equip all for their protection from sin and pursuit of God. This includes everyone and excludes none. Fathers and mothers, will you accept the biblical admonition to raise your child in the admonition and nurture of the Lord? Will you as older men teach the younger men to hate sin and pursue God? Here is the “call”. May God continue to show us the way, and in showing may we obey.

Waukesha Bible Church is a family of families seeking to live in **the Storyline of the Bible**. She is determined by design to have a **God-centered, Christ-exalting worship; a Word-centered teaching** focused on personal **discipleship** through intentional and systematic instruction; a **Global-impacting mission** that resolves to be a **church planting church**; and a **Grace-based fellowship** where disciples are invited to live under a **reigning grace** characterized by a **Gospel-driven sanctification** that celebrates a divine **monergism** to the Christian life.