



A Word to Children

EPHESIANS 6:1-3

**Baxter T. Exum (#1285)
Four Lakes Church of Christ
Madison, Wisconsin
October 26, 2014**

This morning we return to our study of the New Testament book of Ephesians, and this morning we move forward to the opening words of the final chapter, to Ephesians 6, where the apostle Paul starts with some inspired advice addressed directly to children. The book of Ephesians, of course, is actually a letter that was originally written to the church in Ephesus, to a group of Christians meeting in a key city where Paul had earlier spent about three years preaching and teaching. So he is now following up several years later with a message from God to this rather young congregation.

And what I find especially interesting about the passage we are about to study is that Paul addresses the opening words of Chapter 6 directly to the children. I want us to picture this in our minds: Paul writes a letter to the church, and this letter was to be read publicly to the congregation. And based on what we are about to read in Ephesians 6:1, we find that Paul expected the children to be in that public assembly, and he expected them to be listening and paying attention to the public reading of the inspired word of God. Paul expected the children to be there as the church assembled for worship.

I can tell you that over the past 15 years or so, we have lost a number of visitors who have moved here from out of town and have come here looking for a church that has an attended nursery. They have come here looking for a special worship assembly on Sunday, where the children are separated from the adults. Some have come, and their first question is: What do you have for the children? How will you entertain our kids so that we as parents can pay attention during worship? And my answer has always been: We encourage all ages to worship God together! Yes, there is a value to sometimes dividing up by age for various Bible classes, but there is also a value to having even small children with us in the Lord's Day worship assembly. And I would say: That is Paul's opinion as well! Yes, children might make a little noise here and there, there might be a situation where a child needs to be taken out very briefly for a quick reminder concerning how to behave during worship, but we absolutely love having children of all ages with us in the worship assembly.

One of my earliest memories, by the way, goes back to when I was about 3 years old at the church down in Freeport, Illinois. I remember my mom pulling me down the aisle by the ear – down the aisle and right out the back door. I have no idea what I did to deserve that, but I can pretty much guarantee that I never did it again! But the point is: Children are to be included in this assembly. Paul expected the children to be there. He addresses them directly in this inspired letter that was to be read in the public worship of the church.

And before we start digging into this passage, I should also point out that the words we are about to hear are not simply my opinions. The words we are about to hear are not just man-made suggestions. The words we are about to hear are not simply guidelines that have been voted upon by a religious convention. The words we are about to hear are not merely the results of scientific research. These are not the words of a court, or a social worker, or an attorney. These are not the words of a therapist. In fact, these words are not even the personal opinions of the apostle Paul. But rather, these words that we are about to study are the words of God, having been revealed to Paul by the Holy Spirit.

If you will, then, please look with me at Ephesians 6:1-3, the words of God:

¹ Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. ² Honor your father and mother (which is the first commandment with a promise), ³ so that it may be well with you, and that you may live long on the earth.

And so we find in these verses that Paul has a message from God. This morning we start primarily with Paul's advice to the children in the congregation (although there is something for the parents here), but we hope to look at the parents in more detail next Sunday. This morning, though, we start with the children.

I. And we start where Paul starts, as we find in this passage that CHILDREN ARE TO OBEY THEIR PARENTS.

The word ***"obey"*** is very easy to understand. Literally, the word means, "to hear under," and it refers to the idea of hearing and paying attention to what is said, followed by immediate obedience. Last week, we looked the command that wives are to ***"submit."*** This is not the word that is used here. The word here means, "to hear under," the same word used of slaves a little later in this chapter. This is the word Paul uses. Paul, therefore, is telling children that they are to obey their parents. If a parent says, "You need to go to bed at 9 o'clock," it is the child's responsibility to listen to that instruction and to carry it out – turn off the X-box, shut down the computer, brush your teeth, and get in bed. If a parent says, "No, you may not go to the mall with your friends today," it is the child's responsibility to respectfully accept that decision – no whining, no complaining, but obedience to the decision that is made by the parent – not just when we are told to do something that makes us happy, not just when we have perfect parents, not just when we happen to agree with what we are told, not just when we understand what they are telling us to do, but in all things we are to listen and obey. This includes the way we dress, the people we hang out with, the places we go, the things we watch on TV, and what we do online. Children are to be obedient to their parents.

Jesus, of course, is our perfect example here. Maybe you remember that passage back in Luke 2:51 where we find that when Jesus was 12 years old, that he continued in subjection to his earthly parents. Mary and Joseph were by no means perfect parents, but as the Son of God, Jesus demonstrated perfect obedience by submitting himself to the leadership of his parents, as imperfect and as flawed as they might have been. The Creator of the Universe made sure he was in bed by 9 o'clock, if that is what his earthly parents told him to do.

I would also point out back in Ephesians 6:1 the reason why obedience is so important. Children are to obey ***"for this is right,"*** Paul says. Obedience, therefore, is the right thing to do. In every society around the world, obedience to parents is expected, and when children disobey, we know that something is very wrong. In fact, in Romans 1 and 2 Timothy 3, Paul lists being disobedient to parents as one symptom of outright rebellion against God. And if we are tempted to dismiss this particular sin as not being very serious, I would point out

that being disobedient to our parents is listed right along with sins like homosexuality, murder, gossip, brutality, and on and on and on. Obedience to parents, then, is very important.

When our parents tell us to take out the trash, to do our homework, or to shovel the driveway, we need to listen, and we need to obey. We need to hear and we need to do – quickly, cheerfully, with no whining or complaining. I would add here that delayed obedience or partial obedience is not really obedience. If your mom and dad have to tell you something twice, that is not real obedience. You might say, “But I did it!” Not really. You might have done it, but you didn’t do it when they told you to do it. That is disobedience. Or what if they tell you to clean your room, and you start cleaning your room and then get distracted and start doing something else? Again, that is not really obedience. That is only partial obedience, and partial obedience is actually disobedience. Think about going down to Culvers and ordering a butter burger. What if we got our meal and only found half a butter burger in there? You see, if somebody gives us only half the food we ordered, that means the order is wrong! In the same way, cleaning only half your room is not obeying your parents! Only mowing half the lawn is not obeying your parents! Or what if you tell your parents, “Okay, I’ll clean my room later.” Again, that is not obedience. In fact, that is premeditated disobedience. That is planning ahead to delay and eventually disobey. Or what if we get in a huff, “Oh, fine! I’ll clean my room!” and then we go stomping off down the hall rolling our eyes all over the place? Not good! Not good at all! The way I look at it, eye rolling cancels out obedience! Whining cancels out obedience! So again, we are to obey quickly, cheerfully, with no whining or complaining, ***“Children obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.”***

II. We also find in this passage that CHILDREN, IN ADDITION TO OBEYING THEIR PARENTS, ARE ALSO TOLD TO HONOR THEIR PARENTS.

In fact, Paul says that, ***“this is the first commandment with a promise, so that it may be well with you, and that you may live long on the earth.”*** The word ***“honor”*** refers to putting a price on something, it refers to thinking of someone or something as being valuable. As children, then, we are to see our parents as being valuable. We are to address them with respect and appreciation. In the Old Testament, we know the penalty for dishonoring a person’s mother or father was death. But here in the New Testament, Paul keeps it positive, and the motivation here is ***“so that it may be well with you, and that you may live long on the earth.”*** The opposite of living long on the earth, I guess, is living short on the earth, but the idea is: Generally speaking, we will live longer and we will be much happier if we honor and value our mom and dad.

In the immediate future, small children will live longer when they listen as mom and dad tell them not to play in the street. As we get older, our trouble obviously gets a little more complex – relationships, alcohol, drugs, and all that; but generally speaking, if we honor our parents, we will live longer and be much happier than if we decide to completely ignore their advice. To this day, I know that I should not run with scissors, thanks to my parents! This advice has been good for me through the years. Now, this doesn’t mean that an obedient child will live for a thousand years, but this is a general rule, almost like a proverb, not an iron-clad guarantee, but more of an observation that is generally true over the long run. As was read for us earlier from Proverbs 3:1-2, ***“My son, do not forget my teaching, but let your heart keep my commandments; for length of days and years of life and peace they will add to you.”*** Our doctor might say, “Eat a lot of vegetables, exercise, and don’t smoke, and you will live a long life.” Then again, we might get hit by a bus this afternoon, but our doctor was still telling us the truth. The point is: We are to listen to our parents. We are to honor our parents. We are to honor and obey.

- III. **Before we move over into verse 4 next Sunday morning, I want to point out a very important lesson for parents in verses 1-3. Yes, these verses are aimed primarily at children, but I want us as parents to think about this: If God feels so strongly about this that he addresses children directly and tells them to obey, then doesn't this imply that we as parents are to make them obey? Doesn't this passage teach that WE AS PARENTS NEED TO STEP UP AND MAKE THIS HAPPEN?**

As parents (looking at verses 1-3), it should be obvious that we have a responsibility to train our children to listen. Some children are not even old enough to read these verses – that is our job, to teach, enforce, to step up and make this happen. One of the most important lessons our children will ever learn is the importance of obedience. Respect for authority is one of the most fundamental building blocks for society as a whole. Without respect for authority, children grow up and end up in jail. When children grow up needing to be told two, three, four, five times to do something, those are the children who grow up and end up getting shot by the police as adults. There are many situations in this life where obedience is not a negotiation. There are many situations where disobedience may lead to our lives being short on this earth.

Most of us have probably seen a parent in a grocery store with a small child. The kid starts screaming for something, and for the next five minutes, mom or dad begs and pleads for the child to stop, there is a long, drawn-out negotiation, and finally, after begging and trying to reason with the child, even arguing with a child, mom or dad will finally give in with whatever the child was screaming for in the first place. What has that child learned? That kid has learned, first of all, that mom and dad are not in charge of this family. And secondly, that kid has learned that if you want something, all you need to do is to scream, and cry, and throw a fit. But even more importantly, and even more tragically, that child has learned that there is a reward for disobedience. That child has learned the opposite of what this verse is teaching.

As parents, then, if our children have been commanded by God to obey, then it stands to reason that it is our job to teach them to obey. Small children, even those under a year old, can certainly be effectively shown what they are not allowed to touch, bite, pull, poke, spit out, or scream about [Piper, 2013]. As parents, we are bigger than they are. We can use our size and our smarts to teach them that obedience is pleasant and disobedience is not. Now, one reason why so many kids seem to be totally out of control is that we as parents are tired. We don't always see things as being worth the battle. After all, when it comes to raking the back yard, I have a choice: I can have my child do it and deal with the aftermath of any possible disobedience, or I can do it myself. And in so many cases, it seems a lot easier to just go do it myself. Or maybe think about telling your child to go to bed. After we say, "Go to bed," fifteen minutes later we hear them up and around in there. At that point, we have a choice: We can get up and go deal with it, or we can choose to ignore it. So here's the scenario: I am dead tired! I am beat! It has been a long day at work. I'm too tired for this fight. And so, with all of this in mind, I might be thinking: What's the big deal? Maybe I should just let this slide. I have told them to go to bed, they are apparently ignoring me, but maybe this isn't really worth the effort. Maybe this really isn't worth the fight. What we need to remember, though, is that this is so much more important than an arbitrary bedtime. This is so much more important than getting leaves off of the grass or getting the driveway shoveled. We are teaching obedience. And the obedience we teach in private, calmly, consistently, lovingly, over the long run, is slowly but surely training our children to obey God over a lifetime. On the other hand, by routinely ignoring disobedience, we are training our children that obedience is optional.

Requiring obedience in our children is hard work – it is hard physically, it is hard emotionally. It is much easier to just give in and ignore disobedience. But the end result, if we do ignore it, is spoiled manipulative selfish little brats who grow up to be all that and so much more.

Conclusion:

As we close, I would point out that the real message to parents (and especially to fathers) is still coming – and you know that, if you have looked ahead to verse 4. Lord willing, we can continue our study next Sunday with Paul's inspired words directly to parents, and to fathers in particular. For now, though, we have focused on the children. Children are to obey their parents, children are to honor their parents, and as parents we have a God-given, sacred responsibility to make sure this happens.

This is so important, because the way we think about our parents at a very early age is how most of us will eventually come to think about God. God is the ultimate authority figure, and parents are the authority that God has put in charge as we learn about God. So, as we learn to obey our parents, we are actually learning to obey God. As parents, then, we need to understand the seriousness of this responsibility.

We close this morning, then, with a focus on obedience. Some people might think that obedience is more of an Old Testament thing, that the Old Testament was all about obedience and that the New Testament is all about grace. That is not the case. Over and over again in the New Testament, we read about the importance of obedience to the word of God. Obedience and the gospel are tied together and cannot be separated. Paul's goal (according to 2 Corinthians 10:5) was to, ***"...tak[e] every thought captive to the obedience of Christ."*** Like a good parent, then, Paul taught obedience, and then he enforced it, so to speak, as he wrote about over in 2 Thessalonians 3:14, ***"If anyone does not obey our instruction in this letter, take special note of that person and do not associate with him, so that he will be put to shame."*** To understand grace, to understand the good news, we must understand the importance of obedience.

The good news is that Jesus died for our sins, he was buried, and he was raised up on the first day of the week. We obey that good news by doing the same thing. We die to sin; that is, we have a change of heart resulting in a change in the way we are living. We allow ourselves to be buried with Christ in baptism, being briefly dipped under the water for the forgiveness of our sins. And then, as we are raised up out of the water, the Christian life begins. If you have any questions, if you would like to study further, we hope you will let us know. On the other hand, if you are already a Christian and would like the entire church to pray about some situation in your life right now, we would invite you to write that concern down, bring it to the front or give it to me after the service, and we would be honored to go to God on your behalf. If we can help with any of this, if you are ready to obey the gospel right now, we would invite you to let us know by coming to the front as we sing this next song. Let's stand and sing...

A very helpful resource for this lesson:

Piper, John. *"Parents, require obedience of your children."* October 29, 2013. Blog post, accessed at: <http://www.desiringgod.org/blog/posts/parents-require-obedience-of-your-children>

To comment on this lesson: fourlakeschurch@gmail.com