

## **Ephesians 6:1-3**

### **Introduction**

It's the year AD 60 in the Roman province of Asia Minor, in the city of Ephesus. It's Sunday, the Lord's Day, and night is coming on. The day-laborers and slaves have been given leave from their duties, so now the Christians in Ephesus are all gathering together in a large upper room belonging to one of the wealthier families among them.

On this night, there's an unusual excitement and feeling of anticipation in the air. The Apostle Paul had spent almost three years in this very city, founding and establishing this very church. Many of those gathered in that upper room had known Paul personally and been saved as a result of his preaching and teaching. But there were also many who had been saved later on and only heard of the Apostle Paul second hand. It had been five years now since Paul left to travel further west, visiting other churches he'd already established. On his return journey to Jerusalem, Paul's ship had stopped in the port city of Miletus, almost 50 miles to the south. He had called for the Ephesian elders to come and see him, and when they returned to the church they brought news from Paul that he would never see their faces again. He said only that the Lord had shown him that in every city imprisonment and afflictions awaited him. It wasn't long after that news reached the Ephesians of Paul's imprisonment in Caesarea, and then of his journey to Rome where he was now in prison awaiting his appeal to the Emperor. But now a Christian brother named Tychacus was recently arrived from Rome, and he had brought with him a letter from the Apostle Paul. Tonight they would listen to that letter as one of the elders read it aloud.

Can you imagine the excitement? Gathered in that meeting room were men and women, husbands and wives, parents and children, masters and slaves. And there they all sat together to listen to what we call today the book of Ephesians. As they listened to the elder read, there were many deep things, hard to understand. But Paul said that he prayed their eyes would be opened – and there was much they did understand. After about the first half of the letter, Paul seemed to shift his focus a little bit to how they all ought to be living every day in light of God's love and mercy. And then he began addressing specific members of their group. First, he spoke directly to the wives in the room. Then he addressed the husbands who were in attendance. And then he spoke right to the children. Then to the fathers. Then the slaves. And finally, the masters.

This morning we come to Paul's instructions to the children. And just as there were children gathered in that room in Ephesus all those years ago, so now there are children gathered here 2000 years later to listen to this very same letter and to hear these very same words.

### **I. "Children, obey your parents"**

What happens when you hear those words? Do they irritate you? Do they grate on you at all? "Yeah, yeah, yeah, I know. I'm supposed to obey my parents. That's what they've been telling me ever since I was born." The Apostle Paul writes just to the children and this is what he says to you, "Obey your parents." And maybe it feels easy to respond: "I know!" Even if we usually don't mind obeying our parents, to hear those words is somehow annoying.

All of us here were children at one point, and don't we all know that feeling? Yes, we do – all of us. But just because that feeling is universal doesn't mean it's excusable, or that there isn't another way. But how can you hear those words—"Children, obey your parents"—how can you hear those words and respond with a willing surrender, and even a gladness in your hearts? How is that really possible? Sometimes we could even wonder why Paul bothered giving this instruction. "Children, obey your parents..."

## II. "in the Lord"

The first thing this tells us is that Paul is speaking to you children who have been born again and adopted into God's family (cf. 2:20-21; 4:1, 17; 5:8). In other words, Paul isn't talking to all children everywhere. He's not *necessarily* talking to all the children in this room. Paul is speaking to you children who have *heard* the word of truth—the Gospel of your salvation—and have *believed* (1:13). And because you've truly believed, now you are "in Christ" – you are "in the Lord." That's the only reason Paul can have confidence in saying what he says.

You see, Paul *knows* that we're all *born* into this world with a sinful lust and desire to live life our own way. Paul knows that we're all born into this world with a craving for "freedom" – the right to do as we want, or even just what we really and sincerely believe to be best. Paul knows this, and so he knows that "disobedience to parents" is really just the inevitable outward expression of those inward, sinful *cravings* that we all have from birth.

- ✓ Romans 1:28–30 — And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done. They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents...
- ✓ 2 Timothy 3:1–2 — But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty. For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy...

Disobedience to parents isn't really the ultimate problem. It's that sinful craving for independence, to be my own boss and to do as I see fit – that's really the deeper problem. And this problem is very, very serious because it's hardwired into the very core of our sin nature – no matter who we are. Children, you were born into this world with a strong resistance to the very idea of "obedience." We all were. Paul knows all this, and that's why he says to you children who have placed your faith in Christ, "Children, obey your parents *in the Lord*." You see, there's the *Gospel*. This isn't just some outward duty that you have to buckle down and force yourself to fulfill. Children, obey your parents as the working out, and the overflow of this amazing reality that *you* are a new creation in Christ. The Apostle Paul didn't just now start talking to you! He's been talking *to you* throughout this whole letter. And so he wants you to see the command to obey your parents especially in the light of chapter five verses 15-21 (see outline on last page). Your relationship with your parents is one of the main places where you have the opportunity to live wisely as a child of God, understanding what the will of the Lord is, and being filled in the Spirit.

To obey your parents “in the Lord” means that you’re really giving your obedience directly to Jesus Christ Himself. Think of that. When you obey your parents not just because you feel like you have no other choice, but as a sign of your *devotion* to Jesus, Jesus actually receives your obedience as obedience given to Him. “In the Lord” means everything.

So what we see is that your obedience to your parents is a sign of your exalted status as a son or a daughter of God. You were born into this world with a sinful craving for independence – to be your own boss and to do as you see fit (especially when others appear to be wrong). But now your obedience to your parents is one of the evidences that you are an equal heir with your parents of the grace of life – that you have equal access with your parents to the very throne room of God. Children, obey your parents in the Lord. There’s no other sign more powerful or beautiful than this that *you* are truly one of God’s children, being remade into His image. Children, obey your parents in the Lord...

### III. “for this is right”

All of us like to ask “Why?” Not just children, but adults and parents, too. We want to know the *reason*, and we really want it to be a *good one*. So to the question, “Why should I obey my parents?” Paul answers: “*For this is right.*” There are a whole lot of children who will never be satisfied with that answer. But what about you? It’s easy to want a “better,” more convincing reason – preferably a reason that explains the *benefits* to me *right now*. But for all those children who are “in the Lord,” it’s what’s “*right*” that matters more to you than anything else in the world. It’s what’s “*right*” that holds now a special attraction for you. Remember that Paul was speaking equally to the children when he wrote these words in chapter five:

- ✓ Ephesians 5:8-10 — For you were once darkness, but now — light in the Lord. Walk as children of light (for the fruit of the light is in all goodness and righteousness and truth), *carefully working to discern what is pleasing to the Lord.*

But the *good news* in this case is that you don’t have to carefully work to discern, because it’s already clear. “Children, obey your parents in the Lord, *for this is right*”! Or as Paul says in Colossians:

- ✓ Colossians 3:20 — Children, obey your parents in everything, *for this pleases the Lord.*

And really, it’s just this simple knowledge that can give you strength and courage to obey even when it’s difficult, and even when you don’t feel like it – it’s this simple knowledge that obedience to your parents is “right” – *pleasing* to the Lord.

When Paul says, “for this is right,” his point seems to be that this is one of those laws that God has written on the hearts of all people (including all children; Rom. 2:14-16). In other words, everyone knows—even without having the Bible or someone else to tell them—everyone knows, deep inside, that it’s “right” for children to obey their parents. And it’s “right” *because* this is the will of God – *because* this is what pleases the Lord. We *know* this, and we know what a *huge deal* it is, because it’s actually one of the Ten Commandments that God wrote with His own

finger on the tablets of stone. So now Paul quotes that commandment. “Children, obey your father and mother in the Lord, for this is right...”

#### **IV. “Honor your father and mother”**

This really just spells out what Paul has already said. In the Bible, true obedience isn’t just outward conformity or compliance. It’s not just doing what your parents say while inwardly you’re resisting and rebelling and maybe full of anger. How can that be when you’re obeying your parents “in the Lord,” and as a sign of your devotion and love for Christ? True obedience “in the Lord” means honoring your parents from the heart – in thought, in word, and in deed. Obedience and honor must characterize every aspect of your relationship with your parents (“in everything” – Col. 3:20).

✓ Leviticus 19:3 — Every one of you shall *revere [fear]* his mother and his father... I am the LORD your God.

Notice that in this verse the mother is mentioned first, before the father. I think the point is that from your perspective as children, your father and mother are *equal* in authority and *both* are to be *equally* feared and honored. Back in verse 21 when Paul introduced this whole theme of submission, he said, “submitting to one another *in the fear of Christ*.” And so as children, your *holy calling* is to fear and reverence your mother and your father as an expression of your fear and your reverence of Christ – who is the coming Judge, and also your Savior and your King. In the end, that’s the only way to really maintain true biblical submission to your parents—you will only be enabled to obey and honor your parents—in *the true fear of Christ*. You can only obey your parents “*in the Lord*.” That’s especially true when we remember that all parents are very far from perfect. There are some parents who abuse their authority. At times, that will sadly be true of your parents. But even then your *divine calling* as children remains the same. This calling is not to honor your parents because of *their* worthiness, but rather because God Himself, in *His* sovereign *wisdom*, has appointed them to that position of authority. Children, obey your parents *in the Lord*. Children, honor your parents *in the true fear of Christ*.

Calvin writes: “The human mind recoils from the idea of subjection, and with difficulty allows itself to be placed under the control of another. Experience shows how rare this virtue is; for do we find one among a thousand that is obedient to his parents?” When we remember that obedience includes *honor*, then we might even say “one among *ten* thousand.” So then, *who* is the child that actually fears and honors his parents? *Who* is the child that truly fears and honors even his sinful and flawed parents? He (or she) is nothing less than God’s *new creation*. “Honor your father and mother...” And then Paul interrupts his quotation so he can introduce the next part of the quotation:

#### **V. “(this is the first commandment with a promise) in order that it may be well with you and you may live long upon the earth.”**

That this is the first commandment with a promise shows us again how extremely *important* it really is. That’s Paul’s point. Children, this is a *really big deal*. It *must* be, if God attaches a

promise like this. “Honor your father and mother... *in order that it may be well with you and you may live long upon the earth.* Jesus reminded His listeners in Matthew fifteen:

- ✓ Matthew 15:4 — God commanded, “Honor your father and your mother,” and, “Whoever reviles father or mother must surely die.”

In Israel, the punishment appointed by God for a child who belligerently dishonored his parents was death. But even when the law failed to carry out that punishment, God wasn’t blind, and the only thing that child could expect from God was His judgment and displeasure – and the complete absence of God’s blessing on his life. That’s true even today – even when the death penalty no longer applies. And so we read in Proverbs:

- ✓ Proverbs 20:20 — If one curses his father or his mother, his lamp will be put out in utter darkness.
- ✓ Proverbs 30:17 (cf. Deut. 28:26) — The eye that mocks a father and scorns to obey a mother will be picked out by the ravens of the valley and eaten by the vultures.

Paul says that those who practice disobedience to parents are “worthy of death” (Rom. 1:28-32). But for all those children who are “in the Lord,” the curse gives way wholly and completely to blessing. The threat and the warning is replaced with a wonderful promise. “Honor your father and mother... *in order that it may be well with you and you may live long upon the earth.*”

In the original context of the Old Testament, this well-being and long life was experienced in the land of Canaan (Exod. 20:12; Deut. 5:16). But now that Christian children can be found everywhere in the world, the promise applies everywhere in the world – wherever these children are found. The point isn’t that you’ll never have any suffering or that there will never be any chance of an “early” death – but you will never, ever encounter these things as the expression of God’s displeasure. Instead, His blessing will always rest upon you. And even in trials (even supposing the exception of an early death), it will be *well* with you in this earthly life. God’s grace and favor will rest upon you and follow you wherever you go. God has graciously chosen to reward the child who obeys and honors his parents.

This principle holds true for all Christian children, but Paul is thinking especially of Christian children who have Christian parents – which is the normal pattern. So the real *goal* of this command to honor and obey your parents is that you might learn Christ (cf. 4:20). The father speaks to his son in Proverbs chapter six:

- ✓ Proverbs 6:20–22 — My son, keep your father’s commandment, and forsake not your mother’s teaching. Bind them on your heart always; tie them around your neck. When you walk, they will lead you; when you lie down, they will watch over you; and when you awake, they will talk with you.

Paul goes on to say in the very next verse: “Fathers, bring [your children] up in the training and admonition of the Lord.” The ultimate goal of obeying and honoring your parents “in everything” (Col. 3:20) is that you might heed their instruction, and learn Christ, and grow up in true godliness. And Paul says in another place:

- ✓ 1 Timothy 4:8 — Godliness is of value in every way, *as it holds promise for the present life* and also for the life to come.

So to all of you children who are “in the Lord,” be encouraged(!!!) that as you obey and honor your father and mother, it *will* be well with you, and you will *know* the blessing of the Lord on your life.

### Conclusion

Every child has broken the fourth commandment. All of us who were ever at one time children have broken the fourth commandment. Our failure to obey and honor our parents is proof that we are born into this world in sin – by nature children of wrath. In the eyes of a holy God, every child who has disobeyed or dishonored his parents deserves death.

**But...** God is full of mercy and steadfast love. And so the very law that condemns you – that very law is meant to bring you to Christ where there is full forgiveness and full cleansing and full pardon for sin. The law brings condemnation, so how can it not point you to Jesus in whom, as Paul says, there is no condemnation (Rom. 8:1).

And the moment you truly turn to Jesus and trust in Him, the Bible says you’re a new creation. *You* are God’s “workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works [for giving obedience and honor to your parents], which God prepared beforehand, that you should walk in them” (Eph. 2:10). And so **now** the law that once condemned you can actually be your delight and joy. **Now** one of the surest signs that you are truly one of God’s children, being remade into His image, is that you are a child who obeys and honors your father and mother from the heart. **Now**, though you’ll never be without sin this side of heaven (1 Jn. 1:10-2:1), the Apostle Paul can write to you: “Children, **obey** your parents **in the Lord**, for this is **right**. **Honor** your father and mother (this is the first commandment with a promise) in order that it may be **well with you** and you may **live long** upon the earth.”

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### <sup>5:15</sup>**WATCH CAREFULLY THEREFORE HOW YOU WALK,**

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**NOT** as unwise

**BUT** as wise, <sup>5:16</sup>buying up the time, because the days are evil.

<sup>5:17</sup>Because of this, do **NOT** be foolish,

**BUT** understand what the will of the Lord is.

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<sup>5:18</sup>And do **NOT** get drunk with wine, in which is dissipation,

**BUT** be filled in the Spirit...

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<sup>5:21</sup>**submitting** to one another in the fear of Christ,

<sup>5:22</sup>**wives** to your own husbands as to the Lord...

<sup>5:25</sup>(Husbands, love...)

<sup>6:1</sup>**Children, obey your parents in the Lord...**

<sup>6:4</sup>(Fathers, do not provoke...)

<sup>6:5</sup>**Bondservants, obey your earthly masters...** as you would Christ...

<sup>6:9</sup>(Masters... stop your threatening...)