

The Church's Children

Ephesians 6:1-3

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Introduction

Two weeks ago, I began a new morning sermon series on *The Christian in Every Stage of Life from the Cradle to the Grave*.

- We began with a theme song for this series... Psalm 90.
 - At the end of that song, we ask God to make us fruitful and to let His beauty be upon us.
 - As Christians, that is the desire we have for us both as a body and as individuals.
 - We have a care and a concern for each other that our light would shine for Jesus Christ, that His beauty would be seen upon us for His glory.

Last week, we looked at Christians the first stage of life, the church's babies.

- We saw how Jesus said that even the little babies of the church belong to His kingdom.
 - We looked at the privileges and the benefits that they have as being numbered as His people.
 - We talked not only about the responsibilities that parents have, but also at the responsibilities that these little infants themselves have to begin their service to the Lord.
 - We looked at the beauty that shines in them, especially in the area of their receptivity to the instruction they are given even before they can talk.
 - A Spirit filled child's readiness to receive and to live in the truth and to receive grace is an example to us all of what it means to belong to God's kingdom.

Today, I want to move along to the next stage of life, that of the church's children.

- By *children*, I mean in particular those who are no longer infants, but whose Christian walk is still largely the responsibility of their parents.
 - Of course as children grow up, the responsibility gradually shifts from the parent to the child, and at some point, they become communicant members.
 - They are then of such age and maturity that they stand on their own when it comes to their profession of faith.
 - The profession of a five year old depends mostly on their parents, but the profession of a young adult depends mostly on the young adult.
 - We will look at the church's young adults next week...but this week it is the church's children.

The text I have chosen for this subject is Ephesians 6:1-3.

- This passage is directly addressed to children, and much of what I say today will be addressed directly to the children.
 - But of course what I say to the children ought to matter to all of you because the children of the church are your brothers and sisters in the Lord and you are to care about them and to minister to them and to pray for them...
 - not only if you are their parents, and not even just if you are older siblings, but also as fellow church members—you are to pray for them and to encourage them and to receive them as your brothers and sisters in the Lord.

- In writing Ephesians, Paul did not expect everyone but wives to tune out when he addressed wives and everyone but husbands to tune out when he addressed husbands...
 - So also when he addressed children, he expected everyone else to listen too.
 - So please give me your attention as I read our text to you...Ephesians 6:1-3:

Ephesians 6:1-3: Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. ² “Honor your father and mother,” which is the first commandment with promise: ³ “that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth.”

May the Lord bless to us the hearing of His holy Word.

I. Children of the church, you belong to a special society!

- Do you know what a society is?
 - It is a group of people who are together for some reason.
 - You belong to a lot of societies.
 - You belong to your family—that is society.
 - You belong to a country—most of you are citizens of Canada.
 - If you go to school, you are part of that society.
 - There are all kinds of societies.
- A. But there is a special society that you belong to that I want to talk about today.
 - Do you know what society it is?
 1. You could call it a family because it is a kind of family.
 - You could call it a nation or a city because it is that too.
 - In fact, you could call it a great kingdom because it is a society that has a great king, and there are people that belong to it from all over the world.
 - It goes all the way back to Adam and Eve.
 - Now do you know what special society I am talking about?
 - I am talking about the church.
 - The church is the greatest society of all because it has King Jesus, the Son of God, as its head, and it is the only society that will last forever.
 2. Like any great kingdom, the church is divided into many different parts.
 - Canada is one nation, but it has different provinces, and in the different provinces are different cities, and in the cities are different neighbourhoods.
 - The church is like that.
 - We belong to Covenant Reformed Pres. Church and it is part of the church called the Canadian Presbytery, and it is part of the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church, and it is part of the worldwide church of Jesus Christ.
 - In our Bibles, we read three verses in Ephesians 6.
 - Ephesians was first written to a church in the city of Ephesus, the church at Ephesus.
 - If you look back at the opening to this letter, it says “To the saints who are in Ephesus, and the faithful in Christ Jesus.”
 - They were called saints because that is what all the people that belong to the society of Jesus Christ are called.
 - It means that they are set apart in this society as those who belong to our King Jesus Christ—as those who belong to His church.

3. Children, did you know that you belong to this society with your parents?
 - Well you do!
 - a. Last week in my sermon I talked about how even little babies belong.
 - Jesus said so:
 - Parents were bringing their little babies to Jesus and some of his disciples tried to stop them, but Jesus said, “Do not forbid them, for of such is the kingdom of God”
 - He was telling us that these little babies were part of this special society.
 - b. This week, you can see how the Apostle Paul shows us that you children are part of the church.
 - We just saw that he wrote Ephesians to the church at Ephesus?
 - Well when he gets to chapter 5, verse 22, he starts to write to different kinds of people in the church...
 - First, he writes to the wives, so he begins verse 22 by saying “wives...” to get their attention.
 - He is writing to them as part of the church—part of the society of Christians at Ephesus.
 - And then in verse 25, he addresses the husbands, so he says “husbands,” and then he talks to them.
 - The husbands are also part of the church that he is writing to.
 - But when you get to chapter 6 verse 1—what we read before, what does he say then?
 - He says “Children...”
 - He addresses the children because children are part of the church.
 - Now if the children at Ephesus belonged to the church of King Jesus with their parents, what does that say about *you*?
 - It tells you that you belong to the church of Jesus Christ today along with your parents.
- B. It is a wonderful thing to belong to the church—this special society of Jesus Christ.
 1. Not everyone belongs to it.
 - You probably know a lot of children that don’t go to church.
 - They are not part of this special society.
 - And some children belong to churches that are really no churches because they have turned away from Jesus and Jesus has taken the gospel from them.
 2. Paul explains in Ephesians 1:4 that we were chosen to be in this society by God.
 - a. But don’t let that make you feel proud the way you might if you were chosen to be on soccer team that only a few were good enough to be on.
 - Paul tells us that we were chosen by God to be holy and without blame.
 - He doesn’t say that we were chosen *because* we were holy and without blame, but that *we should be* holy and without blame.
 - That means that we were not holy and without blame when He chose us.
 - To be holy and without blame is to be free of sin and guilt.
 - It means that we are what we ought to be before God.
 - And Paul says that we were not that at all!

- b. In fact, He says the very reason God chose us to be in Christ was because He wanted to show everyone His grace...how gracious a God He is...
 - He wanted to show everyone His own kindness in helping people and forgiving people who deserve to be rejected and punished.
 - So he didn't choose us because we were good, but because we were bad.
 - There is nothing to be proud about.
- c. And do you know what He had to do to make us holy and without blame?
 - He had to bring us to King Jesus—and He had to bring King Jesus to us.
 - Paul says in Ephesians 1:4 that we were chosen "*in Him*" that we should be holy and without blame."
 - We were sinful and guilty, so God sent His Son Jesus who is holy and without blame...and then He died on the cross for our sins.
 - He had to be punished for what we did so we could be forgiven.
 - You might say that He gave us a king that was acceptable to Him and our king paid for our sins so that we could be acceptable through faith in Him.

TRANS> So you see, the only people who can belong to the church are those who are completely unacceptable to God apart from Jesus and His death on the cross.

C. But how did you get to be in the church as children?

1. You got in because your parents are in.
 - a. You children would not be here in the church if your parents weren't here, would you?
 - If your parents were staying at home or going to the ball game instead of coming to church, that is what you would be doing too.
 - If they had not brought you to be baptised, you would not be baptised.
 - b. It is the same way for being a Canadian citizen.
 - You live here and you are a Canadian because your parents are.
 - If they lived in Ireland and were Irish citizens, then you would live in Ireland too, and you would be Irish.
2. But how did your parents get into the church to start with?
 - a. In some cases, they are here the same way you are...because their parents were in the church.
 - And if that is so, you might be able to go back a long way...to your parents' parents' parents' parents and keep on going back...
 - But eventually, you would find someone who probably worshipped rocks and trees...
 - Or maybe someone that went to a church like I did where the minister didn't even believe the gospel.
 - But the question is, how did that person who was born outside the true church get in?
 - b. The person got in because God called him in...
 - God called him to be holy and without blame through faith in Jesus Christ, and God's Spirit enabled him to obey the call.

- He gave that ancestor of yours the Holy Spirit to change him.
 - So that he could see how wrong he had been to live apart from God—how sinful he was and how much he needed forgiveness...
 - And so that he would see how Jesus, the Son of God, is the only one who can save him by His death on the cross.
 - And so that he would want to be holy and without blame and so that he would receive Jesus and trust in Him for salvation.
 - That was how your parents or your grandparents or your great grandparents or whoever it was left their idols and came to Christ...
 - and when people come to Christ, they become part of the church that Jesus established in the world along with their children.
- c. But there is something else that had to happen for your parents to be here today with you.
 - Even if your father or your mother started out in a true church,
 - they had to continue in the church when they got older or they would not be here with you today.
 - Sometimes, when children grow up in the church, they reject Christ even though He is preached to them.
 - And at other times their church starts to teach that we don't really need Jesus to save us...they falsely teach that we are basically good and just need to follow Jesus' example.
 - That is a terrible lie, but sometimes when children grow up in a church like that, they will believe the lie because they are sinners just like you are.
 - So a lot of people can start out in the church, but not continue.
 - Jesus told parables about this, like the parable of the sower.
 - It is very sad when people reject Jesus, but it happens all the time.
 - It shows that they never really trusted Him because if they had, they would have continued in Him.
 - But if your parents are here today as members of this church or another church that is trusting in Jesus Christ,
 - It means that they either came to Him from outside when they were older or that they grew up in the church like you and then professed Him like some of the young adults that grew up in our church have done.
 - And it means that they have continued with Jesus.
 - And that is a good thing for you...because as children, you are here only because they are here.
 - If God had not saved them and kept them, you would not be here.
 - You are part of the church because they are part of the church.

TRANS> But now we need to get on and look at what God tells you to do as children of the church.

II. As children of the church, you are told to obey your parents in the Lord.

A. You are told to do this simply because it is the right thing to do.

- You can see how Paul says: **Children, obey your parents in the Lord for this is right.**

1. In this part of Ephesians, Paul is telling lots of people what is right...

- In chapter 5, he tells wives to respect their husbands and husbands to love their wives as Christ loved the church...

- After telling you to obey and honour your parents, he tells your dads to not provoke you to anger but to bring you up in the nurture of the Lord...

- Then he tells servants how to treat their masters and masters how to treat their servants...

- So everyone is being told things that are right for them to do as those who are in the church and belong to Jesus.

2. God always gives this kind of instruction to His people.

- The things He tells us are things that we ought to already know, but because sin has clouded our minds, He kindly gives us instruction in how to live.

a. It is something God does especially for us because we are His people.

- He has called us in Christ to be holy and without blame before Him in love, so He gives instruction in what is right.

- He wants us to live beautiful lives as those who have been brought to Him through Christ.

b. He does this with the Ten Commandments.

- Before He gives His people the first commandment, He reminds them that He is the LORD and that He is their God and redeemer.

- In other words, He reminds them that they are His people.

- And then He tells them how to live a righteous life as His people—as the people that He has redeemed for Himself.

c. And here in Ephesians...

- Before he got to this part where he started telling everyone what was right for them to do,

- He started out by telling them how God had chosen them to be in Christ and had forgiven their sins and given them power to live a new life...

- It is not until after all that, He starts telling them how to live a right life before Him.

3. And the thing that is right for you children is to obey your father and mother in the Lord.

- From the beginning, God made us in such a way that as children we need our parents to take care of us and to teach us how to take care of ourselves.

- You were not born knowing how to gather food or grow food or find food or even to know what food is good to eat.

- You didn't know what to do to keep warm or to keep yourself clean.

- You didn't even know how to talk—you learned that from your parents.

- They have to teach you about things to look out for too...
 - Like to not eat poison ivy or soap, and not to run out on the highway...
 - And in this sinful world, they have to teach you to watch out for certain people that will try to take advantage of you and abuse you.
 - And they teach you how to work and to read and to help others—all sorts of things.
- So children should honour and obey their parents as the ones God appointed to bring them into the world and to care for them and teach them.
 - Before the world fell into sin, it would have been very natural for children to honour and obey their parents.

TRANS> So as children of the church, you need to obey your parents because it is right, and Jesus saves us so we can be restored to what is right.

- But that is not the only reason you should obey your parents.

B. You should also obey them since it is because of them that you are in the church.

- Just as you are only in the world because they brought you in and took care of you, so you are only in the church because they brought you into the church.
1. They are the ones who brought you to Jesus and you are to learn about Jesus from them!
 - a. They have wonderful things to tell you and to show you about Him.
 - It is for them to tell you about the wonderful things that He has done to save us from our sins...
 - How He came into the world and died on the cross to redeem us.
 - Each day they can show you how to go to Him for forgiveness when you have sinned...
 - They can lead you to do that from before you can even speak.
 - b. They can tell you about how trustworthy He is, and teach you to pray to Him for the things that you need.
 - To look to Him for food and to thank Him for it...and for safety and for all sorts of things.
 - For working out problems with other people...
 - But most of all, for helping you to live a godly life.
 - They can help you understand that you have a sinful heart and show you how to go to Christ for help.
 - When they see you starting to struggle with obedience, they can teach you how to ask God for grace to obey—
 - to ask Him for the Holy Spirit to help you come cheerfully when you are called...
 - or to help you look out for the needs of other people or help you to be kind to your brothers and sisters.
 - c. And each day, they can teach you from His word so that you will learn of His majesty and grace, and of His commandments.
 - And they can bring you to church and teach you how to listen to sermons and how to apply them...
 - And they can help you learn how to praise God from your heart.

2. And God has also appointed them to correct you when you do wrong.
 - a. We all sin.
 - Sin is a very horrible thing, but sometimes it looks good to you.
 - When it does, God calls your parents to wake you up by chastening you with a rod that stings and with a rebuke calls you out.
 - Our world doesn't know how bad sin is and how it ruins people's lives, so they do not understand why Christian parents want to chasten their children with the rod of discipline.
 - They don't realise that it is to deliver their souls from death because the only way parents who are not Christians know to use the rod is when they get angry and lose control.
 - But when parents love their children in the LORD, they will chasten them to get their attention—not to hurt them—but to help them.
 - And it does help—I know it helped me...and it still does when God chastens me in the ways He chastens adults.
 - It is to get you to pay attention when you are doing wrong and hardly facing the truth that it is wrong.
 - b. And God uses your parents to give you warnings as well.
 - Proverbs talks about that—about fathers warning their children not to get into the wrong crowd...
 - And warning them about the seductress who tries to draw you in to have sex with her outside of marriage.
 - They can tell you how that will harm you and harm other people too, and they can tell you how it displeases God.
 - They can tell you about what God has planned for loving families and for husbands and wives instead—to have sex in a beautiful caring way.
 - Parents understand the temptations that you face because they face them too... in that way and in other ways; and they can help you learn to fight against them with the armour of God.
 - They can show you how to turn to Christ.

TRANS> With all of this wonderful instruction that God gives you through your parents, it would be a shame for you to miss it all by rejecting your parents.

- You should gladly obey them and honour them as those Christ has given you to guide you and lead you while you are young.

III. What beauty will be yours if you do obey them!

A. Children, you have a special privilege of showing everyone what obedience is supposed to look like.

1. There are lots of people that are supposed to obey—wives to obey their husbands, servants their masters, pupils their teachers, citizens their rulers...
 - but honour and obedience stands out in the relationship of children to parents more than it does in any other relationship!

- It represents the relationship that we are all supposed to have toward God as our God.
 - When Jesus saves us, we are all called God’s dearly beloved children; and we are told to serve Him and honour Him as obedient children.
 - You as children in the church are to show all of us what that obedience is supposed to look like.
 - You are to show everyone how beautiful it is, how right it is so that we can look at you and say, “Now that is the way it ought to be!”
2. Parents, of course you are to lead your children’s obedience so that it is a beautiful dance with you—where you teach them to keep in step with you.
- I know that this is a great challenge—
 - We all have a sinful heart and that is why we need a Saviour in the first place...but we do *have* a Saviour who is ready and able to help us.
 - If we cry out to Him, He will give us the grace we need to serve Him both as parents and as children.
 - As I showed you last week from Isaiah 40, He gently leads those who are with young!
 - He has special help for you—I will be talking to you as parents more in a future sermon.
3. But as you children learn to honour your father and mother, people of the world will look on and they will see the beauty of a loving parent child relationship...
- And the people in the church will look on and it will be an encouragement to them of how they ought to live in obedience to authority.
 - It will encourage the other children and it will encourage the other parents.
 - It will encourage all of us to imitate this obedience toward the Lord, and show us what the grace of Jesus Christ can do when it works in us.

TRANS> But this relationship between parents and children is much more than a beautiful example to follow.

B. It is, in God’s gracious hands, a means of bringing you children to Jesus and establishing you in Him so that you can stay in Him forever.

1. As I have shown you today, children, you would not be in the church if it were not for your Christian parents staying in...
- You have learned of Jesus through them.
 - You were brought to Him by them to start with and it is for you to continue in the Lord by obeying them in the Lord as they call you to follow Him.
 - The primary instruction of a faithful Christian parent will be that you serve the Lord and trust in Him.
 - That means that if you continue in the instruction of your Christian parents, you will continue to rest in Jesus Christ.
 - Instead of rebelling against their instruction about this which is true and right, you will receive it.

2. In Ephesians 6:1-3, the LORD emphasises that this commandment to obey your parents is of primary importance for you.
 - Our English translation says that it is “the first commandment with a promise,” but the word “the” is not in the original.
 - For this reason, it seems better to translate it “a commandment of first importance.”
 - And indeed, it is of first importance, especially for children in the church!
 - Again, keeping it means you continue in Christ.
 - It is a commandment that has a promise for children when they, like Timothy, continue in the holy word that their parents have taught them from infancy.
- Now let’s look at the promise itself.
3. The promise is stated in verse 3: **that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth.**
 - a. How well it will be for you if you continue in the instruction of your parents!
 - Proverbs speaks of how it will keep you from many bad things:
 - It will keep you from folly.
 - It will keep you from the seductress.
 - It will keep you from bad companions.
 - It will keep you from deceivers.
 - It will keep you from laziness that leads to poverty.
 - Proverbs also speaks of how it will adorn you.
 - It be like beautiful clothing—you will be able to live beautifully for Jesus Christ.
 - It will lead you in the way of wisdom and of the fear of the Lord so that you will learn to live in the truth that, in the end, the only thing that matters is your relationship with God.
 - b. And then there is the second part of the promise...that honouring your parents will give you long life.
 - In the old covenant, the Lord promised long life to His people in the land of Canaan—and clearly it was eternal life in that land.
 - Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph all believed they would inherit that land even though they did not inherit it while they lived.
 - They insisted on being buried in the land as a testimony of their hope—the land where God promised to establish His kingdom.
 - They believed that they would be raised up at last to receive their inheritance—and indeed they will.
 - In the Psalms, the promise of inheriting the land is extended to say that the saints will inherit the earth—and they will.
 - In the New Testament, this is repeated and emphasised.
 - Believers will inherit the whole earth—it will be a new earth that is fully renewed.

- Paul speaks of how the curse will be completely removed from the creation itself when we are revealed at the last day as God's true sons and daughters.
- The point is that obeying your parents in the Lord leads to eternal life.
 - Living long in the earth is, in God's way of doing things, living forever.
 - Obeying your parents in the Lord means that, of all things, you obey them by looking to their Lord and Saviour as your Lord and Saviour.
 - The greatest dishonour to a parent is to reject their God as your God.

Conclusion

So you see how important this commandment is for covenant children!

- Children get their start in the church, but if they depart from their parent's instruction and reject the Saviour their parents hope in, they will be cut off.
- How we need to pray that the beauty of the LORD will be upon the children of the church!
 - Too often, this has been an area that churches have grossly neglected.
 - It should be of the utmost importance to us.

Children, how God has blessed you to bring you into a covenant home!

- It will only be by a wicked and hard heart that you do not continue in the Lord.
- You have the blessing of being directed to Christ by your parents and by the church—and to reject that is a matter of great folly and wickedness.
 - Yes, I know that your parents are not perfect—but even though they are not perfect, the Saviour they point you to is perfect.
 - They need Him because they are not perfect just as you need Him because you are not perfect...
 - You are a sinner in God's sight just like they are, but why would anyone reject a perfect Saviour just because the people who point you to Him are not perfect?
 - That makes no sense at all.
 - You should rather love your parents who point you to Jesus and honour them in the Lord.
- Yes indeed! Look to the gracious Saviour as you have been taught.
 - If you do, He will keep you and you will live forever in His house and enjoy a glorious inheritance with your believing parents.