7-28-19

Ephesians 6:1-4

I realize as I begin this section that I am speaking to people who are mostly already grandparents or even great-grandparents. Still, Christian principles are being dealt with that can be used in our relationships with our descendants and even with our Christian brothers and sisters. We can also gain insight as to why this world has deteriorated as it has.

The first thing to notice is who Paul is addressing; he is addressing children and he is addressing them directly. He expects them to be present during the Christian worship service where they would not only hear readings from the Old Testament Scriptures, but also from the circulating apostolic letters, such as this one. He does this same thing in his letter to the Colossians; he addresses the children directly.

From this, we can know that it is good and acceptable to have children present with us during our worship service. Yes, sometimes they squirm, sometimes they make noise; but it is up to the parents to determine how best to deal with them and it is up to the rest of us to tolerate small disturbances. The reason being that the child derives great benefit from being here. Here in church, although they do have to put up with some boring guy talk for a while, they are exposed to Christian adults. Adults who take interest in them and can be a good influence on them. More importantly, the Holy Spirit is here during the worship service and the children are then exposed to Him.

Paul is continuing with some life examples of his statement in verse 5:21, “be subject to one another in the fear of Christ.” In this example, it is how children are to be subject to their parents. Notice that in this subjection, Paul uses the word “obey”. Children are to obey their parents. As an aside, I think we are all familiar with the marriage vows from the 1600’s in which the wife vows to “obey” her husband. While overall these marriage vows are beautiful, the word “obey” oughtn’t to be there; it is not Biblical. The wife is to be subject to or submissive to her husband, not obedient; there is a difference.

Paul gives three reasons why children should obey their parents: natural law, Biblical law, and the Gospel. In verse 1, Paul says, “For this is right”. When it comes down to it, we never need another reason to do something other than because it is the right thing to do. What this means is that we believe in absolute truth. Absolute truth is something we see quite often in the Bible; we also see it in nature because God created nature. Absolute truth is something that is true regardless of circumstances; it does not change. God is good; no one comes to the Father but by Jesus; we are either male or female; these are examples of things that are true no matter what.

Absolute truth is under attack today. People are encouraged to make up their own “truth”. Each can believe what they want and expect no consequences for their choice. In other words, truth is relative. This is a tremendous falsehood that pervades life now and it doesn’t take long to find examples of the damage being done to people and society. This is one of the grounds that Christians must stand on: That there is absolute truth and it is contained in the Bible.

“For this is right”; until recently, this was a self-evident truth in all societies. Children obeyed their parents for their own safety and well-being. Children are ill-equipped to deal with the world and need guidance. They need to be taught, and by obeying their parents, they learn right and wrong; they learn how to get by in the world. Paul talks about this in Romans 2:14-15.

For when Gentiles who do not have the Law do instinctively the things of the Law, these, not having the Law, are a law to themselves, in that they show the work of the Law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness and their thoughts alternately accusing or else defending them.

Societies have always held that children are to be obedient to their parents, even before Christianity. In these verses we see that God has placed that idea in our hearts, it is part of the human makeup. To go against this idea is to be in rebellion against God, which is exactly what people do when they are outside of Christ.

Paul goes beyond natural law and refers to the law of God. He quotes the fifth commandment of the decalogue: Honor your father and mother. This is a God given command that was to be followed by the Jews and is a moral command that is still very much in effect for Christians. Now there is some difference between obey and honor which we need to look at.

Is Paul calling for lifelong obedience here? The answer is no, as we can see in Paul’s recent quotation from Genesis: For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and shall be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. This represents a fundamental change in the parent/child relationship. Obedience is required when the child is young and under the care of their parents. Once the child is of age, this requirement is ended. As a rule of thumb, as long as the child is living under the parent’s roof, obedience is necessary.

Honor is another matter. Honoring one’s parents is a lifelong commitment. When God gave this commandment, He didn’t put any time restrictions on it. God is very serious about this.

Leviticus 20:9

If *there is* anyone who curses his father or his mother, he shall surely be put to death; he has cursed his father or his mother, his bloodguiltiness is upon him.

Of course, this punishment was under the Mosaic covenant; it was part of God’s social law while living under a Theocracy; having no ruler but God. We are now under the new covenant in Christ Jesus; we hold to the moral law out of love for our Saviour and our desire to please Him.

This leads us to Paul’s third reason, which is because of the Gospel. He says to “obey your parents **in the Lord**”. That is in the Lord Christ. It is ultimately in obedience to Jesus that a child will obey his or her parents. This is especially true for children who are a little older and can have some understanding of Christian outlooks. Still, these things should be taught from the earliest age.

Going back to verse 5:21, Christians are to be subject to one another and Paul is giving examples of how this is to be accomplished. We remember that Jesus Himself was subject and so, we seek to imitate Him. Jesus was completely subject to the law and the only one to live it perfectly. We see a wonderful example of this in Luke 2:41-52. Joseph and Mary had left Jerusalem with other family after celebrating the Passover. After a day’s journey they realized that 12-year-old Jesus was not with them. They returned to Jerusalem and searched for Him for three days. Can you imagine having lost your 12-year-old child in a city for five days? They found Him in the temple, amazing the teachers with His wisdom. His mother asked Him why He had treated them this way, because they had been terribly worried while looking for Him.

He answered them, “Why is it that you were looking for Me? Did you not know that I had to be in My Father’s *house*?” Joseph and Mary had enough information by this time that they should have known where He was, but like most of us, they hadn’t caught on. Verse 51 tells us, “And He went down with them and came to Nazareth, and He continued in subjection to them”.

At 12-years-old, Jesus’ knowledge amazed the teachers of the law; He had more understanding than His mom and dad; He was God; yet He followed this commandment as a human-being and remained subject to His parents while He lived with them. Additionally, while hanging on the cross, He honored His mother by placing her under John’s care, seeing to it that she was to be provided for.

The question does come up as to whether there is any time a child does not obey their parents. If the parent issues a command that is directly in opposition to Christ, then the child is to disobey. All attempts should be made to avoid this situation, but it may be unavoidable, especially if the child becomes a Christian while the parents are non-believers. Our relationship with Jesus is over and above all others; He must come first.

As usual, Paul balances this statement to the children with a statement to the fathers. Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. This command is directed to fathers, but it certainly applies to mothers, especially in our culture. At the time Paul wrote, Roman law gave fathers absolute control over their families. Children born with deformities were thrown onto the rubbish heap. If a child became a problem, the father could inflict the death penalty. Family members could be sold into slavery or forced to work in any manner the father chose. Paul explains the Christian way.

“Do not provoke your children to anger” calls the father to treat the child like a human-being; with respect and dignity; not like a possession or tool. To constantly provoke a child causes them to grow up either angry or broken. Neither is any way to live. The Christian mandate is to love; we must love our children, which is actually our natural reaction to them.

The verse goes on to say “bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord”. There is a lot in there. First, bring them up, is not to be glanced over. That is the job of a parent, to bring the child up, to care for them, to teach them; it is a long and time-consuming process, but that is what we are to do.

Discipline is important.

Proverbs 13:24

He who withholds his rod hates his son,
But he who loves him disciplines him diligently.

This is sometimes taken out of context and used to excuse excessive beating of a child. Sometimes, the rod is necessary, but it should be rare and used with wisdom, not in the heat of the moment. The word diligently does not mean to apply the rod at every opportunity; it goes along with not provoking the child to anger. There are lots of ways of discipline that help a child understand wrong; often times it only requires an explanation.

Instruction in the Lord is the heart of child rearing. This matches up with the Old Testament telling fathers to talk with their children about God at all times.

Deuteronomy 6:7

You shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up.

Speaking of Jesus should be part of our everyday conversation. It needs to be something our children are used to hearing and are unafraid to talk about.

These words of bringing them up in discipline, and instruction carry the ideas of nurturing, nourishing and cherishing. It means both verbal instruction and active discipline. The description is of a loving home environment where children are taught respect and parents lovingly provide for their children, all in the Lord Jesus Christ. This is the Christian family.

Although primary responsibility belongs to the parents, we who are grandparents also need to provide these things for our grandchildren, especially if the parents are not providing Christian upbringing. This doesn’t mean we try to overthrow or undermine the parent’s authority; we simply provide some Christian doctrine when we have the opportunity.

Throughout history, by natural law, societies understood that the stable family unit had to exist in order for the society to function and thrive. By God’s law, we see this same thing, instituted by God, for the Israelite nation in the Old Testament. In the New Testament, by the Gospel, we are again taught the importance of a stable Christ-centered family. The importance of children is seen in all these. Jesus said to let the children come to Him. But now, very recently, the family unit isn’t seen as being necessary. In fact, parents are seen as a detriment, to be overruled by the state.

The Bible gives us warnings and we see these warnings coming to pass. In Romans 1:28, “And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper”. Paul then gives a long list of depravity, one of which is “disobedient to parents”. Do we not see this now? This is a result of turning our backs on God.

But also, this is inevitable. We read in 2 Timothy 3:1, “But realize this, that in the last days difficult times will come”. Another list of depravity follows and again we see, “disobedience to parents”. It should not surprise us that many kids have no respect for anything; that so many fathers are absent and shirking their responsibilities, society even considers them superfluous; and while many mothers are forced to work to provide for their families, they so often put their careers ahead of their children. The Bible tells us that these are merely signs of the end times.

So, what is our response as Christians? First of all, we rejoice; the long-awaited arrival of our Saviour to establish His Kingdom is nearer now. Secondly though, we need to make sure that when He comes, He finds us working. We are to share the Gospel with those who are perishing; we are to live life in our families as God has ordained that it should be; we need to be submissive to each other; and as Paul told us back in 5:18, we are not to be drunk with wine, but be filled with the Holy Spirit.

Prayer

We lift up our prayer to You, O Lord, for the family in this nation. Your perfect word explains how the family should be; but the family, like marriage, is under direct attack by satan. We ask Your Holy Spirit to work in families that they may focus on Jesus; and that the family be established again in this country.

We lift up to You the children. All across this country, they are misdirected and abused by the world. Their souls are so precious; gather them to You in great power as only You can do. May Your Holy Spirit perform a great work among them, that they will reject the foolishness of the world, and be brought to You in a great harvest.

Lead us, as parents and grandparents, as members of this church and of Your invisible church throughout the world, as citizens of Your Kingdom, as Christians, to reach out to children so that they may learn about You and see that there is a better way than what this world offers. This is beyond what we can do ourselves, so we place these prayers in Your all-powerful hands, and offer ourselves for Your use.

We pray these things in Jesus’ name

Amen