

Ephesians: What's God Saying to You? What are You Going to Do About It?

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I. Introduction

The U.S. is currently undergoing serious unrest in its streets. Setting aside the issues over which both sides are fighting, what would lead young men and women to behave the way they are, to loot and destroy others' private property? What would lead them to curse and spit at the authorities that are there to serve and protect the citizens of those neighborhoods? God tells us that when the children of a society are rebellious and disobey their parents, this is what will result.

II. Ephesians: What is God Saying to You and What are You Going to Do About It?

Chapter 6

As Christians, as children of God, we have certain obligations to each other because of our relationship to Jesus. He is our Head; we are His Body, 1:22-23; 2:5-6, 4:15-16, a Body that is an interconnected family who is supposed to support each other and help each other grow, 4:16. A family who also has God as their Father, 1:2; 2:18; 4:6, a Heavenly Father who has something to say to every one of our relationships. The Lord teaches us, 4:20-21, that we have obligations to our friends, our spouses, our parents, our children, our bosses, our employees, etc., 4:25-6:9. Our demeanor towards everyone is supposed to be sacrificial love and forgiveness not hatred and anger, 4:25-5:2, especially towards those closest to us, 5:21-6:9. He commands us to submit to them, to sacrifice our desires and interests for theirs, which is impossible unless we give control of our lives—our emotions, our thoughts, our actions—to the Lord's Spirit, 5:18, who is there inside us, 2:18, 22; 3:16, waiting to guide us through every difficult heartache, emotion, or dilemma. And if we have ears to hear, He'll let us know when we're going down the wrong alley, where Satan is waiting for us, 4:26-27, 30.

6:1-3, having addressed our obligation to our spouse, the Lord now addresses our obligation to our children and parents. As with the marital relationship, the Lord addresses the one under authority first, the children. The initial command is addressed to children who are still under their parents' authority; we know this because these children are obligated to *obey* their parents (children from age 0 to 18¹). But the Lord is also addressing adult children when He has Paul quote the 5th commandment (Exodus 20:12). The Lord is telling us to honor our mother and father and, if we do so, things will go well for us and we'll have a long life.

This is the promise that Paul is referring to when he quotes the command. He says that it's the first commandment with promise. However, when you look at the original context of Exodus 20, it makes you wonder why Paul said this because it looks like the 5th commandment is not the first commandment with a promise attached to it; the 2nd seems to have a promise too, though it may just be commentary on God's character (20:6). So what does Paul mean?

¹ If you've followed God's command and have raised your children in the "training and admonition of the Lord," then when your children are age 14 or 15, you should be able to remove most, if not all, restrictions so that they can begin to act as independent adults, which is your job and goal as a parent. If your children are 21 or older and are still living under your roof, are not yet independent, responsible adults, something's gone wrong.

First, this is not a verbatim quote of Exodus 20:12. It appears that Paul was quoting from the Septuagint (a Jewish translation of the Old Testament Scriptures done around the 3rd – 5th century B.C.), since his wording is closer to it than anything else. But since his wording is not exactly the same, it likely means that his intention was not a verbatim quote. It appears that he's making an application of the 5th commandment more than he's concerned about an exact quote. As for it being the first commandment with promise, he may just mean what he says, i.e., he may be saying that the 5th commandment out of all 613 commandments that make up the Mosaic Law is the first one to actually have a promise attached to it.

Second, so why did he quote it and what does it have to do with his command to children to obey their parents? He's telling children young and old, he's telling you and me that if we want to live long and prosper, then we have to love obedience and hate disobedience. This is a cruel reality that the nation of Israel is living to this day. What God told Israel, what He's still telling you and me today, is that if we hate obedience, we will suffer for it. Notice the context of Exodus 20 and what God says about loving obedience vs. hating obedience (20:1-6). What will God do to Israel if they hate His obedience? He will visit the sin of the fathers on the children, on the third and fourth generation of those who hate Him. This doesn't mean that God punishes the kids for what their parents do; it means that God will punish the kids for repeating the sins of their fathers and mothers. And when it came to the nation of Israel, in fact, when it comes to the children of any nation, what happens to a nation whose children do not respect their parents, who disobey their parents? It will crumble. That's exactly what God told Israel would happen to them right before He sent them into the Promise Land. He told them that if they obeyed Him, He would, as He says in Exodus 20:6, show them mercy. That is, He would bless them beyond their wildest dreams (Deuteronomy 28:1-14). But if they hated His obedience, He would not only curse them beyond their wildest dreams, He would uproot them from their Promise Land (Deuteronomy 28:15-68). And that's exactly what happened to Israel; to this day they do not possess their Promise Land and are in exile.

“[I]n the Lord.” Notice that God tells us as children that we must obey our parents “in the Lord.” God is not saying that children should obey their “Christian” parents. The phrase “in the Lord” modifies the verb “obey,” so God is saying “Children, *in the Lord* obey your parents.” This means a couple things: first, you will notice that the phrase “in Him,” or “in Christ”² shows up in Ephesians over and over. It is one of the central themes of this letter, especially in the first three chapters. One reason children must obey their parents is because they are literally part of Christ, as is every Christian. Since we are forever united to Jesus, 2:5-6, since we are forever a part of Him, doesn't it make sense that we should behave in a godly manner no matter the circumstance? Isn't that what God and the Lord Jesus Christ urge us to do in this letter, 5:1-2? We should behave the way Jesus behaves because we are Him and He is us; His Spirit is inside guiding us and wants to obey God, 5:18. Jesus wouldn't disobey His Father and didn't disobey His Father so it wouldn't be right for us to disobey our parents. This is also why 6:1 ends with “for this is right,” i.e., the right thing for Christian children to do is what Christ Himself would do, obey your parents. Thus, “in the Lord” is reminding Christian children that they are part of Christ and should behave accordingly, something He's urged us over and over in the letter, 4:1-3, 17-19, 25-32; 5:1-4, 7-14, 15-20, 21-6:9. Second, “in the Lord” is also there to remind children why they're supposed to do everything God commands: because of Jesus. Jesus is the center of the universe, 1:10; He designed everything, including relationships. So it's not your parents who are ultimately telling you to obey your parents, it's Jesus. Jesus is the One standing there telling you to take out the trash, do your homework, study hard, put your toys away, eat your vegetables, stop hitting your sister, etc., etc.

² “in the Beloved” also shows up once, 1:6.

Jesus is the Lord of *the* universe which means He's the Lord of *your* universe. You want to obey your parents because you want to obey Him. You must learn to love obedience the way Jesus loves obedience. You want to grow up to be just like Him, obedient to the Father. And obeying your parents and loving obedience will bring the blessing of a long and blessed life instead of misery and an early death (Exodus 21:15, 17; Deuteronomy 21:18-21; 27:16).

Why do I have to obey my parents? Some kids (toddlers or teens) think that they know better than their parents; they want to do things their way. They see their parents' rules as stupid and restrictive, as fun-killers. But everything that God says "NO" to will hurt us if we say "Yes." And everything that He says "Yes" to will bless us if we say "Yes." So when kids think that they can make up their own rules, they're sorely mistaken. To do this is to go back to the Garden and ask Satan for advice all over again. He's the one who taught us that we can make up our own rules, that we could be the master of our own universe. The GIANT problem with this theory is that the rules of the universe are set and God set them. Think about it for a moment, in what arena of life can you take it upon yourself to make up your own rules and thrive. Can you do it in sports? Work? Parenting? Sex? Money? Race? Politics? Every time you make up the rules and ignore God's, you will suffer, just like if you ignore God's rule of gravity while standing atop the Empire State Building, you will suffer. You may not believe in gravity, but gravity believes in you. There is something else Satan taught us, he taught us to see God as someone who's trying to keep something from us, which in turn makes us hate His rules. That's why kids see things like curfews as their parents keeping them away from fun. The moment you think that your mom and dad are keeping something from you, you will hate the rule keeping you from it and it will also lead you to hate them.

Do I have to honor my wicked parents? You may be thinking, "But my parents aren't honorable. They were the worst parents ever; they abused me. You mean to tell me that God wants me to honor them?!" Not exactly. This command also applies to adult children, but it won't apply the same as to children who are under their parents' authority and obligated to obey them. You don't honor them the same way as when you were a kid. God wants you to be respectful, but He's not asking you to place yourself under their authority or abuse. He's not telling you to do everything they tell you regardless. Sometimes honoring them will mean staying away and refusing evil requests. However, you never want to cut them off or give up on them. Sometimes honoring them will mean confronting their wrong in order to free them from it. God wants you to look at your parents the way He does; remember, you're to imitate Him, 5:1. This means that you forgive everything they did to you just as Christ forgave you everything you did to Him (4:32). But it doesn't mean that you have to let them into your fellowship if they're still abusive. You can withhold fellowship until they repent (Luke 17:3). Remember, Satan is trying to destroy your relationship with your parents for good; God is trying to heal and restore it.

III. Conclusion

Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. "Honor your father and mother," which is the first commandment with promise: "that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth." And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord.