

Notes: Wisdom for Children and Parents (Eph. 6:1-4)

Intro: The obedience of parents *and* nurture by parents are part of what it means to be filled with the Spirit (5:18) and walk in wisdom (5:18). The quality of life of early Christian households was a radical change from the callous cruelty of first century Rome. In our own day when the members of many families are alienated from one another, where many parents are terrified not only to say “no” to their children but to say anything to them, Paul has wisdom to share.

#1: Children obey your parents. These words are refreshing! The local congregation is a “church family.” Paul speaks not only to parents but to their children! Obviously whole families were expected to gather for worship. There the Ephesian children would not only have heard the Scriptures explained but also Paul’s apostolic letter read *to them*. That the children of Christian parents should be given such a prominent place in the congregation when the Roman world minimized their importance shows how the early church took to heart of the words of our Lord (Mk 10:14-15). The requirement of a child’s obedience. A child’s obedience of parents is a self-evident truth. Children innately understand this necessity because God has written this law on all human hearts. Every society has recognized the obligation of obedience to parents since the beginning of the world. The unbelieving moral philosophers of Greece and Rome taught it. The Stoic philosophers said that a son’s obedience was self-evident and needed no proof. Much earlier in history, in oriental culture, Confucius taught of the necessity of obeying parents. And so we are no surprised when Paul lists “disobedience of parents” in his letter to the Romans as a sign not only of a decadent society but also a spiritually dead heart (Rom 1:30). The root meaning of this word “obey” is picturesque. It means “to hear under”—to listen as one who has put himself “under” what is said. The description Luke gives us of young Jesus offers a wonderful picture. Luke’s shows how Jesus even as a twelve year old engaged the learned teachers in the Temple with insightful discussion. They were amazed by his understanding of God’s Word and his answers to their questions. Jesus also gently but firmly reminded Joseph and Mary of his unique relationship to his heavenly Father. Yet, Luke says he remained submissive and obedient to them even though they lacked his wisdom and were frequently in error. Should we do less? The reasons for a child’s obedience. Paul offers two: First *it is right*. Children must “obey parents *in the Lord for this is right*.” God has placed parents in authority over their children. Children must learn to obey their heavenly Father by first obeying their earthly father. God is training children to obey him in the future by obeying their parents today. Great confusion reigns. Confronting a disobedient child is never convenient or happy. Parents may wonder “Should I require my child to obey?” God says “Yes, it is right.” Second, *it is good*. Paul quotes the fifth commandment and points out that God promises obedient children blessing and safety. Life requires wisdom and God wants obedient children to stand on their parent’s shoulders by benefiting from their wisdom. Children take heart from your Savior’s example who submitted to his parents imperfect as they were. Remember: obeying parents is obeying the Lord.

#2: Parents love your children. In vs. 1, Paul addresses “parents” in vs. 4 “fathers.” Why? Under the Roman law of *patria potestas* (the father’s power), a father had absolute authority over his children. He had the power to let them live or die. Paul is addressing the responsibility of both parents through the authority of the father. A Christian family must shine as light in the darkness because of the love parents show for their children. We see: The requirement of love.

Paul addresses parents because God gives *parents* the primary responsibility for raising their children. Parents, we must ask ourselves whether or not we are assuming the primary responsibility of being the chief caregivers of our children. This caution must not be ignored when many parents have turned over the upbringing of their children to others. The *restraint of love*. Parents are cautioned against provoking their children to anger. How much wisdom is in this warning! Parents remember, God has entrusted the care of your children to you by placing you in authority over them. You are as priests to your children. You minister the Lord to them. Children must learn obedience to the Lord in part by their obedience of you. However, a parent may try to subordinate a child to his authority in a way that obscures rather than expresses the gracious authority of God. The obedience of the child is then severed from a relationship of love and acceptance by the parent. What sins properly provoke the anger of a child? Indifference. Favoritism. Disciplining the child primarily for selfish desires or one's reputation rather than out of concern for the child. The *responsibilities of love*. Two words summarize them: nurture and admonition—or a balance of affirmation and admonition. Behavioral studies corroborate this biblical teaching. Healthy children are more apt to come from homes where authority is firm and loving rather than overly authoritarian or permissive.