

#familydynamics

Week 4: Ephesians 6:1-6:4

Introduction

Last week, we studied the concept of mutual submission and explored how husbands and wives should live out the teachings in Eph 5:21-33. The call to **“submit to one another out of reverence for Christ” (Eph 5:21)** serves as the foundational principle for all relationships that Paul mentioned, i.e. husbands and wives (5:22-33), parents and children (6:1-4), masters and slaves (6:5-9).

This week, we will focus on the interactions and dynamics **between parents and children** in light of Eph 6:1-4. Many young adults have started to experience a subtle “power shift” in their families: When we were kids, we naturally looked up to our parents as our guardians, protectors, teachers, etc. and most of the time, obedience and submission was a given; but when we have grown up and started working and contributing to the family, subtle conflicts or struggles may start to arise. For instance, have you ever felt annoyed when your parents still give you advice on things that you actually know better? Did your parents feel offended when you disagreed with them? To what extent should you still obey and submit to your parents?

Warm-up question

When was the last time you travelled with or spent a full day with your parent(s) for leisure? How was the experience?

Read Ephesians 6:1-4, Colossians 3:17-21, Deuteronomy 5:16

1. How would you define “obey” (Eph 6:1) and “honor” (Eph 6:2), and is there any difference between these terms? Share one personal experience when you decided to (or refused to) obey / honor your parents.

- The Greek word for “obey” in 6:1 is the same as the one used in 6:5 describing how slaves should obey their masters, indicating a sense of hierarchy (which is distinct from the mutual submission between husbands and wives). It means to obey, to give ear, and to render submissive acceptance.
- The Greek word for “honor” in 6:2 means to show respect and high regard, to give recognition, and to revere. Some scholars said “honoring” is a wider concept than “obeying”, because “honoring” involves not just the behavior but also the attitude. Some scholars said “honoring” is a gentler term than “obeying” – kids obey their parents, but grown-ups just need to honor them – but this is open to discussion.

2. Based on Eph 5:21, 6:1-3, and Deut 5:16, why are we commanded to obey / honor our parents? Is there any condition or exception to this command?

- Eph 6:1 said “for this is right” – this was what the Old Testament taught, and this was how Jesus behaved (e.g. Luke 2:51).
- Eph 6:2-3 was quoting one of the Ten Commandments in Deut 5:16. The phrase “so that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth” is not just referring to tangible benefits like better well-being or longer life span, but is more likely a proverbial expression (e.g. Psalm 91:16) that generalises the long-term blessings when families honor God and honor each other.
- The phrase “in the Lord” (6:1) modifies “obey”, not “parents”. The point is not that Christian children must obey only Christian parents, but rather Christian children must obey their parents in keeping with their commitment to Christ.

“To honor someone therefore, is to evaluate that person accurately and honestly, and treat him with the deference, respect, reverence, kindness, courtesy, and obedience which his station in life or his character demands.” – Wuest (biblical scholar)

3. According to Eph 6:4, what are the responsibilities of parents? Our parents, as with all of us, would inevitably have fallen short of God’s standard. How can we still honor and love them despite their shortcomings?

- “Exasperate” is also translated as “provoke”, which means inflaming the child’s anger unnecessarily or unreasonably (see also Eph 4:31). This command would have been revolutionary in its day when a father had absolute authority in the household.
- Hendriksen (theologian) listed some ways in which parents may become guilty of exasperating their children in modern day contexts: (1) over-protection, (2) favouritism, (3) discouragement, (4) failure to take into account the child is growing up and need not be an exact copy of his father to be a success, (5) neglect, and (6) bitter words and physical cruelty.
- Paul instructed in Eph 6:4 that parents should “bring them up” (i.e. provide for their children’s needs), “in training and instruction” (i.e. directing and correcting their children) “in the Lord” (i.e. with the Lord at the center of their relationship and training).

4. Eph 6:1-4 reflects the principle in Eph 5:21 – mutual submission in reverence for Christ. Reflect on your own family dynamics: What’s one step that you can take to bring transformation to your family, in light of what you’ve learned in Ephesians? (E.g. love of Christ, reconciliation through Christ, submission in reverence for Christ, etc.)