

AN EXEGETICAL STUDY OF EPHESIANS 6:1-4 IN THE CONTEXT OF PARENTS-CHILDREN RELATIONSHIP IN IGBOLAND

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Abstract

Obedience as a term may appear very common to both modern day layman and the contemporary scholar. It is an attribute that works hand in hand with trust, loyalty and true commitment. Thus, it is not really as simple as it appears, considering the fact that the first sin of man recorded in the Christian Bible is the sin of disobedience; the direct opposite of obedience. Again, in the Old Testament, there is an assertion that “obedience is better than sacrifice” (1 Samuel 15:22). Also, in the whole of the Decalogue in Exodus 20:3-17, the act of obedience is the first and only code accompanied by a promising reward. It must be noted at this point that in human cosmology, hardly will there be a reward attached to an easy task. Hence, this research paper maintains the view that obedience as a concept could be more complex than it appears. It believes that viewing the concept with the lens of exegesis will expose as well as simplify this complexity. The exegetical work here is especially interested in the New Testament part of the Bible. In the presentation of what appears to be a family or household code, the apostle Paul or whoever wrote the epistle to the Ephesians made mention of obedience with special reference to its condition as seen in the Decalogue. Specifically, Ephesians 6:1 in the LXX (Greek Septuagint) reads; “Ta. te,kna(u`pakou,ete toi/j goneu/sin u`mw/n ĩevn kuri,w|Ð\ tou/to ga,r evstin di,kaionÅ” (The children, obey your parents in the Lord. For this is right). Here, the prepositional phrase evn kuri,w|(in the Lord) is kept in parenthesis. This is what drew that attention of the researcher who is of the opinion that if there is obedience ‘in the Lord’, then there is the possibility of obedience ‘outside of the Lord’. Again, with the rise in cases of family crises and conflicts seen amongst parents and children (youths to be precise) today which mostly hinges on obeying or not obeying the former and equally affects the larger society, the researcher believes that a proper exegetical interpretation of Ephesians 6:1-4 can serve as a lasting panacea.

Keywords: Exegesis, Parents, Children, Relationship

Introduction

Obviously, globalization has influenced and affected a lot of things in human existence; the way we talk, dress, walk, reason, and even the way we treat each other, all have been influenced by globalization and western civilization. Hence, it cannot be an overstatement that family relationship which exists precisely between parents and children has received its fair share of western influence in Igbo nation. As the smallest unit of the society, the importance of the family cannot be overemphasized. It is where virtually every human person gets his or her first orientation about life and what it is. Thus many figures we have in Igbo land today with their different and unique personalities were all shaped one way or another by their individual families through parents. When one is wrongly shaped, he or she would certainly bring his or her wrong shape in the larger society leaving negative impacts wherever he or she finds himself/herself.

Undoubtedly, the Apostle Paul or whoever authored the epistle to the Ephesians, having understood the dangers of poor and wrong parents-children relationship saw the need to dedicate the first four verses of the sixth and last chapter of the epistle (Ephesians 6:1-4) to what both old and modern day biblical scholars term “Household Code”. As short as this portion of the New Testament Bible is, it contains a compendium of what it takes to have a sound parents-children relationship in the family which would in turn benefit the larger society positively.

Thus, carrying out a proper exegesis on the above mentioned portion of the New Testament Bible is of paramount importance to especially Igbo Christian parents as raising children precisely at the adolescent stage poses enormous challenge to the family. Remya (2016) rightly notes that adolescents are differentiated from other early human developmental stages in terms of their strong sense to exercise their autonomy. This is where they are likely to begin to question the legitimacy of parental authority and parental supervision. Other scholars like Mba, Oginyi and Nwankwo (2014) equally note that the attitude of parents towards the upbringing of children in our society seem to be creating a lot of social, moral, spiritual and psychological problems. Alike (2012), supporting the above claims, maintains that the family is the child's first place of contact with the world. The child as a result, acquires initial social, moral and spiritual behavior from parents and other significant persons in the family.

Clarification of Key Terms

It is of great necessity and quite pertinent to clarify some of the key words in this paper, in order to give room for massive coherency. Some of these terms include: exegesis, parents, children, relationship.

Exegesis

According to the New Catholic Encyclopedia (1967), the term exegesis is the explanation of a passage or a book of the Bible. The Greek word *exhghsivj* from which the English word exegesis is derived means literally a leading out. The purpose of exegesis, therefore, is "to bring-out" "to set forth", and explain an author's thought. Since the sacred scriptures are divinely inspired books, the purpose of Biblical exegesis is to set forth and explain their full thoughts not only as human documents but also as writings containing God's word and God's revelation. Exegesis, simply put is a critical explanation or interpretation of a text, particularly a religious text. It is a systematic process by which a person arrives at a reasonable and coherent sense of the meaning and message of a biblical passage. Here, an understanding of the original text (Greek and Hebrew) is required.

Parent(s)

The term 'parent' as presented by Hornby (2010) simply connotes one's father or mother. Parents as used in the topic of this research serve as its plural form; a combination of both father and mother. This does not in any way imply that every family must have parents as there are types of parenting which includes one-parent family or single parent family, step parent and foster parents. Thus focus in the research investigation includes the study of father and mother relationships with their young ones, be it collectively as parents or individually as a parent as well as foster parents or guardians. In other words, the work would consider parenting styles in relation to the exegetical text.

Children

For the purpose of clarity and for a better understanding of the purpose of this research, the term children is explained to focus more on the adolescent or the youth. This is because most of the major challenges faced by parents when it comes to parenting are experienced in trying to handle children at the adolescent stage of life. Every youth or adolescent is of course someone's child.

Hornby (2010) presents the term children as the plural form of the word child, which means a young human who is not yet an adult. It is from the stage of being a child that one matures into an adolescent. For Hornby (2010), an adolescent is a young person who is developing from a child into an adult.

However, according to American Psychological Association (2002);

There is no standard age range for defining adolescence. Individuals can begin adolescence earlier than age 10, just as some aspects of adolescent development often continue past the age of 18. Although the upper age boundary is sometimes defined as older than 18 (e.g., age 21 or 25), there is widespread agreement that those in the age range of 10 to 18 should be considered adolescents.(p.5).

Hence carefulness must come into play in parents-children relationship so as to avoid giving to the society adolescents or youths who are not properly formed through right parenting. Thus throughout this research work the concepts of children and adolescents/youths would be used interchangeably when and where necessary.

Relationship

Hornby (2010) has four (4) different explanations for the term “relationship”. He explains it as “the way in which two people, groups or countries behave towards each other or deal with each other”, “a loving and/or sexual friendship between two people”, “the way in which two or more things are connected” and lastly, “the way in which a person is related to somebody else in a family” (p.1242).

Relationship, as used in this research finds its definition in the first explanation as seen above. This is because it is the definition that involves behaviour, interaction and communication that takes place between two or more people. It is simply the relationship that exists in an interpersonal communication. It is the way in which people feel and behave towards each other. It is equally in line with Hamilton’s (2007) definition. She defines human relations as the “ability to interact effectively with diverse others in a variety of situations” (p. 5). For Trask (2011), personal relationships form the foundation of the human experience, influencing our sense of self, the trajectory of our lives, and even physical and psychological health. Human beings according to him are hardwired to attach to others from birth onwards, and study after study illustrates that a long and happy life is associated with strong, positive interpersonal relationships. These interactions provide the basis for social support, a critical aspect of the human experience.

Theoretical Framework

Martin Buber’s I and Thou Theory of Communication

I and Thou is the most durable and important conceptual contribution of the 20th-century philosopher of dialogue, Martin Buber, and the title of his most famous book. As often happens with such terms, it became so well-known and seemingly accessible that it developed its own reputation as a pop-culture slogan. Self-help gurus and critics alike have used it in ways that surely would have surprised Buber and other Continental philosophers, such as Gabriel Marcel and Hans- Georg Gadamer, who developed similar concepts and applied them in sophisticated ways (Littlejohn and Foss, 2009:487).

Buber’s *I-Thou* and *I-It* theory of communication are what he called “primary words” for understanding human relationships. Littlejohn and Foss (2009) note that the ‘I-thou’ part of this theory refers to the relational attitude or orientation of regarding the other in his or her concrete uniqueness, as someone capable of full responsiveness to one’s own speech. The ‘I-It’ attitude, on the other hand, primarily regards the other as an object to be dealt with, affected, changed, measured, endured, or understood in role.

This work also adopts this theory from its ‘I and thou’ part since it presents a condition of interaction or relationship where one gives regard to the other as one who is unique and responsible in his or her own existence. Parents-children relationship should be based on this. No party should see or treat the other as an object per se but a human with feelings and emotions. Thus it should not go the ‘I-It’ way but rather the ‘I-Thou’. Evidently, the exegetical text (Ephesians 6:1-4) portrays this and more which would be exposed with a careful analysis.

Parents-Children/Adolescents Relationship

Of course, various scholars and authors have aired their views on parent-children/adolescents relationship as a concept. Anyanwu (2010) opines that this type of relationship is concerned on how parents interact with their children especially at the adolescent stage. She insists that;

Proper parenting practice and parent-adolescent relationships at home would lead to better sense of self which translates into good personal and social adjustment, while poor parenting and parent-adolescent relationship leads to social incompetence. The question then is; how well do parents and adolescents in South Eastern States of Nigeria relate; has this relationship

any influence on adolescents' psychological wellbeing- personally, socially and emotionally. (p.198).

The above assertion already confirms the possibility of the existence of problematic parents-child/adolescent relationships in most families. Thus this research work looks forward to rendering a lasting panacea where problem exists through an exegetical study of the selected text.

Parents-Children/Adolescents Relationship in Igboland

Effort is made at this point to consult the views of some Igbo Christian parents and children with regards to the kind of relationship which exists in their respective and individual families. This was done through oral one-on-one interviews as well as through phone calls.

O.J. Egwuonwu (personal communication, November 24, 2021) agrees that western civilization has affected a lot of things in Igboland and family relationship is never an exception. Even though the Bible is there to guide Igbo Christians, its misinterpretation continues to prevail and is not helping matters. He further notes that although parents are meant to come into certain decision making in their children's lives, they should be careful not to abuse it. However, where parents are failing in this aspect, the children should not go to the extreme by dictating for their parents.

Ugwuanyi, Formella and Szadejko (2020) discover that the Igbo culture just as every other culture influences parenting styles. This is why the typical Africa way of parenting appears like child abuse to the westerner. They suggest that notwithstanding the fact that parenting job seems to be difficult and challenging, it is expected that a parent should show love and affection to the child at all stages. In their words; "Parental love, care and affection, play a big role in the psychological development of the child. Unfortunately, some Igbo parents abuse their children in the name of parenting" (pp.7-8). With an exegetical glance on the text (Ephesians 6:1-4), this work aims at exposing more.

Establishment of the Textual Form and Orientation

Here, effort is made to view the text, Ephesians 6:1-4 with an exegetical lens, pointing out its textual problems if any. This would be followed by the delimitation/orientation of the text.

a. Textual Criticism of Ephesians 6:1-4

Nestle – Aland presents the text as: **Ephesians 6:1-4**

Ta. te,kna(u`pakou,ete toi/j goneu/sin u`mw/n İevn kuri,w/Đ\ tou/to ga,r evstin di,kaion² ti,ma to.n pate,ra sou kai. th.n mh te,ra(h[tij evsti.n evtolh. prw,th evn evpaggeli,a/(³ i[na eu= soi ge,nhtai kai. e;sh/ makrocro,nioj evpi. th/j gh/j⁴ Kai. oi` pate,rej(mh. parorgi,zete ta. te,kna u`mw/n avlla. evktre,fete avvta. evn paidei,a/ kai. nouqesi,a/ kuri,ou

A comparison of this text with other variants reveals few textual difficulties. In other words, the text does not have many textual problems. This section would be devoted to the few prominent ones. An obvious problem is seen in v. 1. Here, Nestle-Aland presents "in the lord" *İevn kuri,w/Đ* which remains in parenthesis. This reading in the text is testified in vast majority of other manuscripts or witnesses like ı^{46} & A D1 Ψ 33 81 \hat{A} *pm* whereas a few such as B D* F G b; Mcion^T vid Cyp Ambst omit it entirely. The verb to be; *evstin* in v.2 is also omitted in B*. Since they are not omitted in the text as presented here, it makes it longer and a more difficult reading. The longer reading is preferred because it indicates the preponderance of ancient, well-distributed evidence. For *İevn kuri,w/Đ*, (in the Lord) Metzger (1994) argues that "if it had been inserted under the influence of Eph 5:22, one would have expected $\acute{\omega}\varsigma\ \tau\tilde{\omega}\ \kappa\upsilon\rho\acute{\iota}\omega$ (as the lord). If Col 3:20 had been the influence, the insertion would have been after "*δίκαιον*" (p.541). This simply suggests that although "in the lord" has many variants in reading, the ı^{46} makes strong evidence to affirm "in the lord" as original. Therefore, going by the *Lexio Deficilio* which states that the more difficult reading a manuscript has, the closer it is to the original, the text here is taken to be closer to the original and to account to other readings in the other manuscripts.

b. Presentation of a Working Translation

The proposed working translation is presented as follows: "1 The children, obey your parents (in Lord), for this is just. 2 Honour your father and the mother, which is first commandment in a promise, 3 in order that it may become well for you and you will be long-lived on the earth. 4 And the fathers do not provoke to anger your children but nourish them in training and instruction of the Lord."

c. Delimitation of the Text

Just as Larkin (2009) notes, this is the fourth (6:1-4) of five hortatory paragraphs in this fifth and last hortatory section (5:15-6:9) of the ethical portion of the letter to the Ephesians (4:1-6:20). It is the second component of the household code which actually began at Ephesians 5:21 and is composed of two exhortations: one to children (6:1-3) and the other to parents (6:4). Each exhortation uses the household code's formal elements: (1) the person addressed according to role (6:1a, 4a); (2) the command (two exhortations each, with those addressed to parents using contrasting exhortations; 6:1, 2, 4); and (3) the motive or rationale for the command (two rationales, but only for the children; 6:1b, 2b-3). The consistent reference to participants ("children," 6:1, 4; "parents," 6:1; "father," 6:2, 4; "mother," 6:2), the presence throughout of vocabulary from the domain of righteous behaviour ("obey, right," 6:1; "honour," 6:2; "nurture, training, admonition," 6:4), and the use of ἐν κυρίῳ . . . κυρίου (6:1a, 4b) at the beginning and end all provide coherence for this hortatory paragraph.

Generally, the author of Ephesians in 6:1-9 attempts to address the subject matter of "being in submission to one another in the Lord (5:21)." The same theme is applied in the household codes (5:22- 6:9). The household codes divided into three pairs such as wives and husbands (5:21-33), children and parents (6:1-4) and slaves and the masters (6:5-9). One in each pair is subordinate to higher power. The act of submission of the subordinate to the superior power in household is respectively known as *Haustafel* (household code) which is also ethical call to relate better in home (6:1-9). It is not only limited to the subordinate it also extended to the authority in the household. Thus the author in this section (6:1-9) explicates the Christian household code to contribute to the subject matter. This is obviously because of the author's conception that whatever affects the family will eventually affect the Church.

Exegetical Interpretation of the Text

The children, obey your parents v.1

Ta. te,kna(u`pakou,ete toi/j goneu/sin u`mw/n êvn kuri,w|Ð the children obey your parents in the Lord. The first address to the particular group in this verse is "children". Abbott (1986) suggests that addressing instructions to children is in itself not unusual, "but it is distinctive in relation to discussions of household management in the Greco-Roman world, where it was the male adult free person who was addressed rather than the subordinate parties". The vocative of direct address to the children and the word *te,kna* is used here as regardless of age but of relationship. According to Boomerly (cited by Lincoln, 1998), here *te,kna* refers to the children who are able to understand the precepts of the lord. Hence the author adds in the first phrase *evn kuri,w|* (in the lord).

Furthermore, Abbott (1998) goes on to opine that in Jewish social context, addressing to the children is an honour because when they are addressed then they are considered to be genuine and accepted by the family which is social honour for the child. Subsequently, the author provides the first household code with the imperative *u`pakou,ete* "obey". Here the imperative is used in a sense of command which addressee needs to follow. Then the imperative follows with the appropriate object, *toi/j goneu/sin u`mw/n* "your parents." Children's obedience to their parents is the natural law. Conversely in the social context in the Mediterranean world obedience to the parents was the chief virtue of children (Abbott, 1998:196).

On the other hand, Schnackenburg (cited by Wintel, 2004) affirms that the phrase *evn kuri,w* "in the Lord" here is used as dative of sphere or realm. It connotes the meaning that children should obey their parent in the sphere of Lord. Although "in the lord" has the variants in reading, ¹⁴⁶ makes strong evidence to affirm "in the lord" as original. The phrase "in the Lord" generates the range of obedience. He (Schnackenburg) further claims that here the author does not want necessarily to call for children's obedience in everything, but instead he substitutes obedience in the Lord. Here the dative of sphere provides sort of limitation. According to Wintel (2004), this limitation is because of the possibility of the gentile parents. Also, O'Brian (1999) argues that "in the Lord", is virtually synonymous with "as to the Lord" or "as to Christ" (cf. 5:22; 6:5) and indicates that their obedience is part of their Christian discipleship". It is not rendered simply because of their parents are from gentile

or greater authority or status. However the phrase “in the lord” can be understood that it the submission and obedience is in the realm of God to the parents and as to Christ.

Honour your father and mother vv.2-3

The second instruction for the children here is that they should honour their parents. The phrase *ti,ma to.n pate,ra sou kai. th.n mhte,ra h[tij evsti.n evntolh. prw,th evn evpaggeli,a]* “honour your father and mother which is the first commandment with the promise” can be called as mandatory phrase for the children in the social context. The word *ti,ma* is used here in present imperative sense it is progressive present and used in the sense of “weight”; giving weight to their parent. On the other hand, Stoeckhardt (1987) asserts that the word *ti,ma* “honour” includes both that the children recognize their parents as their superior and that they also gladly submit themselves to the will of their parents. In the social point of view in the Mediterranean world honour includes providing them and burying them. Thus the second household code for the children is to honour their father and mother. The motivating part of honour lies in the phrase *h[tij evsti.n evntolh. prw,th evn evpaggeli,a* “which is the first commandment in a promise”. This promise therefore remains the motivating factor here; a sort of encouragement to the addressee. Here, the word *prw,th* is not used in a numerical sense but according to the rank because Exodus 20:5-6 the command includes both blessing and cursing. Here the benefit of following household code is to receive blessing which is long life. Eventually, honouring parents in itself is the submission to their authority. Thus the *haustafel* (household code) for the children is centered in again two words; obedience and submission (Johnson, n.d).

The fathers, do not provoke to anger, your children v.4

Kai. oi` pate,rej(mh. parorgi,zete ta. te,kna u`mw/n “the fathers do not provoke to anger your children”

In v.4, the author addresses the superior power *oi` pate,rej* ; vocative of direct address is used to address fathers. The link between the exhortations to both halves of the pairing; “children and fathers” are underlined by the conjunction “and”. At the beginning of v 4, both groups, not just the subordinate one, have obligations. According to Liefeld (1997), fathers in ancient Rome had extraordinary power over their children. In the Greco-roman tradition, unwanted children, especially girls, were exposed to the elements or otherwise disposed of. Abortion was also practiced. But Christian parents, as the author of Ephesians says, must not act as though their children were their possession. Hence the first household code for the fathers, *mh. parorgi,zete* “do not provoke to anger” is used in prohibitive imperative sense. It shows that fathers are not allowed to provoke their children to anger. Anger here includes attitudes, words, and actions which would drive a child to angry exasperation or resentment and thus rules out excessively severe discipline, unreasonably harsh demands, abuse of authority, arbitrariness, unfairness, constant nagging and condemnation, subjecting a child to humiliation, and all forms of gross insensitivity to a child’s needs and sensibilities. On the contrary, the second household code “*avlla. evktre,fete auvta. evn paidei,a| kai. nouqesi,a| kuri,ou* “but bring them up in the discipline and the instruction of the Lord” indicates that they should concentrate on bring their child in discipline and instruction of the Lord. *avlla* here is used as adversative conjunction to bring the contrast behaviour of the fathers towards their children. The present imperative *evktre,fete* is in progressive present which indicates ongoing action. Hence, the fathers’ duty is to bring their child up in the instruction of the lord and should be done on daily basis. Conversely, *evn paidei,a| kai. nouqesi,a|* is used as dative of standard, thus the parents have to disciple their children according to the standard of God’s discipline and instruction (Liefeld, 1997:150).

Semantics/Linguistic Analysis of the Syntax

The text of exegesis is obviously very rich in style and sound. An interpretation of the text makes an understanding of words used a necessity. The verbs, both main and subordinate clauses are highlighted differently and then commented upon very briefly. Phrases, clauses, and sentences would also be given a technical clarification wherever and whenever necessary. It shall follow a pattern of analysis of verse after verse beginning with v. 1.

6:1 Τὰ τέκνα, ὑπακούετε τοῖς γονεῦσιν ὑμῶν ἐν κυρίῳ, τοῦτο γάρ ἐστιν δίκαιον.

Noun clause: *Τὰ τέκνα.*; Here both the definite article 'τα' and the noun 'tekna' appear in the vocative case. τέκνα is thus vocative case, neuter plural of the noun 'teknon'. In household codes, participants are addressed according to their role.

Main verbal clause: *υ`ρακου,ete toi/j goneu/sin u`mw/n Êvn kuri,w|Ð*

υ`ρακου,ete : Present active imperative, 2nd person plural of the verb, *υ`ρακου,w* which means 'to obey'. The present tense can be used to introduce a general precept.

τοῖς γονεῦσιν: This a dative complement of ὑπακούετε. *γονεῦσιν* is the dative plural of the masculine noun, *γονεῦς* meaning 'parent'.

ὑμῶν: This is the plural genitive case of the 2nd person personal possessive pronoun *ὁμοειj*. It is a genitive of relationship.

ἐν κυρίῳ: This is a sphere of reference, characterizing the activity as Christian (cf. 4:17; 6:10; 1:3 on ἐν Χριστῷ). Given the other "sphere of reference" uses, this is not "sphere" in the sense of "carry out your obedience to parents as obedience to Christ" in parallel with 5:22. Larkin (2009) argues that it does not point to "incorporative union," since it is characterizing an action. Nor is it a reason or motivation for the action, which is supplied by the subsequent clause. For him, the referent is Christ, not God the Father, consistent with the other uses in Ephesians (2:21; 4:1, 17; 5:8; 6:1, 10, 21).

Subordinate clause: *τοῦτο γάρ ἐστιν δίκαιον*

τοῦτο: This is the masculine singular nominative case of the demonstrative pronoun, 'ου[toj' (this). Here, it works as the nominative subject of ἐστιν (is). The antecedent is the entire preceding clause (cf. 2:8 on τοῦτο).

γάρ : This article introduces a causal clause; the first grounds/rationale for the exhortation.

ἐστιν : This is the present active indicative mood, 3rd person singular of the verb, εἰμί (I am).

δίκαιον : This functions as a predicate adjective. Metzger (1976) notes that Paul can use δίκαιος in a general conventional sense without reference to God (Phil 1:7; 4:8; Col4:1), which some see as the usage here. However, it indicates that Paul is referring to "that which corresponds to the righteous divine order enjoined by the commandment" (cf. 2 Thess 1:6, where the divine moral order is brought out explicitly).

6:2 τίμα τὸν πατέρα σου καὶ τὴν μητέρα, ἥτις ἐστὶν ἐντολὴ πρώτη ἐν ἐπαγγελίᾳ,

Main verbal clause: *τίμα τὸν πατέρα σου καὶ τὴν μητέρα*

τίμα: This is the present active imperative, 2nd person singular of the verb, τιμάω (to honour). The present tense introduces a general precept. Best (1998) comments that here, τιμάω ("to attribute high status to someone by honouring") includes the idea of "obey," but more widely involves care of parents and may focus on inner attitude rather than outward acts (Best, 1998: 565). Although this is a quote, the shift from plural to singular still serves to individualize the command; each child is expected to honour his or her parents.

τὸν πατέρα . . . καὶ τὴν μητέρα: Here, both *πατέρα* (father) and *μητέρα* (mother) are placed in the accusative case and thus functions as the accusative direct objects of τίμα.

σου: This is the singular genitive case of the 2nd person personal possessive pronoun *su* (your). It is a genitive of relationship.

Subordinate clause: *ἥτις ἐστὶν ἐντολὴ πρώτη ἐν ἐπαγγελίᾳ*

ἥτις: This is the nominative case of the indefinite relative pronoun *tij* standing as a nominative subject of ἐστὶν (which is). The feminine gender noun *ἐντολὴ* (commandment) agrees with the predicate. This indefinite relative pronoun functions in its normal capacity to indicate the class or status to which, a particular 'commandment' belongs. It also emphasises a characteristic quality about it (Hoehner, 2002:789). Though its clause gives the basis for the ground of the exhortation, the pronoun itself does not function as a causal link.

ἐντολὴ πρώτη: This is a predicate nominative noun (first commandment). Best (2002) argues that the sense of *πρώτη* is not "pertaining to prominence or *most important*". He suggests that it is a view that attempts to avoid the difficulty of seeing the fifth commandment as the first to contain a promise when the second commandment appears to have one (Exodus 20:4-6). However, it must be noted that the positive statement in the second commandment is not a direct promise but part of a description of

God as a jealous God. It is thus better to take *πρώτη* as an ordinal (“first”), not in terms of the first command that a child learns but rather as the first commandment in the Decalogue that in form and content clearly contains a promise (Lincoln, 1998:404).

ἐν ἐπαγγελία: This is the dative case of the feminine singular noun *ἐπαγγελία* (promise). Here it stands in a position of reference. It points out the way and the manner in which the commandment is first; the first with a promise or that contains a promise.

6:3 ἵνα εὖ σοι γένηται καὶ ἔσῃ μακροχρόνιος ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς.

Verbal clause: ἵνα εὖ σοι γένηται καὶ ἔσῃ μακροχρόνιος ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς.

ἵνα: This is an article that works together with the subjunctive verb of purpose or reason. In other words, it introduces a purpose clause (in order that or so that).

εὖ: This is simply an adverb of manner which means ‘well’ in the sense of one’s wellbeing. Hoehner (2002) is of the opinion that the adverb here, probably points to temporal well being, or the stability necessary to function well in the family and society. For Lenski (1937), it should not necessarily be extended to permanent well-being in the full Christian sense, to be under God’s constant blessing.

σοι: The dative case of the second person personal pronoun (you). Here it points out who gains the advantage from honouring one’s father and mother.

γένηται : This is a verb in the aorist middle voice subjunctive mood, 3rd person singular from the verb, *γίνομαι*. It is work in agreement with the *ἵνα* of purpose; ‘in order that it may ‘become’ well with you’.

ἔσῃ: This is the 2nd person singular, future indicative mood, middle voice of the verb *εἶμι* (you will). The future tense here clearly emphasises more certainty of the promise’s fulfillment than a subjunctive which places it under probability.

μακροχρόνιος: This is a nominative masculine singular of the normal adjective; *μακροχρόνιος* (long-lived) . Here, it appears in as a predicate adjective. The expression makes the adjective particular. However, Hoehner (2002) asserts that the referent is not to eternal life but to physical longevity.

ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς: This is simply a prepositional phrase; ‘on the earth’. The main noun here which is *γῆς* is in genitive case singular form and remains a feminine common noun. Lincoln (1998) hints that the omission of the original phrase, “the Lord your God is giving you,” makes the referent of *τῆς γῆς* “the earth” appear to mean the whole earth rather than the land of Canaan in particular.

6:4 Καὶ οἱ πατέρες, μὴ παροργίζετε τὰ τέκνα ὑμῶν, ἀλλὰ ἐκτρέφετε αὐτὰ ἐν παιδείᾳ καὶ νοουθεσίᾳ κυρίου.

Noun clause: *Καὶ οἱ πατέρες*

Καὶ: This is a coordinating conjunction which could mean ‘and’, ‘even’ or ‘also’. Here, it functions as a continuative link. Lincoln (1998) avers that in the household code, conjunctions are used (6:4, 9) to link groups with mutual obligations (children and parents, slaves and masters). Best (1998) is however sees the *καὶ* as “almost” transitional; contrast reference to wives and husbands with a transitional or no connective in Ephesians 5:25, 33.

οἱ πατέρες: This is the vocative case presentation of the masculine definite article *οἱ* and the masculine noun *πατήρ* in their plural form (the fathers). In household codes, participants are addressed according to their role. It is in continuity with the comprehensive parental references as seen in verses 1-2 (*γονεῦσιν; πατέρα . . . μητέρα*). Both Lincoln (1998) and Best (1998) argue that the referent is to both parents (cf. Col 3:21; Heb 11:23; and perhaps 1 Cor. 4:15) rather than “fathers” only.

Main verbal clause: *μὴ παροργίζετε τὰ τέκνα ὑμῶν, ἀλλὰ ἐκτρέφετε αὐτὰ ἐν παιδείᾳ καὶ νοουθεσίᾳ κυρίου.*

παροργίζετε: This is the present active imperative, 2nd person plural of the verb; *παροργίζω* (“I make angry” or “to provoke to anger”). The present tense normally introduces a general precept.

τὰ τέκνα: The definite article *τα* and the noun *τεκνα* appear in the accusative case. *τέκνα* is thus accusative case, neuter plural of the noun *τεκνον*. Hence both the definite article and the noun are functioning as the accusative direct object (the object that receives or suffers the action) of *παροργίζετε*.

ὑμῶν: This is the plural genitive case of the 2nd person personal possessive pronoun *ὑμεῖς* (your). It is a genitive of relationship.

ἀλλὰ: This is a coordinating conjunction which could mean ‘but’ or ‘except’. Here, it appears adversative since it is used to introduce a positive command immediately after a negative one.

ἐκτρέφετε: This is the present active imperative, 2nd person plural of the verb; *ἐκτρέφω* (I nourish or I bring up) . It introduces a general precept. The verb here is used in the extended sense of “to rear, bring up from childhood”.

αὐτῶν: This is the accusative case, neuter plural of the personal pronoun; *αὐτοῖς* (himself, herself, itself, same, he, she or it). It performs the function of accusative direct object of *ἐκτρέφετε* (nourish them).

ἐν παιδείᾳ καὶ νοουθεσίᾳ: This is a prepositional phrase meaning “in training or discipline and instruction or admonition”. They are presented as the instruments for the nourishing or nurturing of the children. For Larkin (2009), since Paul normally indicates by context that *παιδεία* or its cognates mean “discipline, correction” (cf. 1 Cor. 11:32; 2 Cor. 6:9), the meaning here is probably the more general, “training,” i.e., “the act of providing guidance for responsible living” (cf. 2 Tim 3:16; Titus 2:12). He further hints that given the more comprehensive meaning of *παιδεία* vis-à-vis *νοουθεσία*, the *καὶ* is explanatory rather than continuative. It does not indicate two coordinate aspects of domestic training but rather presents a balance of deed and word. It introduces a second term that explains the first.

On the other hand, the noun *νοουθεσία* refers to verbal instruction that involves “counsel about avoidance or cessation of an improper course of conduct” (Best, 1998:569).

κυρίου: This is the genitive case, masculine singular of the common noun; *κυριοῦ* (lord or the lord). Here, it functions as the subjective genitive, modifying both nouns preceding it. Hoehner (2002) is of the opinion that here Paul or whoever the author is, identifies “the Lord” (Christ, not the Father, congruent with other references in the household code; 5:22; 6:1, 7-9) as the one who exerts his training/admonition through the parents.

Theological Reflection and Hermeneutical Application

Undoubtedly, it is quite easier for one to theorize on parenting than putting it in practice. This is to say that sustaining a sound relationship between parents and children especially in this contemporary time requires great and extra effort. It is a task that requires great commitment. This is certainly why Gordon (1970) posits that;

When people become parents, something strange and unfortunate happens. They begin to assume a role or act a part and forget that they are people. Now that they have entered the sacred realm of parenthood, they feel they must take up the mantle of parents. Now they earnestly try to behave in certain ways because they think that is how parents should behave. (p. 13).

The above assertion justifies the need for this exegetical study since it has been clearly established thus far that Ephesians 6:1-4 as a text contains the right household code.

God apparently laid the family foundation right from the creation of the world as seen in Genesis 4:1ff. Here, the picture of the first family on earth was clearly created (Adam, Eve his wife with Cain and Abel their children) and it was not quite long the family started, problem ensued. A move from here to so many other parts of the Bible continues to reveal other kinds of family instability. It not surprising however, to see Paul or whoever wrote the epistle to the Ephesians, addressing household matters by outlining ways to make family affairs run smoothly.

During the exegetical interpretation, efforts were made to clarify some pressing issues especially as it concerns ‘obeying parents in the Lord’ as seen in v. 1 and contributions from various biblical commentators has gone a long way to explain what this points to. It is Schnackenburg (cited by Wintel, 2004) who comments that the author does not want necessarily to call for children’s obedience in everything, but instead he substitutes obedience in the Lord. What this means is that this obedience should be carried out matters which does not stand against the will of the divine (God). However, as strange as it may sound, many Igbo Christians parents today always see disobedience in their children when they refuse to go by certain decisions they (parents) make on their behalf. This is seen matters of lifestyles, career choice, choice of marital partner, etc. Hence, a child who insists to studying journalism against the father’s decision to go for medicine could easily be seen as rebellious

and disobedient. Ironically, C.S. Umelo (personal communication, January 12, 2022) submits that if her child insists on studying music when she knows that he can do well in medicine, she would not count it as disobedience since going for music is what will made the child happy and fulfilled. But then, she did not fail to state that she will not be happy that her child chooses music over medicine. For the researcher, this is a clear indication to more needs to be done in enlightening parents on matters like this because if she is not happy with the choice of the child, the relationship still lacks some smoothness. This is apparently the case with some families even till date.

Sometimes, wrong comparisons are made by parents thereby pushing a child into involving in a social vice. It is no longer uncommon to hear talks like “look at the kind of cars your mates are already driving”, “some of your mates are already building houses for their parents and you are still here eating mama thank you”. The researcher at this point maintains the fact that any child who adheres to kind of pressure and does the will of the parents has obeyed them but then such obedience is not in the Lord but “outside of the Lord”. This is because Jesus Christ will push or pressure his own into following the wrong way with the mentality that the end justifies the means.

Again, some parents because of the poor economic state of the country which affects most homes have insisted on who their child especially the female ones must marry. This is of course based in the suitor’s level of financial affluence as against true love and understanding which should guide marriage. Any child who does not follow their decision is of course term disobedient and stupid and most time even denied parental marriage blessings. Godly parents should and must always reflect on Ephesians 6:1-4.

Furthermore, another important part of the exegetical text is v.4 where parents specifically the fathers are warned against provoking their children to anger. It may not be an overstatement to assert that most fathers today would never see any of their actions towards their children as provocative. Some are even ignorant of the fact that they can provoke their children to anger through their words and deeds. This is obviously why Gilbert (cited by Bunge, 2008) takes time and effort to outline possible ways through which parents provoke their children. He notes;

The command to not exasperate our children is not solely directed at dads. The translators however were wise to use “fathers” here because the father will be ultimately held accountable to God for how he has led his family. Biblical leadership is about responsibility. (p.7).

He thus stresses that when parents are told, “Provoke not your children to wrath...”, God is telling them to avoid;

1. Failing to allow them to be children.
2. Treating them with harshness and cruelty.
3. Ridiculing them in front of others.
4. Displaying favouritism and making comparisons.
5. Failing to express approval.
6. Being arbitrary in discipline and lacking consistency.
7. Neglecting them and making them feel like intruders.
8. Seeking to achieve their goals and life aspirations through their (children’s) lives. (p. 7).

In what appears to be not farfetched from the above submission, Schleiermacher (cited by Bunge, 2008) urges parents to build trust in their relationships with their relationships with children by taking their concerns and interest seriously, by responding empathetically to their needs and by resisting the temptation to live out their dreams and aspirations through their children.

Conclusion

Finally, “honouring parents” as seen in v. 2 should not be overlooked. This goes beyond ordinary respect for one’s parents to include understanding them emotionally. However, it must be noted that parents who honoured their children by giving them responsible parenting should be the ones to expecting sound and good honour from their children. In some Igbo Christian homes today, elderly parents are less cared for. Part of the reasons for this is because of proper orientation on the young one

during training. An Igbo adage states that “*nne zuchaa nwa, nwa a zuo ya*”(when a mother finishes nurturing the child, the child in turn nurtures her); this is a very important aspect of Igbo cultural values which must be inculcated in every Igbo Christian child if honouring parents as instructed in this text (Ephesians 6:2) must be sustained.

Recommendations

Human relationship at all levels is best enjoyed when it is unstrained. Thus family enjoyment and happiness cannot be sustained when parents do not relate well with their children and vice versa. Most times when human problems occur people tend to sort for solutions from faraway even when the solution is right there at their feet believing that it is only when one travels far that solution can come. Unfortunately, the Christians' attention to the Christian Bible appears to be on a drastic fall in recent times and this is why when certain issues arise amongst Christians, remedies are difficult to arrive. In the New Testament part of the Bible alone, solutions to most challenges faced by Christians abound which cannot be exhausted. The researcher at this juncture thus recommends the followings.

1. A return to the proper application and use of biblical texts in tackling human issues of which the challenges facing parents-children relationships in Christians homes remains an obvious one. Harsh economy, quest to make more money and conquer poverty has blinded all so much that even the clergy is not exempted.
2. Finally, John Bowlby's theory talks about Attachment, Travis Hirschi is on Social Bond while Martin Buber focuses on the 'I and thou' in human interaction and communication. These theories when applied with the exegetically analysed text (Ephesians 6:1-4) gives one a strong instrument to combat any challenge which may be encountered in maintaining a good parents-children relationship. The researcher thus recommends this work for all parents, intending parents as well as children especially those at the adolescent stage. Its reading and application can bring effective solution when and where necessary.

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