

Children

by Hendrik Joubert

I write so that you will know how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth. (1Timothy 3:15) This statement is made immediately after God, through the apostle, reveals the qualifications for those who desire to serve as elders, to ***feed the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. (Acts 20:28)*** The qualifications for those who are to serve as deacons in the Lord's church are included.

The letters of Paul, written ***with the wisdom given him (2Peter 3:15-16)***, contains instructions relevant for every member of God's household and the list of qualifications is followed by specific reference to the fact that some will not submit to God in order to conduct themselves properly in *the household of God. (1Timothy 3:16-4:1-6)*

In the lists of qualifications for those who desire to serve as elders and deacons the conduct of their children comes under scrutiny. This *qualification* has specific reference to the individual's ability to manage his own household before he considers involving himself in the task of taking care of the household of God. ***(1Timothy 3:4, 5, 12)*** In the case of the elder it is said that he has to have ***children who believe. (Titus 1:6)***

One of the more challenging questions to settle is to determine the age of accountability, where the child becomes responsible before God for his or her actions. When Paul explains the purpose of the Law he makes the statement that he ***was once alive apart from the Law; but when the commandment came, sin became alive and I died;... (Romans 7:9)*** Since the Law was given centuries before he was born this statement seems strange at first; however, there was a time in his life as a Jewish boy when the apostle was blissfully ignorant concerning the Law given through Moses – until he could *understand*.

In the Old Testament we find a reference which helps us understand what he is saying: ***Then Ezra the priest brought the law before the assembly of men, women and all who could listen with understanding, on the first day of the seventh month. ³ He read from it before the square which was in front of the Water Gate from early morning until midday, in the presence of men and women, those who could understand; and all the people were attentive to the book of the law. (Nehemiah 8:2-3)***

All who could listen with understanding. These were able to receive the law and adjust their conduct accordingly. As a young Jewish boy Paul reached the point where he could understand, and the ***commandment came*** for him, causing his spiritual death because he found himself violating it. Every child starts out in life innocent as Adam and Eve; until they reach the point of understanding. Not every child reaches this point at the exact same point in his or her life.

Knowing when the child should **obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus** in order to avoid the judgment of God (**2Thessalonians 1:8**) by becoming a *believer* is a challenge every parent faces. If we do a reasonable job of teaching our children there always is the possibility of the child acting simply on the impulses of the parents and others in the church rather than obeying from the heart **that form of teaching** received from God. (**Romans 6:14**)

The New Testament contains various references to the conduct of children, some of which are direct instructions. **Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.** ² **HONOR YOUR FATHER AND MOTHER (which is the first commandment with a promise),** ³ **SO THAT IT MAY BE WELL WITH YOU, AND THAT YOU MAY LIVE LONG ON THE EARTH.** (Ephesians 6:1-3)

The importance of obedience to parents is brought out in a negative context also by explaining the *godless* conduct of others. In **Romans 1 disobedient to parents (vs. 30)** is listed among other sins identified with those said to have a **depraved mind. (vs. 28)** Many are surprised to learn that it is considered such a "biggy." It is included with a similar list in **2Timothy 3:1-5.**

The Scriptures explain the responsibilities *adult children* have towards their parents in their old age, or in times of need. The church (collectively) has a responsibility towards those who are widows *indeed*, and these are distinguished from other widows by reason of the fact that they have children able to take care of them: **but if any widow has children or grandchildren, they must first learn to practice piety in regard to their own family and to make some return to their parents; for this is acceptable in the sight of God.** (**1Timothy 5:4**)

The church is not to be burdened with my responsibility as a child in this regard: **If any woman who is a believer has dependent widows, she must assist them and the church must not be burdened, so that it may assist those who are widows indeed.** (**1Timothy 5:16**)

Obedience to parents is not an option. It is such a basic concept that it is used to express the attitude each member of the household of God, adult or child, should have towards God. **As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts which were yours in your ignorance,** ¹⁵ **but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior;...** (**1Peter 1:14-15**)