

Children, Obey Your Parents

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Bible Text: Ephesians 6:1-3
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Now we come to the next section, the role of children, or I call it "Children, Obey Your Parents." Now we visited this text a few times over these almost four decades I've been with you because if you're going to preach on children, there is not a whole lot of texts to pick from and this is one of the primary ones. So it's going to not be a whole lot of brand-new stuff here but things you need to hear, things you teenagers need to hear and reaffirm in your hearts, and you moms and dads who are beginning your journey of raising children, you need to hear this again and reaffirm these things in your own hearts, and those of us who are grandparents need to reaffirm these truths in our own hearts.

So Paul now says, "Now here's the way you live as Spirit-born children of God and when it comes to being younger people who are under your parents, here's what you're supposed to do." Chapter 6 of Ephesians, verses 1 through 3,

1 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.

Now, I. let's get right to it, notice this is an emphatic command. This means, in fact, that it's just strong and it's clear. Notice there is no beating around the bush here, it's just straightforward, strong, clear, to the point, "Children, obey your parents." You wonder why that's such a needful instruction, it's a needful instruction because children are very prone not to obey their parents and this dishonors the Lord.

Now there are so many children today in the world you and I live in, in the culture that you and I have to live in, that are so anti-truth in the way they behave, I mean I could explain it that way, they are anti-biblical, they are anti-God, and so the spirit permeates our children in all the culture that we are to be anti-authority. We are to be against all authority. But that's absolutely contrary to the edict of God. God ordains the authorities in the earth and for children, they are told to obey authority, and so many children today have a dishonorable and disrespectful attitude when it comes to their parents and to those in authority over them.

John MacArthur in his commentary on this section of Scripture stated that the United States has at least 8 million serious assaults each year recorded by children against their

parents. Eight million. Such disrespect and disdain for their parents. He continues and he says this, "Children who are incessantly told that they can do whatever they wish and that they can have their own way, are children who will soon mock their parents, their teachers, moral standards, the law, and society in general. All human relationships obviously grow out of those of children with parents. Children who respect and obey their parents will build a society that is ordered, harmonious and productive."

Now when we look at the Scriptures and we think about this thing of honoring authority and let's remind ourselves that all of us are under authority, and I don't want to bleed too much over into parenting because that's the next installment in Ephesians, we'll talk about Christian parenting, but parents parent, parents train their children as those who are under authority. Now we need to make sure our children understand that, that we are not doing what we want to do in the way we raise you, we're answering to the authority over us. God's word, our Lord God is over us, and when daddy goes to work, he has an authority he has to submit to. He is to honor and obey his employer, etc. etc. Moms are to honor and obey their husbands. All of us have authorities we must submit to. It's God's way of ordering society and what Paul is actually saying here, now as Christians, you ought to be beginning to grasp the wisdom of this. This shouldn't be just a common drudgery to you, you should be able to see that God's great wisdom is behind the structures of authority. So here particularly, children, obey your parents.

Now in Jude 1, Jude mentions some very vile and corrupt types of men in wickedness and he elaborates and says, "Yet in the same way these men also by dreaming defile the flesh," it means they are involved in vile wicked things with her flesh, then he says, "and reject authority." Isn't that interesting? He lumps the rejection of God-ordained authority right in the midst of the most vile wicked sins. And 2 Peter 2:9 and 10, the same kind of thing, "then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from temptation, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment for the day of judgment, and especially those who indulge the flesh," notice this wording, "in its corrupt desires and despise authority." There it is again, these people he says, they are involved in vile and wicked things and they despise authority. They do not want to honor the authority God has put over them and is that not just prominent in our culture today? Don't be surprised that a culture that begins to say every sexual or vile lust a man has we're now supposed to applaud it and affirm it and encourage it, and let's rebel against all authority. It's just debauchery almost.

We have this notion, good night, I think this really became springing forth in the sixties, that's a long time ago now, but it's this notion that a person is not to be held responsible, they are not to say no to anyone, we all should be able to do as we feel and as we want. We even have children today who are claiming they are transgendered and their parents are actually getting them hormone therapy. I think it was Vanderbilt University and I believe it was Princeton University who have done studies on the children and said that the great majority of them are fine later on in life, they are comfortable with who they are, and that it is borderline child abuse, if not child abuse, to do this to children. But where does this notion come from? The notion comes from, "I answer to nobody but me. I am my own final authority."

I mean, in today's world we come up with all these sophisticated, high sounding narratives for why we can reject God-ordained authority. As a matter of fact, in most cases they'll say, "Well, that's abusive." If you have to submit to someone, "Well, that's abusive." If you're required to obey another man or person, "Well, that's abusive." For exactly some of the feminists would tell us that teaching a wife to submit to her husband, "Well, that's abusive." Some union leaders might say that telling an employee he is to honor and obey and work for his employer like working unto the Lord, they'd say, "Well, that's abusive." A liberal church member or a liberal professing Christian might say that being taught to obey your elders and submitting to church elders, "Well, that's abusive." And on and on and on we could go. The psychologist and the psychiatrist, so many of them would tell you, "You really can't tell a child no anymore. You can't really expect a child to obey anymore." Well, that's warping their self-development. I just read recently about a type of parenting, I think they call it peaceful parenting. Oh, it sounds so beautiful. Peaceful parenting, and when your child gets in a rage and throws their milk glass across the room and knocks their food on the floor, here's what they say, you are to sit down and reason with them. I can tell you something better to do, they should be taught to obey. Now look, that makes pretty good sense if you reject the Bible's teaching of the sin nature but when you know we all have a sin nature so all children come into the world obsessed with themselves, wanting their own way, and not caring how they put others at a disadvantage, they ought to be caused and taught to obey.

So today we have this spirit, this resisting of authority. It's championed. It's applauded. It's celebrated and by the way, even more so, it's become, this spirit is permeating the evangelical church today. I've told you before, I'm just shocked at the things I'm beginning to hear about this mindset in the church. It's like Proverbs 12:15 says, "The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, But a wise man is he who listens to counsel." Well, the Bible says foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child so he comes into this world thinking he knows what's wise in his own eyes. He knows mom and dad aren't wise, he's wise in his own eyes.

Now there is a time for sure when a child has to be – listen to me – made to obey. Again, don't want to get too far over into the parenting message, that's next, because we should try to reason and explain things. Some of you dads might be a little too harsh or too firm. Some of you moms might be a little too hard and too firm. There is a place to give a child some understanding but, look, you've got to be discerning. There are a lot of times when a child just has to be made to obey but then as a child gets older in those teen years, and certainly the upper teen years, we are praying and working that our children obey us because they are beginning to discern the wisdom in obeying their parents. And praise God when we begin to see that taking place in their hearts, what a blessing that is. But a small child, a toddler and on up in those years, most of the time they just have to be made to obey.

Judges 21:25 speaks of the spirit that is becoming so prominent in our culture today, "In those days there was no king in Israel," no authority, that is, "everyone did what was right in his own eyes." Well, doesn't that speak to our culture? By the way, that was the culture that will Paul was writing to, a pagan culture, had no reverence for the God of Scripture,

so you just had people doing whatever was right in their own eyes. By the way, the children in this culture were widely abused and treated horribly in some cases, especially if they were born to the wrong family. I mean, infanticide was just common in the ancient Roman empire. If you had a child, the parents just decided, "Do we want to keep this one or expose it?" And that's the way they viewed children. So when you get away from the Bible, when you throw out the Bible as the foundation for your country and for your ethics and for your laws, I'm telling you, you are on the road to ruin.

So when Paul writes to the church, he's writing to Christians. He's writing to those that the Gospel has changed their heart. They are beginning to grasp God's truths are right and so he's saying to them, "You folks be the model of doing it right in your homes," starting with this emphatic instruction, children should be obeying their parents. The spirit of disobedience to God-ordained authority comes from Satan because he is the arch-rebel of the universe. When the employer or the government or the church or parents establish good rules or good laws or standards and we hold those under us to those standards and we expect obedience, we are not being abusive, we are being biblical, and even we are being loving.

One of the best illustrations I've ever heard about why a child needs rules and they need to be disciplined when they break the rules is because children need the loving security of knowing there are guardrails in life. That if you raise a child without rules and you raise a child without discipline, then you're like sending a child over a bridge with no guardrails. It's just very insecurity. They don't feel protected and they don't feel loved. And I believe some of these liberal folks, I believe they are genuine and sincere. They think they're really loving their children by abandoning the concept of respecting and honoring parents. They think they are loving their children by throwing out discipline but actually the children are growing up saying, "We don't know where the barriers are. We don't know where the guardrails of life are." And it breeds an insecurity.

It was years ago when I believe it was my oldest daughter was maybe in the sophomore year in high school and she had a friend and the friend asked about her doing something, and she asked me or her mom and we said, "No, you can't do that," it was funny the reaction that we heard from this girl. She said to my Katie, she said, "You know, my parents never tell me no." That was her first response. It wasn't, "Well, I can't believe your mom and dad won't let you do that." Her first response was, in effect, "I wish someone would tell me no," and I think you'll see that in the heart. Now they'll kick against it. Oh, my goodness, the world, the universe is going to melt if they don't get their way. They will cry and scream and, by the way, if a child gets on the floor and holds their breath and just beats on the floor, just let them die right there on the floor. I guarantee, they'll gasp in a moment, they'll start breathing again and everything's going to be fine. Look, do you understand they have a little demonic sin nature and you've got to break that will. You've got to teach your child to respect and honor authority. Now don't be surprised if you are a real permissive parent and you've about thrown out discipline if your children grow up to not honor God either. These things go together. It's the foundation stone actually in culture.

But those who resist, those who undermine, those who disobey God-ordained authority, they are not godly, they are not wise, and they certainly should not be followed because what they are is foolish rebels. They are not rebelling against a human individual – listen, when you rebel against one God has put in authority over you, you rebel against God. You think, "Wait a minute, my parents are imperfect." It doesn't matter. The king is imperfect but we are to honor the king, the Scriptures teach us. Mom and dads are imperfect but you honor them for the Lord's sake and trust God is big enough that he can work through imperfect parents and give you your perfect outcome in life, and he certainly can do that.

We do know the Bible makes it very clear that the problem rebel will be punished. The Bible says in Proverbs 16:5, "Everyone who is proud in heart is an abomination to the LORD; Assuredly, he will not be unpunished." So teenagers, can I challenge you tonight, how is your attitude toward mom and dad? The Bible wants you to do more than just begrudgingly go along with it, the Bible wants you to see that God has ordained this for your good and his glory. Children, obey your parents. It's an emphatic command.

It's actually an evil spirit to resist authority and that spirit, again, has permeated our world today, it's infiltrated our nation, it infiltrates the workplace, it has infiltrated the home, and unfortunately it has infiltrated the professing church. But brothers and sisters, let us be resolved to honor the precepts of God and honor the wisdom of God. Let the rebels scoff, let the God-rejectors rage, let the seductive and deceptive ones spread their lies and be undermining, let the liberal and the man-centered humanist laugh, mock and ridicule us as primitive or barbaric, whatever they may say, but listen, God's truth stands. Let God be found true and every man a liar and that's what Paul is saying. When you come to Christ, you reclaim these grand old standards of God, these foundations he has given you.

This is very emphatic, "Children, obey your parents." Children in all the centuries of our past should obey their parents. Children of today's world should obey their parents. And children in the future world should obey their parents. Period. It's emphatic. There is never a time when this is not right. We will not evolve as a people beyond the necessity of children obeying your parents. It's for all of time. As a matter of fact, nature's law teaches it. We see it in nature. Those who give life, the parents, are expected that their offspring would honor them and follow them and obey them.

Well, it's emphatic. Secondly, a big word, it's axiomatic or self-evident. In other words, it's just obvious that this is right and that's the way Paul writes it here in Ephesians 6:1, "Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right." God our Creator designed it to work this way and to function this way. It's just right. Nothing more really needs to be said. In Romans 9:20 the Bible says, "On the contrary, who are you, O man, who answers back to God? The thing molded will not say to the molder, 'Why did you make me like this,' will it?" His point is God made us and this is the way he designed us to function in our families. It's axiomatic. It self-evident. This is the right thing. It's woven into the very nature of our being. It's woven into the very nature of creation itself that children should obey their parents.

So nature shows us the truth of it. The written law in both the Old Testament and the New Testament affirms the truth of this. This is exactly as it should be. It is right just like all the commandments of God are right and we must lovingly and courageously teach what God's word teaches and expect ourselves and expect our children to honor God's word. Why? Because it's right. It is right and always will be right. Psalm 19:8, "The precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; The commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes." Psalm 119:75, "I know, O LORD, that Your judgments are righteous." Psalm 119:128, "Therefore I esteem right all Your precepts concerning everything, I hate every false way." Hosea 14:9, "Whoever is wise, let him understand these things; Whoever is discerning, let him know them. For the ways of the LORD are right." It's axiomatic. It's always been right.

Now when we teach our children to obey and when children obey, this discipline and oversight of our children must be guided by love but never abolished by love. That is such a twisted spin on what love is. Certainly love guides how we discipline. You must not discipline your children in anger. I'm getting over into the next installment's message, I'm getting over into parenting. So love does guide this principle of children obeying but love never abolishes. "Well, you know I just can't correct them and I just can't spank them because, you know, I just love them so much." No, you don't, you love yourself because when you say your wisdom is better than God's wisdom, that's self-idolatry, that's self-love over honoring God and loving God and his truth. Do you understand that, mom and dad? Love will do what's right in God's eyes against your emotions. Oh my goodness, how we need to just let this sink into our thinking in this warped world in which we live in today. Proverbs 13:24 reminds us, "He who withholds his rod hates his son, But he who loves him disciplines him diligently." Did you hear that? If you hate your child, you'll not require them to obey, you will not discipline when they disobey. But if you love them, you'll not withhold the rod of correction.

So it's right and it is good for the child, it's good for the family, it's good for the culture and the nation in which those families exist for children be made to honor their parents, but even more than the good outcome, what Paul is saying when he says, "Children, obey your parents for this is right," he's saying it comes from the God who can only give you what's right and good. Do it for the silly little Christmas song, for goodness' sake. Be good for goodness' sake, the sake of the God who gave it, and it's inherently the right thing to do.

Now let me give you a challenge in thinking about that, and that is to be glory of God focused. Understand that we don't just follow rules, we don't deify the rules, we deify, we glorify rather the God of the rules. We trust his wisdom is greater than our wisdom. Now the world, the devil and your flesh will always come up with exception clauses of why a young person should not obey their parents and rebellious young people always come up with great sounding reasons why they can exempt themselves from obeying parental authority. This is why you have rebels always ganging up with each other because rebellion loves company. Do you know why? Because their conscience bothers them. God has put that in their heart that they are to honor their mother and father. God has put it in their heart for them to obey their parents and if they are in rebellion and doing things

they know their parents are saying that they should not be doing, they've got to appease that so they get other rebels to run with them and that strengthens or rather diminishes the power of their conscience and it encourages more rebellion. I've been in many churches, by the way, and there were young people in groups in those churches, they didn't have tattoos and didn't have weird colored hair and didn't have piercings all over their bodies, but they were a gang of rebels because they didn't have a heart to honor God, they didn't have a heart to honor their parents. You can put on a Christian cloak and still have a heart that is in rebellion against God. A home that does not teach obedience to parents is a home of sin and it's a home of shame. It's a perversion of God's standard and the God-ordained pattern. Why? Because it's axiomatic, it's self-evident, this is right.

Now a third concept here, not only is it emphatic, it's just clear and precise, "Children, obey your parents"; it's axiomatic, it's just absolutely self-evident that this is the right thing, it comes from God, but it has a prominence to it even compared to other commands of God. In verse 2 he says, "Honor your father and mother which is the first commandment with a promise." Honor your father and mother. Now this is in all caps in our text, which means it's a quote of the Old Testament. It's a quote of the tenth commandment from Exodus 20. As a matter of fact, God gave Israel four commands about their relation to him, and then when he started about how you are to conduct yourselves one toward another, the first command he gave was honor your father and mother, and Paul is pointing out that this command, it has a prominence to it and I think it's because it's so foundational to everything else in life. It's so foundational to how a child grows up and relates to their employer one day; how they relate to the elders in their community; how they relate to their spouse; how they are going to relate to their God later. It's foundational to everything in the society and everything to their life. So God gives it a real prominence. It was one of the 10 Commandments. It was engraved on a tablet of stone by the very finger of God.

So we see a prominence to this commandment. The Jews always listed this first when they would teach their young people because it is so necessary of a foundation to bless succeeding generations. There was a Chinese proverb and it says this: one generation plants trees and the next gets the shade. Well, when we're training our children right and teaching them to obey and disciplining them when they disobey, we're planting trees that will bring the blessings of shade later on down the road, not only for ourselves but for many many others.

Now when he says we are to honor them, this expands things and it shows, again, the prominence of this, because honor comes from the heart. A young child doesn't have a heart of wisdom yet. The Bible says a young child's heart has foolishness in it, but as a child grows if they are under sound teaching and we're filling their hearts and lives with the Gospel and the things of Christ, then the Spirit can enable them to grasp the wisdom of God and they will begin to learn not only just to coldly obey mom and dad but, again, to obey them from the heart with honor towards them, and that is so very important. Not just cold obedience but a heart of honor and respect for mom and dad.

So children must be taught and encouraged to cultivate a heart of reverence, honor and esteem for their parents and we have to remind ourselves this is not natural. This isn't a bartering system where we get our children to jump through the right hoops and do the things we want because we reward them certain ways. No, we want our children to grow to where they obey us not because they are going to get a reward but because they've learned the wisdom of it and there is an honor and a respect in their hearts.

Now let me just say a word of balance here and that is that there are times when a child must honor their parents but not obey their parents. I have had the unfortunate ministry at times, if you will, of counseling with a person who was abused as a child, and I mean clearly abused in some of the most vile ways sometimes. Obviously, a child that is being told by a parent to do what is evil and wrong cannot do that. Why? Because there is an authority higher than mom and dad. Now we can keep an honorable spirit but disobey the command, and I think that's very very important. I think the narrative of Daniel in Babylon is a great example. I'm so glad this was taught to me early on because as Daniel when he was a Jewish teenager and he is brought into captivity there in Babylon, and then the king began pushing on Daniel, who knows in that promiscuous and pagan culture the kinds of evil a teenager could have gotten into. But as the king would push on these Jewish exile boys, they had already picked Daniel out as being a very promising leader for him in his kingdom and they told Daniel, "You've got to eat these foods and do these things," and Daniel with a spirit of reverence for the authority of the king said, "If I could have your permission, let me keep my Jewish dietary laws but see if I can't serve you better by doing it." So Daniel maintained the spirit of respecting and honoring authority but purposing to disobey any command that dishonored or violated the law of God.

So there is a time when children should try to maintain an honorable spirit but they could not and must not sin to submit to mom and dad. And mom and dad, if we cross the line, getting over to the next message, by the way again, then we ought to go to our children and say, "Dad's under authority too. I answer. I'm not the final authority here, God is. So dad was wrong here. My attitude was wrong. The way I approached this was wrong. Will you forgive me?" And as children learn that you are under authority and you are submissive to authority, it's amazing what God will do in their hearts.

Lastly, number four, this is a command that contains an encouraging promise. There is an encouraging promise. It's emphatic, it's clear and precise, "Children, obey your parents"; it's axiomatic, it's just right, it's self-evident that it's right; it has a great prominence as the very first command God gives, and I think that's because it is foundational to so many other things in life; and then lastly, there is a unique promise that's given here. Notice he has it in there, verse 3, "so that," honor your parents, "so that," verse 3, "it may be well with you, and that you may live long on the earth." Now I want to remind you that these are considered general principles, not absolute specific promises. Generally speaking, a child that honors his his parents will do well and live longer. Generally speaking, a child that has a rebel spirit and dishonors his parents will not do well and will not live long on the earth. There can be an exception but that's the general rule. So this is a revelation of

the general purpose of God, that is what some theologians would call the usual course of providence. This is what usually will happen.

Now there's a negative side to this. If you honor your father and mother, first of all, you're going to do better and you're likely going to live a lot longer. If you do not, Proverbs 30:17 comes in, "The eye that mocks a father And scorns a mother, The ravens of the valley will pick it out, And the young eagles will eat it." What does that mean? That the ravens and eagles are going to eat your eyes. It means you're dead. When there is a dead animal out there in the forest somewhere, the first thing that happens is one of these birds will come down and peck on the eye to make sure it's fully dead. That's what he's saying, the odds are good if you're not raised with discipline and you are disobedient to parents, that you're not going to live long on this earth. It's a general promise that will serve to God's glory and our good if we honor and obey parents as young people.

I will sometimes, I don't know maybe one, two, three times a year, I'll get a card or a letter in the mail or I'll get a phone call and honestly, I barely remember some of these people and they'll say something like, "Brother Jeff, I was in your youth group 35 years ago and you taught us," and they'll name the biblical truth or refer back to a biblical truth and say, "You taught us that and I didn't believe it and I didn't honor that and I've been through such trouble in my life, but now the Lord has saved me and I thank you for giving me that and now I'm on a better track." Because over time, God's word bears itself out in your life. T-i-m-e really will expose these things.

Now two practical thoughts. 1. Remember this, when you promote a child's rights, you promote rebellion. Now there are some children's rights. I'm not saying that, but if that's your theme in life, you've got this right, and you've got this right, and you've got a right to do this, you've got a right to do that, if that's the spirit of your home and the spirit of the way you raise kids, I'm telling you, it will promote rebellion. But if you promote responsibility, you've got a responsibility to honor God, you've got a responsibility under God to obey your parents, you promote revival. You promote rights, you promote rebellion. If you promote responsibility, you promote revival. Generally speaking, that's true.

Lastly for young people, put your heart and mind on the things your parent have done well. I know I'm talking to some of you and I know over the internet and other places I'm talking to probably many people, and you might be 30 years old, you might be 70 years old and your parents failed you or a parent failed you and it hurt you. I understand that. I've been through some of that but it is a wonderful thing when God will give you the grace to say, "But you know, they did do this right. And my parents did do this right." And focus on those things.

I read the testimony of a young man and his father was a medical doctor and he said a couple of things about my dad, first of all, he was never home because he was always working. He was always working and he said, I grew bitter about that. Then when he was home, he was the kind of man that I couldn't talk to. He was just almost impossible to talk to and I grew even more bitter about that. Then he said, I learned later in life there

were some good things to that. My dad took such good care of us and I was able to go to a good college and he covered all the tuition and the bills and so he was faithful to take care of me and faithful to take care of the family. He said then I learned something I never knew about him, that my dad was very generous. He gave free medical care to so many people who couldn't afford it and he gave so much money to good causes and Christian ministries and supported the Gospel as it was being preached around the world. He said, I learned of these things through other people as time went on.

So he said, I determined to focus on the things my dad did do right and that's what I'd challenge you to do. That's been great for me and it'll be great for you. Stop focusing on the things your parents did wrong and start praising God for the things your parents did right. There is some stuff in there if you'll look for it. And do you know what? God will give you the victory and then as a mom or dad, and then as a grandmother or granddaddy, or a great-grandmother or a great-granddaddy, or a great great-grandmother or a great great-granddaddy, you can determine that you're going to do a better job in those areas but always honor your forefathers. Children, obey your parents in the Lord for this is right. Act like a Christian is what he's saying. Act like a Christian in your homes.