

Children Obey Your Parents

Ephesians 6:1-4

1 Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. 2 "Honor your father and mother," which is the first commandment with promise: 3 "that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth." 4 And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord. (Ephesians 6:1-4 (NKJV))

Thanks be to God that He is God over all the family; first over the husband and the wife, as we have been studying over the past few weeks, then over them as they become a father and a mother, then over their children, even to their children's children.

And we must continually remind ourselves that He is not just "out there somewhere", watching over us from a distance, but His Spirit is instead ever-so intimately involved within each of us in the family, in all that we do, from birth until we breathe our last. God is always God and He is never "not intimately involved"!

Here in these scriptures for today, God has just finished giving some of the most intimate of instructions to the husband and wife. And then from there, He begins to speak to the husband and wife about being a family, with children. And His words are both an encouragement and a caution to each of them about the relationships they will have with each other within the family, children with their parents and parents with their children. And folks, these words are so very, very important because, if followed rightly, blessings will flow throughout the family both for them and for generations to come.

Here, we are presented with a family, a father and a mother with children. And yes, though the word "pater" in verse 4 is most appropriately translated "fathers", it also has implication of both "fathers" and "mothers", and is sometimes translated as "parents". But because the father has the primary responsibility for leading and providing for and nurturing the family, we will today speak more directly to us "fathers".

Here, may we quickly take note, that while yes, during the formative years of a child's life, he or she is under the authority and direction of the father, here God is speaking directly to the children, which means that each child is also personally and individually accountable to God for their own behavior.

And that is so for all people throughout all the earth. Each person stands alone and is personally accountable for all that they will ever do while they abide in this life. We are told that clearly both in the Old Testament and in the New Testament. Listen to these words from 2 Corinthians 5!

10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.
(2 Corinthians 5:10 (ESV))

So then, these words spoken by God directly to the children hold all the weight and all of the consequences that would be directed towards a fully grown adult.

And we must not misunderstand. God is always “good” and He is always merciful and kind; and He will give full consideration as to whether a child is mentally and spiritually mature enough to be held personally accountable.

And may I address that consideration a little more in depth? We often use the expression, “age of accountability”. May we understand that there is no set age for accountability given to us in these scriptures! Such decisions as those will be made by God for each child individually according to their maturity level. For some children it might be twelve or fifteen years of age. But for others, it may be as early as five or six. And for some, as with those who are mentally disabled, it might never be. You and I can’t know these things, but God can; and we can be comforted knowing that God is always “good”. In Psalm 119:68, we read the words describing God, “You are good and You doeth good”. And God will exercise His goodness with each child.

Fortunately, the vast majority of children that we encounter each day, our own and others, are of reasonably sound minds and are able to comprehend and obey God’s commands. And it is to those that these words are addressed.

1 Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. 2 "Honor your father and mother," which is the first commandment with promise: 3 "that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth. (Ephesians 6:1-3 (NKJV))

So then children know this, that you are personally and directly accountable to God for your every thought, word and deed.

And here also, God is instructing children that they cannot “bypass” their responsibilities towards their parents. Children must obey their parents.

Working with children for so many years as my wife and I did at French Camp Academy, we heard all sorts of responses from the children. But regardless of their

response, we always had the understanding before us that we, their “substitute parents” were accountable to always be teaching them these commands and expectations of God.

For us here today, may we take a close look at God’s precious words for our own families . . . verse 1 . . .

1 Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. (Ephesians 6:1)

What exactly do the words “in the Lord” mean?

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Bible scholars have offered many thoughts about these words; and there can be a number of meanings, depending upon the context! For myself, I have come to accept their meaning to most often be “as unto the Lord”, or “in the same manner that my obedience would be shown directly to the Lord Himself.”

God is always Holy and is trustworthy to be obeyed, and because He is Holy, we know that He would never require His children to do anything wrong or sinful. For that reason, if something that is obviously sinful is being required by a parent, then a child has no obligation “unto the Lord” to obey their parent.

But with that being said, for the most part, such abhorrent behavior by parents are an “exception” and not the “usual”. Because of that, may we consider that these words before us today, are not dealing with those few exceptions, but rather with the most usual and obvious forms of obedience and disobedience that takes place in the ordinary daily relationships between children and their parents, that of getting about the common matters of daily life. In those, dear children, your instruction is plain and simple . . .

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And may I add what I believe to be an appropriate instruction and that is “immediately so”, without question.

I recall an expression that my daughter would quote to the teenage girls in her dormitory as she served as a “houseparent” at French Camp Academy. She would say to them “delayed obedience is disobedience”. And I do believe that that correctly fits God’s definition of obedience and disobedience as it is given here.

And note in these words also that there is “a promise of a consequence” tied to a child’s response.

3 "that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth." (Ephesians 6:3 (NKJV))

Folks, God makes promises to us often through His commands, here referring back to the fifth commandment . . .

16 'Honor your father and your mother, as the LORD your God has commanded you, that your days may be long, and that it may be well with you in the land which the LORD your God is giving you. (Deuteronomy 5:16 (NKJV))

And here in Ephesians 6, God clearly reaffirms the truth of the fifth commandment.

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Again, note the two consequences, the “good consequence” spoken clearly, “that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth”.

But also just as clearly, there is a “bad consequence” that is plainly implied within this command, and that is that a child cannot expect or even hope for daily life to go well for them if they live in disobedience to their parents. And sadly, these words are also clear that a disobedient child may not live to be “old and full of years”.

I am reminded of a time that I once counted over fifty former students of French Camp Academy, some that I knew well, who each died at very young ages after leaving French Camp. Where those dear ones all bad and deserving of dying young? No! Many of them died from diseases and accidents and such. But besides that, such is not for me to decide. Jesus alone is the righteous judge.

But may I say that some of those young people, perhaps many of them, did live very “disobedient lifestyles” especially as they grew into their older teen and adult years.

And besides those young ones that I knew personally, all we have to do is open our newspaper each day and we read that young people all around us are dying, most of which is attributed to some form of “disobedient” behavior, drugs, crime, and on and on. Such was the case in the last issue of our local newspaper, two photos of young men, one of a young man who died, the other of his killer.

So then, what are we to do? I believe that the answer to that question is why God placed verse 4, right here up close of this instruction to the children.

4 And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord. (Ephesians 6: 4 (NKJV))

Folks, we know very well that our children can often be difficult and stressful to our patience. And here, God is saying simply, “fathers, do not let your child’s behavior determine your response. It does not matter how they act, what they say or what they do. We are ever and always their parents and we must do as parents must do and “Bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord.” (Ephesians 6: 4)

Most importantly, may I strongly caution us that we cannot, we must not wait until our child is already half-grown and has already developed bad behavior and habits before we begin to “bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord”, such failure on the part of us parents will surely lead to the failure of our children.

Parenting is a “full-time” job, by both parents. And with that in mind, may I pause here and give a plug for “stay at home moms”. Day care has become so necessary in today’s society and today’s economy. The house payment is so expensive and other such family expenses are so high. But folks, some of those expenses are truly optional, at least they are at some point within our decision making process.

As parents, we need to somehow, get control over all those optional, and often “ego driven”, decisions that we make. Our truck does not need to be that big. And our house really does not always need to be as pretentious as it is or be in that special neighborhood. Yes, we love our lifestyle, but are not our children’s lives so much, much more important than our “ego”.

And so, I cry out to every family . . . if there is any possible way to get yourself out of the bondage you are in to the more expensive lifestyle and return to a expense level where mom can be a “stay at home mom”, please, please, please do it. Your children are worth your sacrifice.

Before we close, may I address one of the most important of God’s commands, one of my favorites, from Deuteronomy 6? According to these words, we, especially us fathers, must begin to follow this command at the earliest ages, and we must be consistent and diligent. And if we are, then hopefully our children’s later “teenage years” will not be quite so turbulent and difficult. Listen!

6 "And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. 7 You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in

your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. 8 You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. 9 You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates. (Deuteronomy 6:6-9 (NKJV))

May I say with confidence that if this is the father that a child sees and hears each day, beginning from their earliest years of life, then in their later years, when the child is in his or her adolescence and teens, their behavior will be very different from the behaviors that we see in our culture today.

So then, may I put us fathers “on the spot”! Just as it is our responsibility to make sure the love relationship with our wife is a right and godly relationship, so also is it our responsibility to train up our children in the right way, in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

We fathers have a huge load to carry, but we must carry it faithfully. We have no choice, the futures of our wives and our children hang in the balance.

But with that being said, we do have help, really good help. God does not leave us to do our “fathering” all by our own wits. He first gives us His Holy Spirit to guide and to direct our thoughts and behaviors. And then also, right there beside us, He gives us our “perfectly fitted helpmeet”, our blessed wife. And folks, I have found that I can do some of my best fathering through the wisdom and blessing of my dear wife. She is so good at it. And no, that does not mean that I can dump some of my responsibility onto her. I always have the responsibility on my own shoulders, but she is always there to help me carry the load. And she does that so very, very well.

And fathers, may I encourage us to do this “fathering” well and fully in accordance with God’s instructions. If we do that, then the things we instruct our children will have much more authority and weight than if we just insist on our children obeying us “just because I’m your father and I said so”.

We have to teach our children about Christ, about His goodness and His righteousness and about His perfect plan for their lifetime of “green pastures” and “still waters” and pleasant days, verse 3,

3 "that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth."
(Ephesians 6:3 (NKJV))

Parents, do we not want these good and precious things for our children? I know we do! But it all must begin very early in our teaching of them. We must love the Lord our

God with all of our heart, our soul, our mind and our strength ourselves. And as our children grow up seeing us truly loving the Lord, then they too will be drawn to love Him. And when they love the Lord themselves, then their obedience to Him and to us will not be nearly so burdensome to them.

But again, it must begin with us fathers and mothers. Listen as we close!

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