

Christ and the Adult Family

The Ten Commandments

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Well, we continue our worship this morning by turning back to the 10 Commandments in Exodus 20, and I invite you to turn there as we consider one final implication of the family dynamic that God calls forth. This is God's moral law that applies to all people and in a particular way for those of us that have believed in Christ, the Scriptures give us guidance on how we are to live to the glory of God now that we have received new life in Christ, and so we're looking at a matter of obedience and a matter of instruction from God's word and we're going to see some very practical implications from it here this morning.

We're at the fifth commandment in Exodus 20:12 that says,

12 Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be prolonged in the land which the LORD your God gives you.

We've looked at this passage from the perspective of the way that children are to respond to their parents and we've seen that there are biblical implications of this commandment for parents and the way that they are to lead and instruct their children, and that has kind of been with an emphasis on their developmental years, you might say. There's one final implication that Scripture speaks to extensively and it is a most practical topic, and the question that we want to answer today is how does a biblical family interact as adults? How is a Christian adult son, a Christian adult daughter, how are they supposed to interact with their parents? And conversely, how are the Christian parents of adult children supposed to interact with them?

The commandment here does not explicitly address those matters but as you study the rest of Scripture, you find that there is plenty to guide us and instruct us, and as I've said a time or two, the published Christian materials on parenting tend to focus on the childhood years and the training years, which is fine as far as it goes but sometimes that leaves a gap of what happens in that transition between childhood and adulthood, what happens, how are we to interact with one another as those children become adults whether they're Christians or not. So I don't recall anything ever preparing me for the role of being a parent to adult children from any kind of published materials I've seen. I'm not saying it's not out there, I'm simply saying I haven't seen it or hadn't seen it and I want to fill that gap today because, you know, as the parent of six adult children, it's a very practical

matter. And I would just preface by saying this, I suppose: parents, Christian parents need to know how and when to let go. There is a transition that takes place and the roles and the biblical responsibilities change and we need to be sensitive to that and aware of that. You know, you spend 17-18 years leading a child under your roof and instructing them and having, you know, a manner of say in what they do and all of that, but there's a transition that takes place, that's not meant to be a permanent state of affairs. There is to be a change and we need to understand that, and I can illustrate this with a very poignant story from a prior ministry that I was involved in.

I remember seeing the wedding photo of a couple that by the time I had met them had been married 10 or 15 years and they had come and sought me for help on dealing with a member of the family. And so as I was in their home, I saw a picture of their wedding day and, you know, wedding pictures normally all kind of look the same, you know, the bride is happy, the groom is happy, and there's just this joyful ambience that the photo reflects. Well, this one was different. This one showed something completely different. It was a picture of the bride and the groom walking down the aisle after they had been pronounced husband and wife and the photographer caught an unintentional but very telling moment. As the groom walked past his mother, she reached out and grabbed his arm with her head down in obvious sorrow, and as they were walking out to their new life together as a married couple, she was clutching him and it proved to be symbolic. She did not want to let go and it was symbolic of the controlling way that she would try to deal with her son and her daughter-in-law in the future of their marriage. It was very unsettling to see that, especially in light of subsequent events. That's a negative picture of the kind of thing that we want to address here this morning.

Now let me say this: this is, I understand, a very delicate topic. This gets very very close to home in a way that perhaps nothing else that we do, as we speak about human relationships, than anything else could do. Your family experience has developed over decades. That experience will shape how you interpret what you hear me say today and that's okay but we just need to be aware of that. And not only is the experience and decades of habits in place, with a family that has multiple children, every child is unique within the same family and so I realize the utter impossibility of anticipating every question, the utter impossibility of gently addressing every sensitive concern that might be in your heart, and what we need to do is just recognize our limitations here this morning and seek biblical principles that give us guidance generally, and then for my part, I'm going to trust the Holy Spirit to help you apply them going forward in your family life.

What I want to do is break it down this way. First of all, I want to address the adult child in the relationship and address that rather quickly and briefly, though, you know, it could be a message all of its own. Then secondly, to address the parents in the relationship, you know, and it doesn't really matter if your children are 20 or 50, you know, all of this applies and we need to think through these things. And we come to this humbly, we come to this knowing that we've all fallen short as parents, we've all fallen short as children, we realize that we haven't attained to the perfection that God's word calls us to, and so we come dependent upon grace, dependent upon Christ to be merciful to us, looking to

Christ and relying on his righteousness for our acceptance before a holy God. We rely on his righteousness, not our own, we're not talking about these things so we can gain points with God, you might say, rather we're talking about these things because this is what God's word says to us and how he would instruct us in living as those who now profess to know the Lord Jesus Christ. So we're going to approach it that way.

So first of all, we want to address the adult child in the relationship. Let's say you're an adult Christian and you have a relationship with your parents, maybe they're far away, maybe you're still living under their roof, but there are principles that guide us and what we want to understand is that as a Christian and even if you're not a Christian, under God's moral law you still have a duty to honor your parents in your life, and we want to look at a couple of Scriptures that give us guidance and instruction on that. Remember the fifth commandment, "Honor your father and your mother," that is an enduring moral principle that applies to all men and at all times. This is part of God's moral law. That is not changed, it is not altered, it is not abrogated just because you become an adult or just because you move out of the house, and even if you've been married and you now have your own family, this is still a duty from God upon you that he wants you to respond to.

So with that in mind, let's turn to Matthew 15 where you see Jesus Christ himself applying this to adults, applying the principle of honoring parents to adults, and these adults were hostile to Christ, these adults were not honoring their parents, these adults were not even genuine believers, they were religious but they were not truly in the family of God. So in Matthew 15:1-6, we read this, "Then some Pharisees and scribes came to Jesus from Jerusalem and said, 'Why do Your disciples break the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat bread.'" Focused on their little external regulations that were extra-biblical, beyond the text of Scripture. Jesus wasn't having any of it. "He answered and said to them," he answered their question with his own question, "Why do you yourselves transgress the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition? For God said, 'Honor your father and mother,' and, 'He who speaks evil of father or mother is to be put to death.' But you say, 'Whoever says to his father or mother, 'Whatever I have that would help you has been given to God,' he is not to honor his father or his mother.' And by this you invalidated the word of God for the sake of your tradition." So the Pharisees had made up this rule and they told their disciples that all you need to do to protect your assets from your parents is to devote them and set the assets apart for God, and then if your parents have need you can say, "Oh, I'm sorry but this has been set apart for God. I can't help you with your needs because I've already dedicated it to God." It was a sham, it was a hypocrisy that simply allowed them to retain possession of their own wealth and not to distribute it and help it with their parents. Jesus dissects that, he eviscerates it, you might say, and says, "No, there is a commandment of God upon you." And he tells the Pharisees, he says, "By your instruction, you have enabled people to dishonor God, to sin against the commandment of God, and you've elevated your teaching over the clear, direct commandment of God to care for your parents."

So he obviously enforces upon them, enforces upon even unbelievers in addition to believers, that even as an adult you have a duty somehow, somehow, I emphasize that

word, somehow to care for your parents and this is verified for us as we look elsewhere in the word of God. Turn further back in your New Testament to the book of 1 Timothy 5. I'll give you a moment to find it there, 1 Timothy 5, and as we're turning there, we just, you know, we just acknowledge the fact that we're just barely touching on these issues and, again, just trusting the Spirit of God to apply them and not, you know, we make no pretense of giving a full exposition of these matters here today.

In 1 Timothy 5, beginning in verse 3, the Apostle Paul now instructs the church, he is now instructing believers, the word of God is instructing believers here and he says to them in 1 Timothy 5:3 and this is the word of God speaking to us, he says, "Honor widows who are widows indeed; but if any widow has children or grandchildren, they," meaning the 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." He says if there are widows in the church that have children or grandchildren, it is not the responsibility of the church to provide for them and to care for their needs, it is the responsibility of the family to provide for them and to care for them. And Paul feels and the Spirit of God feels so strongly about this, that down in verse 8 you read this, he says, "But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever." This is a seriously convicting statement for Scripture to make, for a professing Christian to refuse to care for their parents somehow, Paul says that is worse than being an unbeliever. And why would that be? It's because it's rooted, although Paul does not quote the commandment here specifically, he's obviously recognizing the ongoing, enduring, moral authority of the fifth commandment and says that under the law of God, under the instruction of God, children and even grandchildren have a responsibility to care for those who gave them life and who cared for them in their early days.

So as we think about what this means, I think it's important to realize that there are a multiple number of ways in which this could apply. If parents happen to be independently wealthy, then it's obvious that there's not a financial need there that needs to be taken care of, but there are other needs. Jesus said that, you know, man does not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God, and so there are relational needs that parents have, there are spiritual needs that parents have, and there are needs for love and support and attention that parents have and Scripture says that children have an obligation to honor their parents and to provide for that.

So those of you that are adult children, let me just ask you gently and supportively: do your parents have what they need? Do you express love to them? Do you care for them? Are their financial needs taken care of? Are their physical needs taken care of? And I know that there are many examples in our church of adults who are doing just exactly that and are caring for their parents on a regular consistent basis and you've been a great encouragement to me with your example. I respect that. I'm grateful for that. And let me go further and say this: I understand that some parents are not very lovable, that in many cases they have breached boundaries so repeatedly that, you know, the relationship has been broken. Well, even in that, let me just say this, to understand that your duty before God, your parents' merit is not the issue whether they deserve it or not, and perhaps there

are situations where, you know, if there's been an abusive environment and there is an unrepentant, controlling, sinful disposition of the parents that's destroying family life, that, you know, different boundaries need to be considered there, but that's pretty far deep into a situation, and to just realize that however, whatever their faults, that somehow God's word has upon us a duty to care for our parents, to provide for them physically, to provide for them financially, to provide for them relationally, to check on them if nothing else. Somewhere in there, even in the midst of the difficult relationships that your parents, some of you, your parents have imposed upon you, somewhere in that with the help of your spouse, if necessary with the help of your elders, to sort through and say, "How can I honor my parents in this difficult situation?" But realizing that your parents have a biblical claim on you, by which I mean God has imposed a biblical duty on you to be mindful of your parents and to care for them in whatever way, shape and form the circumstances of your life require. You know, for some it's simply a matter of just being generous in time, generous in love, generous in affection for your parents, but there should not be a Christian who has a parent that is at all cooperative in the relationship, there should not be a Christian who has a parent that could truly say my Christian child neglects me. That's not right. That's not honoring your parents.

So for the adult child in the relationship, that's all that I'll say about it for today but just to lay that out and to have us think through these kinds of issues with each other. But for this morning, we want to focus most of our time on the parents' role in the relationship as we consider what the Bible says about Christ and the adult family. And in the parents' role, I'm going to be a little more specific, I'm going to lay things out in a little bit more detail. Believe it or not, I have eight points here, eight subpoints in this section here and all I'm going to do is just say it and read a Scripture and then move on without trying to give a full explanation, and we're going to start here.

1. For the parent in the relationship, I want to encourage you to remember your spiritual resources when the nest is empty. Remember your spiritual resources when the nest is empty, and I think that's really important in a church environment like ours because we have so many families that have truly devoted themselves to raising their family and giving their attention and you structured life around raising your children, providing for them, being there for them, sacrificing things economically for the sake of having time with your children and wanting to raise them and devoting yourselves to their education and having them in church and all of that focus, and that's what you gave your life to, and then all of a sudden, the children start moving out, sometimes, it happened this way in our family, sometimes they move out together rather quickly. Life changes in a matter of months from having a full, busy, noisy household to having a lot of quiet around, and sometimes parents don't know what to do with that, they're at a loss and they're kind of grieving the loss.

Well, just remember your spiritual resources when the nest is empty. Beloved, your life was never intended to be centered exclusively on your children as the preeminent, most high priority in your life. That place is always reserved for Christ alone. Christ is Lord. Christ is the ultimate priority. The Christian family raises their children for the sake of Christ and in response to the gift of Christ, not for the sake of the children themselves,

the children were never an end in and of themselves, the end, the goal, the purpose was always Christ. And maybe we kind of sort those things out in retrospect, you know, when the empty nest comes. Let me just remind you that the Lord Jesus Christ is sufficient for you in this lonely season, that the word of God is sufficient for you in this lonely season. Psalm 19 says that the word of God is perfect, restoring the soul. There is enough treasure in the word of God to comfort and fill your heart as you look forward to this new stage of life. 2 Timothy 3:16 and 17 says, "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God," the woman of God, "may be adequate, equipped for every good work."

So Scripture tells you that it is sufficient for every situation in life, every season in life, and the word of God is sufficient for you, and if you are feeling the pain and you are discouraged and disappointed by the way that things have unfolded, let me call you back to the word of God and to, you know, sometimes we have to take our focus off of the children and remind ourselves of what's eternally important and what is the living bread upon which our soul feeds. It's the Lord Jesus Christ. It was never our physical progeny and we need to remember that and be mindful of that.

Let me point you to another Scripture because those are familiar and we refer to those often, we refer to this one also as well, but in 2 Corinthians 12, I want you to turn there with me for just a moment. 2 Corinthians 12:9, the Apostle Paul had been praying, asking the Lord three times to remove a thorn in his flesh from him and God hadn't answered, God hadn't given him what he was asking for in prayer at the time, instead God gave him something else, God redirected his attention just as God would redirect our attention if we are overly consumed by the nature of the empty nest. He says in verse 9, God said to Paul, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness." And if the empty nest has been bruising you and discouraging you and you can't seem to find your way out of it, the starting point for you is to go to God, recognize the truth of his word and say, "O God, help me to understand the sufficiency of Your grace in this situation that I might be content and even joyful despite the absence that I now have in my household. Your word says right here, Lord, Your grace is sufficient for me. Help me to find that. Help me to know what that means. Let Your Spirit open my mind and comfort my heart so that I understand that and live in a way that glorifies Christ saying I find my satisfaction in Christ even though my children are no longer with me, even if my children don't honor me the way that I wish that they would. I can live with that, I can accept that, I can be content in Christ in the midst of that because the spiritual resources that He has given to me are sufficient to satisfy my heart." It's a challenging perspective but it's one that we need to hear.

Now secondly, not only remembering your spiritual resources but, secondly, as it comes to dealing with adult children, I would encourage you to think along these lines, and as I contemplate some of the young families in the church, you know, and it seems like, you know, your kids are under the age of 10 and this all seems so very very far away, listen, it's going to be here tomorrow. It's going to seem like tomorrow. Where did the time come? This matters today. This is the time, if your children are really young, this is really the time to embrace these things and to prepare your heart for it. It's much more difficult

to adapt when you weren't ready for it, you hadn't thought through it. Well, you've got an opportunity to do some advanced planning. You know, people prepare for retirement financially and, you know, some people plan for that decades in advance. Well, how much more should we be spiritually preparing ourselves for an inevitable time that is to come, and point 2 here will help us in that way, and I would state it this way: understand, my friends, that new boundaries are in place. New boundaries are in place as your children become adults, and we see this stated clearly with regard to marriage in Genesis 2, and I think that it's right to understand that the principle extends beyond just marriage because the commandment of God is exceedingly broad.

In Genesis 2:24 it says, "For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh." Before the fall of Adam, before the fall of our human parents, God had planned in the perfection of that environment for the parent/child relationship to contemplate a transition in which there would be a new family dynamic introduced as the man, as the woman, became adults and their new priority, their new commitment was now to their marriage relationship in a way that made the parental relationship secondary. It doesn't end the parental relationship, it does not end the responsibility to honor your parents, but there is a new dynamic in place. And again, speaking to those families that we love and that we support, you've got to remember the supportive spirit in which I say these things. Families that have really devoted themselves and tried to develop their family life over 15-20 years or so, you know, this is a transition and what you, as a parent, have a responsibility to understand and to recognize is this, is that the days of parental control are over. They're over. As young people transition into adulthood, independence comes with that and there is a transition and, you know, the nature of it's affected by all kinds of factors, how old are they, are they still in the home, are they outside the home, have they been married, all of that we, you know, we just can't explore all of the variations of that. But mom and dad, you have to come to a recognition in your heart that the relationship has changed and you need to let them go, you need to let them exercise their independence. Yes, they have a duty to honor you but there are a couple of things that we need to say about that very clearly. The duty to honor you does not mean that that adult child has to obey you. They have become independent adults. They are now accountable to the Lord themselves. They are directly responsible to God in a way that is different from when they were young children at your knee. So that adult son, that adult daughter, is now directly responsible to God, not to you. You're not their boss anymore, especially when they have moved out of the house, they are not under an obligation to obey you in the way that they were as a young child.

Now again saying this sympathetically, for parents who are used to receiving compliance and obedience for many many years from their children, for parents that are used to being the center of their child's life, and I had to adapt to that, adapt to this. I think I'm still trying to figure it out for myself. For parents who are used to receiving and enforcing compliance, for parents who are used to being the center of their child's life and affections and attention, this transition creates some tension and it creates a need for a transition in your own thinking. Honor comes from your child's heart, not from your command that they give it to you, and if the honor doesn't come, the command doesn't

help and the command shouldn't even try to be enforced. Your children are independent now and you need to let them make their own decisions, and as you do that, you are trusting them to the Lord that you say you believe is sovereign over all things, who's sovereign over the hearts of all men, that is sovereign over the way that your life circumstances come to you. But we have to understand this point that new boundaries are in place. You cannot require honor from them and rebuke them when it lacks. You have to give them space in order to develop this and how they respond to their responsibility to God to honor you, that's between them and the Lord. It's not for you to regulate and try to control.

So even in the most loving relationships, even in the most loving mutually supportive relationships with adult children, my friends, you as the parent in the relationship have a responsibility to honor boundaries. Your children get to decide where they want to spend their holidays, for example. Your children get to decide their own approach to raising their own children. Your children get to make their career and Christian marriage choices. It's their life. They get to do this. They get to make those decisions just like most of you probably did on your own, you know, when you were younger. So we realize and we come to acknowledge the fact that new boundaries are in place that change the way that we respond and parents need to be very very careful, I'll talk about this more later this morning, need to be very very careful about what they say about what their children should or should not be doing with their lives, and even more careful about what their children should or should not be doing in relationship to themselves. New boundaries are in place for the parent of adult children in a Christian family.

Now thirdly, you need to love them with a biblical love. You need to love them with a biblical love and, you know, if it seems like I've gotten really personal, I haven't even started yet in terms of getting personal and addressing matters of the heart here and addressing our attitudes toward our adult children and the spirit of sacrificial love is at the very heart of true Christianity. Christ sacrificed his position in heaven and came down to earth. He lived a perfect life and then he sacrificed that life to God in order to atone for the sins of everyone who would ever believe in him. He loved us with an everlasting love at great personal cost. My friends, Jesus Christ, if you are a Christian, he loved you enough to overlook your sins, to forgive your sins, and to be reconciled with you; his attitude toward you has always been conciliatory. He's always sought that reconciliation, so much so, that if any man is unreconciled to God, it is the man's responsibility, not God's because the gospel goes out freely to all men, "Repent and believe in Christ and you will be saved. Repent and believe in Christ and you'll be reconciled to God."

So there's this generous sacrificial love that is at the core of true Christianity. Now watch this, for those of us that are Christians or those of us that claim to be Christians, that spirit of sacrificial love God intends to carry over in our own hearts in the way that we deal horizontally with men. We're not like some who say, "I've been forgiven by God," and then go out and are unforgiving toward others, in our family, in the church, in the world. No, that is an utter contradiction of Christianity to have an irreconcilable heart to men, a bitter refusal to interact, to love others when you say that God has forgiven you. Look,

that does not compute. So much does it not compute that I'm going to talk about it next week on Sunday as we prepare for, you know, recognizing the Lord's birth.

But anyway, going to 1 Corinthians 13, that great love chapter, the Apostle Paul shows the preeminence, the priority of love, the excellence of love, you might say, by contrasting it with other spiritual gifts or other kinds of activities. He says this love is at the core and is superior in importance to other matters of spiritual gifts so that he says, beginning in verse 1, "If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. And if I give all my possessions to feed the poor, and if I surrender my body to be burned, but do not have love, it profits me nothing." You know, if I could speak in tongues, if I could speak like angels do, if I had a gift of prophecy and I knew all the mysteries of God, if I was a martyr for the faith and my body was burned at the stake, if I gave all of my possessions and fed the poor, there's a perspective on social justice for you, I could do all that stuff but if I'm not a man or a woman of love, none of it matters. I'm nothing. I'm zero. As John MacArthur said many many years ago, a phrase that convicted me in the early days of my Christian life, if you don't have love, you're zero, you're nothing, you don't even matter.

That's how important love is in the Christian life. It's not about having a sense of morality that now you use to enforce your rights against others, or use to judge others. It's not about that at all. If God loved you enough to forgive your sins, then love ought to be pouring out of your life. And what is that love, what is its character, what is it like? Look at verse 4 with me. Paul says, "Love is patient, love is kind and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails." And so you love them with a biblical love.

How far does that go? Well, let's assume that your children are hostile toward you. Let's go to a worst case scenario and assume that your children are hostile, they don't want anything to do with you, maybe they have reason, maybe they don't, maybe it's completely unfair and unrighteous and they are acting like you're an enemy and it's breaking your heart and you don't know what to do. This happens in life, doesn't it? We know about this. Well, what about that? Well, turn over to Matthew 5:43 and following. How important is this principle of love and how far does it go? Matthew 5:43, "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous." Both the righteous and the unrighteous receive the common grace of God. He's so generous and kind, isn't he? "For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? If you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same?" His point is you don't even have to be a Christian to love people who love you back. There's no special merit given to those who are kind to those

who are kind. The love of God sets a standard, the love of Christ sets a standard, Christ loved us while we were his enemies. He went to the cross while we were unreconciled to him and he showed kindness and sacrificial love to us even then. He calls us to love our enemies.

Well, beloved, this applies in family life and it applies in church life as well. I understand that children may break your heart, I understand that you may have grievances against people in the body of Christ, but don't you see the duty of love? This doesn't justify you in pushing people away, this doesn't justify you in being bitter and resentful against your adult children for their conduct because you have a positive duty from Christ to love them just as you have been loved by Christ himself. Even if it is beyond your capability to produce the reconciliation exactly like you want, God still has a duty on your heart to be patient, to be kind, to not take into account a wrong suffered, to even love your enemies and what does that look like? Well, somehow showing kindness, somehow showing kindness. I won't prescribe it to you but somehow showing kindness. If it's nothing more than dropping a card in the mail or sending a text, "Hey, I'm thinking about you and I'm praying for you," if that's all you can say in the confines of the marriage, wouldn't it be right for you to pray for your enemies? Wouldn't it be right for you to somehow show kindness after God has shown an eternal kindness to you? You see, what we're saying is this, is that you find yourself in that sad situation with adult children, you extend kindness even when they don't deserve it. Even when they don't deserve it, and the core test for your heart is whether you understand that God in Christ showed kindness to you when you did not deserve it. Do you understand that as a fundamental principle of spiritual existence? If you understand that fundamental principle in your spiritual existence, then you understand, it should be obvious that secondary kindness flows from you to others who have not been kind to you.

We're not talking about enabling their sin and let me just take this one step further. My good friend, Chris Hamilton, at Grace Community Church who stimulated some of my thoughts in this message, he makes this point when he teaches on these matters. He says it does no good to lecture your adult children on their lifestyle, their friends, or their behavior. They already know that you disapprove without you saying anything, and so you don't need to speak to that, to lecture them, to nag them again and again and again. You're just driving them further away with that kind of relational conduct which leads us to our fourth point. Fourthly, guard your tongue. Guard your tongue. I won't say zip it, though it could be said that way.

Let me just give you a life verse that goes beyond today's topic but is certainly very applicable in this context of Christ and the adult family. I want you to turn over to Proverbs 10:19. Rather than simply quoting it to you, I want you to see it. If this is a verse that you are not immediately familiar with, I would encourage you to highlight it, to mark it in your Bible somehow and come back to it again and again. This is a life verse for your tongue that has direct application in your family relationships. Proverbs 10:19, "When there are many words, transgression is unavoidable, But he who restrains his lips is wise." There are times to just be quiet. You don't have to articulate every opinion that you have. You don't need to air every grievance that you have with your adult child.

So how can you restrain your lips with your adult children? Well, let me give you four little examples and we could go a lot further. 1. Keep your complaints about them to yourself. Keep your complaints about them to yourself. "I wish you called more. I wish you, you know, I wish you would come over more. Why can't I see you?" No, keep your complaints to yourself, you're only driving them further away when you say things like that, beloved. Restrain your lips. Don't give opinions that you haven't been asked for. Don't give opinions every time you're asked. You know, there are ways besides that. "Dad, what do you think about this? Mom, what should I do here?" "Well, I think you need to sort that out on your own." And fourthly, very very important, if your child is married and they have a dispute with their spouse, don't be an audience for that dispute. Send your child back to their spouse. "Sweetheart, I'm sorry to hear this but you need to work it out with him. Son, it's time to grow up. You need to be the man here. You need to work it out. You need to lead and work that out on your own. I can't help you with this one." The parent has no place in the middle of marital disputes between their children. I know some of you will disagree with that but you need to stay out of it and let them sort it out, or send them to their elders whether they're in our church or someone else, but that is not your place to try to fix their marriage. That's like grabbing hold of a hot skillet on a stove, you're just going to grab it and you're just going to sear your own flesh. That is never going to turn out well. You make your contribution to the situation on your knees in prayer. "God, You help them. I can't, Lord. May Your Spirit help them. Give them wisdom. Give them grace. Father, see them through this time." But you guard your tongue and when you're tempted and you say, "No, but this time I really really need to say something, this is an exception," what do you do at that point? You hold your tongue. Shhh, and let silence be your wisdom and trust God to work in their lives over the course of time.

Fifthly, this kind of fits in with everything that we've been saying but it's a nice separate point: let them go. Let them go, and for this I want you to turn to Luke 15, and we see some of these principles in the story about the prodigal son and his faithful father. You know the story and I'm not going to bother rehearsing the context for you on account of that. Just look at Luke 15:11 and 12 for now. Jesus said, "A man had two sons. The younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of the estate that falls to me.' So he divided his wealth between them." And you know what happens, that son took his portion of the family inheritance, left in rebellion, squandered it all in loose living, and subsequent events show just how immature and ungodly this son was. Look, this father in the story, he surely knew what the character of his son was, and what did he do? He still let him go. He still let him go and, beloved, there is just a time where we need to let our adult children feel the pain of their own sin and foolishness and not try to keep them out of trouble, not try to insulate them from the consequences of their decision. They are adults responsible to God and they need to learn the hard lessons of life just like you and I did, and they need to feel the pain of the consequences of their disobedience and their sin. And it might ruin their lives from a human perspective, but that's between them and God.

There are times where you've got to let them go. It is not your place even as a Christian parent to try to keep them from the lessons of life, and I respect, I know that some of you have excelled in that and you understand this principle and you've done that with them, and it's been hard to watch it unfold as they go into sin, but you've understood that they're in a different position of life, you're not their savior and you shouldn't act like it. Yes, be active in prayer for them, receive them when they come, we'll talk about that in a moment, but you've got to let them go. The time comes where they need to go and you let them do it and not try to prevent it.

Now sixthly, be ready to forgive. Be ready to forgive. Since I'm going to address this more next week, I'll just keep this really brief here this morning. You know, part of the way that the Lord taught us to pray in Matthew 6, he said in the fifth element of the petitions, he taught us to pray this way, "And forgive our transgressions as we also forgive those who transgress against us." Forgive our debtors as we forgive those who are our debtors. Beloved, isn't forgiveness central to Christianity? That's the whole point, the whole point of the proclamation of the gospel is that there is forgiveness for your sins by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ crucified and risen for you. This is the whole message of Christianity is that men and women, boys and girls, can find forgiveness in Christ.

Well, just as I was saying earlier, this especially applies to your own flesh and blood and it applies within the body of Christ as well, that's a secondary matter here, but beloved, you need, if you are hostile to someone in your family, in the biological family, hostile to someone in the family of God, you need to realize that you need to repent of that. That is sinful. That is wrong for you to hold those grudges and perpetuate them and nurse your hurt feelings and refuse reconciliation. There shouldn't be any of that in a Christian family whether it's the nuclear family or the family of God. You need to have a disposition that's willing to forgive, willing to let it go, willing to reconcile.

The father of the prodigal son certainly teaches us this trait. You're still there, look at verse 20. Again, you know the story, the prodigal son had gotten tired of eating with pigs, wanted to come back and just make himself a servant to his father, and he had rehearsed his repentance beforehand, he had a script in mind. In verse 18 he says, "I will get up and go to my father, and will say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in your sight.'"" He's saying, "I've sinned against God and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me as one of your hired men." You know, there's just such a pathos in that, isn't there? I don't know if I'm pronouncing that word right. There's such an emotional element to that and you just see how his heart is broken, he's bankrupt in spirit, his whole demeanor has changed from the selfish way that he had acted earlier but for now our focus is on the father. So in verse 20, this son who had shamed his father publicly, who had squandered the estate, who had behaved in such despicable ways, utterly bringing shame on the name of his father and all of that, keeping that in mind as we read on, verse 20, "So [the son] got up and came to his father." What did the father do? "While he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion for him, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.'" And the father interrupts him, he didn't finish the script, the son didn't. The father interrupted him,

verse 22, "the father said to his slaves, 'Quickly bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet; and bring the fattened calf, kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; for this son of mine was dead and has come to life again; he was lost and has been found.' And they began to celebrate."

Do you see the immediate reception that the father gave to him? There was no waiting period for the father to show his love. The entire time that that son was gone and rebelling against his father, his father was waiting for him with a mind that was willing to reconcile. He was dominated by a conciliatory spirit, not a resentful one, so that at the first sign of his son returning, the father ran, didn't let the son finish talking, "I am so glad to see you!" And you just kind of picture him falling on his neck and kissing him and hugging him and embracing him. And oh, Christian parent with a hard and rebellious son, let your heart live there. "Lord, if You ever bring him back to me, my arms are going to be open wide." And some of you have had the sweetness of a son, a daughter, coming back after rebellion like that and know the sweetness of putting your arms around them, thinking in your heart, "I never wanted you to go in the first place. I'm so glad to have you back." And you kiss and kiss and kiss on them. Why? Because you were always ready to forgive, you were always willing to forgive them. And I know that at times, man, some of those kids, some kids just make that really hard because they're so hard and rebellious and so difficult. I get all of that, but keep coming back to you before Christ saved you. Weren't you hard and rebellious toward God yourself? Weren't you defiant toward the Lord? Weren't you defiant and settled in your sin? You wanted nothing to do with the love of God and yet what happened when you turned to him in faith and repentance? What happened? What did you find? You found God embracing you in a way that goes beyond what even the father of the prodigal son did.

So you need to be ready and willing to forgive and trust and pray and wait for God to give you the opportunity to exercise that virtue toward them. Maybe they won't have reconciliation today but as Scripture says in Romans, insofar as it depends on you, be at peace with all men. Be ready to forgive. And let me just say that for some adult Christian children, you need to adopt that posture toward your parents as well. I'm addressing parents toward the children but it flows the other way, you know?

Seventhly, pray for them. Pray for them. Keep in mind the eternal nature of their souls, that is far more important than how they respond to you in this life. And I just, you don't need to turn there for the sake of time but I'm going to take you to a place that you might not think of in this context, but in the book of Job, Job, that righteous blameless man before his trials hit, this is how he dealt with his children, how he vertically manifested his care for his children in the presence of God. It says in Job 1:5, "When the days of feasting had completed their cycle, Job would send and consecrate [his sons and daughters]," listen to this, "rising up early in the morning and offering burnt offerings according to the number of them all; for Job said, 'Perhaps my sons have sinned and cursed God in their hearts.' Thus Job did continually." He was interceding for them in the manner appropriate to that dispensation before the time of Christ. He was offering sacrifices on their behalf and what was in his heart was, "Maybe they've sinned against God and I don't know about it, they've sinned in their heart. I just want God to be

reconciled to them. I want to make whatever spiritual provision on their behalf that I can. I want to mediate for them."

Well, how much more you, Christian father, Christian mother, for your wayward adult children, mindful of praying for them, not giving up on them, not abandoning them saying, "Well, they've chosen their course and they're on their own now." No, if they're your flesh and blood, if they're your flesh and blood, God would have you to continue to pray for them. Even if they're long gone and you haven't heard from them for a very long time, at least let them have while you have breath, let them have an advocate before the throne of God in you. That's an appropriate way for a Christian parent to think of their adult children, and if your kids are Christians, all the more to pray for them, "Lord, continue the work You've begun in them."

Finally, point number eight: give thanks for them. Give thanks for them. Let me just review these points very quickly. Remember your spiritual resources when the nest is empty. Secondly, understand that new boundaries are in place. Thirdly, love them with a biblical love. Fourthly, guard your tongue. Fifthly, let them go. Sixthly, be ready to forgive. Seventhly, pray for them. Finally, number eight, give thanks for them. In one way or another, your children are a gift from God to you. Maybe their gift is to humble you, to make you more dependent upon God in your own broken heart over their rebellion, to see something, to have some kind of sense of identification with Christ as he looked on rebellious Jerusalem and he cried over them, he wept over them, Scripture says. He says, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how many times I would have gathered you like a mother hen gathers chicks under her wings but you wouldn't have it!" And you have a rebellious child and you feel that way toward them, you're getting something of the mindset of Christ toward rebellious humanity, willing to be reconciled but they will not have it. And if that's the extent of it, God is using your children there but your children in one way or another, and how much more if they are sweet and affirming and loving and affectionate and supportive, how much greater is a gift like that to a parent? How much greater is a gift like that to an unworthy dad or to an unworthy mom? When you have a child like that, then we ought to be giving thanks, ought we? 1 Thessalonians 5 says, "In everything give thanks for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus."

Well, beloved, I understand that these things can be very difficult. I realize we've raced through things that affect family life. And I understand one other thing, I understand that your children can hurt you deeply and that they can break your heart. I get that. I get that and I sympathize with you in it, but as the adults in the room let us remember this, the flipside of that, the truth is also that parents can hurt their children deeply as well, and so we consider all of these principles from that perspective. We need so much grace, we need so much favor and help from a gracious and holy God, and to you who are adult Christian children in a family, for those of you who are Christian parents with adults and dealing with the whole spectrum of things of which we've spoken here today, may the one who saved you from sin by his grace now lead you in grace as you work these things out in your heart and lives.

Let's pray together.

Father, we've touched on so many things that touch so close to our hearts, how we pray for each one here, for the ministry of Your Holy Spirit to be on parent and child alike. Father, may children honor their parents and, Father, in the ways in which we've spoken here today, would You make those of us who are adult parents, make us worthy of that kind of honor that they would give to us. Give us Your grace, Father. We know that we've all fallen short of Your glory. We thank You that in Christ we have One who was perfectly righteous child and that righteousness in family relationships, that perfection is part of the righteousness that is imputed to us when we believe. You see us in light of the righteousness of Christ, not in light of our own sins. For our sins, You have taken and cast them into the depths of the sea. So help us having received grace, to live it before our parents and, Father, I thank You for my dear mother and I thank You so much that she's still with us. Give us grace toward our parents, give us grace toward our children, give us grace toward each other in the body of Christ and in those around us so that, Father, our lives might be some kind of reflection of the amazing grace that You have shown to us in Jesus Christ our Lord. We pray in His name. Amen.

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