

Lesson 1: The Duties of Children and Fathers

A parenting class for teens? Yes! The posters of the *children* of my students remind me of how soon it may come.

Amazingly, Ephesians 6:1-4 and Colossians 3:20-21 are the only two passages in the entire NT that give explicit teaching on the parent-child relationship. *And yet, how many books do we have on parenting?*

Granted, the NT assumes OT teaching, as seen in the quote from the Ten Commandments; but if this is all that the Holy Spirit deemed important to place in the NT, these verses must be very important. Let us consider each one.

The Duties of Children

Parents must know what God expects of children; otherwise, how will they know the goals or the motives involved?

The immediate goal of parenting is *obedience* and *honor*. Of these two goals, honor is more basic:

1. Honor is listed among the Ten Commandments (cf. Eph. 6:2-3). Its position in the Ten Commandments stresses its importance. Honoring our parents is similar to honoring God and in some regards more important than not murdering or committing adultery. No wonder the ravens pluck out the eye that mocks his father (Pr. 30:17)!
2. It is possible to obey externally without honoring internally; but whoever truly honors will obey.
3. Obedience is required through childhood and youth—until a man “shall leave his father and his mother and be joined to his wife” (Eph. 5:31)—but honor is required for a lifetime, often as elderly care (Mt. 15:4-6; 1 Tim. 5:4, 8).

To some, the stress on obedience may sound pedantic, self-serving, or even coercive. However, many parents never achieve this goal, and so rely on manipulation to get their children to do what they want. Obedience is not pedantic. Children should obey their parents *in all things*. Under the Law, rebellious sons were to be stoned to death (Dt. 21:18-21); and even now, disobeying parents is listed among the ills of the latter days (2 Tim. 3:2; cf. Rom. 1:30).

Two clarifications:

1. Obedience should be done with an eye towards pleasing the Lord (cf. next lesson on the fear of God).
2. Obedience is limited to “in the Lord” as something “right” and “pleasing” to God.
A child should not obey his parents if they are commanding him to sin (cf. Acts 4:19; 5:29).

The Duties of Fathers

Paul could have addressed “parents” (Eph. 6:1; Col. 3:20). Why not? *Fathers are responsible for their household*. A father will not do all the training (Pr. 1:8), but he manages it. He is responsible. His family bears his name.

Interestingly, Paul first stresses what fathers must *not* do: provoke their children to anger or despondency.

How many fathers lose influence in their children’s lives because they ignore their manners in giving good content?

Some fathers intimidate their children through anger and then reap the harvest of teenage resentment.

Some fathers exasperate their children with high expectations and a criticalness and then break their spirit.

Knowing and managing the emotional state of the children is the father’s responsibility.

It is not wimpy to attend to emotions. Remember the beautiful plea: “My son, give me your heart” (Pr. 23:26).

Are the doors of communication open or shut? You can’t force them open. It takes time to build trust (16:6).

Positively, fathers are told to “bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord” (Eph. 6:4).

Fathers “nourish” their children with spiritual care (cf. 5:29). Nurture is the responsibility of fathers.

Putting bread on the table is not enough. He must train (“discipline”) and verbally warn (“instruction”).

The Scriptures do not justify a silent father. His words matter. His words are God’s words (“of the Lord”).

Are you motivated?

If early childhood is the primary responsibility of motherhood, early adulthood seems to be that of fatherhood.

Together, fathers and mothers have a high calling and weighty task. *Are you ready to learn about parenting?*