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[“Children obey your parents in the Lord”](#)

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“Children obey your parents in the Lord, for it is right.” Ephesians 6:1
Sunday, May 13, 2007
Morning Worship at Williams Camp
Lakeville, Massachusetts

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Sermon by Daniel J. Casieri

Reading: Ephesians 6:1-4

v.1. “Children obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.” When last we met we saw that the Scriptures do indeed speak of children as special creatures in the sight of God. We saw from the word and from Christian tradition that childhood is a time of wonder and awe, a time of simplicity and innocence. And yet we are enjoined to treat childhood also as a time of duty and responsibility. And so the apostle does not write more than three verses before he again enjoins the father as head of household, as loving disciplinarian, and as the temporal custodians of their eternal souls, to guard himself from expressing zeal without love. In short, Paul enjoins fathers to treat their children with firmness and patience in the same way we adults, as God’s children, are so treated by our Father.

It seems to me that in order that the post-modern parent may carry out this ancient biblical command we must take care not to let the world around us form our priorities for us. So much of parenting today is to prepare the youngster to make a living in the world, to seek material success, and temporal status. In fact it seems to me that morality itself is taught only as an aid to this end, rather than the supreme end. To do ‘right’ is taught as a social convenience because we still live in a society that respects common courtesies and pleasant personal exchanges. In other words, ‘be nice to people because it will help you get ahead in the world’.

The Christian must accept for himself another course. Morality, doing right, living in obedience to the command of God, is not so that one may reap temporal blessings - though there are many promises of such blessings. In fact it is not because we may reap eternal blessings - though there are indeed blessings beyond imagination promised to those who obey God. The first priority for the Christian parent is to instill in the child that one must obey the commands of God, pay service to the Almighty, and make supplication for the blessings, because God is worthy of our praise, the Author of our destiny, the Creator of our lives, and the owner of our souls. We obey God not because it is nice to do so, not because it is temporally, socially, or materially convenient or beneficial to do so. We obey and worship God because He is worthy of our obeisance. We revere His statutes because they are His - or as Paul writes, "for this is right."

His majesty is beyond our ability to comprehend it. His power is without limit. His nature is without flaw. His love is beyond measure. His Son is without equal. His church is His beloved possession. This world is destined for destruction. Where will you invest yourself, parent? Where will you teach your children to invest themselves? In what is passing away? Or, in what is eternal and becoming ever nearer?

Obedience is an investment. It is the proof of honor. It is the character of sincere love. It is the evidence of respect for sovereignty, God's sovereignty in the specific details of life and order, because it was His divine choice that the parents you have are the ones He gave you. To disown them through disobedience and disrespect is to disown the God of the Bible. It is the parent's duty to instill this connection in the children.

For the parent to miss this teaching as a point of duty in the divine order of things, is to risk the eternal soul of the child in his care. To forgo discipline is to express nothing less than contempt for the soul of the child who left to himself and his own foolishness. "He who spares his rod hates his son. But he who loves him disciplines him promptly (Prov.13.25P)." I pointed out last week that your child will not grow out of his rebellion. It must be driven out. "Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child; The rod of correction will drive it far from him (Prov.22.15)."

Obedience as honor and a show of submission is what Calvin refers to when commenting on these verses, saying: "Experience shews how rare this virtue is; for do we find one among a thousand that is obedient to his parents?"

The law is universal because the depravity of our souls is universal. I really tire of counseling parents of rebellious children who say, 'Oh we've tried that. It doesn't work'. 'We've tried the spankings, we've tried the time outs, we've tried the explanations.' Parents, quit trying on the command of God and commit to it. You cannot try out Christianity. Fortunately, we who are saved are stuck with it. To even speak of trying a biblical mode of discipline to evaluate its effectiveness is a form of rebellion in your own heart. The word does not teach that we should use God's methods because they work, but because they are right. It should be assumed and trusted in beyond measure that God's word will be effective and not return void. Stop giving God a chance to fix your life. Sincere submission to the commands of God is as fixed as you will ever be.

Remember, the epistle does not begin with this chapter. It closes with this chapter. Submitting to God as a point of order and priority cannot come before the God of that order is known - and I do not mean known in the heart of the child, but in the acts of the parents. Parents do not forget the glorious salutation of the great apostle at the beginning of this epistle which says: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace by which He made us accepted in the Beloved."

Paul goes on to recount the blessing showered upon those whom God has shown His love, saying: “In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace which He made to abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence, having made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself, that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth - in Him.

In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will, that we who first trusted in Christ should be to the praise of His glory.” Eph.1.3-12

But know this parents: I do not include this reminder so that your children may start out obeying for the right reasons. I include, as does Paul, so that adults may know the reason for rearing godly offspring. Your children will embrace these truths in time. But now, is the time for obedience whether or not your children understand the reasons for obedience. Children do not need a reason to obey. They need to be made to obey. This is why Paul gives the warning to fathers not to provoke them to wrath by this arduous duty of training. The duty is to make them comply, the method is to do so with tender and loving affection. And please do recognize that a harsh word of warning, or the implementation of the rod is part and parcel of this love.

Love does not leave so that discipline may enter. Discipline is an essential part of that love. Our culture has embraced the term ‘tough love’ which to us must be a redundant term. You see, love is by nature tough, it in fact endures all things and never fails, Paul writes elsewhere. Tough love is in fact true love. When love is recognized by your child in both of these forms you will have won their hearts. Just as we obey God out of love and out of fear, so must our children learn to obey. Obedience comes first. Understanding comes in time.

Palmer and Alexander write: “The grand fallacy consists in assuming that the child must know in order to obey, and therefore it must be waited on for the knowledge ere the obedience is exacted. It should obey without knowing. The will and the affections are in exercise before the judgment and the reason. These are to be met at the threshold. At the first dawn of intelligence the child should find itself under authority, and obey by the power of instinct. If the master is to be acquired after the will had developed itself in flagrant opposition to authority, the conflict must be proportionally severe, and rarely ends in the parent’s acknowledged triumph.”

Note: these ministers refer to the parent’s acknowledged triumphs. I must say I am appalled when I see that the peace within a home comes only as a compromise between parent and child, and rarely or never as a triumph for the parent. Some of you have already trained your children to argue with you. You wrongly believe that in this way you will cultivate thoughtfulness in them and surely gain their hearts. Friends, what a fallacy. You have gambled on your instinct and risked the most precious thing you own, the soul of a child.

Our hearts belong to God when we know that we have not obeyed because of the promises. The world, the flesh, and the devil, also make great promises to us. Consider what the devil promised Jesus in the wilderness, indeed he offered the whole world. Our hearts belong to God when we give them freely to Him knowing that only He is worthy to own them, and only He can be trusted with them. Without this knowledge courage will fail, determination will weaken, faith will flounder with the floundering fortunes of this life. But to know your God beyond this world’s transient pleasures is to know Him as He would be

known. And it is this knowledge that is the father's duty to pass to his children. When children obey without a word, without an argument, when parents discipline without waiting for anger to appear, without guilt, and without compromise, then God's peace may be said to have descended upon a household. Palmer and Alexander write: "At this stage the authority may be as mild as love itself, without impairing its efficiency."

So, by what method must children be brought to obedience? Common sense itself teaches that if the will of the child is not eventually taught to control itself then the duty has not been rendered. We must control ourselves from within. If a child will not sit when he is told to, he cannot learn what he must. He is not given a reason to sit, but rather a command to sit. Teaching necessarily comes after compliance at this level.

But the child's own sense of belonging will bring him to sit when the parents sit, when the older siblings sit. I speak here of home worship, of family devotions. Father's do not neglect this duty. A worldly education may teach a young man how to own the whole world, but it cannot teach him to own his own soul. That is the father's job. And I do not want to end this session without pointing out what I believe may be six of the most important practical steps to a peaceful household and obedient children.

But know this practical axiom first, i.e., the practical difference between your child and an unchurched public schooler is probably not the love of virtue of the one and the love of evil of the other. It is probably not the overwhelming unction of the Holy Spirit upon the one and the influence of the devil upon the other. Friends, the difference is not one of nature or degree. It is one of opportunity to sin. Your child will sin as regularly as the unchurched child if he is given the opportunity. Restricted opportunities restrict the expression of willfulness against God and parents. Jesus taught us to pray, "lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil." Paul wrote, "evil company corrupts good habits." Yet we still expect that our children will minister to one another for the good, as though their predilection for evil has someone miraculously disappeared. Unsupervised peer involvement is an overwhelming opportunity to sin that almost no child has the strength of conviction to resist. My children never get into trouble when I am present. They frequently get into trouble when I am not. Parents are the difference, and an absent parent is an absent difference.

1. Do not argue with children. There is nothing that will more quickly unravel the character of your child as this. Arguing suggests equality, the notion that you and your child are on the same level. It shows that you as an adult have not understood divine order, or are in rebellion yourself. A child's opinion should be given only when it is solicited by the parent. Remember, everyone around you has to put up with that bossy little brat that you have created.

2. Do not praise potential. Only praise actual achievement. To paraphrase Paul, praising potential puffs up, praising achievement builds up. Ability is given by God, like intelligence, physical coordination, or physical beauty. If praise is received at this level, why bother to achieve? Yet when results are praised this motivates the child to produce further results.

3. Require obedience by a prompt use of 'the rod'. Do not wait to become angry or overwhelmed. Let it be known that there will be no return to routine before punishment for rebellion has been rendered - and obey rule number 1.

4. Withhold privileges and pleasantries until obedience is cheerful. To paraphrase Palmer and Alexander: You do not conquer by attack. You conquer by siege (which means to surround a city and overwhelm it). Invade the entire world of the child. Let submission be the only true refuge for his soul. There is no place to run except into the loving bosom of the family and the arms of Christ.

5. Make parental praise the highest reward. It is the duty of the mother to build in the child the instinct for pleasing his father. Freud referred to this instinct of pleasing father as the super-ego, and saw this as society's perverse pressure upon the individual fighting for emotional and creative freedom. Contempt for authority is the first mark of the atheist. Submission to legitimate authority is the first mark of the child of God.

6. Make it obvious that love of God - evidenced by honor and cheerful obedience - is first place, over jobs and careers, over personal convenience, over personal desires, over individual hopes and dreams. And let it be seen in the life of the parents, and in a steady regimen of dutiful daily worship of God, 'when you rise up, when you lie down, when you walk by the way'.

(This sermon was preached in October of 2004
by Daniel J. Casieri)

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