

Obedience—Showing that You Believe
God's Wisdom for Children
Palmetto Baptist Church

Text: Ephesians 6:1-3; Col 3:20

Ephesians 6:1- “Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. HONOR YOUR FATHER AND MOTHER (which is the first commandment with a promise), SO THAT IT MAY BE WELL WITH YOU, AND THAT YOU MAY LIVE LONG ON THE EARTH.” (NASB95)

Colossians 3:20 Children, obey your parents in all things, for this is well pleasing to the Lord.

Introduction:

- Throughout the ages, political leaders have always understood the importance of the next generation. Chairman Mao supposedly said, “Give me the ears of the children today, and tomorrow I will control the Nation.”
- Without a doubt, Satan understands the strategic importance of influencing children – especially those of believers. If he can divert our children, he will impact the next generation of believers and hinder the advance of the Church of tomorrow. For this reason, Paul takes time to reveal God’s Wisdom for Children.
- We are in a section of Ephesians where Paul has instructed believers to “Walk Wisely” – and he has explained that a wise walk involves living in line with what the Holy Spirit has revealed in His Word.
- We have noted that through the astonishing ministry of His Son, Jesus Christ, God has established a cosmic “shalom” that will last for the lifetime of the “shalom-maker,” Jesus Christ. Further, He intends to bring about this “shalom” on the earth when His Son comes to reign over the Kingdom given to Him by His Father. Finally, Paul has informed us that there is a present-day, real-time display of this shalom in the lives, households, and local churches of the people who have been redeemed, adopted, and called together as His Church.
- In this section, Paul has given Wisdom for Wives and Husbands for marriages that glorify God by displaying what this shalom looks and feels like relationally in the context of marriage.

- Now Paul turns to the family unit itself and delivers wisdom for Children and Parents so that they might live together in a family that glorifies God by displaying what shalom looks like in the relational aspects of a Christian household.
- In the text before us, Paul focuses on God’s wisdom for children. This passage is relevant to all of us because we are all someone’s child – but it is particularly relevant to those who still live at home with their parents. AND, it gives us an important reminder that God cares about children, and He has an important part for them to play in His plan for the Church.
- Imagine if you had the opportunity to speak with all the young people in this congregation between the ages of 8 and 20, but you had to limit your comments to one strategic piece of advice – what advice would you give them?
- Would you instruct them about moral purity? Would you instruct them about the importance of diligence and hard work? Would you speak to them about the opportunities afforded them by hard work and a good education? Would you warn them about the temptations and trials they will face in life?
- What would you say to a group of young people if you could only give them one piece of advice? This is precisely what God is doing through the Apostle Paul here in our text – this is one of two places in all the New Testament where God directly addresses children – and therefore, the single thing He chose to say to them is of utmost importance.
- Of all the things He could have said to them, the one instruction He gave is simply this – Children, honor and obey your parents.
- *There are a number of accompanying ideas that develop this one responsibility – but at the end of the day, God has one hugely important instruction for each young person here this morning – honor and obey your parents!*
- So – with that in mind, *let’s take time this morning to make sure we understand exactly what God has in mind for us when He tells us to obey our parents – to honor our mothers and fathers.*

I. Who is Being Addressed – Children (6:1)

A. Generally – Believing children of all ages

- Children – a **broad term** that could include small children, older children living at home, and even children who were living outside of the home and who were themselves parents.

- Little children: “Let the little children to come to me” – Jesus was talking about small/little children (Mt 19:14; Mk 10:14; Lk 18:16).
- Older children living at home: The OT law addressed older children and held them accountable to the most severe penalty (death) for disobedience and disrespect – and the sins committed by them are typically committed by older people who are well into young adulthood (Dt. 21:18-21).
- Adult children: Jesus rebuked the Pharisees for failing to honor their parents by using the law to avoid having to use their resources to care for their parent’s legitimate needs (Mt 15:4; Mk 7:10).
- So in a sense – Paul is directing this “wisdom” to all of us – we all have parents and we have an ongoing responsibility to obey them when we live in their home and to honor them when we are out from under their authority. In other words, while our obligation to obey specific instructions may change when we leave the home and establish our own lives and homes, our responsibility to honor and respect our parents continues throughout our lifetime – it is never abrogated.

B. Specifically – Believing children living at Home

- This text seems to direct attention primarily to those children who are old enough to hear with understanding and who still live at home under their parent’s authority.
- The term “in the Lord” may have reference to the spiritual identity and condition of the children Paul is addressing. Paul is obviously speaking to children who can understand and give willing obedience to his instruction. He is addressing them independently from their parents – and he references that they are “in the Lord.”
- Clearly, God is speaking to children and anticipates they are old enough to understand and have come to the place where they can give willing obedience – God knows children can understand and so He instructs them directly and expects them to obey His instruction. God loves children, speaks directly to them, and clearly expects things of them and responses from them.
- Not only are these children old enough to understand but they are still young enough to be living at home under their father’s

training. This is seen in the term Paul uses for obey – “to hear under” – which speaks of one listening with the intent of obeying someone who has authority over him.

- So – what does God expect of children of all ages but especially those that are old enough to understand but still young enough to be living at home under their parents’ direct authority?

II. What is Expected of Them – *Obey Your Parents* (6:1)

- In essence, what God expects of children is the same thing He expects of moms and dads and everyone else – that they give willing and glad submission to the authorities God placed in their lives (5:21)
 - This is not optional – it is a command.
 - This is to be done consistently (present tense)
- In other words, the kind of honor and obedience God expects of children at their level is actually what He expects of their parents in their relationship to Him. So what does that look like?

“But thanks be to God that though you were slaves of sin, you became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching to which you were committed,” (Romans 6:17)

“For I will not presume to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me, resulting in the obedience of the Gentiles by word and deed,” (Romans 15:18)

“For the report of your obedience has reached to all; therefore I am rejoicing over you, but I want you to be wise in what is good and innocent in what is evil.” (Romans 16:19)

“So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling;” (Philippians 2:12)

“We have confidence in the Lord concerning you, that you are doing and will continue to do what we command.” (2 Thessalonians 3:4)

- Just as their parents are to fully, willingly, and joyfully honor and obey God, their children are to obey them. Parents are to serve as the model of the kind of obedience God wants from their children.
- ***And – what this looks like for children is fleshed out in two responsibilities related to their actions and their attitudes.***

A. *Obey your parents – Our Actions*

- The term “obey” (**upakouw**) literally means “to listen under” and it has the idea of a subordinate listening to the voice of someone who is over him.
 - The Bible often uses the term “hear” or “hearken” to refer to the kind of listening that results in obedient action.
 - This kind of “hearing” that leads to obedience has 3 aspects.
1. **Attentiveness** – *showing the worth of a person by giving attention to his words.*

James 1:19 “This you know, my beloved brethren. But everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger;” (James 1:19)

App: The way you listen to your parents is an indication of how you respect them – do you listen half-heartedly? Are you busy doing other things when your parents speak to you? Do you respect their words and wishes enough to give them your full attention when they are speaking with you?

2. **Responsiveness** – *knowing, accepting, and cheerfully doing what God and others are expecting from me.*

Obedying or “harkening” to the voice of your parents involves more than paying attention when they speak – it means acting according to what they say! And what Paul has in mind is not merely doing only what they say – but really committing to understanding and attempting to do what your parents actually want even when their words don’t always spell out those desires in explicitly clear ways.

3. **Submissiveness** – *Doing what I should do, when I should do it, how I should do it, with the right heart attitude and spirit toward the authority asking me to do it!*

1 Samuel 15:22 Then Samuel said: "Has the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, As in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, And to heed than the fat of rams.

- Obedience starts with our actions – but it also involves our heart.

B. Honor your parents – Our Attitudes

- The term “honor” means to assign proper value to something or someone and to treat with high regard or as valuable.
- This term is used by Peter in exhorting believers to adopt a particular posture toward the emperor (1 Peter 2:17). It was also used by John to describe our attitude to Jesus by comparing it to Jesus’ attitude toward His Father (John 5.23).
- This is an important expansion of the obligation God places upon children to obey their parents. A person can obey someone without honoring or respecting them; but they cannot truly respect or honor while intentionally disregarding or disobeying their words.
- Honor is what should motivate us to obey – it speaks to the internal heart attitude that should accompany our external obedience.
- When a child is very young (between the ages of 1-7/8 the focus of his duty is to obey His parents by conforming to their instruction).
- But – as a child grows up in age and matures into a young adult – the focus shifts to the attitude he is to cultivate toward his parents – an obedience that is motivated by a desire to honor them!
- Honoring our parents is directed to both our Father and our Mother (not playing one parent against the other) and it involves two primary things:

1. *Respecting Them in Your Youth*

- This means that you will recognize their God-given role in your life and seek to discern and do their legitimate desires for you as a child in their home.
- This means that you will regard them as important and valuable people in your life and seek to find and follow their counsel and wisdom for your life.
- **Applicational Illustrations:**
 - How you address them – “yeah”; “Whatever”
 - How you refer to them – “my old man/old lady”
 - How and why you seek out their advice, and more importantly, what you do with their counsel when you receive it. For example – have you really sought your parent’s counsel and wisdom about the friends you have in life? About what you should consider doing in life? About their perception of the spiritual condition of your life?.

2. *Caring for Them in their Old Age*

- Jesus had strong words of condemnation to say to a group of religious leaders who were finding loopholes in the law so they could excuse themselves from caring for their parents.

Mark 7:9 He was also saying to them, "You are experts at setting aside the commandment of God in order to keep your tradition." ¹⁰ "For Moses said, 'HONOR YOUR FATHER AND YOUR MOTHER'; and, 'HE WHO SPEAKS EVIL OF FATHER OR MOTHER, IS TO BE PUT TO DEATH'; ¹¹ but you say, 'If a man says to his father or his mother, whatever I have that would help you is Corban (that is to say, given to God),' ¹² you no longer permit him to do anything for his father or his mother; ¹³ thus invalidating the word of God by your tradition which you have handed down; and you do many things such as that."

III. When it is Expected of Them (to what extent): Col 3:20

A. *In all things – Obey*

1. Do you mean everything?
 - Yes – unless they are asking you to sin or to disobey something God has either commanded or prohibited.
 - God has given parents a legitimate context for a specific period of time when He expects you to obey the biblically-based authority He has delegated to them over you.
2. Are there ever times I should disregard a parent?
 - Only when you have a Biblical warrant to do so in regard to something that is clearly mandated by God – you must obey God rather than men (Acts 5.29).
 - While you are submitted in all other areas
 - Only after you have appealed to them in appropriate ways
 - And – if you have to do so – it must be done with respect and with appropriate deference and respect!
Illustration: if a parent asks you to break a law or to violate a moral or ethical command that is clearly spelled out in Scripture – you are compelled to appeal to them on the basis of Scripture and then to respectfully and carefully obey God.
- Parents – if you have Godly children who are wanting to obey you and they appeal on a matter that is not Biblically

wrong – you need to consider God’s instruction to you that you not provoke them to wrath! God did not give you power and authority over your children so you could lord it over them ... but so that you could nurture them, protect them, and develop them as image-bearers who God has gifted and called to serve Him.

- You are to lovingly lead them with the intent of training them to obey God and to love the things that He loves.
- When you refuse to let your children do what they believe God is calling them to do – and the matter they are asking about is not unbiblical – are you willing to give prayerful consideration so that you are using your authority over them to conform them to God’s will as opposed to getting them to do your will? Are you cultivating an environment where you children can actually appeal and entreat you about something you have asked them to do?

B. At all times – Honor

- The point to parenting is to raise the next generation of believers who will serve the Lord and will themselves one day be parents.
- So – there comes a time in a young person’s life where he/she is no longer under the direct authority of a parent.
- The Bible is unclear as to exactly when this happens – but the Biblical pattern seems to indicate that it happens when either a child is married or when that child comes to a certain age where they are old enough to be responsible to make their own living and are no longer living at home.
- Caution: Some people teach that a woman needs to live at home under her parents authority if she isn’t married – this is certainly not provable from Scripture (other than an odd text or two taken out of context about a daughter and vows). Typically, when a woman goes off to college and is educated and prepared for her life calling (which may not be marriage), she is at this stage.
- Proof – the idea that an unmarried woman is to remain at home and not to do anything profitable with her life is simply unbiblical – Lydia was a business woman in Acts who was a seller of purple and who was instrumental in helping Paul establish the Church at Philippi. Eudias and Syntache were described as “fellow laborers” in the Gospel.

- When a young person reaches this stage of life – even though they are no longer under the direct authority of a parent – they do have the life-long responsibility to honor and reverence their parents! They are no longer under a biblical mandate to follow their parents’ instructions on day-to-day matters in their own lives as adults living on their own and individually responsible to God. However, as fully responsible adults, they are under the biblical warrant to honor and respect their parents.
- Biblical Illustrations of these concepts:

As a boy, Samuel rendered obedience to both his parents, and to Eli the high priest when he entrusted to Eli’s care (1 Sam 2:11, 18-21, 26; 1 Sam 3:1-19).

As a boy, Jesus lived in humble, submissive obedience to His parents (Lk 2.51).

Eli’s sons disobeyed him in their youth and early adulthood (1 Sam 2:12-17) and disrespected and disregarded him as adult priests serving under his authority (the same authority that all other priests respected and followed) (1 Sam 2:22-25; 27-36).

IV. How it is Expected of Them – *In the Lord* (Eph 6:3)

- “In the Lord” is not referring to the kind of parent that a child is obligated to obey – in other words, Paul is not saying that children are to obey parents who are believers (in the Lord).
- Rather – in this text Paul is talking to children who are believers or in believing homes and is instructing them to obey the Lord!
- Just like wives were to obey the Lord by obeying their husbands (5.22), so believing children were to obey the Lord by obeying their parents!
- Paul addresses children in the church at Ephesus as full image-bearers who, as believers, had the Holy Spirit Who would enlighten and enable them to render the obedience God was asking of them.

V. Why it is Expected of Them

- Why should a believing child give diligent obedience to his parents while living in their home and why should he render life-long respect to them?
- This text gives three important reasons/motivations for doing so:

A. *Because this is Appropriate and Fitting (right) in God’s Sight*

- The idea here behind the term “right” is “just” – fitting or proper.
- In other words, this is how God designed human relationships to work – and this is universally recognized and acknowledged.
- Everyone in every culture realizes what happens to society when children are disobedient to parents.
- Paul warned Timothy that a sign of the last days would be that society would be marked by children who were disobedient and disrespectful to parents. (2 Tim 3:2; Romans 1:30)
- Illustration: Something is horrifyingly broken when a child disrespects, disobeys, or even strikes or injures a parent! Even people who do not know the Lord recoil when they see and hear a child or young person do and say things like this to their parents.

B. Because this is Biblical Mandated (First Commandment)

- In fact, this is so basic that God not only included in the 10 commandments, but He also specifically repeated it 7x in the NT (Mt 15:4; 19:9; Mark 7:10; 10:19; Luke 18:20; Eph 6:1; Col 3:20)
- It is impossible to please God if we disregard this commandment.
- But why did God command this of all children in general, but particularly of His own Children? In short – because He granted parents a unique role in His universe.
 1. They are image-bearer to whom He has uniquely delegated some of His own authority – He has granted them the right to instruct, permit, and restrict specific image-bearers for a specific time frame in their lives.
 2. He has granted to these image-bearers (parents) the amazing, unique privilege of making other image-bearers. No other moral creature in the universe has been given this privilege. Other than God, Parents are the only other moral creatures granted the ability to do what God does – to make image-bearers.
 3. He has given them a sober responsibility with regard to their own children – to provide for them, protect them, prepare and equip them for life, and to point them to a proper relationship with God and a life of acceptable worship and service to Him.

This is why God gave parents this unique authority – and this is what they are to use that authority for! Not to get their way or to make their life easier – but actually to serve and nurture their children and encourage them to become men and women who worship and serve God in spirit and truth!

C. *For this is Beneficial (With promise – Exodus 20:20; Dt 5:16)*

1. Length of Your Days

Interestingly – in Paul’s day, the average lifespan of children was shockingly low. Less than 50% of children lived to be ten years of age. In fact, so common was the death of children in a household that in Roman or Greek society, it was uncommon for parents to have more than momentary grief or to engage in prolonged mourning over the loss of a child.

2. Prosperity in Your Ways

God promises that His protection and blessing would be upon a child who determines to obey and honor his/her parents by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Conclusion:

- God considers the obedience of Children to be of utmost importance!
- He attached the gravest and most serious of penalties in the OT to adult children who persistently disobeyed His commandment to honor their parents, cursed their parents, or struck their parents! (Dt. 21:18-21)
- Why so severe a penalty for something every one of us at one time or another has been tempted to do – even if only in our hearts?
- Because if we don’t learn to honor and submit to the legitimate authority of our earthly authorities who have been appointed over us by an all-wise God, we will never learn to submit to God.
- This bears out in real life – children who are perpetually disobedient and disrespectful to mom and dad rarely end up obeying God in other areas of their life!
- And this is important because of what people everywhere instinctively know and personally experience.
- In Paul’s day as well as in our own – people instinctively know that children should obey and respect their parents. They instinctively know that adult children should honor and care for their parents. And they recoil when they see egregious violations in either case.

- However, in Paul's day and in our own – what people instinctively knew was not what they practiced. By the time Paul wrote to the Romans – he described pagan culture as one filled with children who blatantly disregarded, dishonored, and disobeyed their parents. Nor was this limited to people raised in a pagan, gentile culture. God's own people had become experts at dishonoring their parents by refusing to use their resources to care for their elderly parents – and they had been taught how to get around this biblical expectation by the Pharisees themselves!
- Something had gone horribly wrong in the relationship God designed between parents and children – and the flaw was both undeniable and universal. Shalom had been broken in very deep and irreparable ways. Until Jesus came to make peace and the Spirit came to enlighten and enable both parents and children.
- *So as a young person living at home – will you commit to respecting your parents by hearing and obeying them?*
- *As an adult – will you commit honoring and caring for you parents while you have them in this life?*