

Children and Parents

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

² "Honor your father and mother" (this is the first commandment with a promise),

³ "that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land."

⁴ Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

(Eph 6:1-4)

A Boy Named "Sue"

Johnny Cash sang a song about *A Boy Named Sue*. He didn't have the following in mind. In Mumbai (India), a son **sues** his parents because he was born without giving his consent. They call the movement **anti-natalism**, and Raphael Samuel says he believes births are unfair to children, because it forces them to live a life they didn't ask for. "I want to tell all Indian kids that they don't owe their parents anything. I love my parents, and we have a great relationship, but they had me for their joy and their pleasure. My life has been

amazing, but I don't see why I should put another life through the rigamarole of school and finding a career, especially when they didn't ask to exist.”¹

In New Jersey, the parents of a 17-year-old girl told their daughter that when she was grown, she should do whatever she wanted. She didn't like their rules, so she left. Her parents stopped paying her high school tuition and took away her car that they owned. She then moved in with a friend whose parents hired an attorney to **sue** her parents. “Clearly this family needs therapy, not attorneys,” as the writer of the article says.²

If you want to see how truly messed up things can get, read the piece, “15 Crazy Cases of Kids Who Sued Their Parents And Won.”³ Among these are several cases where the parents were truly despicable, stealing large sums of money, keeping the kids locked up in cages, and more. Dr. Martyn Lloyd Jones wrote,

¹ Amanda Tarlton, “Son is Suing Parents Because He Did Not Consent to Being Born,” *Fatherly* (Feb 6, 2019), <https://www.fatherly.com/news/man-sues-parents-born-without-consent/>; Simrin Sirur, “These Indians Don't Want You to Have Babies Because Life Sucks,” *The Print* (Jan 30, 2019), <https://theprint.in/culture/these-indians-dont-want-you-to-have-babies-because-life-sucks/184973/>.

² Michelle Singletary, “Daughter, 18, Sues Parents for Support,” *Washington Post* (March 6, 2014), https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/economy/daughter-18-sues-parents-for-support/2014/03/06/75beb836-a49e-11e3-84d4-e59b1709222c_story.html.

³ Katrina Wharton, “15 Crazy Cases of Kids Who Sued Their Parents And Won.” *Babygaga* (Sep 7, 2017), <https://www.babygaga.com/15-crazy-cases-of-kids-who-sued-their-parents-and-won/>.

All will agree that this is a tremendously important subject at this present time. We are living in a world which is witnessing an alarming breakdown in the matter of discipline. Lawlessness is rampant, there is a breakdown in discipline in all these fundamental units of life—in marriage and in home relationships. A spirit of lawlessness is abroad, and things which were once more or less taken for granted are not only being queried and questioned but are being ridiculed and dismissed. There is no question but that we are living in an age when there is a ferment of evil working actively in the whole of society. We can go further—and I am simply saying something that all observers of life are agreed about, whether they are Christians or not—and say that in many ways we are face to face with a total collapse and breakdown of what is called ‘civilization’ and society. And there is no respect in which this is more evident and obvious than in this matter of the relationship of parents and children.⁴

That was fifty years ago. How much more today? We are dangerously close to utter civil collapse. All it needs is the

⁴ D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Life in the Spirit in Marriage, Home & Work: An Exposition of Ephesians 5:18-6:9* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1973), 238.

right catalyst. It behooves us to therefore ask, what is causing this insanity?

Sin, the Evil Powers, and the New Man

Ephesians answers this question with two things. The **first** comes from within. It is called **sin**. “You were dead in your trespasses and sins in which you once walked” (Eph 2:1-2). “Do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger” (4:26). This is a world darkened with human rebellion against God. If God commands us to do one thing, every fiber of our being tells us to do the opposite. We do not like thinking ourselves under anyone’s authority, not God’s, not our parents, nobody.

The **second** comes from without. It is **the fallen powers** of this age. “... following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience” (2:2). Timothy Gombis refers to this as “the chaotic, destructive and divisive social patterns created and fostered by the evil powers, who have perverted the created order in such a way that has affected every aspect and level of society.”⁵

⁵ Gombis, Dissertation, 157.

We've made much of both of these, but especially the supernatural powers, as we have worked our way through Ephesians. It is interesting, then, that in the chiasmic structure of Ephesians, it is this portion of Ephesians 2 dealing with both sin and the powers that parallels the long unit we are in now, [the Household Code](#).⁶

- (D) Ephesians 2:1–10: Walking by the Great Love with Which He Loved Us
- (D') Ephesians 5:15–6:9: Walk in Love as Those Who Are Wise

This reinforces that the commandments we are looking at are a counter to the rebellion of our sin and the sin of the heavenly beings whom God set in charge to oversee the world, but who fell wickedly. These commandments deal with [wives and husbands](#), (today) [children and parents](#), and [slaves and masters](#). Their purpose is to set straight the behavior of the most fundamental unit of any civilization—the family. In doing this, there is a sense in which the kingdom of God advances or intrudes upon the fallen age of men.

⁶ See [John Paul Heil](#), *Ephesians: Empowerment to Walk in Love for the Unity of All in Christ*, (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2007).

But it is not merely behavior that is in mind. It is also our **minds and hearts**. Like a lamp to our feet on dark paths or honey in our bitter mouths, the law of God is holy, righteous, and good (**Rom 7:12**). It is we who are not, until we have been justified by faith. Then we are the righteousness of Christ and the law no longer seems dark or bitter. We are capable of seeing it for what it is.

That leads to **another thing** to remember about where we've come from. The Apostle has been teaching us that in Christ, God has been doing something marvelous. He has been making for himself a **new man**, the body of Christ on earth, the very temple of God wherein dwells the Holy Spirit of God. You, if you are in Christ, are this man. And you, therefore, by the Holy Spirit, have the power of God in your life to wish and to will to obey God's commands from the heart. It is always vital to remember the gospel as you turn to understand and apply God's law.

Children and Parents

Children: Obey and Honor

We have finished up the lengthy commandments given to wives and husbands. Today we will talk about the second of three pairings: **children and parents**. What causes children to want to sue their parents and even file for divorce from them (see the famous case of Gregory K from 1992 in n. 3 above)? It is the breakdown of the family at the most fundamental levels. This takes place through the unbridled wills of both rebellious and sinful children *and* parents. Therefore, both are addressed.

The passage begins, “**Children, obey your parents in the Lord for this is right**” (**Eph 6:1**). You may find it interesting that in these ancient household codes such as the Greeks had, like the wives, **the children were never addressed!** The focus was on the patriarch subduing or establishing dominion over his children. Thus, “**By commanding children regarding their subordinate role in the New Humanity, the author grants them dignity and affirms their valued position.**”⁷ In other words, simply by talking to the children, Paul is showing love for them.

⁷ Gombis, 164. He cites Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus: Vicit Agnus Noster*. 2nd ed. (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1994), 171-72.

So what is he saying? Many today, like our friend from Mumbai, would not think this is loving at all, but that is because they are in rebellion against God. He gives a **command** (*obey your parents*), followed by the **motivation** (*in the Lord*), followed by the **reason** (*for this is right*). The commands of God are never just bare brute orders that you must follow blindly, simply because God said so. Let's work backwards.

The reason you are to obey your parents is because *it is right*. God has established a particular order in the family. Children are under their parents. This is a universal truth; they are your parents. Our society is currently in perhaps the most self-dilutional deceived place any culture in history has been regarding obvious universal truths. Men aren't men. Women aren't women. Children aren't children. Parents aren't parents. Never before has any culture thought and promoted such absurdities. The powers over us are truly dark indeed. But **pretending** so does not make it so. Therefore, children, you do this simply because it is right. Everyone knows it is right, because this has been put on even the most godless heart at the tenderest of age.

Though there is a reason, it is the **motivation** that is transforms a family. From what source do you do it? Simply because it is right? Well, that isn't bad, of course. But no, it

is more. You do it “in the Lord.” As one scholar says, this is a “Christological motivation” and it is “similar to the Christological motivation used for the wives’ subordination, ‘as to the Lord’ (5:22), and the slaves’ obedience, ‘as to Christ’ (6:5).”⁸ In other words, the Apostle is talking here to children who are believers.

Above all other things, Lloyd-Jones notes that the principle from the previous chapter, “Do not be drunk with wine ... but be filled with the Spirit” (5:18) is the key to being able to obey the command.⁹ Of course, all children are to obey their parents, but he knows that it is the children “in the Lord,” that is Christian children, who are able to obey from the heart, for the Lord Jesus has given them a new heart and put his Holy Spirit within them.

Finally then, what does it mean to “obey” your parents? Simply put, it means to do what they say. This is directed at both fathers and mothers. You must obey them both. They tell you to take out the trash, you take out the trash. They tell you to clean your room, you clean your room. They tell you to do your homework, you do your homework. They tell you to take a bath, you take a bath. They tell you to

⁸ Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, vol. 42, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1990), 397.

⁹ Lloyd Jones, 237.

make the table, you make the **table**. You obey them. You do this because “it is right.”

While everyone knows this, it doesn't mean everyone acknowledges it or likes it. In fact, the mass refusal to obey parents is one of the great signs of a family or civilization that is in the stages of **full-blown apostasy**, that is “**gross godlessness and irreligion, when the very foundations are shaking.**”¹⁰ In Romans 1, the Apostle lays bare the open lawlessness of the pagan world. He begins a whole litany of sins with **homosexual** activities (**Rom 1:26-27**). A lot of Christians love to pick on this. Truly, this is a great sign of apostasy and lawlessness. But as his list develops, he mentions, “**disobedient to parents**” (**Rom 1:30**). This is every bit as rebellious as the former, even as other “lesser” sins in our minds are (like gossiping). The point is, this is how civilization collapses, activities like these that hurt one another and hurt ourselves tear apart the fabric of society; they unravel the tapestry; they turn the foundations of bedrock into quicksand. When it strikes at the core of the family, there isn't much hope left. That's why the Apostle heads straight

¹⁰ Ibid., 236.

for it, even as he does in the parallel list in Colossians. “Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord” (Col 3:20).

But let’s look a little more deeply at obedience. It is one thing to obey. It is another to obey “in the Lord” or in a way that “pleases the Lord.” God isn’t just looking at the outward action of obedience. If you do it begrudgingly, with anger in your heart, with back-talk and cursing under your breath, with whining and pouting and copping an attitude, this is not obedience “in the Lord” and it does not please him in any way. Nor does it please your parents.

Thus, vs. 2 helps you understand what obedience is. The Apostle quotes the Fifth Commandment. “Honor your father and mother,” which he says “is the first commandment with a promise.” What does it mean to honor them?

As it is stated in the Ten Commandments, both Exodus and Deuteronomy use the word *kabbed* or “honor.” The word is interesting in that it is the same root as “glorify” (*ka-bad*) which means to “make heavy” or to “honor” in the sense of standing in awe of (cf. Ps 22:23). Thus, honor begins in the heart. That is, in your heart you are to treat them as a heavy thing, as in the sense of not inconsequential, not trivial, and not disposable, not burdensome etc. You are not to

take your parents for granted. You are not to approach them or what they say with a light and carefree attitude even if you disagree, *because* they are your parents and because that is wrong. It may just be that they know more than you do!

Because they are your parents and this is their office, the command to honor goes for **all children** to all parents, no matter how bad or rotten they may be (or may have been). That is, **in as much as they are your parents you are to honor them**. I'll say more about this as we go on.

The OT uses two other related words when it restates the command. One is *hadar*. “**You shall stand up before the gray head and honor the face of an old man**” (Lev 19:32). This is an expansion of the fifth commandment. The point of honor here is **to adorn, pay tribute to, respect, or rise**. It is something you would do when you are in the presence of royalty, or someone else highly esteemed. Imagine your mother as the queen. How would you treat the queen of England? Imagine if every time your parents appeared in your midst, you rose up in tribute and respect. But familiarity breeds contempt. We often treat our parents with contempt simply because we are around them so much. This is not right. The closer someone is to you, the better you

should treat them, not the worse. That is the opposite of honor.

A parallel word used in this same verse is that you are to “fear” (*yare*) God. **Lev 19:3** uses this word with regard to parents. “Everyone of you shall fear his mother and his father.” The idea is not only to highly respect, but also to shake and tremble a bit, because, as **Bill Cosby** says, “They brought you into this world, and they can take you out.” You are to have that same general sense of reverence for your parents at age 15 or 20 or 60 that you had for them at age three. Perhaps you older folks this command didn’t apply to you any longer? They are still your parents! Three-year-old children by nature, but especially when they get into trouble, do not treat their parents lightly, but they shake and tremble and submit themselves, especially when being disciplined. Even when grown, you should **remain like children with respect to honoring your parents**. For, they never cease to be your parents.

This **heart attitude** that you have then begins to work itself out in **practical** applications. The Scripture is full of specific laws, warnings, and examples of this. The law says, “**Do not strike**” your father or mother (**Ex 21:15**). Hitting your parents is the ultimate sign of disrespect of both them

and their office. And yet, you can walk through the supermarket and see from time to time children hitting their parents and the parents doing nothing about it. In the Mosaic economy, striking your parents resulted in **the death penalty**, although it has older children in mind.

The law also says, “**Do not curse**” your father or mother (**Ex 21:17**) or **revile** them (**Matt 15:4**). And yet, you see this even more often than striking of parents. You are not to say, “**I wish you were dead**” to their face *or under your breath*—outwardly or inwardly—for this is a grave sin.

Likewise, you are not to **despise** your parents (**Prov 23:22**). When disciplined, you are not to yell, “**I hate you,**” or “**I wish you were not my dad,**” or whatever. In fact, you are not to even think it. These are among many ways you **treat your parents with contempt**, which became a specific violation of the covenant which brought Israel into captivity. Ezekiel says, “**Father and mother are treated with contempt in you. . . [therefore] I will scatter you among the nations and disperse you through the countries, and I will consume your uncleanness out of you**” (**Ezek 22:7, 15**).

But it is not only this kind of dishonoring that the commandment has in mind. In fact, **the commandment was originally understood to mean adult children of aged parents,**

and much of the time, the sins above are much more common in little children. How might older children honor older parents?

The [Office of Indian Elder Affairs](#) of the state of New Mexico used to have a page that said, “Traditionally, Indian elders have occupied an important, revered position in tribal life. Age has been equated with wisdom and experience ... The role of the elder at the center of the family is of critical importance in the culture.” It then explained how this plays out when they get old. “Most Indian elders wish to remain at home and in the community, regardless of their degree of frailty; many live with several generations of their family under one roof ... In most cases, families want to care for their elders at home. The vast majority of frail Indian elders live at home, cared for by family members ... There is a cultural imperative to keep elders at home, in the community.”¹¹

As I said, this law is written upon the hearts of all human beings. When you read prior to Exodus 20, you see the commandment worked out clearly, but not with regard to young children. [Gen 28:7](#) for example says, “[Jacob had](#)

¹¹ The old link was http://www.nmaging.state.nm.us/Serving_American_Indian_Elders.html, as cited in my sermon on the Fifth Commandment.

obeyed his father and his mother and gone to Paddan-aram.” In an expansion of Genesis found in the DSS, it says of Esau that he swore an oath to his father and mother that he would plot no evil all his days against Jacob (Jub 37:13). He honored his father and mother and did not harm his brother.

On the negative side, you may recall Ham who went into the tent of Noah and uncovered his father’s nakedness (a euphemism for sleeping with Noah’s wife, Lev 20:11). This was a great dishonor and disgrace to his parents, and because of it, his incestuous child Canaan was cursed. (It is interesting to note that Jubilees says that Noah taught his sons’ sons to “honor father and mother” [Jub 7:20]).¹²

I want to make one more point on the positive side and it is an important one, that maybe you have never considered before. It says of Isaac and Ishmael that when Abraham died, they “buried him in the cave of Machpelah” (Gen 25:8-9). It likewise says that when Isaac died that “Esau and Jacob buried him” (Gen 35:29). Again, it says the same thing of Jacob and his 12 sons (Acts 7:15-16). All this before the giving of the Law on Sinai. Why does the Bible preserve

¹² The full verse says, “Noah began to teach his sons’ sons the ordinances and commandments, and all the judgments that he knew, and he exhorted his sons to observe righteousness, and to cover the shame of their flesh, and to bless their Creator, and *honor father and mother*, and love their neighbor, and guard their souls from fornication and uncleanness and all iniquity.”

these “silly” details, when there are so many other “important” things that it could record? It is because this *is* a *very* important thing. This gets at the heart of the Fifth Commandment.

As many commentators explain, “Most ancient readers would have understood this as an admonition to care for one’s elderly parents,”¹³ including everything up to their burial. In fact, taking care of the later years of your parent’s life (and death) is the main way that the commandment is fulfilled prior to God chiseling it into the stone tablet with his finger. This was common among the Indians of North America and in the ancient near east. There is an Akkadian term (*palāḥu*) which means “to revere, treat reverently.” It designates that sons are responsible to provide food and other necessities to one or both aging parents. This word has a synonym (*wabālu*) which means “to carry/support” and it often used in tablets that mandate adult children support aging parents.¹⁴

This gets at the last half of the Fifth Commandment, which Paul says, “is the only commandment with a promise” (Eph 6:2). Paul then quotes that promise, “that it may

¹³ John H Walton, *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary (Old Testament): Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), 233.

¹⁴ Ibid.

go well with you and that you may live long in the land” (Eph 6:3). The Ojibwe Indians believe that treating the elderly with respect and dignity is part of the fuller moral and cosmological vision connected to the ongoing circle of life.¹⁵ In other words, taking care of them will come back on you. It is kind of like the idea of karma in Hinduism. This is a pagan way of explaining what is written on their hearts by God.

I find it fascinating that the Apostle actually quotes this promise for Greek Christians! He doesn’t say, “Well, this now is the part of the command that only applied to the nation of Israel and the Promised Land that he gave them under the terms of the covenant with Abraham.” He applies it straight to Greek Christians living in Ephesus.

The idea is that as parents grow older, if the son supports them (and thus honors God who cares for the helpless), thereby extending their life, he can reasonably expect that his children will treat him like this in his later years.¹⁶ That is a Christian way of talking about the “circle of life,” which is not some accidental cosmic cycle created by Fate, but the laws of God working themselves out from one generation

¹⁵ Michael D. McNally, *Aging, Authority, and Ojibwe Religion: Honoring Elders* (Columbia University Press, 2009), <http://cup.columbia.edu/book/978-0-231-14503-9/honoring-elders>.

¹⁶ Walton, *Ibid*.

to the next according to his covenantal blessing or curse. Though the Apostle does not explain it, it seems to me that this promise works on both a **physical level** (a civilization full of obedient children is going to live long in its land) and a **spiritual level** (those who obey and honor their parents will inherit the kingdom of God).

To sum up then, you can think of this command **positively**. “**Make them glad**” through obedience, through doing what they tell you to do (**John 10:37**), through saying what they tell you to say (**John 12:49**), through listening to their teaching and heeding their instruction (**Prov 1:8**), even through accepting their discipline and reproof (**Prov 15:5**). Proverbs says, “**The father of the righteous will greatly rejoice; he who fathers a wise son will be glad in him. Let your father and mother be glad; let her who bore you rejoice**” (**Prov 23:24-25**). Is this what you delight in, or do you delight in hating and despising your father and mother, or at least making them think you do?

Fathers: Do Not Provoke, but Discipline in The Lord

The last verse of this section moves **specifically** from “**parents**” (*goneusin*) to “**fathers**” (*pateres*). This is the same

man who was addressed in the last section as the “[husband](#).” He has two commands. The first is [negative](#). “[Do not provoke your children to anger](#).” The second is [positive](#). “[But bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord](#).” The parallel in Colossians says, “[Do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged](#)” ([Col 3:21](#)).

These things are also part of the Fifth Commandment in as much as they are written on the hearts of all people, Christian or not. The Greek dramatist [Menander](#) (342-290 BC) for instance, says, “[A father who is always threatening does not receive much reverence](#),” and “[One should correct a child by not hurting him but persuading him](#).”¹⁷ Aristotle cautions, “[Do not be harsh with your children but be gentle](#).”¹⁸ This is basic wisdom and common sense.

And yet, how many fathers seem to lack it? [Berating](#) their children. [Yelling](#) at their children. Physically or sexually [harming](#) their children. Uncontrolled [rage](#) towards their children. Foul-mouthed [cursing](#) at their children. Losing their [tempers](#) at their children. Constantly [cutting](#) their children down with words, “You’re no good,” “You’ll

¹⁷ [Menander](#), *Anthologies* 4.26.7, 13.

¹⁸ [Aristotle](#), *Nicomachean Ethics* 5.1134b, 8.1161b; Cited in Clinton E. Arnold, *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary: Romans to Philemon*, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), 334–335.

never amount to anything.” Or just totally **ignoring** their children. Many men are prone to these things and it is not right.

It is almost like men do not think past the immediate event. Why should you not be harsh with your children, but gentle? Why should you not provoke your children to anger? So that you do not foster and nurture rebellion in their little hearts. If you want Christian children who love the Lord and follow him as disciples, the quickest way to shortcut that hope is to be harsh with them. That is not the way Jesus is with you, is it? If you want to nurture the seed of rebellion that is already in their fallen hearts, with increasing hatred towards God and yourself, then by all means exasperate them. But this is not the Christian father’s hope, is it? Rather, our hope is that they would come to treasure the same spiritual things that we do.

But it is not merely in rage that you can exasperate them. You can do it in all manner of ways. **Imposing legalistic rules** that are not found in Scripture can do it. **Placing undue burdens** upon them can do it. Not trusting them or letting them fail can do it. Being suspicious of their every activity. You have to remember, especially fathers, that to a good degree,

how you are to your children is how those children will grow up thinking that God is towards them.

For that is the analogy, **God is our Father**. So many people in our day hate this idea that God is a father because their own fathers were disgusting human beings. Many weren't there for their kids at all. They abandoned them physically. But many others were never there emotionally or spiritually for their children. So even though they shouldn't do it, their own experience causes them to impose your role-model upon God.

I believe this is one of the ways God uses to **bless or curse** family lines. Generation after generation of godly fathers who treat their children well results, by God's providence and grace of course, in those generations coming to Christ. But the curse of generations occurs, children rebel against their parent's faith, because of how their own supposedly Christian father acted towards them. God embedded this into the very fabric of the way his universe works.

This causes me to think of a little detour. What do you do, children, with **parents who are not righteous**, who have done nothing deserving honor, who are violent, abusive, foul-mouthed, wicked believers or unbelievers? This is a difficult question. Your command assumes to some degree that

a religious heritage is being passed on. As one person writes, “Honor is given to parents as representatives of God’s authority for the sake of covenant preservation.”¹⁹ But you must remember also, you owe greater honor the heavenly Father.

So there are **two things** to consider here. There is the “**office**” of parent. Parenthood is a holy vocation which is patterned after the office of the Heavenly Father himself. **The office of parent is always to be honored**, no matter how horrible the “parent”²⁰ may be. To some degree, because they are parents, you cannot separate the parent from the office. Thus, you must *always* honor your parents.²¹

But you must never honor their sin! Many children have ruined their lives as adults by failing to distinguish the office from the sin. They **make light of their parents’ sin**, treating it as inconsequential. Thus, they end up becoming their parents, doing the very same things as adults to their own children, even though they hated it when they were kids. Others **make excuses for their parents**, and never deal with the

¹⁹ Victor Matthews, Mark Chavalas, John Walton, *IVP Bible Background Commentary*, Ex 20:12.

²⁰ Here, you can extend the office of “parent” to whatever office they hold, be it pastor, politician, prince, or public school teacher, since each is in some sense a “parent.”

²¹ A more difficult question is what to do if the parent has usurped the office itself, by becoming parents in an unholy way (out-of-wedlock, homosexual adoption etc). But even in these cases it seems to me you can still honor the office.

things done to them. Others **hide their parents' sins**, especially if they are particularly gross and illegal. This often causes mental disorders and psychological traumas which vary from person to person. In the process, these children never really grow up.

I fear that we have an entire **culture of adolescence** teaching, governing, preaching to, and leading the youths of today, because as a culture we have not dealt with the sins of our parents! In fact, we have embraced them. Now, an entire culture is facing the disastrous repercussions of not honoring their parents or their offices, while also not taking their sin seriously, and it will mean the end of Western civilization. No culture that does not honor its parents can survive. God will not allow it, because the family is a divine institution, reflecting the very nature of God himself. That culture will self-disintegrate as part of God's decree.

Children, understand this: **God never makes light of parental sin**. God never honors it. And God never asks you do to such a thing. Many biblical heroes were terrible parents, from Jacob patriarch to Eli the priest to David the King. And the Bible never puts their parental sins in a good light, nor does it ever pass by them as if they were trivial or irrelevant,

even though it talks about the men as redeemed image-bearers worthy of dignity and emulation. You have to come to grips with your parent's sins and call sin "sin," while still honoring your parents as the people who brought you into the world and who were given the incredibly difficult task of raising a sinner *like you*. For **you are no easy person to raise yourself!**

There is another thing. You are never to substitute pleasing your parents (good or bad) if this means making them a substitute for your heavenly Father. You are not to idolize them (violating the First Commandment). You are not to follow them into sin or do something sinful that they may tell you to do. The catechism is wise here teaching that the scope of the commandment is "**the performance of duties which we owe**" (LC Q. 126). We do not owe honor to our parent's sin. Nor do we owe it obedience. If obeying them means forcing you to engage in sinful activities at their insistence then you are not honoring your heavenly Father, and you are breaking the Fifth Commandment.

And thus Chrysostom has some wise words. "**What if the parents command foolish things? ... The apostle has a remedy when he says that parents are to be obeyed "in the**

Lord.” They are to be obeyed in whatever way they are not offending against God.”²²

This, fathers, is why it is so important that you obey your part of this command. It is for the sake of helping your children obey theirs. Someone has said, “Let parents see to it that they deserve obedience: and more than this, that they make obedience easy.”²³ This is the Golden Rule, do to others as you would have them do to you. Think about how you can cause them great difficulties in their own obedience to God all because of your own sinful actions towards them.

That leads to the positive side of your job. Bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. When we hear the word “discipline” taken just as a word, I suspect many of us think about the consequences of sin. “I will discipline that child for what he did.” In other words, we think of it much more like we think of the word “punishment.” This is not Paul’s intent here.

Discipline is parallel with “instruction.” In this way, it is much more like the word “to train.” When you go to college, you learn a “discipline.” That is, you progress in your

²² Chrysostom, *Homily* 21.6.1-3.

²³ R. Anderson, *The Entail of the Covenant* (London, 1914), pp. 20–22; cited in F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1984), 166.

knowledge from one degree to the next, about all the things that entail that discipline or profession. To discipline the mind is to set it straight, down the narrow path. This primarily comes through instruction. Sometimes, negative reinforcement needs to occur (spanking, time-out, loss of privileges, or whatever). But the majority of the time it is helping the children learn to think rightly about their behavior in light of “the Lord.” Often times the instruction people need is not about the law, but about the gospel and grace.

Notice how “[the Lord](#)” appears in the instructions to both the children and the fathers. And make no mistake, it is the father’s role in all of this that is so important. He is responsible for ensuring that his children are brought up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. This isn’t obedience for obedience’ sake. It is so that the children might be brought up in the Lord and therefore the instruction has to be of the Lord. It is, in a word, Christian instruction, even as Paul is giving them here.

That doesn’t mean the father has to be the only one (or even primary one) doing the training. It does mean that he has the oversight and it is his responsibility, however that family chooses to work it out, to see that it is being done.

The husband and wife are one flesh and they rule their children together. However they choose to do this, one thing is clear. The husband has the ultimate responsibility for making sure that it is done. Both instruction and discipline.

Two more thoughts before we close. First, Chrysostom speaks the truth when he says, “If husband and wife are well disposed according to the commands he has laid down, there will be little difficulty in eliciting the cooperation of children.” Second, a quote from William Carey struck me this week. He wrote to his son: “Remember, a gentleman is the next best character to a Christian, and the Christian includes the gentleman.’ If a little of the effort used to teach the children not to be naughty were devoted to training them to be gentlemen and ladies, parents would come nearer to fulfilling the Apostolic precept!”²⁴ Naughty children are by nature disobedient children; it is impossible to obey these commands raising such as these.

In all of this, you cannot forget where we came from. I close as I began. The key is to remember that these are instructions for the new man (i.e. Christians) who are filled with the Spirit and have been given new motives and desires

²⁴ In Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1984), 166.

by the regenerating new birth of the Holy Spirit. Thanks to Christ's obedience to God, our obedience in these things is not what puts us in a right standing with the heavenly Father. Jesus did that for us and through faith we are credited that holy standing already.

Rather, our obedience to these commands is done out of the motivation that we are Christians, that it pleases our heavenly Father, that it is right, and even that the promises to have our lives go well and live long in the land will become true for us when we obey. That's God's promise to you. Make sure you spend your lives as families together (both immediate and extended) in such a way that your light is shining brightly to your children, to your parents, and to all those watching your actions as you take the name of Christ upon you and represent him to the world.

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- Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you. (Exod 20:12)
- Honor your father and your mother, as the LORD your God commanded you, that your days may be long, and that it may go well with you in the land that the LORD your God is giving you. (Deut 5:16)
- Hear, my son, your father's instruction, and forsake not your mother's teaching,
for they are a graceful garland for your head and pendants for your neck. Prov 1:8-9
- A wise son makes a glad father, but a foolish son is a sorrow to his mother. Prov. 10:1
- A fool despises his father's instruction, but whoever heeds reproof is prudent. 15:5
- A foolish son is a grief to his father and bitterness to her who bore him. Prov. 17:25
- He who does violence to his father and chases away his mother is a son who brings shame and reproach. Prov. 19:26
- If one curses his father or his mother, his lamp will be put out in utter darkness. Prov. 20:20
- Listen to your father who gave you life, and do not despise your mother when she is old. Buy truth, and do not sell it; buy wisdom, instruction, and understanding. The father of the righteous will greatly rejoice; he who fathers a wise son will be glad in him. Let

your father and mother be glad; let her who bore you rejoice. Prov. 23:22-25

- Whoever robs his father or his mother and says, "That is no transgression" is a companion to a man who destroys. Prov. 28:24
- The eye that mocks a father and scorns to obey a mother will be picked out by the ravens of the valley and eaten by the vultures. Prov. 30:17
- For God commanded, Honor your father and your mother,' and, 'whoever reviles father or mother must surely die.' But you say, if anyone tells his father or his mother, what you would have gained from me is given to God, he need not honor his father. So for the sake of your tradition you have made void the word of God. You hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy of you, when he said; this people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men. Matthew 15:4-9