

## THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF CHILDREN

Note these three interesting quotes...

**Quote #1:** "Children love luxury; they have bad manners, contempt for authority. Children are now tyrants, not the servants of their households. They contradict their parents, chatter before company, gobble up dainties at the table, tyrannize their teachers."

**Quote #2:** "I see no hope for the future of our people if they are dependent upon the frivolous youth of today, for certainly all youth are reckless beyond words and opinionated much beyond their years. When I was a boy, we were taught to be discreet and respectful of our elders, but the present youth are exceeding wise and impatient of restraint."

**Quote #3:** "Our earth is degenerate in these latter days; bribery and corruption are common; children no longer obey their parents; the end of the world is evidently approaching."

Guess when these quotes were originally stated! The first one is from Socrates, 2,400 years ago. The second is from Hesiod, 2,800 years ago. The third is from an Assyrian stone tablet, 4,800 years ago! Such makes one wonder who's telling the truth, because if every generation claims the same thing, then no generation was actually any better than the one before!

The point is that (as Solomon taught in Ecclesiastes), things don't really change much: in general, just as with men toward Christ and wives toward husbands, children have always been opposed to submitting to the authority of their parents (or anyone else for that matter).

One of the main problems in the history of mankind is the desire to do what's right in one's own eyes; and, although some attribute this idea to modern humanistic doctrines, yet it has existed since the dawn of man (cf., Judges 17:6). Thomas Wolfe's story called Look Homeward Angel tells of a college sophomore who felt fenced in and restricted; he wanted to be absolutely free: the restrictions laid on him by his parents seemed like imprisonment. "Don't Fence Me In" is more than a song title of a few decades ago, it has become a philosophy of life practiced by many people. There's a strong tendency to do away with rules and discipline. "It's my life, and I'll do as I please" is the commonly heard statement.

Well, with all this said, let's study the two primary biblical duties of children (obey and honor their parents) and the blessings attached to these duties (Ephesians 6:1-3).

**"Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right."**

**Consider the *Who*: "Children ... in the Lord."**

Although it's God's will that all children, despite their age, obey their parents, yet Paul was specifically referring to children who had become Christians. Why? "Children" were Specifically Addressed. Let's examine the context...

- In 5:22—6:9 Paul was dealing with various relationships wherein there was an obvious element of submission to authority involved, the thesis being to submit to one another (5:21).
- 5:22-24 & 33b deal in the submission wives are to have toward husbands in obedience.
- 5:25-31 & 33a deal in the submission husbands are to have toward wives in *agape* love.
- 5:32 deals in the submission the church is to have toward Christ in obedience.
- 6:4 deals in the submission parents are to have toward children in godly training.
- 6:5-8 deal in the submission employees are to have toward employers in obedience.
- 6:9 deals in the submission employers are to have toward employees in fair treatment.
- 6:1-3 deal in the submission children (as part of the church) are to have toward their parents in obedience and honor.

Notice that in every case, unless "children" are the exception, Paul addressed Christians (cf. 5:1-2, 8, 11-13, etc.). He addressed them specifically by role so that when this letter was read to the church (which was the custom, [Colossians 4:16]), those addressed would give special attention to what he was about to say.

- 5:21—"wives"
- 5:25—"husbands"
- 6:4—"fathers" ("parents" [Hebrews 11:23 where the specific reference is to Moses' mother, Exodus 2:2])
- 6:5—"servants"
- 6:9—"masters"
- 6:1—"children"

The phrase "in the Lord" pertains to "Christians." This Greek phrase (*en Kurios*) is used 46 times in the New Testament (once by John and 45 times by Paul), and in every case, unless again Ephesians 6:1 is the only exception, the phrase is used to denote one's relationship to the Lord. [The Greek preposition "en" denotes a relationship between the subject of the verb and the subject of the preposition: in this case, therefore, it would be, "children ... in the Lord."] In fact, in Ephesians itself, Paul used it in the following ways.

- 1:15—I heard of your faith in relationship to the Lord.
- 4:17—I say ... by the authority of my relationship to the Lord....
- 5:8—You are children of light because of your relationship to the Lord.

Consistently then, in 6:1 Paul was saying, "Children, obey your parents because of your relationship to the Lord," agreeing with the previous point about the context and whom was specifically addressed.

As a side note, the original word for "children" here includes anyone under the guardianship of another: Jesus wasn't Joseph's real son, but He obeyed as if He were (Luke 2:51), likewise Esther wasn't Mordecai's real daughter, but she obeyed as if she were (Esther 2:10 & 20).

### Consider the *What*: "Obey your parents."

**Obedience is exceptionally important!** Although one of the most difficult disciplines in life to master is the discipline of submission or obedience (a synonym of which is "meekness"), yet it's probably the most important to master; in fact, obedience is the first law of the cosmos. The law of obedience orders everything in the universe: the stars, the planets, the seasons, etc.; even man himself tries to control the world by the law of obedience: he wants obedience at work, at play, at home, and in the government (a word which inherently includes obedience, because in order to have a government, there must be "subjects").

The point is very simple: the law of obedience is the very nature of things, at the very core of the universe and of man's life and behavior on Earth. So because of man's God-given ability to choose, it's to be expected that God would demand children to obey their parents, thus being trained for a life of submission to all sorts of authorities, including God Himself.

**Obedience means "to listen and comply."** The original word for "obey" means "to listen attentively" (e.g., Acts 12:13 where Rhoda came to see who was at her door), then "by implication, to heed or conform to a command or authority."

In our struggle to master the submissive attitude, we should so discipline ourselves that submission becomes "second nature" to us so that we can be referred to as "children of obedience" (First Peter 1:14) as opposed to "children of disobedience" (Ephesians 5:6); in other words, by "second nature" I mean that it becomes as if we were born with a natural response to submit or that, if we were born with it, we retain that predisposition.

Since we're talking about how submission to authority is something we must purposely work on in our list of personal skills to acquire, notice the definition of the word "submit" in 5:22 where it speaks of wives submitting to husbands: the original word in 5:22 (*hupakouo*) is related to the original word in 6:1 (*hupotasso*). The original word for "submit" means "to yield, to subordinate, to subject oneself, to obey." It's a Greek military term meaning "to arrange [troops] in a military fashion under the command of a leader," and in non-military use it refers to "a voluntary attitude of giving in, cooperating, assuming responsibility, and carrying a burden."

God views obedience to one's parents to be so important that under the Old Law He demanded that defiant children be stoned to death (Deuteronomy 21:18-21), and Paul listed defiance among some of the most wicked sins (Romans 1:28-32 & First Timothy 3:1-5).

Interestingly, notice that Paul didn't command parents to demand that children obey them (although that wouldn't be inappropriate), but he took it upon himself as an inspired spokesman for God to demand it of them, which emphasizes that this command isn't an arbitrary one, but one that's direct from God Himself. So to disregard it is to disregard God, not just one's parents! In fact, after Paul wrote the Christians at Colossae saying, "Children, obey your parents in all things"(3:20a), he went on to write, "Whatever you do, do heartily, as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ" (3:23-24), which again emphasizes that we obey God by obeying our parents.

**Consider the *Why*: "This is right."** Obedience to parents is naturally the right thing to do for three reasons.

1. *God ordained it to be so.* Through an inspired man (cf. Ephesians 3:3-4) God said, "Children, obey your parents" (Ephesians 6:1), and "Children, obey your parents in all things" (Colossians 3:20a). Further, "the statutes [and] the ways of the Lord are right" (Psalm 19:8 & Hosea 14:9).
2. *Parents deserve it;* in other words, children owe it to their parents to obey them. Since parents play a major role in giving life to children, they deserve obedience from them; immediately after God created Adam and Eve, for example, He informed them as to what He expected of them (Genesis 2–3). Since parents supply all of a child's physical needs for years when he cannot supply them for himself, Paul said that children should "repay their parents" (First Timothy 5:4), and one way to do that is by obedience.
3. *Children should obey their parents for their own well-being.* Hebrews 12:9-11 speak of our "fathers who corrected us, and we paid them respect.... They indeed ... chastened us as seemed best to them.... No chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but grievous; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it." Ephesians 6 goes on to read, "that it may be well with you and you may live long," which leads to the next part of our study (verse 3).

**""Honor your father and mother,' which is the first commandment with promise: 'that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth.'"**

**Consider the *What*:** **"Honor your father and mother."** ("Honor" simply means "to show respect.")

**This 'display of respect' (or honoring our parents) includes how we respond to them while we live under their roof.**

- *We must honor our parents with our hearts.* We fail to honor them by ignoring them. (Remember, the original word for "obey" means "to listen.") We fail to honor them by neglecting or putting off obedience to their instructions.
- *We must honor our parents with our mouths.* We fail to honor them by grumbling or complaining. We fail to honor them by speaking disrespectfully to or about them. We fail to honor them by constantly requiring reasons for every instruction.
- *We must honor our parents with our actions.* We fail to honor them by giving them the evil eye: in fact, Solomon wrote, "The eye that mocks his father and scorns obedience to his mother, the ravens of the valley will pick it out, and the young eagles will eat it" (Proverbs 30:17); obviously this passage was an allusion to the dead bodies of children who were stoned for rebelliousness, but it emphasizes the importance of children not giving their parents evil looks. We fail to honor them by throwing temper tantrums, such as in slamming or throwing things. On the other hand, one of the best ways for children to honor parents is by doing things that need to be done without being told to do them! Parents appreciate that more than nearly anything else that a child can do! It's much like going the second mile in honoring of God (Matthew 5:40-42).

Incidentally, God equated servanthood to sonship when speaking of honor: "A son honors his father and a servant his master. If then I am the Father, where is My honor? And if I am a master, where is My reverence" (Malachi 1:6)? (Note the first quote in introduction again, emphasizing servanthood.)

**Honoring our parents includes how we live after we leave home.**

After all, just as we cast a reflection on Christ by what we do in wearing the name "Christian," so we cast a reflection on our parents' name by what we say and do: we fail to honor them when we commit crimes and engage in drugs, alcohol, and other vices. Proverbs 10:1, 17:21, 25, 19:13, 26, 28:7, and 29:15 all speak of how a child can bring shame (instead of honor) on his parents by the way he lives his life.

**Honoring our parents includes how we care for them throughout their lives.**

Paul wrote, "If any widow has children or grandchildren, let them first learn to show piety [notice] 'at home' and to repay their 'parents' [even though they may be 'grandchildren']; for this is good and acceptable before God" (First Timothy 5:4). Solomon wrote, "Do not despise your mother when she is old" (Proverbs 23:22). [Obviously Solomon didn't mean that we have the right to neglect our fathers; it's just that mothers usually live longer than fathers.]

Jesus is our example. When He knew that He wouldn't be around to take care of his mother, He saw to it that someone did take care of her: "When Jesus saw His mother and the disciple whom He loved standing by [His cross], He said to His mother, 'Woman, behold your son!' Then He said to the disciple, 'Behold your mother!' And from that hour that disciple took her to his own home" (John 19:26-27). Furthermore, He rebuked people who attempted to nullify God's will in this matter, regardless of their rationale (Matthew 15:4-6). Leviticus 19:3 quotes God as saying, "Everyone of you [young and old alike] shall revere His mother and father."

## Consider the *Why*: "That it may be well with you and that you may live long."

### How will honoring our parents result in things going well with us?

Solomon said, "My son, do not forget my law, but let your heart keep my commands, for ... peace they will add to you" (Proverbs 3:1-2), and this is a universal principle. David wrote, "Great peace have those who love Your law" (Psalm 119:165), and Isaiah wrote "'to the righteous that it shall be well with them'" (3:10a). Have you ever noticed how much more at ease you are when you aren't speeding? Why is that? Because you aren't having to keep a tense eye out for cops eager to give out expensive tickets. Paul wrote that "godliness [such as in honoring our parents] is profitable for all things, having a promise [like that of honoring our parents] of the life that now is and of that which is to come" (First Timothy 4:8). On the other hand, Solomon said, "The way of the unfaithful [wicked] is hard" (Proverbs 13:15b), and Isaiah similarly wrote, "'Woe to the wicked! It shall be ill with him'" (3:11a).

Something I thought was interesting is how Ephesians 5:28 relates to Ephesians 6:3—just as it's for his own well-being for a husband to submit himself to his wife through *agape* love, so it's for his own well-being for a child to submit himself to his parents through honor. The opposite of honoring our parents results in alienation, and alienation in family relationships affects the total person.

- It affects both physical and psychological health: A person isn't at ease with himself when living amidst alienation.
- It affects sociological health: A person who cannot obey his parents has a difficult time relating well to any authority in society.
- It affects spiritual health: Our relationship to God cannot be divorced from our relationship to our parents, for it's His will that children obey them.

### How will honoring our parents result in longer lives for us?

The obvious answer is that by listening to what our parents have told us concerning life from their knowledge and experience, we will thereby escape many undesirable pitfalls, pitfalls that could very well be fatal. Many a youth has died "prematurely" due to a failure to heed the warnings of his parents and other older, experienced people.

So what about this "first commandment with promise" clause? It simply means that this is the first commandment that can (and does) apply to man from God—the first thing anyone is able to do or must learn to do in life is obey his parents, and that command, as many others, has a promise attached to it.

## Conclusion

Obedience and disobedience have always had a very important principle connected with them: obedience results in blessing, while disobedience results in cursing; in fact, by virtue of giving His people The Law, God said, "'I set before you today a blessing and a curse: the blessing, if you obey the commandments...; and the curse, if you do not obey the commandments...'" (Deuteronomy 11:26-28).

The curse of death came upon Ahab because he disobeyed (First Kings 20:36), but on the other hand, blessing came upon Abraham because he obeyed (Genesis 22:18). So remember, "'Cursed is the one who treats his father or his mother with contempt'" (Deuteronomy 27:16)!

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