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THE SPIRIT-FILLED HOME (Part 1)

Ephesians 6:1-3

By

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Ephesians Lesson 51

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The Duke of Windsor once quipped, "The thing that impresses me most about America is the way parents obey their children" (cited by Warren Wiersbe, *Listening to the Giants* [Moody Press], p. 253).

This remark is illustrated by a story that Pastor Ligon Duncan tells (http://www.fpcjackson.org/resources/sermons/Ephesians/27b%20ephesians_6.1_3.htm). A mother of a rather precocious 14-year-old daughter called to tell him that her daughter was giving her fits about coming to church. The father was not involved, but the mother was very concerned because the girl was going to a church that the mother did not approve of. The mom said to Pastor Duncan, "What do I do?"

He said, "Now, let me just ask a question. Let's see. She's 14. She's not driving. Right? Now how is she getting to this church?"

"Well, I mean, I'm taking her."

"OK. Well, here's an idea about how you could get her to not do that and come to church: DON'T TAKE HER THERE!"

And the mom's response was, "I can do that?"

The biblical answer is, "Yes, *of course* you can do that!" You're the parent and the biblical order, especially in Christian homes, is not, "Parents, obey your children," but rather, "Children, obey your parents." It would seem as if we've been influenced by worldly psychology that tells us, "Parents, cater to your child's every whim and don't do anything to stifle his self-esteem or warp his fragile personality!" We're afraid to say lovingly, "I'm your parent. God holds me accountable for your spiritual well being. The answer is, 'No!'"

It also seems that teenage rebellion is viewed as the normal experience, even in Christian homes. I've encountered numerous situations where teens from Christian homes have rebelled, sometimes getting involved in serious sin, and the parents shrug their

shoulders helplessly and say, “Well, they all have to go through a period of rebellion!” But that’s a worldly idea, not a godly one.

Dr. Howard Hendricks tells of an evening when he and his wife received a phone call from their daughter, who was a freshman at a Christian college. In a tearful, almost frantic voice, she said, “Mom! Dad! I love you! I love you!”

They replied, “We love you, too, honey. What’s wrong?”

As it turned out, one of her professors had been lecturing on teenage rebellion against parental authority and he made it sound as if a child wasn’t normal if he didn’t rebel at some point. The Hendricks’ daughter had not rebelled and didn’t want to rebel, so she thought that something must be wrong!

In Ephesians 6:1-4, the apostle Paul paints a portrait of a Spirit-filled home. As we’ve seen, Ephesians 5:22-6:9 is built on Ephesians 5:18, showing the results of being filled with the Spirit. The final result of being filled with the Spirit is that we will be subject to one another in the fear of Christ (5:21). Then Paul shows how this works out in family life: wives will be subject to their husbands as to the Lord (5:22-24). Husbands will love their wives as Christ loved the church and gave Himself for her (5:25-33). Now, he applies it to children and parents (6:1-4). He will go on to apply it to slaves and masters (6:5-9). In 6:1-4, the main idea is:

The Spirit-filled home is one where children obey and honor their parents and fathers nurture their children in the Lord.

In this message, we are going to limit ourselves to 6:1-3, exploring the idea that . . .

The Spirit-filled home is one where children obey and honor their parents.

After commanding children to obey their parents, Paul cites the fifth of the Ten Commandments, adding a parenthetical comment, “which is the first commandment with a promise.” As you know, the Ten Commandments may be divided into two sections, each reinforcing the two greatest commandments. The first four commands spell out what it means to love the Lord our God: Not to have any other gods before Him; not to make or serve any idols; not to take His name in vain; and, to keep the Sabbath day holy.

The last six commands spell out how to love our neighbor as we do, in fact, love ourselves: To honor our parents; not to murder, commit adultery, steal, bear false witness, or covet anything belonging to our neighbor.

Standing at the head of this second section, the commandment to honor our parents is foundational to keeping all the commandments that follow. If we truly honor our parents, we will not disgrace their name by becoming a murderer, or committing adultery, or stealing, or lying, or by the greed and discontent underlying covetousness. So honoring our parents is foundational to all other relationships and duties in life.

The keeping of the fifth commandment also works back toward the first four. "Honor," the beginning word of the command, is often used of the honor we owe to God (Frank Thielman, *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, ed. by G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson [Baker Academic], p. 829; see 1 Sam. 2:30). If we are rebellious and disrespectful toward our parents who gave us life and sustenance, we also probably will be rebellious and disrespectful toward God, our creator and sustainer. Disrespect toward parents and God will also carry over into disrespect for all authority, leading to a breakdown of law and order and the disintegration of the very basis for civilized society. Thus the idea of honoring our parents is not some outmoded, quaint idea to be set aside without consequence. It is vital to the survival of civilization.

To whom is Paul speaking when he says, "Children"? The Greek word can refer to children of varying ages. Obviously Paul is speaking to children old enough to understand the command, because he addresses them directly. They could have ranged from the very young to perhaps even young adults still living at home. As long as a child is single and dependent on his (or her) parents for financial support, he is obligated to obey them, unless they command him to do something that would require disobeying God. Even as adults, we should respect our parents' counsel and go against it only after careful consideration and prayer. The command to honor our parents is lifelong. So our text applies to all of us whose parents are still alive. If you have children still at home, it is your responsibility to help them understand and obey this important commandment.

1. Children must be filled with the Spirit in order to obey and honor their parents.

To be filled with the Spirit means to be controlled by the Spirit, which happens as we walk daily in submission to the Spirit. This assumes that a child has experienced genuine conversion, so that the Holy Spirit dwells in him. Every parent should pray for and seek to lead his children to genuine saving faith in Christ.

Many Christian parents mistakenly assume that when a child makes a decision to “ask Jesus into his heart,” that child is eternally saved. He may be, but he may not be. It is fairly easy to talk children into asking Jesus into their hearts. But genuine conversion is when God miraculously brings a person from spiritual death to eternal life. The Holy Spirit convinces the person about his sin (John 16:8-11). He sees his true guilt before a holy God. He also understands that Jesus, the sinless Son of God, died on the cross to satisfy the wrath of God and that every sinner who believes in Jesus receives a full pardon and eternal life as God’s gift. Seeing his own desperate need and seeing God’s gracious gift, he trusts in Jesus Christ as his only hope of heaven. At that point, he receives the indwelling Holy Spirit, who begins the process of sanctification.

I’m not suggesting that a child who is truly born again will always demonstrate the fruits of the Spirit, that he will always cheerfully obey his parents, and that he will always get along with his brothers and sisters! After all, he is immature, both developmentally and spiritually. But, there will be a discernible change in the child’s heart. He will feel bad about his sin. He will want to please Jesus. He will want to learn more about God’s Word and how to grow in Christ. Christian parents should explain to their children that have professed faith in Christ how to be filled with the Spirit, so that they grow in obedience to their parents.

2. Spirit-filled children must obey and honor their parents.

- A. Spirit-filled children must cheerfully obey their parents as an act of obedience to the Lord.

Paul writes (6:1), “Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.” By “in the Lord,” Paul does not mean, “Obey your parents only if they are in the Lord” (that is, Christians). Nor does he mean, “Obey your parents only when you think their decisions

are in line with what you think the Lord wants." He means, *it is your duty in the Lord to obey your parents*. In other words, to please the Lord, you must obey your parents. While grudging obedience is probably better than disobedience, the Lord is pleased by cheerful obedience from the heart (Rom. 6:17). The attitude of a Spirit-filled child should be, "Out of thankfulness to God, who sent His Son to rescue me from judgment, I gladly submit to the authority that He has put over me for my good." In other words, a child's obedience to his parents should be the result of his desire to please the Lord.

The only exception to obeying your parents would be if they commanded you to do something that is a clear violation of Scripture. But even then, you must demonstrate to your parents a submissive spirit that seeks to please them. You should respectfully appeal to them and explain your reasons why you cannot obey them in this instance. You should show that it grieves you to have to disobey them. And, you should submit to any punishment they impose without complaint or rebellion, but with a heart of joy in the Lord, that you are counted worthy to suffer for His name. But such times when you must disobey your parents out of obedience to God will probably be rare.

When Paul says to obey your parents "for this is right," he is pointing out the obvious order that God has ordained. Parents are always older and more experienced than children are. Mark Twain is reputed to have said that when he was 17, he was amazed at how stupid his father was. But by the time he turned 21, he was surprised at how much the old man had learned in four years!

There comes a point, of course, where you move out from under your parents' authority and are no longer obligated to obey them. Wise parents let the reins go gradually, so that a young person assumes more and more responsibility for his own life, until he is on his own. When is that? It's not at some arbitrary age, such as 18 or even 21. But a general rule of thumb is, if you are chafing under your parents' authority, you are probably not ready to be out from under it. Your obedience to your parents shows that you are living under the lordship of Christ and are mature enough to live apart from your parents' direct authority.

Paul goes on (6:2) without any introduction, such as, "just as Moses wrote," to cite the fifth commandment. This shows that...

B. Spirit-filled children must honor their parents because God commands it.

Honor goes beyond obedience in that it involves an attitude:

(1) To honor your parents involves an attitude of respect and esteem.

The word "honor" (in Exod. 20:12) is a Hebrew word with a root meaning of "weight" or "heaviness." It is the same word often translated "glory" in reference to the Lord. To glorify the Lord is to attach the utmost weight or significance to who He is and what He does. It means to assign Him the highest place because He is worthy of it. The opposite of glorifying God is to treat Him lightly, to shrug off Him and His commands as insignificant. Coupled with the idea of weight is that of value, which is the root meaning of the Greek word for honor. Gold and silver are heavy, valuable metals. We say of a valuable man, "He's worth his weight in gold."

To honor our parents is to have an attitude of respect for them that stems from the fact that we greatly value them and the contribution they've made to our lives. To honor our parents is to assign a high place of value to them. This attitude of respect and esteem will result in loving, courteous behavior towards them.

The opposite of honoring your parents would be to show contempt for them, to despise them in your heart, or to be rude and ungrateful towards them. It's your heart attitude that matters. If you're chafing against obeying and honoring your parents, you have a deeper heart problem of rebellion towards God. If you're grateful to God for His salvation, then you can honor those whom He has placed over you for your blessing and protection.

But maybe you're thinking, "My parents don't deserve any honor! Why should I honor them?"

(2) You should honor your parents because God commands it.

God is the sovereign of the universe. His holy law is the final court of appeal! You can't go over His head! He didn't give us the Ten Suggestions for a Happy Life, or the Ten Habits of Highly Successful People, although keeping His commandments will result in a happy life. To dishonor your parents is to disobey God, who

ordained these commandments for our good (Deut. 6:24). We should keep them because we love and fear God.

- (3) You should honor your parents because God promises to bless those who do.

Even if there were no blessings promised, we should obey God because of who He is. But here He graciously attaches a promised blessing. But, Paul's comment, that this is "the first commandment with a promise," is a bit puzzling. Scholars point out that the second commandment, not to make any idols, promises that God will show lovingkindness to those who love Him and keep His commands (Exod. 20:4-6). But, as Calvin explains (*The Institutes of the Christian Religion* [Westminster Press], ed. by John McNeill, 2:8:37), that promise was not confined to that particular command, but extends to the whole law. So the promise attached to the fifth commandment was the first specific promise among the ten and the first of many promised blessings for obedience.

As given to Israel, the promise was that they would dwell in the land of Palestine for a long time (Exod. 20:12) and that things would go well with them there (Deut. 5:16). In Ephesians 6:3, Paul generalizes the promise so as to include Gentile readers, saying, "so that it may be well with you, and that you may live long on the earth." What does this mean for us?

First, there is a principle that disobedience to parents will result in the breakdown of the foundation of a society. Disobedience to parents is one mark of those whom God has given over to their depraved rebellion (Rom. 1:30). It is a mark of the godlessness of the last days (2 Tim. 3:2). When children disobey and dishonor their parents, they do not respect any authority, including the law of the land. So life does not go well with a disrespectful child, because he may end up in prison or dead.

Second, there is a general principle that obedient children will live long on the earth, whereas disobedient children do not. It is not an ironclad rule. We all know of godly children who have died young, and of sinful rebels who live to a ripe old age. But, those who rebel against parents and get into drinking, drugs, and sexual immorality are more likely to die young than those who avoid such destructive sins. At whatever age we die, whether young or old, we

are truly blessed if we have obeyed God, because we have His promise of eternal life, free from all the trials of this life.

But, young people, due to the flesh, often want to be free from parental authority. So they rebel and follow the fashions and sinful activities of the unbelieving youths of our land. But,

3. If you do not obey and honor your parents, you will obey and honor others that do not care about your well being.

As Bob Dylan sings, "You gotta serve somebody." If you rebel against the authority of your parents and follow the so-called "wisdom" of the world, you have put yourself under Satan's authority! Those are really the only choices: you submit to God, who has ordained your parents as the authority over you. Or you submit to the devil, the god of this evil world, who has an army of evil people promoting a lifestyle of rebellion against God and His Word. Satan is not a friendly master!

Of course, the devil doesn't appear as a frightening beast with horns and a pitchfork. He disguises himself as an angel of light, promising you real pleasure and fulfillment. He appeals to your desire for immediate gratification through sex and drugs. He promises you freedom from stifling rules. He appeals to the pride of your intellect, telling you to think for yourself and not accept the outmoded standards of the Bible. But when you follow him, you become a slave of corruption. When you follow God by obeying and honoring your parents, it will be well with you in the long run, although it may be difficult for the present time.

But I must deal briefly with one further question. Some are thinking, "If I had godly, loving parents, I think I could obey and honor them. But my parents are evil people. My father molested me. My mother yells at me and constantly puts me down. How can I possibly honor such parents?" First, let me emphasize, you are not dishonoring God by reporting an abusive parent to the proper authorities. But, assuming that they have not violated the law:

4. If you have difficult, unbelieving parents, you must ask God for wisdom in how best to obey and honor them.

I am not suggesting that this will be easy! But note that God ordained this commandment to honor our parents knowing that

there would be sinful parents. He didn't put in an exception clause! Here are three steps you must take if you have difficult parents:

First, thank God for giving these parents to you, forgive them from your heart, and remove all bitterness towards them. As we saw (Eph. 5:20), we are to give thanks to the Father for all things. If He has sovereignly put you in an unloving family, maybe it is so that the love of Christ will shine from you in that dark situation. But for that to happen, you must submit thankfully to God and you must forgive your parents in your heart and root out all bitterness.

Second, demonstrate a godly attitude toward your parents. Often when young people from a troubled home get saved, they go back home and try to witness to their parents. But they communicate ingratitude and pride. They imply (if not openly state) that the parents have not reared them well. "But now, I've found the truth and I've come to set you straight." If the parents do not drop to their knees in repentance, the zealous young believer often responds with defiance or disrespect. But the main way you should bear witness to ungodly parents is by a godly attitude of honor and submission, even when your parents do things to mistreat or provoke you.

Third, practice deeds of love and kindness toward your parents, even when they mistreat you, with a view to leading them to Christ. Even if your parents are selfish pagans who treat you like dirt, you are God's main link to them with the gospel. Even if they never respond or respond with meanness, you can be kind and caring toward them. If you live in another city, you can write to them, send them cards or gifts on special occasions, or call and let them know that you're thinking of them and that you care. You certainly should pray often for their salvation, since that is their primary need.

Conclusion

Remember, this is all about reflecting God's glory in Jesus Christ to a lost world. By obeying and honoring your parents, you are following the example of Jesus Himself, who although He was God in human flesh, "continued in subjection" to His earthly parents (Luke 2:51). Go thou and do likewise!

(Parts of this message were taken from my sermon, "Keeping the Fifth," preached on May 12, 1996. On the church web at: <http://www.fcfonline.org/content/1/sermons/051296M.pdf>)

Application Questions

1. How can Christian parents know whether a child's profession of faith is genuine or not? What evidence should they look for?
2. Does a child dishonor abusive parents by reporting them to proper authorities? Why/why not?
3. Does honoring our parents imply never confronting their sins? How can we know what to accept and what to confront?
4. Why is it harmful and erroneous to assume that teenagers will rebel against their parents? What can parents do to minimize the potential for teen rebellion?

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