

THE OBEDIENT CHILD

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The first relationship a person ever experiences is the child/parent relationship, and as such it forms the foundation for all other relationships we will ever experience, including our relationship with God. In fact, the only requirement God places on children is that they obey their parents *in all things* (Col 3:20). This command is very straight forward and unambiguous. There is no room for splitting theological hairs, it does not involve any esoteric psychology, it does not require a multi-step program, it does not involve negotiating terms with a child, and it does not take a PhD to provide parental advice. However, being a biblical parent has become increasingly difficult in our child-centered culture that is openly antagonistic to biblical discipline, undermines parental authority, has replaced discipline with drug therapy, and accepts rebellion from children as just a part of growing up. We've even identified stages of rebellion. There is the *terrible twos* when a child starts asserting its independence culminating with the rebellious teenage years. But the Bible recognizes none of these so called stages. Rebellion is rebellion, at any age, and must be corrected in a biblical manner. The Bible gives one simple command: *Children, be obedient to your parents in all things, for this is well-pleasing to the Lord* (Col 3:20). Unfortunately much of the contemporary church has adopted the child-centered philosophy of the culture and has failed to equip Christian parents with a biblical view of parenting and to reinforce God's expectation of children. In many ways the structure of the contemporary church has made it easy for parents to abdicate their biblical responsibility to the church.

The seriousness with which God takes His command to children is highlighted in texts like Leviticus 20:9; Exodus 21:15; Deuteronomy 21:18-21. The penalty for chronic disobedience to parental authority was punishable by death. Of course this was a worst case scenario, but it serves to illustrate how seriously God views His command for children to obey their parents. God never takes disobedience or deception lightly. He never looks on a disobedient child and says, *Oh look, how cute.* We also need to notice that God's command is unconditional, *in all things*, no exception.

Now, there are some obvious limitations, as Acts 5:29 makes clear. Children are not obligated to obey parents when the parent is demanding the child engage in behavior that is contrary to the will and word of God. But even in these situations, the disobedience is to be done in a respectful, loving, but firm manner. Daniel is a wonderful illustration of this type of disobedience (Dan 1:8-16). Rather than an outright refusal to obey the king's edict, Daniel proposed a compromise solution. Sometimes respectful disobedience may even lead to a separation between a Christian child and an unbelieving parent (Matthew 10:34-37).

When Paul writes in Colossians 3:20 and Ephesians 6:1-3, he is addressing this command to Christian parents, so he does not have to qualify the command to be obedient in all things. He assumes the parents are parenting in accordance with Christian principles. When Paul commands in Ephesians 6:1, *Children, obey your parents in the Lord*, to whom is he referring, and what does he mean? Paul is directly addressing the children of the families in the Ephesian church, so they must have been old enough to understand when the letter was read to the congregation. These are not

infants. The word Paul uses for *children* is *teknon* which indicates a closer relationship to the parent than the word *son*. It implies a relationship where the child is still dependent on the parent. By using the phrase *to the Lord*, Paul is indicating the spirit in which the child's obedience is to be carried out. Children are to obey their parents with the same attitude and spirit with which they would obey Jesus Christ. Another important point to note is that the word *obey* is in the present tense and active voice. This means that their obedience is to be a habitual, characteristic behavior and attitude that the child themselves are responsible to actively pursue. Although Paul does not state this in the text, the best model children can have are parents who are obedient to the Lord. God demands obedience from all His children, adults and minors.

Ultimately the question of obedience boils down to a question of love. Love and obedience are inseparable as Jesus makes plain in John 14:15, 21, 23 (cf. 1 John 5:3). Parents, if you love Jesus Christ you will obey Him. This includes training your children from infancy to be obedient. The second chapter of 1 Samuel highlights the tragic consequences for both parent and child when parents fail to discipline their children. God identified the real reason for Eli's failure to discipline his two sons; he honored his sons above God (1 Sm 2:29). In other words, his sons had become an idol. Children, if you love your parents you will obey them, not just out of love for them, but if you profess to be a Christian you will obey out of love for Christ. The only reason not to obey is because you love something or someone more than you love Jesus Christ, which means you have set up an idol in your heart. It is just that simple. Perhaps it is friends, a relationship, certain privileges, etc. Whatever is motivating you to disobey or deceive your parents has become an idol which needs to be removed or it will be a barrier between you and your relationship with Jesus Christ.

Paul follows his command to children by quoting the fifth commandment, *Honor your father and mother* (Eph 6:2). Paul is simply echoing the teaching of the Old Testament . to obey your parents is to honor them, and to disobey your parents is to dishonor them. Just like love and obedience are connected by an inseparable bond, so are honor and obedience. The word *honor* is *timao*, and means *to value highly, place a high value on.* To disobey parents, which is ultimately disobeying God, demonstrates that you do not value your parents or God, or that you value something else more. Grumbling obedience is still disobedience. Partial obedience is still disobedience (1 Samuel 15:22, 23). The action without the attitude is still disobedience, and disobedience is at its core a lack of love and honor for God. Learning to honor and obey parents with the right attitude is the first step in learning to honor and obey God. If a child cannot honor and obey their parents whom they have seen, then they cannot possibly honor and obey God whom they have not seen (cf. 1 John 4:20).

Paul provides the motivation for obedience in verse three of Ephesians chapter six, *that it may go well with you, and that you may live long on the earth.* God gives children a two part promise for honoring and obeying parents: 1) a better quality of life, *that it may go well with you*, and 2) a greater quantity of life, *that you may live long on the earth*. The point is, obedience has positive consequences, but the converse is equally true, disobedience has negative consequences. The pathetic history of the nation of Israel is the account of their reaping the promised consequences of covenant disobedience (Lev. 26; Deut. 28). Disobedience is sin, and the wages of sin is death and separation. Even when God graciously brings a sinner to a saving knowledge of

Himself and cleanses him/her of their sin, they escape the eternal consequences of their sin, but not the temporal consequences. If someone contracts AIDS as the result of a promiscuous lifestyle, the AIDS does not disappear when they become a Christian. If someone is financially irresponsible and accrues a large amount of debt, the debt doesn't go away when they become a Christian. We can continue to reap the temporal consequences of sin for a lifetime, even when God graciously saves us from the eternal consequences of sin. And the consequences of sin do not confine themselves to our own individual life. Sin has a ripple effect. Just like a pebble in a pond which sends out ripples in every direction, our sin will impact the lives of everyone around us. Adam and Eve's disobedience resulted in spiritual and physical death for the entire human race. David's sin with Bathsheba cost Uriah his life, the life of the baby born as a result of his sin, and his family disintegrated. The sin of Achan resulted in the death of his entire family (Josh. 7:19-26). The effects of sin reach far beyond the person committing the sin. This is why God takes the responsibility of children to obey so seriously. If you can't obey your parents, even when you may vehemently disagree with them, then you will never learn to obey God.

To disobey parents is ultimately to disobey God. God is a God of means. He rules over His people by means of mediators. God has established human government and rules through human government, even wicked rulers (Acts 2:22, 23; Ezra 1:1, 2; Habakkuk 1:5, 6), and to disobey human government is to disobey God (Romans 13:1, 2). Parents are God's representatives in the family and to disobey parents is to disobey God.

The main reason children gravitate towards rebellion and disobedience is the same reason we as parents gravitate toward what is evil. The problem is internal, not external. We have a fallen flesh. No one has to be taught to disobey; it is part of our nature as fallen creatures. Depravity is universal (Rom. 3:10-18; Eccl. 7:20). No one naturally likes to obey. Obedience is learned. This is why Paul tells Timothy to "discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness" (1 Tim. 4:7). Obedience requires denial of self. Disobedience says, "I want what I want," but obedience says, "I want what God wants." Disobedience says, "My will be done," obedience says, "Thy will be done." What is God's will for children? Obey your parents in the Lord. Obedience is the way of the cross (Phil 2:8). When we are obedient we emulate Christ, but when we are disobedient and rebellious we are emulating Satan.

Christian parents aren't perfect. We make mistakes in judgment, we all too often act on emotion instead of solid biblical principles, and we may even be over protective. But a parent's imperfections, lack of wisdom, and sins do not give a child license to disobey their parent. God gave you the parents you have, warts and all, to guard, protect, nurture, provide godly counsel, and bring you up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. He expects you to honor and obey, "for this is well-pleasing to the Lord" (Col 3:20).