

The Divine Pattern for the Family, Part 2 *The Role of the Child*

Introduction

James Dobson tells a story about a frog who was out into a shallow pan of cool water. Slowly the water was heated. Almost imperceptibly, the temperature began to rise, gradually moving to the boiling point. The frog continued, however, to sit in the pan, totally unaware of the rising temperature---even when the steam began to curl. Eventually he was boiled to death, although at any point he could have jumped out and avoided that fate. (*Dare to Discipline* [Wheaton, Ill.; Tyndale, 1970], p. 15).

I think that is an apt illustration of what has happened, in many cases, to the American family. We have been sitting in what appeared, at first, to be rather cool water: a God-fearing country where the environment was in many ways conducive to spirituality. However, while we have been content to sit in the midst of the system, it has gradually been heating up and drifting afar from where we first felt secure. The family is being destroyed, and Christian families should have jumped out of the pan a long time ago. When you considered that only 7 percent of Americans currently live in what is known as a traditional family, where the father is the breadwinner and the mother is the homemaker, you know we've been complacent far too long. When you stop to realize the divorce rate among Christians is almost as high as it is among non-Christians, you know we've been apathetic. It's high time that we escape the evil world system that is engulfing us and begin to establish ourselves on the basis of God's revelation. We can no longer count on the luxury of living in a Christian country that is conducive to our spiritual well-being. That is just not the case. Satan has hit the family with an all-out attack, and we need to re-awaken ourselves to the biblical priorities if we're going to get out of the pan before it's too late.

The principles we're going to study, which are related to the inter-personal relationships in the family, are possible only when there is an acknowledgment of the lordship of Jesus Christ. Apart from Him, these principles become only nice ideas that are impossible to fulfill. But when an individual gives his life to Christ, when Christ moves in to a family, and when that family is filled with the Spirit of God, it then becomes possible---even reasonable and normal--to function according to those principles.

As we look at a Christ-centered, Spirit-filled family, what are the factors involved? First of all, the submission of the child (vv. 1-3) and then the submission of the parents, who are submitting to a God-ordained standard (v. 4).

Lesson

I. THE SUBMISSION OF THE CHILD (v. 1)

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

1. "Children"

The word for "children" (Gk., *τεκνα*) is not used to speak of an infant. It is a broad term used to speak of all offspring (i.e., anyone born from another person). We are all

children in the strictest sense of this word. But the idea here is that anyone who is still under the root of, under the domination of, under the control of, or under the responsibility of his parents, which begins when you are in the home, will in a sense extend through the rest of your life. You will still have a deep sensitivity to respond to what your parents say, no matter how old you are, if you've learned that from your earliest years. But as long as you're under their care, and they accept the responsibility to care for you, you must obey them.

2. "Obey your parents"

a. The definition

The word **obey** is a simple yet graphic term in the Greek. It is the compound word *ὑπακούω*, which is from *ακούω*, meaning "to hear," and the preposition *ὑπὸ*, meaning "under." So the Holy Spirit is saying, "Children, get under the authority of your parents and listen." The society we live in is saying that we need to liberate children from parental authority. They are saying that a child must have the right to his own destiny, his own religion, his own thoughts, and his own perspective on economics and morality. But the Bible says the contrary. Children have no business being liberated; they are to get under the authority of their parents and listen to what parents say. That is God's basic design and always has been.

• ***The Key to Right Relationships***

God first introduces His law in Exodus 20. In examining the Ten Commandments, we find they are divided into two parts: the first four commandments deal with man's relationship to God, and the last six deal with man's relationship to man. In moving from the commands regarding human relationships, verse 12 says, "*Honor thy father and thy mother, that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee.*" Notice that this is the only statement in the Ten Commandments on the way the family is to function. Why? Because it is sufficient to produce right relationships within the home and society. In fact, it is the key to all relationships, because a person who grows up with a sense of obedience, discipline, reverence, awe, and respect for his parents will be someone who can make any other kind of human relationship work.

God was serious about a child's respect and obedience to his parents. Exodus 21:15 says, "*He that smiteth his father, or his mother, shall be surely put to death.*" Verse 17 says, "*He that curseth his father or mother, shall surely be put to death.*" All human relationships are based on what is learned in childhood. If you learn reverence, awe, respect, and obedience as a child, then the basis for having proper relationships will be present throughout your life. Undisciplined children who did not know how to respect authority or to honor their parents would have created a chaotic world, so God said to the Jews that the life of a rebellious child was to be taken away.

b. The design

God's basic design for children is that they be obedient to their parents. If you're still living at home, whether you're in elementary school, junior high school, high school, or college, you have the responsibility to obey your parents. But on the other hand, it is the parents' responsibility to teach their children to be obedient. Why? Frankly, because children are not that way normally. You don't have to teach children to disobey; they know how to do that. The first thing you have to teach them is how to obey. Children come into the world disobedient because they have inherited a sin nature, and the only way they'll learn obedience is to be taught. So it's the design of God for children to be obedient to their parents' instruction, but parents must also give instruction that their children can obey. That is well illustrated throughout the book of Proverbs.

- 1) *"My son, hear the instruction of thy father, and forsake not the law of thy mother" (1:8).* That is the keynote of the book. Children are to listen to what their parents say, not because they are infallible, but because it is necessary that children learn authority and submission, and that they learn to be disciplined.
- 2) *"My son, if thou wilt receive my words, and hide my commandments with thee" (2:1).*
- 3) *"My son, forget not my law; but let thine heart keep my commandments" (3:1).*
- 4) *"Hear, ye children, the instruction of a father, and attend to know understanding. For I give you good doctrine, forsake ye not my law. For I was my father's son, tender and only beloved in the sight of my mother. He taught me also, and said unto me, Let thine heart retain my words: keep my commandments, and live" (4:1-4).* That is how God wants truth to be passed on: from one generation to the next. A child must be commanded, and he must be made to listen and obey. Since his natural proclivity is toward sinfulness, if you spare him teaching and discipline, you will spoil him.
- 5) *"Hear, O my son, and receive my sayings; and the years of thy life shall be many" (4:10).*
- 6) *"My son, attend unto my wisdom, and bow thine ear to my understanding: That thou mayest regard discretion, and that thy lips may keep knowledge" (5:1-2).*
- 7) *"My son, keep my words, and lay up my commandments with thee. Keep my commandments, and live; and my law as the apple of thine eye" (7:1-2).* As carefully as you protect the pupil of your eye, so too the law of God, given by your parents, is to be protected.
- 8) *"Hearken unto me now therefore, O ye children, and attend to the words of my mouth" (7:24).*

- 9) *“Now therefore hearken unto me, O ye children: for blessed are they that keep my ways. Hear instruction, and be wise, and refuse it not” (8:32-33).*
- 10) *“Whoso loveth instruction loveth knowledge: but he that hateth reproof is brutish” (12:1).* Why? Because he’ll grow up undisciplined.
- 11) *“A wise son heareth his father’s instruction: but a scorner heareth not rebuke” (13:1).*
- 12) *“A fool despiseth his father’s instruction: but he that regardeth reproof is prudent” (15:5).*

The point is obvious. The Bible says children are to obey.

- ***Why Must Children be Closely Guided and Made to Obey?***

Children have a basic problem: they are children, and as such are lacking in four areas. Those areas are delineated in Luke 2:52. In this verse we see Jesus Christ, from the perspective of His humanity, as a twelve year old child. He was all that a child could be---apart from being sinful. According to Luke 2:52, from the time He was twelve until His ministry, He *“increase in wisdom and stature, and favor with God and man.”* Thus, the four areas in which children lack are: wisdom (mental needs), stature (physical needs), favor with man (social needs), and favor with God (spiritual needs).

1. Children lack wisdom

Children lack discretion, instruction, and knowledge. When a baby comes into the world, his brain is void of information. So whatever he’s going to know must be first taught to him. Also, children have no discretion; they don’t know what’s right and what’s wrong. They don’t know the right foods to eat, and they don’t know not to put certain things in their mouths. Those things must be taught.

2. Children lack stature

Children are weak physically; they are unable to support or sustain themselves. Parents have the responsibility of feeding them, nourishing them, and making sure they get the proper rest. Children can’t fend for themselves; they can’t make it in the world alone, so the parents must protect them.

3. Children lack favor with men

Children are not socially acclimated. The dominant trait of a newborn child is selfishness. He can’t conceive of anything but “I want it now” or “It’s mine.” It’s difficult to teach children to share. They don’t know any of the social graces like humility or unselfishness; they must be taught.

4. Children lack favor with God

In the spiritual area, children don’t naturally grow to love God. When they are little, they will comprehend God, but without proper instruction they will drift

away. Proverbs 22:6 says, *“Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it.”* That is the responsibility of the parents.

c. The disaster

Children face problems in the mental, physical, social, and spiritual areas of life. Parents, you must provide an environment in which your children can grow in those areas of inadequacy. If don't provide for spiritual, social, physical, and mental growth in all the dimensions of life, you're going to come up with *“a generation that curseth their father, and doth not bless their mother. There is a generation that are pure in their own eyes, and yet is not washed from their filthiness”* (Proverbs 30:11-12). In other words, you're going to have an evil, unruly generation. And, according to verse 17, when you get that kind of a generation, *“the eye that mocketh at his father, and despiseth to obey his mother, the ravens of the valley shall pick it out, and the young eagles shall eat it.”* That is God's judgment.

Look around you. We have raised a generation of young people who do only what's right in their own eyes. They mock their fathers, despise their mothers, and are unruly. Children need to be taught to obey. How? By discipline and example.

3. *“In the Lord”*

a. The sphere

When Paul says children are to obey their parents *“in the Lord,”* he's saying that obedience is in the sphere of serving, pleasing, honoring, and worshiping the Lord for His glory.

b. The specifics

Colossians 3:20 says, *“Children, obey your parents in all things.”* Does that mean children are to obey their parents even if they tell them to do evil? No. That's where they have to stop. In Acts 5:29 Peter and John said, *“We ought to obey God rather than men.”* When God's commands intersect with men's commands, you must obey God. Daniel was told not to pray, but he prayed anyway (Dan. 6:10). Some parents have told their children not to worship Christ, read the Bible, pray, fellowship with other believers, or share their testimony. But the Bible says to do those things. So children are to obey their parents in everything, except when it goes against God's stated revelation. Then they have to be willing to suffer the consequences of violating their parents' desires (cf. Matt. 10:37-39; Luke 14:25-27).

4. *“For this is right”*

a. The reason

Why are children to obey their parents? Because verse says, *“For this is right.”* You may ask, *“But where's the psychological evidence? Who did the case studies? Where's the philosopher's opinion here?”* You don't need any other evidence except what is right here. God says it is right.

The word translated “right” is the Greek word δικαιοϖ, which means “righteous,” “just,” or “right.” It’s used of God, Christ, the Word, holy living, and obeying one’s parents, all of which are right and good.

b. The references

The word *right* and its corollary are used 183 times in the New Testament alone. God has established what is right. Some examples of its use in both Old and New Testaments are in Nehemiah 9:13; Psalm 19:8; 119:75; 128; Hosea 14:9; Romans 7:12, 12:2; and revelation 15:3; 16:5, 7; 19:2.

B. The Attitude of Honor (vv. 2-3)

“Honor thy father and mother; (which is the first commandment with promise;) that it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth.”

Honor is the attitude behind the act. The act is obedience, and honor is the attitude. Remember that an act without the proper attitude is hypocrisy. If you do what your parents tell you to do but you hate it and you’re unwilling and nasty about it, then you’re a hypocrite. If you do what your parents tell you to do but you’re bitter, fearful, reluctant, and selfish, that’s not the right spirit. God is after the attitude much more than He’s after the act, because if the attitude is right, the act will follow. But a right act with a wrong attitude is nothing but hypocrisy.

1. The precept (v. 2a)

“Honor thy father and mother”

a. To honor with reverence and respect

The word translated “honor” is the Greek word τιμαιο, which simply means “to reverence, to worship, to hold in awe, to value at a high price.” It is used to speak of Jesus and God the Father in John 5:23. We are to have this attitude of honor, respect, and reverence toward our parents all our lives.

b. To honor with financial support

Honoring our parents is not an attitude only. In Matthew 15:1-6, Jesus interprets the commandment *“Honor thy father and mother”* as referring to financial support. He uses the word **honor** the way it’s used in 1 Timothy 5:17. It can be translated “to give money to” or “to pay.”

So, the Old Testament law of honoring one’s parents meant that as long as a person lived, he was to respect and support his parents. During the first half of a person’s life, the parents give everything they have to supply the needs of their children. When they get to the point in life where they’re no longer able to meet their own needs, it becomes the responsibility of their children to take care of them. That is God’s way of making families stick together. The parents raise their children, and when the children are grown, they take care of their parents while also raising their own children, who are going to take care of them while they are raising their children. That way the family always stays together, and the righteous seed keeps being passed along.

2. The primacy (v. 2b)

“Which is the first commandment with promise.”

The first four commandments of the Decalogue were related to God and didn't have a promise with them. You may ask, “Why is the fifth commandment so important that God puts a promise with it?” Because it's the key to all human relationships and the passing on of a righteous heritage.

3. The promise (v. 3)

“That it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth.”

a. Quality of life

“That it may be well with thee” refers to a full, rich life.

b. Quantity of life

“That thou mayest live long on the earth” refers to a long life---living out the fullness of the time God has allotted to you.

When we are obedient children, when we honor our parents, and when our relationships in the home are right, we'll have full and rich lifetime here, we'll live with Him in the kingdom for a thousand years, and we'll live with Him in the new heavens and the new earth for eternity.

Focusing on the Facts

1. How can the American family be likened to a frog in a pan of water that is gradually heated to boiling?
2. To whom specifically is Paul's command in Ephesians 6:1 directed?
3. What does society advise us to do with children? What does the Bible say?
4. Why is the command to honor one's parents the key to all other relationships in society?
5. What was the consequence of a child's rebelling against his parents in Israel?
6. Why do parents have a responsibility to teach their children to be obedient?
7. In what four areas are children lacking? Explain each.
8. What are the results of not providing the proper environment for your children's growth (Prov. 30:11-12, 17)?
9. What does it mean to obey one's parents “in the Lord” (Eph. 6:1)?
10. Should a child ever draw a line in obeying his parents? Explain.
11. What must a child be willing to face when choosing God's Word over his parent's desires (Luke 24:25-27)?
12. What should be the attitude behind the act of obedience? What is an act without the proper attitude?
13. What attitude are we to have toward our parents all our lives? What else should we be willing to do for them?
14. Why is keeping the fifth commandment rewarded with a promise? What is the nature of that promise?

Pondering the Principles

1. Parents, how are you helping your children increase “in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man” (Luke 2:52)? Are you holding your breath and closing your eyes, hoping your children will automatically turn out all right? Your children are like an investment that must be constantly tended for maximum yield. Unless you know how to read the trends in the economy, adjusting your investment accordingly, there is a good chance you could end up with a loss. Similarly, you need to carefully oversee the valuable investment of your children. Make sure it can weather the depressions and recessions of growing up in an ever-changing society. How are you helping them discern right from wrong? Think of some ways you can help them grow in social and spiritual maturity. Do you know of neighborhood children who are being neglected by their parents? Encourage them to interact with your family so you might introduce a godly influence into their lives.
2. Do you honor your parents as God ask us to, even if they are not Christians? The manner in which you treat your parents will set an example for the way your children will treat you. Do you criticize or ridicule them when you talk to others about them? Are you unwilling to forgive a wrong they may have committed against you? Do you graciously tolerate their criticism of you? If the family you grew up in lacked a healthy family atmosphere, there is still time to change that. Determine what you need to do to resolve any differences or meet any needs they have. Do they need financial assistance? Can they benefit from your spiritual guidance? Do they have any errands you can run or chores you can do for them? If they live far away from you, communicate with them by letter or phone on a regular basis. Make the last years they spend on this earth their most rewarding.