

## What's a Child to Do? • Ephesians 6:1-3

“Today there is very little respect for authority or deference for the experience of elders. The tendency in the modern home is for an undue freedom and familiarity which counts it a smart thing for a child to call the parent by his given name, and to tell the parents what to do, instead of listening to the advice of the parents. One of the most difficult and dangerous factors in the situation is that schools and colleges are encouraging this revolt of youth . . . The Satanic lie taught in so many circles, that a child's will is never to be crossed, but only guided, and that every child's will must be left quite alone to work out his own way in life, is bearing fruit in a ruinous waywardness and an unprecedented flood of lawlessness.”

Was this written in a recent Christian periodical? No. This statement was published in a book by Ruth Paxson written in 1939 and entitled *The Wealth, Walk and Warfare of the Christian*. That evaluation was not about the children; it was about the grandparents and great-grandparents of those children when they were young.

The problems of youth and parents are not unique to any generation. That's why God's Word is as applicable today as it was when it was written.

So, children, listen!

But, just who are the children? We all are! Ephesians 6:1-3 is written for everyone from birth to the grave, whether your parents are dead or alive, whether you are dependent or independent. Everyone is a child of parents and God's counsel to all is this: “Children, submit to your parents.”

In these three verses God gives us three teachings on this very relevant topic.

The first teaching has to do with a dependent's duty. Understand that Ephesians 6:1 is directed

specifically to a dependent's duty and that duty is based upon relationship. It is based on relationship to parents as well as on relationship to the Lord.

You are definitely dependent if you live on your parent's money, live in your parent's house or are under legal age. You are definitely independent if you are married, your parents are dead or you and your parents have agreed in some other way to your independence.

God's word is here teaching that the primary means for dependent children to live out their Christian lives is in their relationship to their parents. The primary duty is to be obedient. That is a way of expressing your attitude and relationship to God.

While the duty is laid on dependent children, the ideal family relationships are when everyone is submitting to one another. Wives submit to husbands, husbands love their wives and parents are united in their expectations.

The Apostle Paul says here, “Children, obey your parents in the Lord.” He's not here saying that if your parents are not Christians you don't need to obey them. He's saying, rather, that the matter of obedience is in the context of your relationship to God. In fact, your relationship to your parents is always to be viewed as a subdivision or as a part of your relationship to God. You obey your parents primarily for God's sake

and only secondarily for your parents' sake and for your own sake.

Now while duty is based on relationship, the

duty is expressed in obedience and obedience means that you do what you are told. Specifically that has to do with the practical matters of cleaning up your room, doing your homework, coming home on time, attending church, the proper and wise use of money, what you watch on TV and when, the selection of friends, the clothes you wear.

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Realistically, this may be very difficult. Parents may be wrong, unreasonable, unkind, unloving, inconsiderate. God knows all of this and calls on you to obey anyway for his sake for a short period of time. Jesus suffered for you, and now he asks you to obey him. God knows that obedience to parents builds character for life and equips the Christian to obey God for the rest of life.

This duty expires with childhood. The independent adult need not obey parents – rather, in verse 2 we are told to “Honor your father and mother.”

Before we go on, we need to add a balancing word. Parental command never supersedes divine command. God never obligates you to do wrong. If your parents command you to do something that is contrary to God’s word, you are not obligated to do that. Seldom does that ever happen, but if it did, always choose God’s will. There is no question about that.

Duty has to do with exhibiting what is right. God is teaching us that obedience to parents is the best way. It’s the right way. It’s God’s way. It is a sign of growth and maturity. It is a sign of strength, not weakness.

God lists disobedience among the worst of sins. In Romans 1:28-32 we read:

Furthermore, since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, he gave them over to a depraved mind, to do what ought not to be done. They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed, and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips, slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents; they are senseless, faithless, heartless, ruthless. Although they know God’s righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue

to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them.

God does not take disobedience to parents lightly. So, kids, listen. God’s very special word is to obey your parents as long as you are a dependent. Practice it! Perfect it! Obey your parents all the time. Think about how you’ll do it. God will be delighted.

The second teaching speaks to all of us. It is not limited to the young and dependent. It is not a matter of external duty but internal disposition. Verse 2 says to us all, “Honor your father and mother.” This is talking about an attitude that produces an action. God calls upon every Christian to think and behave toward parents with honor.

Even if our parents are old and senile, even if our parents are dead, even if they are ungodly, even if they are unkind, God requires that the way we speak about them and the way we think about them should reflect honor. Honor implies deference to their

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wishes, respect for their judgement and trust in their love.

While it is true that as an adult you are not required to obey your parents, the responsibility is always there to honor your parents.

The key verse for this section of the Bible is Ephesians 5:21. There it says, “Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.” That’s the basic rule for all relationships, and here it’s expressed in one’s attitude toward parents. It’s a package deal. If a grown man treats his parents with a lack of honor, then the chances are that he does not treat his wife or his children or his employer or employees as he ought. The one who trusts God, submits to one another and treats his spouse correctly is one who has little trouble honoring parents. Your submission in these areas as a parent will be the model for your children!

The third related teaching in the end of verse two and the beginning of verse three is a divine

declaration. This command to honor father and mother comes with promise. God has singled out this specific commandment as having particularly significant tangible benefits. It's a commitment from God: You honor your parents and I promise that I will honor you.

It's important that we understand that this command's benefits are collective and not primarily individual. Like many of God's Old Testament promises, this one was given more to God's people than to individual persons. As God's people honor their parents collectively, they will live long upon the earth. While there are obvious individual benefits, the promise is not made or broken on an individual basis. The promise that was specifically made to Israel, generally applies to God's people today – our nation, our church, will be greatly blessed in life span and other ways as we place proper emphasis on honoring our parents.

God is our heavenly Father, our heavenly Parent. He clearly tells us what he wants. Now we know our duty and disposition. Now we know the divine declaration. God asks us to joyously obey him and honor parents.

Heavenly father, there are times when we read your word and the teachings seem so abstract that we have to stretch our minds to figure out what we are supposed to do. But this is not one of those cases. This is a matter of black and white.

There is no doubt about it.

Lord, we would like to go on record with you that as the teaching is clear, so our commitment to obey the teaching shall be equally clear. With your help, we will do what you ask us to do. As dependent children, we will obey even if that is sometimes very hard. And, as descendants, our disposition will be one of honoring our parents, whether they are young or old, living or dead. We will do what you want us to do and, as your people, we will claim your promise.

All this we do because you asked us to do it and we do it for your Son Jesus, in whose name we pray. Amen.

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