

Sermon 40: Ephesians 6:1-3: Children Obey Your Parents: Part Three

OUTLINE

The shape of obedience
The motivation to obedience

The shape of obedience

The younger years of 0-5 differ in the way we parent from 5 and up. This phase of their lives is one of immense change. They undergo radical physical changes from being incapable of doing anything for themselves to full mobility and independence. They undergo drastic social changes moving from mother to the family and beyond. Intellectual changes at this stage are revolutionary as they learn language, reasoning, morals, humour and facts. And in amongst all these changes is the development of their spiritual inclinations, they are born with a knowledge of God which is being suppressed by their indwelling sinfulness. These many changes make the early years of parenting very demanding and consisting many different responsibilities. Tripp suggests that in the midst of these many pressing duties that a parent can help themselves by focusing on the one big thing they need to do in this stage of their children's development. What is it? 'The most important lesson for the child to learn in this period is that HE IS AN INDIVIDUAL UNDER AUTHORITY. He has been made by God and has a responsibility to obey God in all things.' P133.

From the day we bring our children home from hospital we are to teach them that they are not the centre of the universe God is. He is their Lord and it is to Him that they owe all their allegiance. As parents we are God's delegated authorities in their lives speaking His word and His law to them. They learn their obedience to God through obeying their parents. And as we train them from young they will continue on this track as they get older. We see that this is outlined by God in Eph. 6:1-3, 'Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. 2 "Honor your father and mother" (this is the first commandment with a promise), 3 "that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land.'

Tripp shows how this verse revolutionizes our parenting and discipline. He draws a circle with a child in it. If the child remains in the circle of obedience, they will receive blessing, but outside of the circle is judgement and pain. Disciplining a child for stepping outside of parental authority then is not a rant but a rescue mission. Discipline and the institution of parental authority exists for the child's well-being and is the provision of God for that child. To resist this authority is to resist the gift of God which protects that child. This circle of safety must be drawn for our children and seen as God's gift, and when parental authority is broken discipline returns them to the circle. Through years 0-5 we are training them to heed our voice that they will listen and stay inside the circle of safety. In teaching them to heed our voice we are also training them to heed other God given authorities. Becoming a good student at school, a good worker at work, a good citizen of the land all begins with submitting to parental authority.

Honouring and obedience need some further definition. Honouring is not only obedience but respect. The 5th commandment calls for children not merely to sullenly submit to parental authority but to honour their parents. This includes speaking well of your parents to others and not slandering them as idiots, and it means speaking to them with respect. Obedience to parents is not a wish but a commandment of God. Obedience must be without challenge, without excuse and without delay. As children get older more explanation for your requests may be necessary but between ages 0-5 we are training them

in obedience and will be asking them to do many things that their sinful hearts will want to resist. At age 1 we do not have to explain the importance of sleep cycles and the repercussions to mind and body when it comes to sleep deprivation. You may want to include some explanation as a way of getting into a good habit of showing how all your requests are reasonable.

Your insistence upon obedience must be fair in that you make rules that are good and righteous that are for the child's good not merely your convenience. You must be clear in your directives outlining exactly what you expect of your children, this will take some forethought, for example when visiting a shop you tell your children before going in that they are not to touch the things on the shelves. So that when it comes to disobedience and discipline it is clear what is being punished. Also you must be consistent and follow through with punishments. Overlooking disobedience is not your decision to make, God has given the rod of correction and parental authority and particular instructions for how our children are to behave and entrusted us with the task of shepherding them. You can of course use your own discretion as you evaluate your child, the situation and because you know the history of the problem, but not insisting on obedience is not an option. Your child's safety is dependent upon their obedience to you. God raises our children to be obedient through their obedience to us.

Tripp does recommend a safety valve, our children should be given the right to appeal if they feel that they are being unfairly treated. This gives safety to our children if we have made laws that were rash or unformed. Parents of course should weigh their commands before they are given. Tripp gives a small practical example, 'imagine your child is reading in bed. It is time for lights out. You could simply throw the switch. You could tell him to shut off the lights. Either way, the child's duty is to obey. Or you could ask, 'How many pages to the end of that chapter? Oh, only a page and a half. Okay, you may finish and then turn off the lights.' As a wise parent, you must exercise sensitivity to your child's needs and wishes as you provide direction. Your true desire is to imitate godly authority that is truly kind.' P141.

It is reductionistic for us to try and categorise the main needs of each stage under with one word but if we had to the word that best describes the parent's job in ages 5-12 is character. Hopefully by this age we have taught them about themselves and their responsibility towards God, and now we are seeking in our parenting to help our children live out of their Christian hearts and faith and not simply under the rules. Remember the illustration of the apples and the tree, we are wanting to now encourage them to not simply behave but strive for Christian character. We are wanting them to become people made in the image of God who are imitating Christ by the power of the Spirit manifesting Christlike character. We want them to not simply carry out tasks but be dependable, not simply tell the truth but to be honest and not deceitful, not merely to obey commands to share but to be kind, not simply to submit to the reminder to put others first but to be considerate. Helpfulness, where they have a servant's heart; diligence where they serve as God pleasers and not merely man pleasers; humility, where they are not conceited in thought not merely by not saying horrible things about others; self-controlled and morally pure, these are the things we must long to see in our children. We must not think that our job is finished when we have trained our children to be quick in the obedience when we are watching because they have learnt to fear the pain of discipline. No, our goal is to see them as saved sinners in dependence upon God's Spirit produce fruit.

Our goal as we prepare our children for life is not merely obedience to rules from without but to regulate themselves before God from within. Rules cannot make a heart selfless. We

want to encourage not merely a servile submission to external authority but an inner submission to God that works itself out in selfless voluntary love. As they grow up in a world that allows all sorts of sins to be engaged in by adults, it is heart holiness and not merely a submission to rules that will help them to glorify God as adults.

Ted Tripp suggests that a parent shepherds the 5-12 year old by helping them think in 3 directions, their relationship with God, with others and with themselves. In our parenting we are seeking to help them see that they are human sinners before a holy God and that they can only be saved and serve others in holy love through Christ. Tripp sets out a number of questions for parents to think through that having thought through them they can engage their children more constructively in these three directions. I will lay out the questions, then I will share his illustration of how these questions help one to parent in a typical fighting over a toy scenario.

Relation to God: Do your children have a relationship with God? Do they feel their need for God? Is God the one in whom they find their strength and comfort? Do they show a desire to know and love God? Are they moved by God's ways and truth? Do they ever talk about God? How do they perceive God? Are they trying to worship and serve Him?

Relation to themselves: What do they think of themselves? How well do they understand themselves? Are they aware of their strengths and weaknesses? Do they understand their own personalities? Do they see themselves as made in the image of God but sinners?

Relation to others: how do they interact with others? What is the nature of the relationships that they have? What do your children bring out in other children? Is your child controlling or controlled, leading or following? When engaging with others are they pleasant or unpleasant? How do they react to losing and winning, to disappointment and gifts?

So here then is the typical scenario, two children are fighting over a toy. Here are some of the methods we normally use that we want to reject. We want to reject the who-had-it-first approach because justice alone does not teach the hearts of our children to share. We want to reject the enforced sharing approach where each has it for ten minutes grudgingly giving it up when their turn is over because this too does not encourage sharing but merely enforces it. We want to reject the approach that ignores the fight because they will just work it out. Nor do we want to get good behaviour through threats or emotional manipulation. This is an everyday thing that comes along and can be a wonderful opportunity to help our children see themselves and their relationship to God; that they are sinners in need of Christ and who can only do what is right by what the gospel provides.

We could do this many ways but here is a suggested approach: firstly, you can help them see the root of the problem using a scripture like James 4:1-2, 'What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask.' Any time there is a fight you can know based on the timeless wisdom of the word of God that someone is being selfish, that the root of all our fights and disagreements is me putting myself before others and not living in love towards my neighbour as God commands. By doing this you are showing that our actions come from our hearts and our hearts are selfish not selfless. The idol of self lies at the heart of all sinful behaviour and is a manifestation of a deeper heart problem that only the gospel can fix. This idol manifests itself in many ways, fighting with a sibling over a toy, complaining that things aren't good enough, sulking when things don't go their way, these and many other things are manifestations of the idol of self in the heart of every sinner. In

our addressing of this and any other situation we expose the heart and lay our appeal to the conscience. The conscience is the parents best friend and an inner helper to repeat what we are saying when we speak God's word. By our words we are speaking about God, what He expects of us, what we are to do, our sinful state, and in certain situations we can use this truth to point our children to Christ who died for their sins and gave His Spirit to help us live the life that is pleasing to Him. Then we are able to ask the children what the right thing to do is in this situation and they from their hearts can determine what should happen next. In this way we are helping them determine and choose the right path not merely keep the rules for fear of discipline.

It is nearly impossible to try and summarise the teen years in one word, but perhaps the best one would be identity. They are in a transition period moving into adulthood, they are transitioning from the world of the family to the world outside. This is the time in their lives where their view of themselves and the world looms large in their thinking. They are incredibly curious about everything going on around them and deeply insecure in themselves. This is the time of their lives where they feel like little fish in a big pond, very inadequate in a world of competent people, their bodies are developing and they are living on hormone milkshakes, and the truths and principles of their childhood will be tested by an unbelieving world and strong temptation. Parenting does not begin when your children become teens rather the parents you have been is revealed.

Ted Tripp suggests 3 principles that teens should be encouraged in and they can all be found in Proverbs 1:7-10, 'The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction. Hear, my son, your father's instruction, and forsake not your mother's teaching, for they are a graceful garland for your head and pendants for your neck. My son, if sinners entice you, do not consent.' The fear of the Lord, listening to parental instruction and forsaking friendship with the wicked.

The Christian teens years are dominated by the struggle between 2 fears, the fear of man which a snare and the fear of God which is the beginning of all wisdom. We are to help our teens see that pleasing God is more important than pleasing the media programmed pleasures of their peers. We are to remind them that eternity and not temporal pleasures is to influence how they make life choices. We are to remind them that costly obedience to God is the responsibility of all ages, that teens do not get a pass from obedience because their lives are somehow harder than others. I don't doubt that their temptations feel stronger than before but God's grace is sufficient, and we are to resist sin to the shedding of blood, unto martyrdom if necessary. We will need to insure that they are in a church where the glory of God is preached, where God is not presented as an idol that exists for our convenience but the God who is all glorious who is worthy of every inch of our devotion and in whose service we will find our deepest satisfaction. The God we project as parents is He the God of the bible, is this displayed in our own worship and obedience towards Him. Teens can smell hypocrisy from a mile away, they are no longer children who don't scrutinise the world they live in. A suggested dinner time study would be the attributes of God.

Parental instruction will be vital to them as they encounter adult problems. Questions of worldview, identity, moral conundrums, sexuality, friend and relationship advice, the bible tells our teens to get their instruction from their parents not their friends. Perhaps in a world where a teen can simply google the answer to things or research it, this is no replacement for godly loving parental council. Your parents know you better than google and probably yourself, as Christians they can offer wise and experienced advice from a heart that loves you, knows life and knows you. Google, an encyclopaedia, etc., these things

cannot replace good Christian council from loving parents. Your whole life of parenting will be the weight of your credibility, if you have parented for their sakes before God and not simply for convenience they will feel free to come to you. If you have nurtured a habit of conversation and listening they will feel free to seek you advice. If you have taught them in family worship and have a forum for raising issues like this then the channels are open for communication.

Forsaking the wicked is the third principle. Friends have often been the refuge for teens who do not have a happy loving home. Often the best defence against our teens choosing wrong friends is a satisfaction that comes from being with their family. There are many proverbs that teach the effects of bad company and we need to train our children from young about the importance of the company they keep. Because God is the centre of our lives we should be seeking company with those who have the same interests that we are not unequally yoked and pulled in two directions.

The teen years are a time for increasing the responsibilities and the trust, of coming alongside in the role of mentor or coach, the time of physical discipline except in extreme cases is over, the monologue of parenting transforms into dialogue.

The motivation to obey

Why should we honour our parents? We could answer and say, because God says so, and that would be good enough. However, Paul impresses upon the Ephesians in 6:2 that this is the first commandment with a promise attached. There is a general promise attached to the second command, that He would bless an obedient Israelite to the 1000th generation, but this command is more personal and specific. In Ex. 20:12 the incentive is, 'that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you.' In the second giving of the law in Deut. 5:16 it is added to, 'that your days may be long, and that it may go well with you in the land that the LORD your God is giving you.' In Eph. 6:3 Paul paraphrases the benefits of the 5th commandment. In the OT the meaning is easy to understand. If you obey your parent's teaching about loving God and keeping His commands, you will be blessed with the blessings of Deut. 28. Since it was God's purpose in the OT to manifest His favour in physical ways in order to recreate Edenic type blessing it was predisposed to being healthy, fertile, at peace, rich, and various other physical tokens of abundance. A long life although not a total removal of the curse of death was the furthest thing from it, and a life that goes well is a life that experiences relief from the thistles and thorns that afflict this fallen world. What did Paul mean by quoting this promise for the Christian Children in the Ephesian church?

We must stress that we are no longer under the blessings and curses of Deut. 28-29, so the notion of Edenic type blessings as a manifestation of God's favour is not the primary meaning that Paul would have intended. In fact, as believers we are going to be hated like Christ was, and will be afflicted since the devil has been cast down to earth and has been given permission to wage war against the saints. Paul as a holy man and obedient Christian hardly knew a time when he was not persecuted. This means that Paul must be intending the promise to apply in a different way. This highlights that the 10 commandments cannot be copied and pasted without reference to the fact that we are in the New Covenant. How then did Paul see this promise being fulfilled?

Firstly, we can accommodate the idea that if you live a holy life as God created you to do, you will generally have a happier life. If you live a life avoiding drugs and alcohol; and are faithful to your spouse; and are diligent at work; and are honest with your neighbour; and

selflessly serve your neighbour, and you keep the laws of the land, etc., you will have a better life than a criminal or an adulterer or a thief. God has indeed built it into His creation that sin is often its own punishment. Cause and effect often bring the consequences of our sins back on our own heads whether it is lying, stealing, sleeping around, etc. this however must be held with a careful qualification. In the OT under the covenantal conditions them this would have generally been more true, however since we are no longer a nation or a theocracy we will see more exceptions to the rule.

Secondly, in the New Covenant the blessings that accrue to us are predominantly spiritual and not physical. We do not agree with the prosperity teachers who copy and paste OT blessings for the church. No things will go well for us in the sense that we will bear much spiritual fruit. In fact, it is often through trials and difficulties that we receive our best blessings in sanctification and faith.

Thirdly, we must also understand Paul's words eschatologically. Long life in the land was a foreshadow of eternal life in the new creation. The message translated into New Covenant terms means that if you obey the gospel that you hear from your parents and follow their instruction in Christ, you will know eternal life in the New Creation.

So here is the main application that the children should take from Paul's words in Ephesians 6:1-3. Listen carefully to your Christian parents, listen to their instruction as they teach you about the world, about the consequences of sin, about the sinfulness of your own heart and most importantly as they teach you the gospel. God has given you parents, not to suppress you as the world would have you believe, but to bring the best of all blessings, to bring you into a positive relationship to God through Jesus Christ. The best thing that your parents could ever do for you is not be rich so you can have every convenience and gadget you ever wanted; nor be permissive so that you could follow every desire you ever have; but give you a loving home where Christ is honoured and point you to the Savior and teach you how to love and serve Him. I had the sort of parents that my friends thought were cool. My father was in prison for drug dealing, my mother let me sell drugs to my friends. My friends envied my parents because they were permissive and let me sin to my heart's content. This is the lie of sin, it says being able to all of your sinful heart's desire will make you happy; but the truth is that doing what God made us to do is the true path of happiness. Looking back I would rather have those parents that teenagers are embarrassed about, parents who love Jesus, who go to church, who talk about the bible and who would care enough about me and my friends to have a Christ centered home that all who came there would know who we served.