

The Biblical Role of Children

A Refresher on the Family

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Well, it's always a joy to preach God's word for many, many reasons, one of those reasons is that I am confident in the power of Scripture and the power of the Holy Spirit to make whatever we study in God's word profitable for you and something that is going to be applicable to you. Sometimes the connection might seem a little bit remote as depending on the passage that you're looking at, but this morning we come to a passage that I know is directly and immediately relevant and will have a close personal application for you whether you are three months old or pushing 90. We come to a passage that intimately addresses some of the most innermost parts of our lives and that passage is found in Ephesians 6, the first three verses and I invite you to turn there with me as we read our text for this morning for our message here today. Reading from God's word, the inerrant, infallible word of God, we find the Apostle Paul saying this in Ephesians 6:1-3,

1 Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. 2 HONOR YOUR FATHER AND MOTHER (which is the first commandment with a promise), 3 SO THAT IT MAY BE WELL WITH YOU, AND THAT YOU MAY LIVE LONG ON THE EARTH.

Now, last time we did an overview, a biblical overview of the principle of honoring your father and mother and unfortunately we don't have time this morning to review that but everything that I say today is said in the context of what we discussed last week and there are probably CDs of that message; if you weren't with us last time, you can pick one up on the way out from the table by the front entrance. But basically what we saw is that God gives a command applicable to all men everywhere that they should honor their father and their mother. This is a universal principle of right and wrong embedded into the 10 Commandments themselves. It's a fundamental tenet of the structure of the universe that children should honor their parents. What we're going to see this morning as we dive into Ephesians 6 is some of the ways that this works out and the way that it works out is this is that Paul here gives us multiple reasons to understand why it is that God calls for obedience to parents and he gives us a sense of incentive, a sense of motivation that when we understand and embrace what Scripture says about this, that it would formulate our affections in a way that would incline us toward obedience and honoring our parents in this way and what you'll see as we go through this is that this isn't

simply for children ages birth to 12 or birth to 18, that this is a principle that carries through in all of life. I mean, you still have a father and mother even if only in your memory if they have passed on. We have a father and a mother and so this passage applies to each one of us regardless of our age or station in life, just generally speaking.

Now, what I love about the Scriptures and what I love about this church, what I love about you is this, is that one of the things that I love about Truth Community Church is that I know that you come here because you want to hear God's word. I'm not trying to give you something and argue with you about whether you should listen to God's word or not, you're already oriented that way and the very nature of your character and sanctification makes it a particular blessing for me as a pastor to open God's word to you. I know that you're receptive to what God says. That's why you're here and so it's a blessing for us to be able to look at this from a joint perspective of receptivity and teachability and to see what God has to say for us and so I thank God for every one of you frequently and for the ability for us to be able to share time like this together.

Now, why that is important is this, is that the passage that we're looking at here today comes in the context of a letter that the Apostle Paul wrote to the church. It comes in the context of God's instruction to his people who belong to the Lord Jesus Christ. While it is true that generally speaking as a moral principle of the universe, that all men everywhere should honor their fathers and mothers, there is a particularly unique and direct application that it has for us in the context of the church because our relationships in families as Christians occur in the broader context of the way that God has redeemed his people. Our relationships occur in the context of the body of Christ and principles that govern the functioning and the thinking and the affections of Christians as a subset of the world and so we see how the relationships within the family are influenced by and directed by broader principles that God has to say to his people generally and we've gone through this so many times as we've gone verse by verse through the book of Ephesians. For those of you perhaps who are visiting here for the first time, this is not a random selection that you're here for. Ephesians 6 is here today from our pulpit because we've covered chapters 1 through 5 already. We've just gone verse by verse. We are taking God's word as he has laid it out for us and this just happens to be today the text that we come to.

Now, having said that, here's what you need to see. In this particular context, the broader principle that Paul is enunciating, that Paul is expanding on in his work, is the principle of submission within the body of Christ. Look at chapter 5, verse 21. We'll just go straight to verse 21. At the end of a long section of Paul describing what it means to live a worthy life, to walk in a manner worthy of Christ, speaking to the church he says there in verse 21, "be subject to one another in the fear of Christ." There is a principle of submission that is at work in the body of Christ and that it is appropriate for those of us who are in subjection to Christ to have a sense of submission and subjection to one another. We don't gather together as a church, we don't exist in the body of Christ in order to advance our personal selfish interests. What Larry said as he was introducing that last song was well taken, that it's not about us. It's not about what I can get out of this. That's a selfish self-exalting approach to life in the body which is the exact opposite

of what gave birth to the body in the first place. What gave birth to the church was an act of self-sacrifice from our Lord when he gave himself on a cross to redeem us from our sins. What this flows from is the love and care of God for his people and that Christ sacrificed for us. Well, do you see, do you understand, do you embrace the fact that what that means is that the church, when the body of believers in Christ come together, that the fundamental fountain, the source of our life, comes from an act of self-sacrifice and that defines the way that we view everything else and everyone else in the body; that we are here, we exist as a vessel of further self-sacrifice because our spiritual life itself flows from Christ who sacrificed himself on our behalf. So it's just a very natural concept that we would be in subjection to one another and sacrifice ourselves for one another knowing that we are in subjection to a Lord who first did that on our half.

You get that, right? You see how that just flows and that just frames and defines everything else? Do you see incidentally how that is a rebuke to an entire philosophy of ministry that says we must condition ourselves so that what people want when they come in the door is what they get? You condition people to be selfish and self-seeking and if I don't like this, I'll go on to something else because it's about what I want. No, that's not right at all. There is a principle of submission and sacrifice in the true body of Christ that flavors all of our relationships a little bit like the flavoring you pour into a bottle of water that diffuses throughout and affects every drop of the water in the way that it tastes. So in the same way, that principle of subjection and sacrifice influences everything in our relationships within the body of Christ. That's the general principle of Ephesians 5:21.

Well, what Paul does now as he proceeds in chapter 5, verse 22 and following, is he helps us see how God wants that general principle of submission to play out in lives within the household of people who are a part of the church. So he addresses wives and he says, "Wives, here's how subjection plays out for you. You are to be in submission to your husbands." We looked at that. He says to husbands, "Here's how subjection plays out for you. You are to love your wife as Christ loved the church. You are to give yourself up for her, not that you dominate her and enforce your will and make her do everything that you want. Just to the contrary, Christ gave himself up willingly for the church. You give yourself up for your wife." So there is a mutual submission that's going in place that plays out in slightly different ways depending on whether you're the wife or the husband but it's informed by the same overarching principle of submission. There you go. That's what Paul addresses in the end of chapter 5, 22 through 23.

Well now, finally we get back to our text here. Now as you go into Ephesians 6, Paul is continuing to apply that principle of submission and he applies it, having applied it to wives and husbands, he now dives deeper into the family and addresses children and parents in the first four verses of Ephesians 6. You can see there is a very logical flow to it here. We'll look at verse 4 about fathers and parents next week, for now, we have this role of children stated to us.

Now, one thing that we should say right at the beginning here. You know, if you just look around you, look at relationships within your own family, you realize that the multiplicity of relationships and the complications and opportunities that come up within family

relationships are myriad, they are infinite, and this passage is not intended to address every single issue that could possibly be raised about the matter of the relationship between parents and children. Paul here in Spirit-inspired ingenuity, is giving us principles, general principles that would inform and frame relationships within the family. He's not trying to answer every possible question that could ever be asked in any culture at any time, rather he's giving us transcendent principles that if we take and embrace and meditate on, will inform us in our individual situations about how we should act and so that's very important to understand. He's giving us general principles, not an encyclopedia of everything that should be stated.

Now, one final thing that I would say here before we get into the text ourselves, it seems to me that Paul primarily here in this particular passage of Scripture has younger children in mind and I say that because of what he goes on to say in verse 4. Look at verse 4 with me and then we'll come back to the first three verses. He says, "Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger but bring with them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord." It seems to me from that that he has the idea of child rearing from early ages up through until they reach their adult years, that that is primarily what he has in mind as we look at this passage and we'll understand it from that particular perspective, but as we go along at the end, we'll have some points of application for those of us who are adults as well. I know that the things that we have to say at the end of the message are going to be particularly applicable to some of you in the difficult relationships that you face with your parents, so there is something here for everybody which is often what happens when you study God's word together.

For now, what we want to do is we want to see three reasons that Paul gives that children should obey their parents and for those of you that are under the authority, under the roof of your parents, this is directly speaking to you in what you should be mindful of and how you should be living life. Let's put it this way, you need to approach this passage in this sense: if you're a professing Christian, you say, "I know Christ. I believe in Christ. I love Christ." Well, what you need to realize is that this is Christ's word to you. This is Christ speaking through the apostolic pages of Scripture. This is Christ exercising his authority and directing your life with what is about to be said. You should also understand that there should be no dichotomy in your mind where you say, "This is my Christian life here and separate and unrelated to that is my relationship with my family," as if you could ignore and reject and be unsubmitive to what Christ says in his word and yet maintain the profession that you are a Christian and an obedient one at that. Your relationship with your parents is a barometer of your relationship with the Lord. You must understand that and you must receive that and be open to it if you make any profession of Christ at all. What we're doing here in Ephesians 6, it's like we're putting a thermometer in your mouth and we are taking your spiritual temperature. A cold, harsh, distant, conflict filled relationship with your parents is saying something else about your spiritual life. You cannot separate the two. So we need to be teachable and receptive as we come to this.

Paul gives us three reasons why children should obey their parents. Let's go at them one by one. We'll take them one verse at a time. Why should children obey their parents?

Why should you as a young person in a Christian home be committed to obedience and honoring your father and mother? Scripture makes it very plain. First of all, obedience is right. Obedience is right. Obedience is the way that things should be. The contrary is impossible to think that that is a right manner of conduct. Notice how Paul addresses the children here in chapter 6, verse 1. Obedience is right, he says, and we look at it and see it in the words of Scripture when we see Paul say, "Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right." He addresses children directly.

Now, let me just take a little bit of a tangent here, just a little bit of a side rail on something about church ministry, do you realize, this is a simple observation, sometimes the simplest observations are the most profound ones that you could make, do you realize that when Paul writes this letter to the church in Ephesus and the others who would receive this, do you realize what he's doing? He speaks directly to children who are being brought up by their parents in the Lord. Do you know what that means? Do you know what that means? That means that he expected the children to be in with the parents when this letter was being read. This is a direct contradiction of the philosophy of ministry that separates children out and puts them someplace else while the real ministry of the church takes place to the adults. The very structure of Scripture, the very way that Paul addresses the church, assumes the presence of children in the midst so that they would hear what was being read at the same time; not done at a separate children service later on with a separate epistle to them. It's woven right into the fabric of the New Testament and that's a powerful corrective to the modern tendency to separate children out for an age segregated time of worship. Let's just be candid with what Scripture is saying to us here and realize that maybe the simplicity of Scripture rebukes a whole mindset of an approach to church ministry. I'm glad you children are in the service with us, in with our parents. You belong here. We want you here. You are an integral part of what happens at Truth Community Church. You belong here and we want you here and we're glad you're here and we love you and we want you under God's teaching just like the rest of us are. And a word to you parents that do that and go through the difficulties of the logistics of having your kids here with you, God bless you. You're doing the right thing. Your children are under the word of God. That is far more important to them than that they would have a fun time someplace else away from you. So even the general way that Paul says, "Children, obey your parents," he obviously assumes that the children are going to hear him when this is read.

Now, that said, coming back to the text again, he says, "Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right." Notice that this is a slightly different word. It's a different word in the Greek even than what he said in verse 21. In verse 21, he said, "be subject to one another in the fear of Christ," here in chapter 6, verse 1, he says, "Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right." It seems to be a somewhat stronger term. There is a little more authority being asserted here in terms of a narrowing the grounds of conduct and attitude in what is being said. It carries the idea, this word carries the idea of this, children, young people, here's what this word means: it means to obey on the basis of having paid attention to. In other words, your parents say something, you pay attention to it, you listen to it, you process it and then you do what they say. That's the idea of obedience.

So and we just need to be real candid here and know that God's word speaks to us in love and for our good, the idea of a young person being a Christian who was also simultaneously resistant to what their parents say is something that is utterly foreign to Scripture. That is not a Christian child responding that way and perhaps for some of you, you're new Christians and you're just coming to grips with these things and you realize, "Oh, I need to change here," you need to repent and adjust your life in a way that is consistent with what Scripture calls you to be. But God's word comes to you this morning, those of you that are under your parents' roof, it comes to you this morning and it directly addresses the question when your parents speak, how do you respond? Do you listen? Are you receptive? Are you teachable? Or are you resistant, hostile, and they might as well be speaking to a rock for all of the response that you make to them? Where are you, young person, in your response to your parents? You need to realize that God calls you to obey your parents, to listen to them, to heed what they say and to adapt your attitudes and conduct in response to them accordingly.

Now, what should we say to that? Why are they to do this? Why is it that children are in that position? Why can't they be moral free agents and do whatever they want? Well, that would be wrong. Obeying your parents is right. Look at verse 1 with me again, chapter 6, verse 1, "obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right." It's a word that elsewhere in Scripture is translated "righteous." This is in accordance with what should be. And in this verse, what Paul is doing here, he's appealing to, in one sense, a sense of natural law that applies everywhere. He's going to bring Scripture into it in verse 2, here it seems that he's giving an overview of just what the natural order of things should obviously be if we weren't so distorted by sin. Think about it with me, young people, those of you, even those of you that are adults and you're working through the way that you have approached life or with your own kids, you need to think about, we need to think through this. We need to think about the moral order of the universe for us to respond rightly to God. Now, you think about it, again, addressing the general order of things, not the worst extreme example of parental abuse; that's not what we're talking about here. You come to this and you say, "Of course, parents should have children who are obedient to them. Of course, children should obey their parents." Why? Think about it, those of you that are in a Christian family with parents that are reasonably doing what they can to care for you, love you and provide for you, you should think about it this way: what do your parents do? Your parents provide for you. They feed you. They give shelter to you. They give love to you. They give care to you. They look out for you. They are the ones who gave physical life to you. Without them, you would not exist. And without them, you would not be able to continue your existence because you cannot care for yourself. That's what your parents do. They are a mediating authority from God in your life. They have a mediating authority of God over your life and they are also the way that God cares for you. God cares for you through the actions of your parents, young people. The room that you have, the bed that you have, is something that your parents have provided for you. When you sit down and you eat or you go to the fridge, you're hungry, you've got something to eat or drink or whatever, you know, it's your parents that are providing that, in one manner or another, paying the bills and making that available to you.

Now, here's a question for you, young people, I'm talking directly to you, those of you that are under your parents' roofs whether you make eye contact with me or not, you cannot evade the force of God's word on this. When your parents are doing that for you, even though they may be most imperfect in the way that they do and they have their own flaws, I get that, that's not God's concern that he wants you to be thinking about. God wants you to be thinking about what your response is and in light of the way that your parents provide for you and have given life to you and they sustain you, you need to answer this question, every one of you needs to answer this question: what kind of treachery is it that rebels against that? What kind of rebellion is it that bucks against the very people that make your life possible and provide for you? How can you justify that kind of rebellion? How can you be the dog that bites the hand that feeds it? You know, there's a reason why there is that proverb that exists about animals, that's totally inappropriate. You feed a dog and it would turn around and bite your hand, the very hand that delivers its sustenance, the dog would bite it? Decent dogs don't do that. Well, in a much greater way, children, you need to be thinking about your parents and thinking through what is right in the order of things. And I realize your parents have fallen short. Do you know what? The children that are in my family, their father has fallen short. You don't view it from that perspective. You say, "You don't know how upset my parents have made me." That's not the point. The point is you understanding your position in God's order of the universe and understanding what God calls you to do. Let him deal with your parents, you deal with what he says to you and what he says to you is you obey your parents. You listen to them, you heed them, and you adapt your life to what they say. You must recognize their authority. You must recognize that in the providence of God, children, God has given you exactly the parents that he wanted you to have. He didn't want you to belong to family X down the street. He didn't want you to be a part of a different family. He gave you the parents that you have and so you need to see that your parents are the ones that God has appointed for you and that your specific parents are the ones that he calls you to obey.

What does that mean? Let me just be real candid, clear and direct as best as I can with the influence of the Holy Spirit in your heart, what does that mean for you? And even if you're four, five years old, you're old enough to understand this: it means that you comply with your parents' authority. You obey their wishes. You do what they want you to do. That is God's call on your life. And, children, young people, according to God's word, it is sinful for you, it is a sin against a holy God for you to inwardly resent your parents' authority or to outwardly defy it. There is no justification for that whatsoever. So when your loving, patient mother speaks to you, your response should be, "Yes, ma'am. What else would you like from me?" When your father speaks to you, you should have the attitude if not the exact words, "Yes, sir. I'm going to do that right now." And see and understand that what you need to see, the way that you need to think rightly about your parents is that behind your parents is the authority of God. This is God's commandment to you. It's not just your earthly parents in a human capacity speaking, you as a professing Christian young person, you in a Christian home, come under the authority of God and realize that the holy, uncreated, Maker of heaven and earth who will be the Judge of the living and the dead speaks to you today and says, "Children, obey your parents in the

Lord, for this is right." This is God speaking and that means that you cannot rebel against your parents without rebelling against God himself.

So you're only left with the question: well, what are you going to do with that? And to realize perhaps here's a good spot for a word of the Gospel, you know, I'm sure that for some of you this is very convicting and you realize even if you're outwardly compliant that inwardly you resist and you can't wait to get out of the house because you want to be away from your parents. Realize that even that attitude is sinful against God. If God's word is convicting you here today, don't resist it. Don't resent the speaker simply because he has shown you what God's word says. And above all else, I beg you, oh, children, I beg you, don't harden your heart. If this convicts you of guilt in your life, then humbly go to Christ and repent and say, "I have been so sinful. Please forgive me. Please help me to change. Please change me." And go to Christ for what he would do in your life.

Notice that Paul says, look at verse 1 with me again. He calls this an obedience that's in the realm. "Children, obey your parents in the Lord," in the realm of the Lord. This is God's order. This is what God wants. This is what God has established. Now you respond as unto the Lord when I say to you, speaking as the Apostle Paul, "Children, obey your parents."

Children, we'll wrap up this point by saying this one thing, this final thing and this in some ways is the most important aspect that you could get out of this particular point. You must think about this. You must transcend thinking about your human relationships and focus your mind completely on God alone and on God himself as you think about this and realize that your first and foremost responsibility is vertical in accountability to God. And when you understand that, then you understand this: the fear of God and your love for God completely informs and conditions your demeanor toward your parents. It couldn't be any other way.

Now, kind of spoken about this from a negative perspective. Those of you that have good parents and you love them and you appreciate them and you have good harmonious relationships in your family and you are responding well to your parents, do you know what? You should just pause right here, right now, and just say, "Oh God, thank you for the parents that you have given to me. You have blessed me with gracious godly parents. Oh, I know they're not perfect, God, but they love me and they care for me and they have directed me in the way of the Lord and I love you, Lord Jesus, and I love my parents and it's just so good to see your blessing in my life this way. I'm so grateful, Father. Thank you for the family that you have given to me." That would be an appropriate way for you to respond if you come from a family that is ordered well and you love your parents. Obedience is right. There is no denying that. There is no arguing against that no matter how hard your heart might be before you came into this room and toward your parents.

Now, secondly, Paul has said obedience is right. Do you know what else he says? He says obedience is required. Obedience is required. It's not just out of a natural law sort of sense that, well, obviously, you know, there's a common sense order of things that transcends cultures. You go to Asian cultures and you see the reverence that they show to

their parents and the obedience and respect that they show to them. You get a sense of how this transcends even Christian teaching, but here in chapter 2, Paul brings the Scriptures to bear and says that obedience is required. Look at what he says in verse 2, notice the all caps. He's quoting from Scripture here. He says, "HONOR YOUR FATHER AND MOTHER (which is the first commandment with a promise)." This is God's commandment to you. A command means God says this and expects you to comply, to do what you're told by God himself and God says you honor your father and your mother.

This was really the whole subject of last week's message and so I'll say just a few things here about it without detaining us for long. As we saw last week, Paul is combining a quotation from Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5. Look over at Exodus 20 with me for just a moment. We won't mind a brief moment of review, will we? No, Don, we won't mind that. I'll answer my own question. How is that? Exodus 20. As Moses is delivering what we call the 10 Commandments in Exodus 20, he goes through commandments to honor the name of God and not take his name in vain, remember the Sabbath day and so forth, and you come to verse 12 and the fifth in that list of commandments, he says, "Honor your father and your mother," then there's a promise that's attached to it in this context and this is what Paul is referring to in Ephesians 6. There is a promise that comes with this that is unique. For the first time in the 10 Commandments, you get God promising a result that will attend obedience to this command. He says in verse 12, "Honor your father and your mother, so that your days may be prolonged in the land which the LORD gives to you." He says you'll enjoy long life as you honor your father and your mother.

Look over at Deuteronomy 5:16 just so you can see these things kind of tied together. Deuteronomy 5:16. Again, young people, children, just some of the most simple things that can help frame the whole course of your life. Understand that when we talk about the 10 Commandments that we're not saying that these are the 10 suggestions; these are the 10 ideas that you can take or leave as you wish. This is God of all, God with all authority saying, "I command everyone to live this way." This is what is required from God himself. You can't resist this, reject it without rejecting the God who spoke it. You're just not in that position. Deuteronomy 5:16 says, "Honor your father and your mother, as the LORD your God has commanded you," this is required, and then Moses says, "that your days may be prolonged and that it may go well with you on the land which the LORD your God gives you." It's required and yet it's required in a way that attaches a promise. There is a positive motivation. This isn't simply a threat that if you don't obey your parents you'll be struck dead by lightning, it's not that. That's not the spirit in which God delivers this commandment at all. He says, "Children, you honor your father and your mother," and there is a promise from God in the order of the universe attached to that, "that it will prolong your life and things will go well with you."

Now, who would not want it to go well with them? Who would not want the blessing of God on their lives? And as we saw last time, young people, to honor your parents is more than simple external conformity. It's more than obeying outside while you're sitting and shaking your fist on the inside. You see, God's law doesn't work that way. God's law doesn't simply regulate our external conduct, it goes to the heart. Do you remember in

Matthew 5 how Jesus spoke about that? Jesus said, "You've heard that you shall not commit murder, I tell you don't be angry in your heart." Jesus said, "You've heard that you should not commit adultery, I tell you don't lust in your heart." So God's word is designed to influence the direction, God's law applies and attaches its authority to the attitudes of your heart, not just your external behavior.

So to honor your parents, to give them honor, is to give them respect, to give them love, to give them deference, to show them kindness. And do you know what? Let's just go further than this, you cannot honor your parents if you withdraw from them in sullen silence. It's not enough to say, "Well, I don't back-speak to my parents. I don't argue against them, I just go to my room and I stay there and we don't even interact with each other." Do you know what? That's not honoring your parents. You see, there is a positive element to this command as well that says you are to proactively love them and interact with them and engage them in a way that shows love, respect, deference and care for them. This is God's command. You cannot honor somebody by ignoring them and shutting them out of your life, can you? Can you? It's okay to nod your head no because the answer is obvious. No, you can't. So there is a positive dimension of honoring your parents, there is a negative dimension to it. You comply with their wishes, you hear what they say and you respond to them with loving and grateful hearts.

Now, I know that for some of you this comes to you in a time of a lot of accumulated ill will and difficulties in the relationship. Let me give you another good word from Christ: he has the power to transform that. Our Lord Jesus Christ has the power to change that and transform it but what you must understand, young person, child in your parents' home, is that the change that he is calling to you is one that starts in your heart. You don't wait until your parents change, you adapt your heart. You receive the influence of God's word on your heart and say, "God, as a response to you, I ask you to change me. I will change and I ask you to help me to change," is your response to God's word. And, you know, I like to just be as direct and candid as I possibly can in times like this. Children, I know that you wouldn't say it exactly like what I'm going to say but you have a sense of pride or resentment or something that informs you that says, "You know, I'm not going to do that. That doesn't apply to me. I'm too good for that. I'm above that." Oh, oh, oh, the thought of that being in one of your hearts is just depressing to me and it's so wrong and it's such a wrong view of yourself because, do you know how I can say that for sure? As we said last time, our Lord Jesus Christ himself submitted to his parents. He did not deem it unworthy of his exalted position as the Son of God to obey his parents, to comply with their wishes, to honor them, to care for them. We saw that all last time. Do you mean to tell me that somehow you're better than, separate, apart from Jesus in your attitudes? That doesn't make any sense at all, does it? You just realize that that's just inexcusable and maybe the conviction of this is so much and so powerful that you just need to say, "Do you know what? I must not be a Christian. I need to repent and receive Christ for salvation," rather than saying, "I'm a Christian and I excuse and exonerate myself from all of the bad patterns of my own life and heart."

You know, I didn't grow up in a family that was self-consciously Christian. My dad was not a believer by any means. And, you know, I look back on it, young people, and I just

as a word of identifying with you a little bit, I look back on my life as a young person before I was in Christ and under the roof and authority of my parents. You know, my dad did a lot of things that were harsh; they were unkind and there were different things about him that made it easy not to like him, but when I look back on it, my whole attitude was the problem in response to him. I didn't give him the respect that he deserved as my father. I didn't give him the love that was righteous. You know, I withdrew. I got sullen and depressed and not so much depressed but just antagonistic toward him. Well, do you know what? My response to my father wasn't my dad's fault, that was my own sin. And what I want you to think about as you go out of here today is whether, you know, maybe your parents haven't done everything right but, do you know what, before you worry about anybody else's sin, you need to own your own. You need to own your own sin and repent of your own sin and it's amazing how repentance and forgiveness and the influence of the Holy Spirit in your life can change you without your parents changing at all. You need to realize that maybe it's your own attitude that is the real problem here and stop blaming your parents for your own disobedience to God. Let's just be real.

Now, point 3 here. We have said that obedience is right, obedience is required, finally, obedience is rewarded. I started to allude to this already but we'll separate it out as a third point here. God requires obedience, he commands it. Obedience is right, you can see that by just looking at the natural order of things. Finally, we see here Paul motivating children toward obedience with a promise. He says obedience is rewarded. God honors those who obey and honor their parents with his blessing. Look at verse 3, he says, "SO THAT IT MAY BE WELL WITH YOU, AND THAT YOU MAY LIVE LONG ON THE EARTH." Now, in those original contexts that we looked at from Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5, God was making a promise of long life to Israel in the land that he had given to them or was about to give to them. Here Paul takes that and expands it out and shows that the general principle extends even to Gentiles and what he's saying is that the order of things and the way that God operates in his providence is so that those who honor their parents find themselves in a life that has blessing attached to it; that things go well for them; that there is an order of prosperity and harmony that permeates life as you go forward; and that that God gives as a reward to honoring your parents.

Why would that be? Well, first of all, let's note this: Paul here is making a general statement. In a sense, it's like a proverb in that this is the general usual order of things which is different from saying it will absolutely be true in each and every person without exception. You know, there are good faithful Christian young people who die early: disease, accidents. There are good faithful Christians who experience poverty in life. Look at our brothers and sisters in the Third World countries and we wouldn't quickly misunderstand that. Paul is making a general statement here, not an absolute statement without any possible exceptions and notice what he's saying here. This will help you understand more fully the bigger point that he's making. Here's the point: the order of life over time, across centuries, across many people, across cultures, the order of life over time shows that children who honor their parents will do better in life than those defy their parents. General principle of life. And when you think it through, you can see why this would be especially those of us who have a few more years on our lives and have seen things.

Children, here's the thing: you're going to go through life whether you like it or not, you are going to go through life under someone's authority. You're under the authority of government. You will be under the authority of a boss one day. You'll be under the authority of church leadership if you're in a decent church. There are principles of authority throughout all of society. Wives, you'll be subject to your husbands. God's established a pattern of authority in the order of the universe. Well, where is it that we learn this principle of submission and obedience to authority? How is it that we learn to get along with the authority that is over us? It happens in the home. It happens as you in a microcosm of greater societal principle learned to respond well to the authority that God has put in your life. If you reject and rebel against and kick against the smaller level, smaller realm of authority that God has given you, on what basis do you think that you're going to respond well to other authority outside the home? And when you can't respond well to authority in the workplace, do you know what's going to happen? You're going to get fired. Do you know what's going to happen when you don't respect the authority of law enforcement? You're going to get arrested and end up in jail. And on it goes.

You see, there is more than just your parents involved, there is the self-discipline of you learning to respect authority, honoring it and complying and adjusting your life to it and that's not the principle of power speaking to those trying to keep them in subjection as liberal theologians would try to say, this is God's word. This is the way that God has ordered life. You cannot object this, you cannot question this, rebel against it without rejecting and rebelling against God himself which is ultimately a way to set your path on a direction that leads straight to eternal judgment in hell. How are you going to respect the authority of Christ, the authority of God's word, if you won't even respect the authority of your parents in your home? What makes you think that God will somehow bless you and receive you into heaven if you have a settled heart of rebellion against everything that he has established in your life? How could that ever go well for you? Do you see that your own self-interest is at stake here?

So, children, learn to respond to authority at home and that carries over to the authority of a boss, law enforcement, marriage. Do you know what else, children? One day you're probably going to be a parent and do you know what you're going to want? You're going to want obedient children. And how do you think they are going to learn obedience from you if you spent your whole life in rebellion against your own parents? You're just setting up a cycle that will bring you misery in life and why would you do that? Why would you do that when God has graciously made it plain to you and promised you, "Do you know what? Honor your father and your mother and it will go well for you in life." Why would you kick against God? Why would you kick against your parents? Why would you kick against your own self-interest in life by continuing in the hard rebellious attitudes that you have toward your parents? It's totally irrational, isn't it? Isn't it? It's okay, you can nod because I'm going to agree with myself anyway. You might as well agree too just for the sake of harmony, for relationships in the body of Christ. You might as well agree. This is irrational, isn't it? Yeah, it is. And do you know what that tells you? Do you know what that tells you? It tells you that sin is irrational. That sin dominates a heart and distorts it thinking in such a way that you act in ways that are completely contrary to

God, your own self-interest, and it's obvious and yet you're dominated by it. That's why you need a Savior. That's why you need to be delivered. That's why you need to repent and come out of, you need to come out of your life of sin. You need to come out of that rebellion in your heart and submit yourself to Christ and ask him to save you and redeem you and to wash away your sins with his precious shed blood on Calvary and be open to the consideration that maybe even though you've been in a church all your life, maybe that you've never been born again and that you need to be born again today because your life has been so completely inconsistent with the clear teaching of God's word here.

Well, Paul has given us guiding principles, as I said, not an exhaustive catalog. Next week, I'm not done yet. I know next week is usually when you close your Bible and start to think about, "Okay, what's for lunch?" I'm not done yet. I've got a few more minutes to go. Next week, what we'll see is we'll see the restraint that Scripture establishes on abuses of parental authority. We have to separate this out but they should be viewed as a unit. God speaks not only to children, he speaks to parents as well and parents will find their order in God's structure next time. For now, what I want to do is I want to close on a pastoral note. I've spoken primarily to those who are still being brought up, still, you know, in those birth, teenage, maybe early 20 years under your parents' authority, but I want to address those of us who are adults and we have parents, address parents and the role of parents of adult children, and I realize that this can present some particular challenges and so I just want to give you a little bit of perspective to help you as you go forward. I'm mindful and one of the things I love about being a pastor and preaching this way instead of just having a conference circuit preaching the same six messages all the time, what I love is knowing you well enough to know some of the heartache that you've faced in life and some of the challenges that you're going through and to be in a position to be able to help you with that.

So let me just give you a perspective on how the principle of honoring your father and mother applies as you move into adult life, okay? That's what we're going to do in just a couple of three minutes here. First of all, we need to understand this: first of all, the duty to honor your parents continues into your adult life. It does not cease when you exit your parents' home as if suddenly you can disregard your parents and that this principle no longer applies. It continues into your adult life. We see that from the fact that Jesus cared for his own mother on the cross. Jesus cared for them and even though your geographic and your residential place may change, they're still your parents, right? And so somehow this principle of honoring your parents still continues and so what can we say about this in the most general of ways? The most general of ways? Even as an adult, you should continue to show love and care to your parents even after you've moved out of the house. Whatever that means in your context, the idea of love and concern and care for your parents is a responsibility that goes with you when you leave the house. You don't leave that behind. What does that mean? You should be generous and patient with your parents. You should overlook their faults with a willingness to be as gracious with them as God has been gracious with you. God doesn't impute iniquity to you, you should have an equally magnanimous, generous, gracious attitude toward your own parents. That's one way to honor them.

You should pray for them. Do you pray for your parents? When you have opportunity to speak of them, do you speak well of them? Do you at least restrain yourself from speaking ill of them in deference to the fact that they are your parents and God says to honor them? Your parents should never be the subject of ridicule in your conversations with others. That's not honoring them and that's not honoring the God who gave those precise parents to you. So what you speak and your attitudes in your heart, you should provide for them as their needs require and as your means allow. And so there is a matter of resources, there is a matter of heart attitude, there is a matter of the discourse that you engage in. You can still honor your parents that way without being in the same kind of obedient relationship that marks those who are being brought up in a home in the early years of their life.

Now, secondly, and this may be especially helpful, I hope so: the nature of your honor changes in adulthood. The nature of your honor changes in adulthood. Should you honor your parents in adulthood? Yes. Is it the same kind of obedience that you give when you're under their roof? No, it's not. It couldn't be when you see the totality of Scripture. First of all, those of you who enter into marriage, marriage means that you give a higher priority to your spouse than you give to your parents. Look at chapter 5, verse 31 of Ephesians, "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and shall be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." There is a setting apart, there is a separation that takes place so that in your attitudes and in your perspective on life, you say, "Well, I'm going to honor my parents but my first priority is my spouse," and so there is a matter of setting a priority and perhaps setting some boundaries in your relationship with your parents. Now, let's say this: as you enter into marriage, you should include a relationship with your parents in what flows out of that. That would be God's order. You can give a priority to your spouse and leave and cleave, as it were, and still have room in your heart and life to show honor to your parents even though it may not be the same quantity of time and effort that marked you when you were in your own home, in your parents' home. So marriage should include a relationship with your parents but it changes the nature of the priority that you give to parents.

Now, let's say this in just trying to be real about life here: having said that, having said that you should honor your parents, let's be honest, let's just be really candid with each other and not make this some kind of pretended environment that no one lives in, if your parents refuse to honor boundaries or they try to set you against your spouse, you need to give preference to your mate, not to your parents. You cannot in obedience to Christ in leaving and cleaving to your spouse, you can't honor that prior principle and then in the name of honoring your parents let your parents wreck your marriage with their interference and unkindness if you run into that. So we see that fidelity to Christ does not require compliance with every parental demand once you're married because your parents are now subordinate to your marriage relationship. You can still honor them but you also have to realize that it's not like this, for those of you that are listening on the CD, it's one hand over the other. You need to be aware of that. So however that works out in your life, I'll trust the Holy Spirit to give you wisdom. The nature of your honor changes in that way. Marriage gives you a higher priority to your spouse.

Secondly, oh, and this one is so important: loyalty to Christ may bring conflict to you with your parents. Jesus was explicit on this point. Look over at Luke 12. And I realize that some parents will try to throw your spirituality in your face and say, "Why don't you do what I say? Blah blah blah." We're not capitulating to that. Luke 12:51 through 53. Just understand, I just want you to see that Jesus understood that this would happen as men follow him. Verse 51, he says, "Do you suppose that I came to grant peace on earth? I tell you, no, but rather division; for from now on five members in one household will be divided, three against two and two against three. They will be divided," look at this, "father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother," and on it goes. The reality of the world's opposition to Christ is going to play out often in family relationships when a man or woman is saved and he's now an adult in relationship with unsaved parents and the parents want things out of you and demand loyalties that you cannot give to them because of your faith in Christ, and what you need to see is, and we hold these things lightly and not trying to overstate them, but your parents cannot dictate the terms of your faith and obedience to Christ. Christ is supreme. Christ is the one who lay down his life for you. Christ is over all. Your great commandment is to love the Lord your God with all of your heart, soul, strength and mind, and it is not the prerogative of parents to inject themselves and to diminish your faith or to call you away from Christ. They do not have that prerogative. When they do that, you must obey Christ and not men. Period. Do you understand the supremacy of Christ? Then that settles it. And understand this is intended as a comfort to you to realize that if your obedience to Christ has brought you into conflict with your parents, then understand, take comfort in Christ, he told you in advance it would be that way and not worry over it as though you were doing something wrong.

You know, I've mentioned this in the past, I'll mention it again, as a young man, as a new Christian, my father sat me down one time and he said, "I'm glad you're real religious but it's gone too far and I want it to stop." He was just seeing the fruit of a transformed life. I hadn't gone off the rails in any way, shape or form. Do you know what? I did not dishonor my father when I told him no and I told him no immediately. He had never seen that before. "I want it to stop." I said, "Dad, no. No. Jesus Christ has changed my life. I'm not going to stop following him." Now, at the same time in the days that followed, how did I honor my father in that? I didn't separate from him. I sought all the more to show the love and obedience and honor and respect that I could within that context of how Christ defined the parameters of our relationship. "Dad, I'm sorry but you're not the Lord of my conscience. We can't go there and you won't go there but I'll give you every other aspect of human love and affection and obedience that I possibly can in the affection of Christ and the power of Christ until the Lord takes you home." It broke my heart when God took him sooner than I expected. But parents cannot dictate the terms of faith and obedience to Christ.

Thirdly, we've said that the nature of your honor changes in adulthood, firstly, marriage changes it; secondly, loyalty to Christ may bring conflict; finally, peace may not be in your control. Beloved, peace may not be within your control to make it happen. Some conflicts may not have ready resolutions. You know, Romans 12:18 says, "If possible in so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men." Sometimes it's not possible. God

understands that. I understand that. But here's where you go in response to that: even then, even if you've reached the point where you say peace is not possible here, it's not even possible for us to have a relationship based on the way my parents act, even then, guard your heart. Don't feed your anger. Don't feed resentment. Remember that Jesus calls us to even...he not only calls us to honor our parents, he calls us to love our enemies and to pray for those who persecute us. If you find that in that distorted situation with your own parents, at least start with your heart and say, "Lord, I'm going to pray for them. Lord, I'm going to honor them. I'll express love and I'm willing to be reconciled as soon as they show that same willingness." Somehow show an inclination, develop, cultivate an inclination in your heart that says, "God, they're my parents and, God, they won't have a relationship with me but, oh God, I would have it if they would and I pray that you would bless them and help them and, you you know, when it comes to talking about them with others, I'm just not going to say much. I'm not going to speak harshly or badly about them, Lord, I'm just going to trust you with that." And you adopt that kind of perspective in the way you go forward.

Look, human relationships are complex, aren't they? And relationships with parents go to the very heart of who we are. As we work through these things, as you work through these things as you go out, if there is complexity in it and you're dealing with parents that have really messed up, go out with this with a sense of dependence on Christ, "Christ, guide me, help me, guard me, direct me, and help me to honor this principle even if it's not immediately evident to me how that could be." For those of you who have parents that are great and wonderful like I do, my surviving mom, capitalize on it and bless them with your love and care as long as God gives them breath.

God bless you. Let's pray together.

Father, as we have spent so much time on this topic, we now commit it all to you. Father, in one way or another, you've given us the earthly parents that we have had or now do have, give each one in this room wisdom to understand how to honor this principle to which you call us. Thank you for your grace which cleanses us from all sin in Christ. Father, may you extend your grace further to those who have been convicted and the dark deadness of their heart has been exposed. Father, may you move beyond that convicting work to lead them, grant them repentance and faith in Christ as we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

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