

The Fruit of Faithfulness: Desiring to be Obedient Children

Galatians 5:22; Ephesians 6:1-3

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Greg L. Price

What happens when children raised within a household of faith refuse to obey their parents, reject the Lord, and rather walk down the paths that please them? We have some examples (given to us by the Lord) of such children in the Bible who dishonored their parents, who did not show affection for their parents, and who rejected the counsel of their parents. A couple notable ones are these: Hophni and Phinehas (the sons of Eli the priest) who were slain by the Philistines for their disobedience; and Absalom (the son of King David) who sought to overthrow his own father and was speared to death for his disobedience. Dear children, the Lord takes very seriously the honor or dishonor you have for your parents. This is not a light matter in the eyes of the Lord, but one which is of the utmost importance to the Lord your God.

The Apostle Paul particularly addresses you, children, in the text before us this Lord's Day. For the kingdom of God belongs to you as well as to your parents. The Lord Jesus declared concerning little children (even infants) who were brought to Him, "for of such is the kingdom of God" (Mark 10:14). Children, the Lord has called you to Himself in the promises of the gospel made to you in your baptism and in the gospel of salvation. That being the case, it simply follows that children are addressed by the Apostle Paul as a class of members of the church of Jesus Christ (along with husbands, wives, and parents in the letter to the Ephesians). Dear children, it is not simply your parents that are called to faithfulness within the family and within the church, but the Apostle Paul under inspiration of the Holy Spirit specifically writes to you as well. Children, listen carefully and take notes if you can, for God is speaking to you as well as

to your parents through the preaching of His Word. Last Lord's Day we considered the faithfulness of a child to God. This Lord's Day we consider the faithfulness of a child to his/her parents.

I would like to ask and answer the following two questions in regard to the faithfulness of a child within the family from our text this Lord's Day: (1) **What** is a child's duty? (2) **Why** is a child to obey?

I. **What Is A Child's Duty? Ephesians 6:1**

A. A child's duty of faithfulness within the home is summarized in this commandment: "Children, obey your parents in the Lord" (Ephesians 6:1). To obey means to listen to your parents, and to do what they tell you to do with a willing heart. To obey means to recognize that God has placed your parents over you to love, correct, and train you in the ways of the Lord. For example, if you are told to clean up your room, or to take out the trash, to come in from playing, or to get ready for bed, obedience not only means to listen with the outward ear ("I hear you"), but to do quickly and willingly what you are told to do—not when you feel like doing it or when you get around to it, but when you are told to do it.

B. Children, how are you to obey your parents?

1. **Obey so as to please the Lord** ("in the Lord"). You should want to please your parents (so as to make their job a joy and delight), but most importantly you should want to please the Lord out of a heart filled with love to Jesus for all that He has freely given to you. Dear children, do you trust in Jesus Christ as your only Savior from sin? Do you love the Lord? You demonstrate your love for the Lord by the way in which you obey your parents.

2. **Obey with a respectful attitude.** Don't slam doors or stomp out of the room when you don't get what you want. Don't speak in

a sarcastic manner to your parents. Remember, all authority in the home is placed in the hands of your parents by God, and to disrespect your parents, by attitudes, words, gestures, or behavior is to show disrespect for the living God whom your parents represent.

3. Obey from a willing heart.

a. Don't just obey outwardly, but ask the Lord to give you a real desire to be obedient (that is the fruit of faithfulness). Don't be like the child that was told by his father to sit down beside him, so that he could discuss the child's disobedience. The child did not want to sit down, and disobeyed his father. Finally, the child did sit down beside the father after he was disciplined, but said, "I'm sitting down on the outside, but I am standing up on the inside." This is not true obedience because it is not from the heart.

b. Likewise, to grumble and complain about what you have been asked to do (even though you eventually do it) is not the obedience God desires. Don't have the attitude, "Well, if I have to do it, I will, but I sure don't like it. I'm not even going to try to like it." Just as God loves a cheerful giver, so God loves cheerful obedience.

4. Obey immediately.

a. Don't wait until you forget what you were told to do. Don't wait until you are distracted by something you really want to do instead of what your dad or mom has asked you to do. To wait until you are threatened with discipline is not the obedience in which God delights.

b. When you pray in the Lord's Prayer, "Thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven," you are asking God to give you the grace to obey God as quickly as the angels do in heaven. Do you think the angels in heaven have to be told a second, third, or fourth time to obey the Lord? Of course not! God delights in your immediate obedience.

C. Now some of you children might be saying to yourselves, "It's not easy to obey parents as God commands." And you are absolutely

right. In fact, it's not only "not easy", it is "impossible" for you to obey your parents as God commands. The only perfect child ever born was the Lord Jesus Christ, and He never sinned in His thoughts, words, or deeds. Obedience to your parents is hard because you are by nature sinners (as we all are). We want to do what we want to do because we want to do it. When your parents tell you to stop touching those items in the store, you are tempted by your own sinful desires to pick that toy up anyway and hold it in your hands just as Eve was told by God not to eat the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (and which she did anyway).

1. In fact, dear children, the very first reason God has given His commandments to us (commandments like "Children, obey your parents") is to show us that we are sinners and that we need Jesus Christ to save us from our sins (your baptism declares that to you). For without Christ, we will all bear the eternal punishment of our disobedience against God and His good and righteous commandments. Thus, when you know God commands you to obey your parents, and you fail to do so, that holy commandment actually sends you to Christ to find in Him a Savior who kept all of the commandments of God for those who will confess they are sinners and will take Him to be their righteousness. God's commandments should show you that you cannot trust in your own obedience to make yourself acceptable unto God. Only Jesus can save you and make you acceptable to God. Dear children, come to God with an empty hand (not with a full hand of your own good works which you believe will save you) and receive the free gift of Christ. Take Christ and His perfect obedience to be your own by faith as a free gift that God offers you, and God will freely forgive all your sins, consider you as righteous in His sight, and give you that holy desire and fruit of faithfulness to obey your parents.

2. God not only gives you His holy commandments (like "Children, obey your parents") so as to show you your need of Christ, but also to reveal to you how you show your faith in Christ and love for him,

and how you can show God your gratitude and thanksgiving for all that He has done for you. Jesus said to His disciples, “If you love me, keep my commandments” (John 14:15). By the grace of God, dear children, you can sincerely, cheerfully, and quickly obey your parents. And even though it is impossible to do so in your own strength, it is not impossible to do so with the strength that comes from Jesus Christ. Without Christ you can do nothing, but you can do all things through Christ who strengthens you.

D. Does this command refer only to children while they are very young or does it mean older children as well? The Greek word used here for children does not stress the age of the child in particular, but rather the fact that they have been begotten and have parents. Certainly, therefore, as long as children are under their parents roof and authority, they are bound to obey their parents in that which is agreeable to God’s Word (whether they are toddlers, pre-teens, teens, are even young adults who are yet single). Once children have left home, their relationship to their parents changes in various respects, but it never means that children cease to honor their parents in all ways agreeable to the Word of God, nor cease to care for the needs of their parents as they are able.

E. Now, the Lord doesn’t say here, “Children, obey your parents if you like what they tell you to do” does He? No, He commands, “Children, obey your parents IN THE LORD.” There are two ideas that are communicated by the phrase “IN THE LORD.”

1. First, your parents represent the Lord in the home, and therefore your obedience to your parents is obedience to the Lord. And likewise, your disobedience to your parents is disobedience to the Lord. When your parents give you a lawful command or faithful counsel (whether you are 5, 10, 15, or 20), they speak on behalf of God and when you ignore them, tune them out, show disrespect to them, do not obey

them within from the heart but reluctantly and mere outward obedience, or disobey them, you have committed the same sin against the Lord. That's the first thing that is meant by "Children, obey your parents IN THE LORD."

2. The second thing that is meant by "Children, obey your parents IN THE LORD" is that since your parents represent the Lord in the home, they must not tell you to do anything that is contrary to what the Lord says in His Word.

a. To obey "IN THE LORD" means that when parents command their children to disobey God and His Word, the children must respectfully disagree, and rather obey God. Of course, children must be absolutely sure that what a parent has commanded or forbidden is contrary to the Word of God, and if they are not sure, it is always safer and right to obey their parents. And even if children must disobey their parents in order to obey the Lord, they must respectfully explain why they cannot do what their parents have commanded in that instance. They must show their parents that they are grieved in their soul that they cannot obey them.

b. This is actually not dishonoring parents (when you are honoring the Lord), but rather it is truly honoring parents in doing what God has called parents to be. It would actually be to dishonor your parents to follow them in sinning against your Heavenly Father.

c. Children should not break the Sabbath, follow a false religion, lie (by saying that Dad is not at home when he is at home), nor marry one who does not embrace the same principles of religion that the Bible teaches (and are summarized in our Confession of Faith). Such commands would be against God's law. Children are to obey their parents only "IN THE LORD" because all authority to rule in the home comes from God and not from parents.

II. Why Is A Child To Obey? Ephesians 6:2-3

A. A child is to obey because God commands obedience when He says, “Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right. Honour thy father and mother.” God says it is right to obey your parents in the Lord because He has commanded children to do so in the Fifth Commandment, “Honour thy father and mother”).

1. To honor your parents means to see them as precious and valuable to you (and if due to their sinful, disobedient lives you cannot honor them for how they treated you or served God, you may still honor them as having given you life and by viewing the office of father or mother as being precious and valuable—you can also be thankful for what your parents taught you that was profitable and can determine by God’s grace to be the Christian father or mother to your children that you did not have).

2. Children, God doesn’t command you to obey your parents because He wants to make your life miserable, but because obedience leads to joy and blessing (Deuteronomy 6:24). In fact, the most miserable people to be around are those who have never learned to obey. They are selfish and care only about themselves.

3. As you grow up, you do not stop having to submit to those who have lawful authority over you. It’s not just children that are commanded to obey. Wives are to obey their husbands, and adult members of the congregation (whether men or women) are to obey their elders. All Christians are to obey lawful civil magistrates and supremely are to obey Christ. See how long your dad will keep his job if he tells his boss he doesn’t want to obey the instructions his boss gives him. Children, most importantly, if you do not learn to obey your parents, you will not learn to obey the Lord. For if you cannot obey your parents whom you can see, how will you ever learn to obey the living God whom you cannot see? Or if you cannot obey those who represent God in the home, namely your parents, how will you ever obey the God whom they represent?

B. The second reason you children are to obey your parents in the Lord is because God graciously rewards obedience: “Honour 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” (Ephesians 6:2-3).

1. Is this an absolute promise that an obedient child will be wealthy, free of hardship, and live to be 100 years old? No, all such physical promises that pertain to this life are conditioned upon what will most glorify God, what will most edify the Church of Jesus Christ, and what will best promote our own spiritual good. However, ordinarily a child that willingly obeys from the heart grows up avoiding many pitfalls that ensnare people and cut their lives short due to sin and rebellion.

2. It may happen that the disobedient and rebellious child lives a long life upon earth by God’s providence, but in so doing the wicked child only stores up more judgment upon himself in not taking advantage of the time given to repent of his sin and to turn to Christ. The blessing of a long life in such a case is turned into a curse. It may also happen that the obedient and righteous child lives a short life upon earth by God’s providence, but in so doing God takes that which is temporary away (life here upon earth) and gives that which is eternal (life in heaven) which can never be taken away. In such cases, it’s as if God promises a hundred dollars and instead gives the child a million dollars.

3. Dear children, never forget that the promise God makes to you is due to His grace and not due to your own merit or goodness. When you obey your parents, you should not be saying to yourself, “Look at what a good child I am.” You should rather be saying, “Look at what a good God I serve that He has given me the desire and ability to obey my parents.” Remember, the only thing any of us truly deserve from God is hell. Everything else we receive is of His grace, mercy, and love.

4. Also note that promises of earthly blessing are not unique to the Old Covenant (i.e. to Israel), but are expanded in the New Covenant (to all the earth). The reward for believers who lovingly obey the Lord has promise in this life and in the life to come (1 Timothy 4:8). Rewards for obedience since the fall of man do not make faithful obedience a covenant of works. The rewards are graciously and freely offered by the Lord. They are not merited by the one who obeys, but have been merited by Christ who freely dispenses these rewards as an incentive to our loving obedience.

In conclusion, children, let me leave you with several practical ways to apply in faithfulness what God has commanded you to do.

1. **Pray for your parents.** Your parents need your prayers that God will give them wisdom and knowledge of His will in leading you in love. Such prayers of love find favor in God's sight.
2. **Cover their weaknesses and faults.** Rather than exposing your parent's sins and weaknesses to others, seek to bury them from public notice and pray for them (1 Peter 4:8).
3. **If you yourselves would be a good father or mother with your children when you grow up and become parents, learn to obey your father and mother as a child.** Those who have never learned to obey, when placed in authority are sure to abuse it. Those who are best able to lead others have learned to obey God and those whom God has put in authority over them. The problem with men, women, and children in not obeying those who are in authority over them is always that they have not learned to obey the Lord God who is over them. Dear children, you are in training right now to be good parents when you grow up. What kind of parents will you be? A lot depends upon how you are learning to obey your own parents right now.

4. **Jesus is not asking you to do anything that He was unwilling to do Himself with His own parents** (Luke 2:51). And He was the perfect, sinless Son of God! Yet He who was sinless honored His parents and obeyed them, even though they were sinners.

5. **When you disobey (no matter how wickedly), don't run away from the Lord rather run to the Lord and be restored (as is taught in The Parable of the Prodigal Son, Luke 15:11-32)**. Christ is more willing to forgive your disobedience than you are willing to come and to seek it. He will not turn you away. Cast all your sins and disobedience upon Christ. That is why Christ came and suffered as no man has ever suffered—He came to bear the disobedience of all who will trust alone in Christ alone to be their only Savior from sin. As you spend time with Christ in prayer and studying your Bible, He will grow in you the fruit of faithfulness and obedience to your parents and supremely to your Heavenly Father.

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