Opening Words

Children, young people, do you want a long life and have a life where things go well for you? Then obey your parents. Honor your father and mother and the promise will be fulfilled.

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"Should Children Really Obey Their Parents in Everything?" If you were with us in our previous broadcast we started looking at why children were to obey their parents in the Lord, and we saw that Paul listed three reasons. He based this exhortation upon natural law, upon revealed law, and upon the Gospel.

Children should obey their parents because this is a built in, natural law in humanity, and we saw all cultures of the world, Christian and non-Christian embracing this. The reason non-Christian cultures embrace this is that it is rooted in creation. It is part of the makeup of our humanity.

But Paul tells us something else. He says that children should obey their parents in the Lord because we find this command in the Mosaic Law. Paul quotes from Exodus 20:12 and Deuteronomy 5:16 and says, "honor your father and mother (which is the first commandment with a promise) so that it may be well with you and that you may live long on the earth."

The command for children to honor their parents is the fifth of the Ten Commandments. The Ten Commandments consisted of two tablets of stone and many have thought that the first four commandments were written on one and the last six were written on the second tablet. The first four deal with our relationship with God and the latter six with our human relationships. But the Jews always wrote them with five on each tablet, and they placed the command for children to honor their parents with the commands of our worship of and attitude towards God. This was well thought out because a child's attitude towards his parents showed his reverence towards God. A parent was the one who first represented God to his children. Children get their first conceptions of God from the behavior of parents! Talk about a heavy responsibility!

Listen to these words from Leviticus 19:1-4, "Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying: "Speak to all the congregation of the sons of Israel and say to them, 'You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy. Every one of you shall reverence his mother and his father, and you shall keep My sabbaths; I am the Lord your God. Do not turn to idols or make for yourselves molten gods; I am the Lord your God."

Do you see what the Lord was doing here with Israel? He was bringing the command of honoring parents right in with the commands to avoid idolatry, to keep the Sabbath, and to be holy like the Lord. These were part of the commands on the first tablet that dealt with worship of the Lord God. And he showed that a child's attitude towards his parents revealed his attitude towards God.

Paul says that a promise is linked to this command. It is the only command of the Ten with a promise attached to it, and perhaps the Lord did this because he knew our tendency to rebel against authority. And so, he says, "children, obey your parents in the Lord, honor your father and mother and if you do, remember that God has a special promise for you – you will live long on the earth and it will go well with you."

The original command to children was part of the charter covenant between God and Israel, and the promise had to do with their inheriting the land God promised Israel. Paul takes this principle and applies it to Gentile children living long wherever they are on the earth. And it is not just living long but it is living well. He says that things will go well with you. This should be a great incentive for children to obey their parents. Children, young people, do you want a long life and have a life where things go well for you? Then obey your parents. Honor your father and mother and the promise will be fulfilled.

I remember, when as a young man, I began to grasp this. I tried to be much more conscious of honoring my parents. In my father's last years, I enjoyed studying the Bible with him, and when I would leave him to return home I would give him a big hug. He has been gone now for over 35 years, and as I matured and worked hard to make a living for my family I realized how hard he had worked to support us. Many times, I prayed, "Father in heaven, I can't wait to see my father because I want to honor him some more. I want to give him another big hug and thank him again for all he did for me."

I remember also, while my mother was still living, how it was getting close to Mother's Day and the idea popped into my head to fly in my mother and my wife's mother to spend the weekend with us. This was no small feat because my mother-in-law lived in California and my mother was living in Arkansas at the time. My mother had never flown before! But we worked it out and at church on that Sunday which was Mother's Day I honored them both publicly and gave them flowers. I remember when I asked my mom to come forward to the front of our service to receive the flowers I had bought for her and she told me later, "Jonathan, I felt like Miss America walking down the aisle." That made me laugh, and it filled my heart with joy because I knew she felt greatly honored, and I had obeyed Scripture. And guess what, I'm still living and things are going well for me. The promise is true!

I think also that things go well with us when we obey and honor our parents because it provides protection for us. Our parents can see dangers we cannot see. They have wisdom we do not have. They have more experience than we do, and believe it or not, they know us better than we may know ourselves! When we obey, when we get under the authority of our parents, we shield ourselves from unnecessary temptation from the evil one, and we protect ourselves from our own immature, foolish choices.

Paul gives us a third reason why children should obey their parents. We have had the natural law, the revealed law in Old Testament, and the third is the Gospel. He says, "children, obey your parents *in the Lord*." He is writing to a church where entire families have embraced Christ and he wants the children to obey their saved parents. This will result in a great testimony to the world.

Paul says, "this is right for you to do this." A family that lives its faith at home and that follows Christ together will be a great testimony to the world. So, children, obey your parents, not just because you must, not just because it is commanded for you to do this, but obey them because you love Jesus. Obey them because you want to show the world the reality of your faith. You cannot be a rebellious child, a child with a bad attitude and expect others to take notice of your faith and want to follow you into the kingdom.

Now there are a couple of other issues we must talk about at this point. What about children whose parents are not saved. Should they obey them? And the answer is, absolutely! Remember, obedience to parents is not something that is distinctly Christian. It is something that is built into our human nature from creation. Even if your parents are not Christians yet, you should still obey them and honor them. Your obedience to them with a respectful attitude may go a long way in winning them to Christ. If you say, "I'm not going to obey you and honor you because you are not a Christian," you will do great damage to the cause of Christ. They will want nothing to do with your Christ because you will be showing a rebellious spirit that is extremely unattractive to them.

Peter told the wives to honor their unsaved husbands and to win them without a word, i.e., to win them by their chaste and respectful behavior. In the same way, children can influence their unsaved parents. Many years ago, a 5-year old son was responsible for influencing his father to become a Christian! And in the church, I previously pastored, a daughter prayed for her unsaved father. She was just a little girl, only 8 or 9. She would lay on the couch with her head in her father's lap and tell him Bible verses. Month after month this went on and the little girl did not realize it but her father's heart was softening day by day as he saw his daughter's spiritual interest and her sweet spirit. Finally, one day, the father gave his life to Christ and he became a vital member of our church and it was a joy to see the entire family worshipping together.

What if a parent tells a child to do something that is wrong or immoral? This will be the only time where a child can disobey a parent. A child, also is under the higher command of God and in cases like that it is better to obey God rather than man. But I must add, these kinds of situations are rare. Usually, parents are not going to command that their children do something wrong. And if they do, you must still look to your attitude and explain respectfully why you cannot do what they ask because it would compromise your commitment to Christ. You do not do what they ask, not out of a hateful, rebellious spirit, but because of a sweet spirit of obedience to Christ.

One more quick issue here. How long is a child obligated to obey his parents? This changes from culture to culture. There is no verse that says, "obey until you are 18 or 21." In the Roman culture, a son was under the authority of his father if the father lived! In our culture, the goal seems to be to get the kids out of the house as soon as possible, and the children want to be out as quickly as they can. Both our culture and the Roman culture seem to be extreme to me. You know what I think the solution is to that? I believe the solution is "to honor." A child, a son or daughter must always seek to honor his parents. As the child grows into adulthood, he will not obey in the same way he obeyed when he was three years old or ten years old. But he, if he is wise, he will seek to honor his parents. Proverbs tells us not to abandon the counsel of our parents even when they are old.

The goal is not to get out from under authority by being rebellious. The goal is to be mature and to honor the Lord by honoring our parents. Parents can help in this process immensely by the way they raise their children. And to this topic we shall turn in our next study.