

Sermon for Sunday, August 19, 1979, by Andrew A. Jumper, D.D., Pastor  
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"GOD'S GLUE FOR FRACTURED FAMILIES - V

Ephesians 5:21 - 6:4

Text: "Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. 'Honor your mother and father' (this is the first commandment with a promise), 'that it may be well with you and that you may live long on the earth.'" Ephesians 6:1-3

Today is the fifth in our series on the Christian family. I realize that August is vacation season and that for many of you it has not been possible to attend each Sunday. Also, I realize that many of you are visitors and you have not had the opportunity to hear what has gone before. The problem with this is that what I am trying to share with you about what the Bible teaches on the family needs to be taken in context. While each sermon--in a sense--is complete of itself, taken out of context it can be misunderstood. For example, to say that God's order for the home is for the man to be the head of the house is true but when you take that out of context in how he is to exercise his role, then you don't have the whole truth. For that reason, I hope those of you who are here for the first time in several weeks, or who are visitors today, will take copies of the previous sermons which are available at each exit.

In this series, we have been talking about three basic elements within the family. First, we talked about Rule--God's structure for the Christian family. Then, for the next three Sundays we talked about the second element, relationships. Today we are going to continue that subject and talk about the relationship between parents and children. Perhaps next week we will begin to talk about the third element, which is the roles that various members of the family have in God's plan for the family.

Our basic scripture passage this morning is Ephesians 6:1-4. The secondary passage is Colossians 3:20-21. In these passages, God lays down the relationship between parents and children. Now, notice that I said parents and not just fathers. The father is mentioned in both passages in terms of how he relates to the children. However, when we come to talk about roles, we will see that the mother is, so to speak, "second in command" to the father and therefore what applies to him will logically also apply to her. Also, today we have homes where there are no fathers. This may be through divorce or by death, but the fact is there are many one-parent homes. Therefore, the admonition to the fathers will also apply to whoever is the head of the home. It is that person's job, whoever it may be, to fulfill the role of the father figure.

Now, that is the first clarification I want to make--what the Bible says about the relationship of a father to his children also applies to the wife or to whoever is head of the home. The second clarification I want to make is this: our scripture for today assumes a Christian home. When the Bible talks about parent-child relationships, it starts with the assumption that the home is a Christian one. Now, if any young person has a home which is not Christian, what does that mean for him or her? Jesus gives us a plain and simple answer. Loyalty to him is always first. "If any one comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple." (Luke 14:26) He also said that to follow him could result in the fact that a man's worst enemies might be those of his own household. (Matthew 10:21, 34-39)

However, let me make one thing clear. Even in a non-Christian home a child or young person should be obedient to his parents, to honor his father and mother, as far as he possibly can unless it is in clear conflict with his Christian duty.

The worst thing I can imagine is a Christian young person, whose parents are not Christian, using that fact to be disobedient to them. That is no excuse for not giving your parents loving obedience and honoring them as far as possible. Indeed, St. Peter tells us in chapter three, verse one, that a Christian woman living with a non-believer husband ought to conduct herself in such a way that the husband would be won to Jesus by her behavior. He goes on to say, "its not a matter of adorning yourself outwardly, being pretty outwardly". What's important is an inner spiritual adornment of a gentle and quiet spirit. I would assume that same principle would hold true for believing children in relationship to non-believing parents. They should conduct themselves in such a Christ-like way, they should have an inner adornment of a gentle and quiet spirit, so that their unbelieving parents would be touched and moved and even converted by their holy example, by the love and honor and obedience given them.

According to our Scripture this morning, a child or young person has the relationship of obedience to his parents "in the Lord." Let me tell you what that doesn't mean! I heard some young people say what that means is I am to be obedient as long as what my parents tell me to do is in the Lord. That's not what the Scripture said. It is not your duty to decide whether or not what your Christian parents require of you is right or wrong. That's not your responsibility. The Bible gives us a structure for the home--an authority structure--and when you start deciding whether or not what your parents tell you is in the Lord, you are moving yourself outside of God's structure for the family and therefore, out of God's will. Now, you may not like that. And, as a matter of fact, what they ask or require of you may not always be fair or always be the best thing and certainly sometimes it will not be the thing you want. But the Bible says, "Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right." And when it says, "this is right" the text there means that it is God's will that it work that way. So, the first thing in a child's relationship to his or her parents is to be obedient because that is the way God has structured the home.

The second thing in this relationship is the spirit or attitude in which you practice your obedience. When St. Paul says to be obedient "in the Lord," he means to conduct yourself in your obedience in the spirit of Jesus--a spirit of love and humility and meekness. Now, notice the sequence of the next verse. Paul says to be obedient in the Lord and then he adds, "honor your father and mother..." Did you know you could obey, but do it in such a spirit that you do not honor your parents? For example, you could say in an ugly voice, "Alright, I'll do it if it will make you happy." And then stomp around doing it in a violent manner, with an ugly face. Now, you would be obeying, but not in the spirit of Jesus and you would not be honoring your parents. The mere ceremony of obedience without honor, says John Calvin, "is of no value in the sight of God." It's like the little boy who was made to sit down and then glared at his father and said, "I may be sitting down on the outside, but I'm still standing up inside." That's obedience without honor.

A lot of problems in the home arise because the child assumes the job of deciding whether or not the commands of his parents are right or fair. God never gave you that job. You have Christian parents and right or wrong God said its right for you to be obedient and when you begin to judge whether or not its right or fair, then you are moving yourself outside of God's structure for the home and you get yourself outside of God's will. When that happens trouble is always the consequence. And I think you young people can make an amazing discovery. You will discover that as you respond with obedience to your parents--obedience that is in the spirit of Jesus and which honors your parents--you will discover they respond to that spirit in you. You will find them treating you better and more lovingly as you respond better and more lovingly to their discipline. You see, the big problem in your home may not be your parents--it may very well be you!

You may be the one who has moved yourself outside of God's will--God's plan for the family.

So, the Bible says first, you are to be obedient, and secondly, your obedience is to be given in the spirit of Jesus which honors your parents. Now, when you do that the Bible has a two-fold promise for you. The Bible says that things will go better in life for you and you will be blessed with a longer life. Are things going well for you at home? If not, it may be because you are not following God's rules for the home as they relate to you. Go home today and start practicing God's way. Go home and begin to be obedient in the Lord and give honor to your parents. If you will do that, I will make you a promise. I promise you things will get better between you and your parents. And I dare to make that promise--not because it's mine but because God is a promise maker and God is a promise keeper--because that's what God says. He says it will work for you.

Now, let's turn to the parents and talk about your relationship to your children. In the Ephesians passage as well as Colossians 3:21, the Bible says not to provoke the children. The word "provoke" is not a very good translation of the Greek and there is no single English word that is adequate. The Greek word means a sort of continual, irksome discipline that makes a child lose his sense of worth--that makes him feel that there is nothing he can do that is right. Maybe a better translation would be to say, "Fathers, don't frustrate your children..."

Are you guilty of that? You know, as I look back on the days when my children were young I think that's the biggest sin of my relationship to them. I was always quick to discipline and slow to treat them as persons of worth--to elevate them and bring out the best in them--to make them feel good about themselves. You see, Paul is not opposed to discipline, but he is opposed to mis-handling discipline. Discipline ought to correct and structure the life of a child, but it should also provide a framework where his talents and gifts can be enhanced and brought out so that he feels important, a person of worth. And when a child responds obediently to discipline, he should be complimented. We're so quick to be critical with our discipline and never use it as a structure--help a child blossom, bloom and grow and feel like a person of worth. Children need supervision and guidance and discipline, but they can be allowed their own dignity and consideration. You see, a child who is treated with consideration will be considerate of others.

Now, having said that discipline ought to be practiced in the right way and in the right spirit, let me go on to say that it is the duty of parents to discipline. Children need and want discipline. As someone has said, we spend the first two years of a child's life teaching him to walk and talk, and then we spend the next 12 telling him to sit down and shut up! But children need the security of discipline. A child without limits on his life is an insecure child. I don't know which is worse--to have the wrong kind of discipline or to have no discipline. They're both out of the will of God. One of my favorite comic strips is called "The Family Circus." This is about a family with several small children. Several weeks ago, Billy, the oldest child and perhaps a second-grader, goes off to summer camp. At meal time he is sitting in the camp dining room looking at his plate and he says, "I wish my mom were here to make me eat this." Well, that's so true to life. Children need discipline. Just yesterday in "Dear Abby" a young girl wrote and this is what she said, "My problem is my mother. She's too lenient. After she gets angry and punishes me, she often will apologize. Why should she apologize when I know I had the punishment coming?" I was interested in how Abby replied. She wrote, "Discipline is proof of love. When a parent punishes a child, he is saying, 'You are loved, and I am trying to teach you to behave in a socially acceptable manner because I am not going to be around forever to protect and forgive you.'" Then she added wistfully, "Children know this. I wish more parents did." You see, to discipline a child properly is difficult. That's the hard

thing to do. When a child does something he or she shouldn't do, or moving in a direction they shouldn't, that's difficult to know how to discipline and how to exercise discipline. The thing that bothers me today is that so many families aren't willing to invest the time, effort and the trouble to discipline their children properly. The children are crying out for the right kind of discipline.

There are a lot of people today who are trying to absolutize child freedom. As a matter of fact, through the United Nations, there is being sponsored something called "the year of the child." This deeply concerns me. On the other hand, I simply cannot support humanistic efforts to free the child from all rule and all discipline. Is it Sweden who has passed a law forbidding parents to spank their children? You see, we parents are certainly not perfect parents who are angels. But our children are not angels either. A lion cub may be cute and playful, but its basic nature is still that of a lion. The only difference is weakness versus strength. So with children. Our children--as do we--need the restraint of moral law. Of course, if you do not believe in a moral law--as many today do not--then the only issue is child power. That's what humanism is doing--it's elevating child power against parent power. They don't see any moral code above both of them to which both must give allegiance. But in the Christian home, a child soon learns that the obedience asked of him is not arbitrary and capricious. No, the obedience he is asked to give is the same kind of obedience his parents are also subject to.

Does that make sense to you? Parents have the obligation to discipline their children. It is a discipline that is not too harsh where self-worth is destroyed, but it is not so lax that moral chaos results. And it is a discipline to which the parents themselves are also subject for the laws of God are for both child and parents.

Let me make this final comment about the relationship of parents to their children. If you put yourselves under the discipline of God's laws and try to live your life as Jesus would have you live, as your children see you are subject to the same sort of discipline you expect of them, I think you will discover an amazing difference in their attitude. You see, they can never follow in spiritual steps if you don't leave some foot prints.

Addendum: The following poem was given to Dr. Jumper by a member following the sermon. Since it is appropriate to the closing statement, it is added here.

It was a sheep, not a lamb that went astray  
in the parable Jesus told.  
A grown-up sheep that had wandered away  
from the ninety-and nine in the fold.  
Out on the hillside, out in the cold  
It was a sheep the Good Shepherd sought  
and back to the flock, safe into the fold  
It was a sheep the Good Shepherd bought  
and why for the sheep should we earnestly long  
and as earnestly hope and pray?  
Because there's much danger if they go wrong,  
they will lead the lambs astray.  
For the lambs will follow the sheep, you know  
wherever the sheep may stray.  
When the sheep go wrong, it will not be long,  
til the lambs are as wrong as they.  
And so with the sheep we earnestly plead  
for the sake of the lambs today.  
If the sheep are lost--what terrible cost,  
the lambs will have to pay.