

EPHESIANS WEEK #12 - SJGC

Spirit-filled Relationships: Parents and Children

Ephesians 6:1-4

PATTI

We began to explore last week the topic of Spirit-filled relationships in Ephesians 5.

And we looked at the Apostle Paul's teaching about what it means to follow Jesus in marriage; including the sacrificing of selfish desires for the sake of a spouse.

Our reading today speaks of two another foundational relationship – the parent/child relationship.

It's common today for people to believe that the reason they are the person they are is because of their relationship with their parents.

It's possible to go overboard with this and we may conclude that we overdid this and put too much emphasis on it.

Martin Luther says you can describe all of history as a drunken man, who, having fallen off his horse on the left side gets back up on the horse and falls off on the right side.

Yet there is a grain of truth in how foundational our

relationship with our parents really is.
Because biblically, the command to honor to your parents is second only to the command to honor God.

Next to your relationship with God,
it's likely your relationship with your parents that will have the biggest impact on who you become.

Parents (or whoever has played the parental roll in your life) lay the first foundation, so even though the current movement may have gone a bit overboard, the emphasis on parent/child relationships is important.

In describing this relationship, Paul says that children should give parents HONOR.

When Paul says children, he's using a word that literally means pre-adults. He's talking to kids when he says, "Obey your parents ..."

JEFF

The reason he says you should obey your parents is that in Exodus 20:12 the Fourth Commandment says, "Honor your father and mother ..."

And while the commandment doesn't say anything about obedience per se, Paul is applying a general principle here.

Kids should obey their parents because all children have to honor their parents.

Secondly, Paul gives **fathers or parents**.

We'll say more later about why Paul is addressing fathers in particular here, but He gives them both a negative and a positive command.

He says, "... do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up ..." with two tools: **training** and **instruction**.

If you fail to bring them up, and that's what parenting is all about, **you will exasperate them**.

You'll lead your children to anger.

Parents are to BRING CHILDREN UP.

And children are to HONOR.

Let's start with the children first (because we've all been children) and ask...

1. What does the Fourth Commandment require?

What it does NOT say is, "Love your parents."

It does NOT say, "Trust your parents."

It does NOT say, "Admire and enjoy your parents."

And it DOESN'T even say, "Obey your parents." Why not?

PATTI

The Ten Commandments are the ten principles you're supposed to build your life on.

They are absolute, and true for everybody at all times.

They're principles on which society is to be built.

But to say, "Love your parents,"
in the sense of feeling affection for them
would be impossible in certain situations.

Because some parents are evil.
Some parents are neglectful or
abusive or manipulative. And
It would be wrong to feel
affection for such a person.

Another thing the commandment does NOT demand
is to trust your parents.
Let's face it - some parents are UNSTABLE and UNTRUSTWORTHY.
To trust them would be unwise and even dangerous.

Ephesians doesn't say, "Admire your parents," because
in some cases that would be impossible without
actually denying the truth.

It doesn't say, "Obey your parents." The Bible
doesn't lay that down as an eternal and absolute rule,
because your relationship with your parents
is complex, and it changes over time.

It tells **little children** to obey, but it also
says, as we saw earlier in the last chapter,
there is a time in which you must LEAVE
your father and mother (and in the case
of marriage, cleave unto your spouse).

But even if you remain single, the Bible says there is a time when, for the sake of your own growth and maturity, you must get out from under your parents' authority and LEAVE.

But the one thing the Bible commands, no matter what is that we all HONOR our parents.

And you have to distinguish that from all these other things. If you don't, your conscience will assault you, and haunt you.

JEFF

To honor someone is a MORAL CHOICE
Honor has nothing to do with your feelings.
It's a decision to treat your parents with dignity and courtesy, and to commit to their long-term best interests.

A lot of adult children who have manipulative, controlling, or abusive parents say,
"If I honor my parents then I'll come back under their authority, and I can't listen to them anymore.
I can't let them control me anymore.
If I honor them then I'll be under them."

But that's simply not true.
You don't have to listen to them.
You don't have to approve them.
You don't have to confide in them.
You don't have to listen to what they say,
but you can still honor them.

You can still treat them with respect and dignity.

You can still show them loyalty.

Adolescent children, of course, make the opposite mistake.

Adolescent children say, "Well, I'll obey my parents.

I have to obey them. I'm knuckling under,

but I don't have to honor them.

I don't have to be courteous.

I don't have to show respect.

Obedience is enough.

They can't punish me for being cold and sullen."

And that's true. But honor is the most important thing.

In fact, obedience is supposed to flow from honor.

You have to make this distinction or your conscience will kill you,

because there are plenty of reasons why you can't

listen to your parents once you grow up.

PATTI

Right. For example, what if your parents are atheists and you encounter Jesus and become a Christian and your parents think you're crazy for worshiping God?

What happens if you find your parents had a distorted understanding of relationships, and you finally realize how pathological their guidance really was, and you no longer follow their advice?

Odds are, if you have those kind of parents, you'll become cold and defensive.

You cut them off. You belittle them
when you debate with them.

OR you stay completely tied to them,
completely under their thumbs.

The Bible says you shouldn't do either of those things.
As an adult, you should not listen to them or obey them.
or be under their authority,
but you have to be respectful
and treat them with dignity.

If you don't make that distinction,
your relationship with them will continually explode,
and if you don't make that distinction,
society falls apart, because frankly,
it's respect for parents that is the basis
for every other kind of respect and
every other kind of authority.

2. WHY does this command require us to HONOR parents?

The answer is there in the text, but it's easy to miss.
There are a lot of people who think the reason children
must honor their parents is because
"they are flesh and blood,"
which is not a particularly biblical sentiment.

JEFF

Yes. Lots of cultures and ethnic groups and pagan religions
emphasize blood ties, but in the Bible, ADOPTION is central.
The Bible says that bloodline is not the ultimate thing

that ties you.

Honor is a moral choice; it's not the mystery of blood.
And your parents are the people who raised you.
There is no religion that puts adoption in the center like
Christianity does, because in fact,
all believers have been adopted by God.

Time and again, Paul and other biblical
writers use adoption as a picture of how
God loves sinners as he loves
His only begotten Son.

The Scriptures gives us the reason why we
should honor our fathers and mothers.
Paul says, "... for this is right."
It's the moral thing to do.

Around the world traditional families for thousands of years
were authoritarian. In fact, **the father**, in many cultures,
had the right to kill his own children.
He had that kind of authority, albeit an
unbiblical kind of authority.

But in more recent times, the Industrial Revolution
changed the role of the father, who left the home
every day in order to go make money.

Before the Industrial Revolution the father and
mother BOTH provided for the family economically.
If they were farmers, they both farmed.
If they were shoemakers, they both made shoes.

The father and mother
were both doing the economic production,
and they were both raising the kids.

But once the Industrial Revolution came, the father had to leave.
For the first time, and it's not a biblical distinction,
you have the man's work, which is to go make money,
and the woman's work, which is to raise kids.

PATTI

Now it's very clear raising children is NOT just women's work,
which may be while Paul goes out of his way to
address fathers specifically.

If raising kids were solely up to mothers, Paul would've said,
"Children, obey your parents in the Lord for this is right.
Mothers, raise your children up in the
nurture and admonition of the Lord."

The way God sees it, fathers and mothers have
EQUAL RESPONSIBILITY.

During and the Industrial Revolution
fathers became remote from childrearing and nurturing,
so when you put the authoritarianism
of the traditional family along with the
remoteness of the Industrial father,
you have fathers who are alienated from kids,
and both wives and kids who are bitter.

The bible rejects both the **authoritarian model** of the family,

and also the **support model**, popularized in the 1970's by Parent Effectiveness Training curriculum, which said that the parents role is not to teach their children, but rather to support their dreams.

But biblically, Paul says here that, just as the essence of marriage is friendship, the essence of being a parent is to be a teacher.

The essence of being a parent is to be a teacher. Biblically, a parent is supposed to have enough authority **to teach** the child what's right and wrong, to teach what is valuable in life and what's not. And the purpose of the parents' authority is to **bring them up**, to get them out from under their own authority.

The only authority the Bible recognizes is **servant authority**, where you're committed to getting a person raised up to a place of freedom, so that they can stand on their own. So they can be less dependent and make their own decisions.

JEFF

Even if parents give their children the wrong instruction, it's better than no instruction at all. It's better than abdicating the role of parent.

If fathers and mothers don't bring their children up, it provokes them to wrath. It makes them bitter and broken.

We said that bringing up requires both training and instruction,

according to Paul, and **training** means discipline.

It means to hold someone accountable.

To exact consequences for disobedience.

The Greek word for **instruction** actually means “counsel.”

Training and instruction are equally important.

Because if you over-discipline your children... if it's all training and no instruction – if it's all rules and nothing personal, kids will become exasperated.

And if you under-discipline, if you're always reasoning with the child, but never enforcing discipline, you'll get the same result.

There are plenty of parents who raise their children, but not “up”. Instead they raise their kids in a way that keeps them dependent. On the other hand, there are other parents who never raise them up; they just let them out on their own.

3. How then should we obey the command to Honor Parents?

There are all sorts of ways to show your parents the courtesy.

It means remembering birthdays, and calling them when you don't feel like it.

One way to show honor is not to argue with them over every little thing. Show them respect.

Acknowledge what they have taught you, wherever you can.

PATTI

Finally, another way to honor parents is to **forgive them**.

The only way to really honor your parents

is to be free to displease them.
And the way to be free
to displease them is to stop blaming them
for not being able to give you the unconditional acceptance
that only God can perfectly give.

The only place you can get true Father love is in Him.
In the parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15) we see that
our heavenly Father's love is completely unconditional.
It's based, NOT on YOUR performance or perfection;
it's based on HIS performance and perfection.

When you encounter the perfect Father love of God,
you realize that **you have nothing to prove!**
The day you know that is the day your relationship
with your parents will be transformed.

The day you stop letting THEM be god in your life
is the day you'll finally be able to honor them
and forgive them.

If you can't forgive your parents, you will
either hate them or you'll idolize them.
And in order to truly honor them, you
need to be free from the need to please them.

John 1:12 says of Jesus,
"Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave
the right to become children of God —". And so we are.

PRAYER:

Father, thank you that we are free from the need to perform and to prove

ourselves. We rest today in what Christ did for us on the cross. I pray that everyone who is listening right now will be freed from their past and freed for the future because they know what it means to be your children. Empower parents and children, by your Holy Spirit, to be more like you in their relationships with one another. In Jesus' name.
Amen.