

Sermon Title: Honor Father and Mother

Speaker: Jim Harris

Scripture Text: Exodus 20:12 (10 Commandments # 7 of 13)

Date: 4-3-11

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Today's passage from God's Word is aimed directly at you *if* you have ever had a father or a mother, if you have ever *been* a father or a mother, if you have *fathered* or *mothered* a father or mother, or if you are a child of any of the above. This is the absolute *bedrock*, the backbone of society: the family. And one of the Ten Commandments is focused very specifically on this: "Honor your father and your mother" (Ex. 20:12; NASB-1995, and throughout, unless otherwise noted).

As we think about children and parents—and especially you who still live in your parents' home, but not *only* you—as you listen to this sermon, let's remember the reason that God gives us so much time to grow up: it's because we *need* it.

I ran across something this week that I hadn't seen for a long time, and I enjoyed it fresh again. A professor named Richard Lederer spent years gathering things that were written by students; and from actual writings of students, from eighth grade through college, he pieced together his own thing he calls "History Of The World." It was originally published in a trade magazine called "Verbatim," and then he republished it in a book that he called "Anguished English"—and it was so good, he actually had to do "Volume 2."

This is all things that children—students that are from eighth grade through college—have actually written, and I offer it in honor of all who help their children with school projects. Here's "The History Of The World"; I'll just do the part that relates to the Bible times:

"Ancient Egypt was inhabited by Mummies, and they all wrote in Hydraulics. They lived in the Sara desert, and traveled by Camelot. The climate of the Sara is such that the inhabitants had to live elsewhere, so certain areas of the desert are cultivated by irritation. They Pyramids are a range of mountains between France and Spain (you know, "Pyrenees"). The Egyptians built the Pyramids in the shape of a huge triangular cube.

"The Bible is full of interesting caricatures. In the first book of the Bible—Guinnesses—Adam and Eve were created from an apple tree. One of their children, Cain, asked: 'Am I my brother's son?' God asked Abraham to sacrifice Isaac on Mount Montezuma. Jacob, son of Isaac, stole his brother's birthmark. Jacob was a patriarch who brought up his 12 children to be patriarchs, but they did not take to it. One of Jacob's sons, Joseph, gave refuse to the Israelites.

"Pharaoh forced the Hebrew slaves to make bread without straw. Moses let them to the Red Sea, where they made unleavened bread—which is bread made without any ingredients. Afterwards, Moses went up to Mount Cyanide to give the Ten Commandments. He died before he ever reached Canada.

"David was a Hebrew king, skilled at playing the Liar. He fought with the Finkelsteins, a race of people who lived in Biblical times. Solomon, one of David's sons, had three hundred wives and seven hundred porcupines.

"Later came Job, who had one trouble after another. Eventually, he lost all his cattle and all his children, and had to go live alone with his wife in the desert.

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"The Greeks were a highly sculptured people; and without them, we wouldn't have history. The Greeks invented three kinds of columns: Corinthian, Ionic, and Doric. And they built the Apocalypse. The Greeks also had myths; a myth is a female moth. Socrates was a famous Greek teacher who went around giving people advice. They killed him. Socrates died from an overdose of wedlock. After his death, his career suffered a dramatic decline."

I have taught freshmen and sophomores in college. None of that surprises me, not even a little bit. Well, bless you, moms and dads, for the things you have helped your children with. And you have to help them with the assignment for today, which is to understand and apply the Fifth Commandment, which you can break down very easily; it's one verse: Exodus Chapter 20, Verse 12. You Must Honor Your Parents, and, You Will Be Blessed If You Do.

"You Must Honor Your Parents" is quite straightforward here. Verse 12 says: "Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be prolonged in the land which the Lord your God gives you."

The command there, obviously, is "honor"—a Hebrew word that is related to the idea of being "heavy" or "weighty" or "burdensome." The sense of the verb means that, to honor your parents is to give sufficient weight to the significance of their position.

As a matter of fact, when Ezekiel the Prophet exposed why Israel was taken into captivity, in Ezekiel, Chapter 22, he said that among other problems, one of the reasons for the Captivity was that many in Israel had fallen into treating their parents "lightly" (vs. 7). Do you get the idea? Weightiness—treating them lightly.

To "honor" your parents involves at least three things: Prizing them highly—you must understand and appreciate that your parents gave you life. It involves caring and showing affection to them, and it involves respect and reverence for them by obeying them in everything which does not contradict the Bible (see Acts 5:29).

Look how important God considers honoring parents. We are in Exodus Chapter 20; when you get into the next chapter, look at Verses 15 and 17 of Chapter 21—"He who strikes his father or his mother shall surely be put to death...He who curses his father or his mother shall surely be put to death." (cf. Deut. 21:18-21; 27:16)

Now, kids, did you hear that? It's a *very serious thing* to dishonor parents! If you lived in the times of the Old Testament in Israel, and you dishonored your parents, you could have incurred the Death Penalty! Now, obviously, that refers to older children like teenagers, but it is certainly no joke.

God designed the world such that each generation is meant to receive God's truth and His wisdom from the previous generation (Deut. 4:9; 11:19; Ps. 78:5-7; 145:4). You need to learn, you need to grow from, what your parents have to teach you. That's why God made it so natural for you to ask your parents questions (Ex. 13:14; Deut. 6:20).

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And parents, when the questions come—and they can be tedious, and they can be like machinegun fire—remember: God built that in there, because *you* need to pass on His wisdom to the next generation (Is. 38:19).

Now, here's a *really* gross verse for kids: Proverbs Chapter 30, Verse 17—"The eye that mocks a father and scorns a mother, the ravens of the valley will pick it out, and the young eagles will eat it." Alright, a lesson in Hermeneutics—Bible interpretation: This isn't something that is *literally* going to happen to you; it is what is called "hyperbole," or "overstatement"; but *it is* a word picture meant to teach an important lesson: Even when you don't *say* or *do* disrespectful things to your parents, but you give them that "look" that they know so well—God wants you to know, *it's wrong!* Because you see, God is interested in your "heart" (Prov. 23:26; cf. Ps. 15:2; 51:6)—your attitudes and your thoughts—*just as much* as your words and your actions. To scorn and to mock your parents is a sin that you don't dare ignore in your "heart" (1 Tim. 1:5; cf. Col. 3:22).

I'll come back to honoring your parents; but first, let's look at the rest of what this important verse says: "Honor your father and your mother"—and then, a promise, a blessing if you do—"that your days may be prolonged in the land which the Lord your God gives you."

That refers, specifically to the land of Canaan. Remember, Israel had been delivered from Egypt; now, they are on their way to Canaan; that's the land that God is going to give them. These commandments and all the instructions and all the sacrificial system and all of that was so that they could be blessed in that land.

And remember that one of the primary purposes of the Ten Commandments, and everything that goes with them, was to make Israel *holy*—to make that nation *different*, to make them set apart from all the other "nations" (Deut. 26:19).

And in *this* commandment, there's a *specific* promise that, if the people of Israel kept family life together—in order, as God intends it to be—He was going to bless them with *permanent* residence in the land that He promised them. And He has *still* promised them that, and it will come—when Messiah returns (Rom. 11:26; cf. Ezek. 34:25-28). But, they had an opportunity (Matt. 23:37; Lk. 19:41-44).

And once again, the commandment is short; it's simple—it's pretty easy to understand. And in this case, we have a lot more to deal with on this subject. We need to turn to the New Testament version of the commandment. You know nine of the Ten Commandments are repeated, reiterated, and reapplied in New Testament terminology. In this case, we need to turn to Ephesians Chapter 6.

And when we come to Ephesians Chapter 6, the context is crucial. There's a *very* poorly placed chapter division here. There is no logical or grammatical reason whatsoever to divide between Ephesians Chapter 5 as we know it and Chapter 6 as we know it, because the context of this begins at what we call Chapter 5, Verse 18: the command to "be filled with the Holy Spirit."

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Following the command to be under the control of the Holy Spirit comes a series of instructions about ways in which the Holy Spirit, when allowed to reign in people's lives, will make His work visible in everyday life.

When you choose to "walk by the Spirit" (Gal. 5:16; cf. Rom. 8:4, 13)), or, to "be filled with the Spirit," it results in true worship of God—that's Verses 19 and 20 of Ephesians 5. It makes you into a person who submits to those around you (Mk. 9:35; Rom. 15:1-2); that's Verse 21. A Spirit-filled person is *not* a person who demands his rights, demands his way, tries to win every argument; it's the person who tries to find the needs of all those around him and lift them up, to meet those needs (cf. Phil. 2:3-4). A Spirit-filled person, in his or her submission to the people around, becomes a harmonious spouse (e.g., 1 Pet. 3:4-7); it results in a healthy marriage—that's Verses 22 through 33. And then it results in a healthy and productive family life—which is Chapter 6, Verses 1 through 4, which we're going to look at in a minute. And it results in God-honoring relationships when you go out and do your work in the world on your job (vs. 5-9). So in the context, this is what happens when God's way is lived out in families.

And here's a command to children, just like the Fifth Commandment is a command to children: Ephesians 6:1—"Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right." Notice first of all here that this verse is addressed to: "Children"; "Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right." The important thing there is to understand that Paul *assumed* that Scripture was important and practical for *children* as well as adults (2 Tim. 3:15; cf. Prov. 22:6). We need to teach God's Word to children, from as early as they are able to receive it (cf. Is. 7:15-16).

It's also obvious that Paul meant for *parents* to pass this along to children. Now, think about it: If this verse is for children, if the Fifth Commandment is for children, *who* is going to make sure that the children learn what it says? The parents! This is for everybody. That's why I said: If you ever *have been* a child, or you have ever been a parent of a child, this is for you.

The word "obey" literally means "to hear under"; it means "to listen under authority" (e.g., Matt. 8:9; cf. Ex. 19:8; 24:3, 7). It needs a habitual and constant pattern of life; as long as a child is in the home of the parents, that's the duty of the child (1 Tim. 3:4b).

Then, there's that phrase "in the Lord"; and I need to point out to you: That goes along with the word "obey," not with the word "parents"—it's like "husbands and wives," and like your submission to other Christians; you obey the Lord, you obey parents, you submit to your wife, you submit to your husband, you seek to have this right kind of relationship, because it's the right thing to do "in the Lord." This is *not* an excuse for a child to say, "I'm a Christian; my parents are not; I don't have to obey." A wife cannot say, "I'm a Christian; my husband is not; I don't have to follow his leadership" (1 Pet. 3:1; cf. 2:18). A husband cannot say, "My wife is not a Christian; I don't have to meet her needs." The "in the Lord" is a matter of the sphere of *your* obedience, *your* compliance, *your* service; it's not talking about the other person. You should obey your parents because *the Lord* says that you should obey your parents.

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And parents: *We* need to teach this to our children! The next generation depends upon you (cf. 2 Tim. 2:2). And if, about now, you're saying, "Whew! Boy, am I *glad* I have graduated from parenthood now! My kids are grown and gone!"—trust me, there is work for grandparents to do (Ex. 10:2; Deut. 4:9; cf. 2 Tim. 1:5 with Acts 16:1), and *your* kids need help with *your* grandkids, because they have *your* genes. They need help!

"Children, obey your parents in the Lord, *for this is right*." Kids: You don't need to pray about what the right thing to do is, when your parents ask you to do something. It's not just "right" in the sense of being something nice to do, like holding the door open for someone who arrives the same time you do; the word "right" here literally means "righteous"—it is *required by law*. Everything the Bible says to children has to come from parents; parents need to teach the children; children need to listen to the parents.

Paul goes on, and here's where he quotes the Fifth Commandment, from Exodus 20, Verse 12, and Deuteronomy Chapter 5, Verse 16; and Paul actually adds a little parenthesis in Verse 2: "Honor your father and mother (which is the first commandment with a promise)"—all that means is that, among the other Commandments, this is the first one that comes with a specific promise attached—"so that it may be well with you, and that you may live long on the earth" (Eph. 6:2-3).

"Honor" is the Greek version of the Hebrew word; it gives us a pretty good idea how it was actually understood. By New Testament times, it implies treating with respect and kindness and courtesy and obedience—so, the idea of giving appropriate "weight" to their position is certainly borne out by this. Interestingly: This word, in some contexts of the New Testament—especially in First Timothy Chapter 5, where it speaks of widows and of teaching-pastors—the word "honor" can also include financial support (vs. 3, 17). And, in the context of children and parents, it can actually *include* that. When your parents are elderly—when they may need your help physically, and possibly even financially—it says, to not take care of those in your family is to be "worse than an unbeliever" (vs. 8). If your faith doesn't work to the point of honoring your parents in their old age, your faith is phony! That's a pretty bold statement, but look it up in First Timothy Chapter 5, Verse 8 (cf. Prov. 23:22b; 30:11b).

There's something here that takes us *beyond* the Exodus-Chapter-20 version of the Fifth Commandment. Notice a contrast between a couple of words in this passage: Obedience is the duty here—"Children, obey your parents in the Lord." "Honor" is the attitude *behind* the obedience. The two go together.

And did you notice, there's a little change of wording from the Old Testament form of the Fifth Commandment—which says: "Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be prolonged *in the land*"—to this version, that says: "Honor your father and mother...*so that it may be well with you, and that you may live long on the earth*." There's a basic lesson in understanding the Bible: We, the Church, are *not* the Nation of Israel; we don't have a specific "land" that God is promising us; and so, he changes the promise—he was inspired by the Spirit to do so (cf. 1 Cor. 14:37)—"Honor your father and mother...so that it may be well with you, and that you may live long on the earth."

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And that brings up a question: How do you explain the existence of *old* disobedient children, and the fact that some obedient children die young? Well, the answer to that is that obedience and disobedience are very important, but they are not the *only* factors in determining the span of one's life—but they are *important* factors. Disobedience tends to lead toward an undisciplined life, which tends to lead toward vice and dissipation; therefore, disobedience tends to shorten one's life, and obedience tends to being the blessing of longer life.

And though you can't tell it in English, that interpretation I just explained to you is rooted in the very words of this passage. The promises here are stated in the subjunctive mood, rather than the indicative mood. Subjunctive is the mood of "may" and "might" and "should" and things like that; it expresses possibility without certainty. So this is one promise that is a principle, interwoven with other factors.

And notice also: Even if a disobedient child lives to be 117 years old as an evil man, as long as he continues in his wickedness, it will *never* "be well with" him (see Is. 48:22). So, it's a promise of God's favor, God's blessing, and the tendency toward long life.

There are two boundaries to obeying parents. So you kids that are sitting here are saying, "Oh, good! Finally! Here comes a loophole! This is what I can dodge!" Two boundaries to obeying parents. The first one is: marriage. When you get married, as Genesis 2:24 says, you "leave" father and mother, and "cleave" to your husband or wife (KJV), *leaving* former relationships and *cleaving*—or, establishing yourself permanently—in a new relationship. Very strong words: *ending* one relationship, and being *bound* to a new one.

When you get married, you must establish a new kind of relationship with your parents. They are *still* your parents, *and* you get a double dose now—now, you have *in-laws* as well. And you have to *continue* to "honor" your parents; that never ends. But, the accountability that you have is shifted from *your* obedience to your parents to *your* obedience directly to God. Someone not cutting the cord with parents when they get married is a guaranteed way to damage a marriage.

The second boundary on obeying parents has to do with recognizing that God is a *higher* authority than your parents, even if you are not married. As you become an adult, you must walk with the Lord *on your own*—and you have to be accountable to Him.

I came to Christ at the age of 17. I went away to college for a while, but my parents were still involved in my support; I actually came home and lived with my parents for a year during my first year of Seminary, while Marsha and I were engaged. And I had parents that did not share my new walk with the Lord. I had to sort some things out; and I had to choose, on a couple of occasions, to obey God rather than my parents—*and that's difficult*, but it's Biblical (Acts 5:29). Jesus said this, in Matthew 10:37-38—"He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; and he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me."

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You do not want to stand before God and say: "Yes, I know I disobeyed You, but it was because Mom said so." Can't do that! If it's a choice between parents or family and the Lord, the choice is obvious.

There is a certain segment of modern Christianity, there are some in this part of the country that are promoting a false teaching that says that even adult married children have to get their parents' permission or blessing on their activities—and that is clearly *not* the case (e.g., 1 Cor. 7:39). There is a boundary: marriage, and the authority of God.

You can "honor" your parents without always doing what they want you to do, *just like* you are commanded in Romans Chapter 13 to honor civil authorities—"governing authorities" (cf. Prov. 24:21; Matt. 17:24-27; 22:17-21; 1 Pet. 2:13-14). You need not agree with everything they do in order to grant them honor! What if they tell you to do something that *you really don't want to do*? Well, unless it *contradicts* something that God says *in His Word* (Acts 5:29; cf. 2 Pet. 3:2), you do it! You can "honor" your parents in the same way—*except that* after you're out of their home, you are *not* bound to do as they say (cf. Jn. 9:21; 1 Cor. 7:39). If necessary, you choose to obey God as a higher authority, *and* you accept the consequences as part of God's all-wise dealing with you.

One more verse in the context in Ephesians Chapter 6. And here again, the command to children has to be taught to them by adults—by parents. Well, in Paul's version, we get around to instructing the parents. He says, in Chapter 6, Verse 4—"Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord." Now, the *parents'* side of the equation.

By the way: The word is "fathers" here, and that word was chosen by Paul and the Holy Spirit with, I think, a sense of magnified meaning. Obviously, the father is the one who is the leader in the family (1 Cor. 11:3; Eph. 5:22-24; Col. 3:18; Titus 2:5; 1 Pet. 3:1-6); he is the most accountable. If a family is out of whack, a father needs to be on his knees! The father *is* in charge; that's true (1 Tim. 3:4-5).

But *also*, in Hebrew culture it was understood that such instruction applies to both fathers *and* mothers. And interestingly, the *exact* word that is translated "fathers" here is used in Hebrews 11:23 to refer to Moses's "parents"; so this, in the plural, can refer to parents.

And parents: If you want your children to honor you, you must accept your responsibility. *Everyone* is duty-bound to God to honor father and mother at all times through their lives. The other side of the coin is that your children are *far more likely* to fulfill their duty to obey you and honor you *if you* fulfill *your duty* to be a godly parent! Or, as it says so many times in the Bible, in so many ways and in so many contexts: You "reap" what you "sow" (e.g., Prov. 22:8; Hos. 8:7; 2 Cor. 9:6; Gal. 6:7-8). Largely, that is true with your children.

Now, are there *good* parents with *rebellious* children? Yes, that is the case (e.g., Deut. 21:18-21); we are *all* sinners (Ecc. 7:20; Rom. 3:23; Jas. 3:2). But that does not *excuse* parents from doing the right thing (cf. 1 Sam. 2:12, 29).

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Look first at the negative side of this instruction: "Do not provoke your children to anger." The meaning you should apply here is that you must not treat your children in such a way that you help them develop an angry or resentful attitude. They'll have that *on their own*; don't throw gasoline on the fire. The Book of Colossians was written by Paul during the same imprisonment as Ephesians; there are many parallel passages in them, where he addressed several of the same things. In the Colossians 3:21 parallel to Ephesians 6:4, he uses the word that is translated "exasperate"—"do not *exasperate* your children"; and it means "to stir up" or "to agitate."

If you put the two passages together, there is no doubt as to the meaning of them: Don't treat your children in a way that will embitter them against you, or push them into rebellion. What did we say in Ephesians Chapter 4, about how we conduct ourselves with each other in the Body of Christ?"—speaking the truth in love" (vs. 15). Your kids need *both* of those things (cf. Prov. 3:3). They need to know your *unconditional* love and your *unwavering* commitment to the truth; and if one of those washes over the other one, you've lost the balance! You have to have both.

*And* in this realm of "not exasperating" your children, "not provoking them to anger," parents need to know—and this is something that I *grieve* often over: In our version of Christianity today, we have so many books on how to do this and how to do that with kids and have this mindset and to do those things, and a lot of people realize: There is *no single correct formula* for how to apply God's Word in the training of your children.

It *always* has to be anchored in God's Word—it *always* has to be the truth of God's Word. But the only person who thinks that there is *only one way* to raise a child is somebody who has never had *two*, or never had *any*, or never had any *variety* in their children. If you have a child who is angry and resentful toward you, for more than about a day at a time—maybe a week, if you had to ground them, during which time they are being corrected for the purpose of learning a lesson—if you have a child that is in an ongoing condition of anger or exasperation, you need to examine your heart; *you* need to probably make some changes.

Maybe you have sinned against one child in your family by raising her the same way you raised her sister. "It worked the first time! Why doesn't it work with you?" Maybe you have treated a strong-willed child the same way that you treated the compliant older brother. Maybe you have fallen into the trap of thinking every child can be treated identically to every other child, and all will turn out the same. *They won't!* You need to be on your knees *with wisdom!*

There is a member of Heritage Bible Church who told me recently about being at a family reunion. And somebody asked the kids there: "Give me one memory that stands out about your dad"—and there were several dads in the group. And this guy's son said, "I've got that one! I know that one! I did something *really* bad, *really* stupid; and my dad told me to get the paddle and go upstairs. And I knew what that meant, because Dad was smart enough to give himself time to walk upstairs, make sure he did nothing in anger."



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And the boy went upstairs with the paddle. Dad came up. The boy braces himself, and his dad says, "I want you to take that paddle and use it on me, because I must be a *really bad father* to have raised somebody that would do what you did!" That's the *number one memory* this kid has! That's *wisdom*!

That wouldn't work all the time! You know, I could have said that to *my* son sometimes, and I think he would have said, "Oh, yeah!" You *have to be* wise, loving, personal, careful. And parents, there is absolutely *no way on this Earth* that you can apply that kind of wisdom if you are not spending as much time as you possibly can *with your children*—and with your children *individually*, not just together.

You have to *know them* in order to be able to *love them* with the kind of wisdom that you're going to need, because they were born into this world *a mess*—little bundles of *depravity* (Rom. 5:12; cf. Ps. 51:5; Prov. 19:3; Jer. 17:9). They are *as bad as you were* when *you* were that age, only they have *more opportunities* in our world!

There is a lot of wisdom to be gained from observing and asking others how they have handled situations that you might be facing, but there is not *only* one technique. Some parents have one child that is *utterly* compliant and easy to train—and those can be the most difficult ones, because they'll say, "Yes, yes, yes, yes, yes," and do everything you want on the *outside* because they're *really good* at covering the bitterness in their hearts! Sometimes it's *hardest* to get to their *hearts*.

And then, they have another child that is *extremely* active, sees *no reason* why sleeping more than three consecutive hours would *ever* be important—it's like they've been mainlining caffeine since the cradle. And sometimes, they're in *the same family*!

What you do as a parent—it won't be perfect! Mistakes *are* inevitable (Jas. 3:2). And I'll tell you: You'll probably be the rare exception, if your child never says something on the order of, "I have you!" in a moment of frustration.

But what you are called to do is love, train—you're called to do everything *humanly possible* to produce a disciple of Jesus Christ, to let your children learn that *you* "stand" in the "grace" of God (Rom. 5:2), that *you* "walk by the Spirit" of God (Gal. 5:16, 25), *just as they* need to do.

I wish we had time to open up everything that is in Ephesians 6:1-4, but we don't. If you are good at searching internet archives, you can find a sermon if you want to dig a little bit deeper into that.

But, notice the *positive* part of the instruction that is in Ephesians Chapter 6, Verse 4—"Do not provoke your children to anger"—that's the negative part—"but bring them up"—there's the command; "bring them up," help them grow up, help them mature. And two words help you know *how* to "bring them up"—or "nourish them" is the idea of "bring them up"; you need to have both of these things: "bring them up in the *discipline*"—that's the first word—"and *instruction*"—the second word—"of the Lord."

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"Discipline" is a mark of true love for your children (Prov. 3:12; 13:24; 19:18; 20:30). Don't discipline them, and they will get a message about your love (cf. Heb. 12:6, 9a). But "discipline" is much more about nurturing than it is about pain.

Some people act as if the most important principle of parenting is *corporal punishment*—you know, if you just know the right techniques for spanking, you'll produce a perfect child—and that's *way short* of what this means. *There may be a time* for corporal punishment (Prov. 23:13-14); and to take that out of the repertoire, as our society is wanting us to do, is not a good thing (Prov. 13:24a).

But this word "discipline" is related to our word "pedagogue"; a "pedagogue" was a professional teacher of children. We might use the word "nanny," or "caretaker," or something like that (cf. Gal. 4:1-2). *Over-discipline* a child and you will "exasperate" him or her; be inconsistent with a child and you will "exasperate" him or her, "provoke" him or her "to anger." But it's about *nurturing* that child. If you plant something, and you want it to grow and you want it to be healthy, sometimes you have to trim it, don't you?—pull off dead leaves, clip branches that cross each other, clip things that crowd out—so that the plant is *more* productive in the end (e.g., Jn. 15:2b); that's the idea of "discipline." But if you want a plant to grow well, you do not go out and take your Four Iron to it, and "discipline" it! That doesn't work! It's *nurturing*—it's not about the *pain*, it's about the *resultant* nurturing (Heb. 12:11; cf. Deut. 8:16; Ps. 119:71, 75).

And the second word in that verse about what to do to bring up children in the Lord is "instruction," and that one literally means "training by word"; it has the root word for "mind" in it, so it has to do with shaping your child's mind. It can be positive or negative verbal instruction; it can include "Do this" and "Don't do this"—what to do, what not to do.

But put it together, and the word picture is very clear: Parenthood requires giving specific, careful, systematic instruction over the long haul, bathed with consistent love and praise, and the necessary doses of chastening. It all needs to be woven together according to God's wisdom.

"Bring them up in the discipline and instruction *of the Lord*." The only way for you to know that you are on target is to relate all of your parenting to the Word of God; *that* is the instrument, both of "instruction" and of "discipline." To fail to give your child the knowledge of God's Word, to fail to give your child the ability to view life in light of God's Word, is *criminal negligence* before the God who entrusted a life into your care.

Now, friends, *you can't guarantee the results*. You can't! That is one of the errors of some of the thinking—that, "If only I control *everything* my children do, if I control their environment, if I don't allow them to be influenced by peers, *that* will *absolutely* produce godly kids!" *That's not how people get saved!* Salvation is what your kids need. You don't just let them go and do whatever they want, but you don't constrain everything they do—you don't treat a 14-year-old the same way you treated a 9-year-old; you don't treat a 17-year-old the same way you treated a 7-year-old. There has to be *great wisdom* here, and there must be *much prayer*—and still, you can't guarantee the results.

Sermon Title: Honor Father and Mother

Speaker: Jim Harris

Scripture Text: Exodus 20:12 (10 Commandments # 7 of 13)

Date: 4-3-11

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I have friends who were raised in a Christian family, president of the student body of the Christian high school, going on the missions trips and doing the outreaches—and then going away to college and getting saved a few years later! It's *not* the *externals*, it's the "heart" (1 Sam. 16:7; 2 Chr. 16:9; Prov. 17:3; Rom. 6:17; 10:9; 2 Cor. 1:22; 4:6).

Well, as if you haven't had enough: A couple of exhortations, and we'll close.

First of all: If you still live with your parents, your duty is clear—you must obey and honor your parents. Kids—*cheerfully* do what your parents ask, and treat them with respect; and don't say "Yes," and then give them that "look" that makes the eagles salivate about plucking out your eyes!

That doesn't mean you can't ask questions. That doesn't mean you can't discuss issues. But your *duty* isn't negotiable before God! And, by the way: Kids—if you would like more freedom, if you would like more trust, the shortest road to gaining trust and independence is: obey and honor your parents. And, by the way: When they *give* you a little freedom, *don't blow it* (cf. 1 Pet. 2:16). They that giveth can taketh away—and *they had better*, or they'll have *me* to deal with.

If you don't live with your parents any longer, you have a duty before God: honor them. It takes time, it takes energy on your part. And, by the way: You should help your children be acquainted with their grandparents, and teach them, by your own example and by your instruction, to honor them as well (cf. Lev. 19:32).

You should *always* listen to your parents (cf. Jb. 12:12). I think it is always wise to seek their advice. Of course, you have to weigh it against Scripture (Is. 8:20)—you have to seek the wisdom that God promises (Prov. 2:6; Jas. 1:5)—but it's important to honor your parents and to accept what God might teach you through them.

Another exhortation: To grownups with parents still alive—be ready to face a reversing of roles that is likely to occur between you and your parents. My dad died when I was a fairly young adult. My mom had some fairly severe physical limitations, and she finally chose to pick up and move near one of her sons; she chose me, the youngest. I realized one day: There will be *a whole lot of times* in the next several years that my life is going to be a lot simpler when it comes to decision-making, because I'm going to have a mom who needs me; and when she needs me, *I know God's will for my life!* It's easy! It's the Fifth Commandment! (cf. 1 Tim. 5:4) And God blesses you obeying His commandments (Deut. 11:26-27; Jos. 1:7-8; Ps. 1:1-3; 128:1; Prov. 10:6; Jas. 1:25).

When that time comes for you—if that time comes for you—you need to be helpful to your parents without demeaning their dignity or their personhood. It's one thing to tell children to obey and honor their parents, but we need to recognize that the responsibility falls on *parents* to make it work. And by the way: Your kids are going to watch how *you* treat your parents; and your kids are liable to decide where and how you live in *your* last years. I don't say it *just* to be pragmatic, but it is pragmatic.

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On another note: There was one time several years ago—one of those days when one innocent little thing happens, and you remember that incident, apparently for the rest of your life. It was a long, long time ago—it was *at least* 20 years ago, probably more like 25 years ago. I was preparing to preach on Ephesians 6, and Marsha and I heard someone make reference to two children—they were ages two and four—and these two children were described—*by one of their parents*, mind you; this is a parent talking about their own two- and four-year-old kids—the parents said they are: "Too wild to take to a restaurant." That reveals some of the parental attitudes that contribute to some of the problems that we have today (cf. Prov. 29:15).

Sometimes among our family, we'll go out; we'll see kids like that in a restaurant or in a store—and I confess, the comment has been made: "Let me take him home for a couple of hours! We can fix that!"

Just who do people like that think is responsible for *doing something* about children who are "too wild" to be allowed to eat in public? Parents need to get over the insecurities and stop being afraid of kids (cf. Prov. 29:25). That's a *huge* problem in our world! We have trained parents not to take control. Doctor Spock was *wrong* about a whole lot of things.

As you lead your children (Prov. 20:7), and as you keep them "under control with all dignity" (1 Tim. 3:4) in your home, how are you approaching the responsibility of instructing your children in God's laws? I keep kidding you, chiding you—Have you memorized the Ten Commandments yet? *Have your kids help you!* They'll memorize them *way faster* than you will. That should be a lifestyle for you.

And what does it take to raise the right kind of kids? What does it take to have the right kind of home? It takes wisdom. It takes God's Word (e.g., Ps. 119:24, 105).

The Bible does not command anything called "daily devotions"—oh, but how many sermons I've heard about *that!* The Bible doesn't mention "the family altar." I knew a guy who came to Christ; he was an adult, he had kids; he came to church—brand new Christian—and somebody said, "You need to have a 'family altar' in your home," and the preacher just *rang the chimes* on 'a family altar'; so he went down to the local Christian bookstore and he said, "Do you carry 'family altars'? I need one!" Somehow we miss the point—we miss the *forest* for the trees! Do you know that Jesus and Peter and Paul had *never* heard of "Sunday School"? Do you know their kids didn't have "AWANA," or a "youth group"? Do you know that "Christian School" didn't exist? Do you know that they didn't have *one single copy* of James Dobson's books in Greek, in New Testament times?

Obviously, *none of those things* are the things that will *cause* your family to live out the Word of God! They can be helpful tools, but *that's* not the issue. The issue is: moms and dads marinating in Scripture (Col. 3:1-2, 16), passing it on to kids. It's not that complicated. Ever since the days of Jesus and Peter and Paul, Christianity has always been *one generation* from extinction! We need to pass it on to our children. *And* we need to give birth to a *whole new generation* of people who don't yet know the Lord. What *does* it require? It requires a lifestyle—a *lifestyle* immersed in the right things.

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You know the famous passage in Deuteronomy Chapter 6: the *Shema*. Before Israel entered the Land—and I know we're not Israel, but there's a principle here: "Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord is one! You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might" (vss. 4-5). *That's* what it takes! Your kids ought to be able to look at you and say, "Oh, Wow! Does Dad ever love the Lord his God!"

Moses goes on to say: "These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your sons"—I mean, *silly stuff* like memorizing the Ten Commandments!—"and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up." *The only time* that you should be instructing your children in the Word of God is: whenever you get up, whenever you go to bed, whenever you're at home, and whenever you're not! The rest is free-time from parenthood. That's what God says! "You shall bind them as a sign on your hand and they shall be as frontals on your forehead. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates" (vss. 6–9).

There are several metaphors there...and, of course, the Pharisees took them all literally—so they rolled up little scrolls and put them in the little things that dangled from their hats, and they rolled up little scrolls and screwed them to the thing on their door (cf. Matt. 23:5)—instead of realizing: That means that's what *governs your home*, that's what *governs your cities*, that's what *governs your thinking*!

Parents, you are the number one influence on your children—more than school, more than peers, more than teachers, more than friends, more than relatives, more than books, more than *anything else*! You need to be the *right* kind of influence, and let your kids see you honor your parents, and teach them to honor you.

It's not a hard commandment *to grasp*, and it takes *everything you have*—"with all your heart...soul...mind...and...strength" (Mk. 12:30)—to live it out.

So, let's pray:

*Our Father, how we do thank You for giving us the instruction we need to have the order in our lives, in our families—and indeed, in our churches—that will cause You to get the glory. Father, I lift up every mom and dad here this morning, and I ask that You will give them grace, strength, wisdom, discipline, commitment, tenacity, resolve, to live this out for the next generation. Father, I pray for every young person here, still living with Mom and Dad, that You will convict them of sin and righteousness and judgment for their attitude concerning their parents, that they would grasp Your wisdom of doing things the right way. Father, I ask for everyone here, still with a mom or a dad, or a grandmother or a grandfather alive, that we would be the kind of examples that You wish to put on display, to honor the generations that have come before us. Whatever needs to be done in each of our hearts—starting with mine—do it, I pray, that we would be the more useful for You, that You could get Your glory through us and through Heritage Bible Church. For we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.*