

Building a Godly Home

VOLUME THREE:
A Holy Vision for Raising Children

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Preface

Have you ever needed some detailed, practical counsel for your marriage?

—Scott Brown and Joel Beeke

Children Showing Respect for Parents

Ephesians 6:1-3 says, "Children obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right. 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."

After husband and wife, the second relationship in a family is that between parents and children. In laying down their duties, the apostle begins with children. His direction and encouragement to them is laid down in the three first verses of the sixth chapter, in which he declares their *duty* and adds *reasons* to motivate the same. In laying down their duty he notes three points:

1. In what it consists (obey, honor).
2. To whom it is to be performed (your parents).
3. After what manner it is to be done (in the Lord).

The reasons used by the apostle are four:

1. The position of parents (in the Lord).
2. The fairness of the thing (this is right).
3. The commandment of God (honor thy father, etc.).
4. The reward promised (that it may go well, etc.).

Under this word, "obey," which the apostle uses, and that word, "honor," which the law uses, are all those duties included, which anywhere throughout the whole Scripture are commanded to children.

We will therefore set them down in some order, and handle them distinctly one after another. The *fountain* of children's duties will be explored. The *streams* that flow from it will be observed. The fountain is an inward disposition of the heart consisting of love and fear. The streams flowing from it extend to parents, both while they are living, and also when they are dead. Children's duties which are to be performed to their parents while they live concern their authority and needs.

The authority of parents requires of children respect and obedience. Their needs require paying them back. The duties which children owe to their deceased parents concern their body and credit. Their body must be buried with decency. Their credit must be maintained with honor.

Children's Love to Their Parents

I make the fountain of children's duties to consist of a mixture of motivations, regarding that authority and affection which is mixed together in parents. The authority of parents requires fear in children, and their affection, love. So complete and so warm is parents' affection towards their children, as it would make children too bold and insolent if there were not authority mixed in to work fear, and so supreme and absolute is their authority over them, as it would make children like slaves to dread their parents, if a fatherly affection were not mingled there to produce love. But both these joined together make a very good combination. Love like sugar sweetens fear, and fear like salt seasons love, and thus to join them both together, makes a loving-fear or a fearing-love which is the basis of children's duties.

Where Christ forbids an excessive love in children to their parents (Matt. 10:37), He implies that it is appropriate for children to love their parents (so long as their love be rightly limited). He implies that it is an affection planted in

children even by nature to love their parents. Joseph is commended to children as a worthy pattern in loving his father, and that from his youth till the decease of his father. To testify of this, in his younger years he brought to his father the "evil report" of his brothers (Gen. 37:2), by which he provoked their envy and hatred, which he would never have done, if he had not loved his father. Having been long absent from his father, when by God's providence there was offered an opportunity for him to meet with his brothers, one of his first questions to them was about their father (Gen. 43:7), and hearing that he was living, he did not think it good enough to send him the needed food, but also needed to see his face and have him dwell with him (Gen. 45:9), and while his father was on the way he went out to meet him, and at first sight embraced him and wept a good while, a sign of great affection (Gen. 46:29).

That love which parents naturally have for their children ought in fairness to produce in children a love to their parents. For love deserves love, and most unworthy are they to be loved, who cannot love in return. The love of parents above all others is to be answered with love on children's part to the uttermost of their power, because it is free, great, and constant.

Besides, children need to have love for their parents, lest for lack of it, their submission (which of all others ought to be most free) should turn into slavery.

Children should work at this because by nature they are not so prone to love their parents as their parents are to love them. Love is weighty, and, as weighty things do, it descends. Children therefore, conscientious of their duty, must labor to supply what is missing, and help nature by grace. I do not deny that there is naturally in children a greater love to their parents than to others, yet in comparison of the warmth of parents' love to them, their love to their parents is merely

cold. Therefore as the heat of the sun shining much and long on a stone wall draws a reflection of heat from that wall, so the hot beams of parents' love, which with fervency and constancy are cast on children, ought to provoke and stir up children to send forth a reflection of love to their parents.

Two extremes are contrary to this affection of love. One is lack of natural affection, which is a very offensive and abominable vice in anyone, but most of all in children. The apostle counts this among the most evil vices that are (Rom. 1:30; 2 Tim. 3:3). The other is hatred and despising of parents, an extremely shocking and unnatural vice. From this comes mocking and cursing of parents, of which we shall hear later.

A Child's Fear of His Parent

To the duty of love, *fear* must be added, which is a child's *awe and respect of his parent*.

This awe and respect arises from the high view which a child has of his parent in his judgment and opinion because he is his parent; and from it proceeds on the one hand a desire and effort in all things to please the parent, and on the other hand a dread to offend him.

In this respect the fear of a child is not like the fear of a slave. For a child's fear, being mixed with love, concerns offending his parent, but a slave's fear, which is ordinarily mixed with hatred, concerns only the punishment which his master may inflict upon him. Fear is so appropriate to children, that the awe and reverence which the saints have for God is called a filial or child-like fear.

This fear in a child is a particular branch of that honor which the law requires of children to their parents (Ex. 20:12), and it is explicitly commanded to children by the law (Lev. 19:3). That phrase which God uses of Miriam, "If her father had but spit in her face, should she not be ashamed seven days?" (Num. 12:14) shows that there ought to be such a fear

of the parent in a child's heart, as should produce shame when the parent is offended. We have a worthy pattern in Jacob, who was afraid that he might gain the blessing in a way that offended his father (Gen. 27:12).

This fear keeps love in its limits, and restrains a child from rudeness and doing harm. And it is a cause of a child's respectful and obedient conduct to his parent, for as the heart is affected the conduct will be ordered.

Contrary to this is that casual, or (which is far worse) that low and despicable view of parents which is in the heart of many children, especially if their parents are poor, of low status, uneducated, ignorant, or subject to any weaknesses. It is certain that Ham had too casual, if not a low opinion, of his father when he mocked him (Gen. 9:22). A true filial fear would have restrained him from that extreme.

Therefore, to produce and nurture this fear, and to prevent or correct the contrary extreme, let children remind themselves of their parents' position and authority, how they represent God, and were a means by which God gave their children being: children have received their very substance from the substance of their parents. In this respect, though they should seem contemptible to others, yet not to their children.

Thus concludes our discussion of a child's inward disposition towards his parent. The manifestation of it must be by his outward conduct in two things, *respect*, and *obedience*, both which have to do with a parent's authority.

A Child's Respect in Quietly Listening to His Parent

The outward *respect* which children owe to their parents consists partly in their speech, partly in their conduct. Their speech both to and about their parents must be seasoned with respect to their parents in their presence, and about their parents in their absence.

In their presence, children do this by *restraining* and *wisely controlling* their speech. For restraining speech two virtues are required, silence and patience, silence in choosing not to speak and in ending their speech, and patience in listening to their parents.

The two branches of silence are signs of great respect. They must sometimes choose not to speak, especially when parents are speaking, or till parents give permission to their children to speak. They must end their speech when parents come into the place where children are speaking. Thus children testify that they in the presence of those whom they must respect and honor. Job thus sets forth the respect which princes and others did bear to him in his prosperity, "The princes," says he, "refrained talking, and laid their hand on their mouth, the nobles held their peace," etc. (Job 29:9-10), namely, while he was in presence, or while he spoke. The same may be said of children's patience in enduring their parents' speech; which Job also notes in these words, "Unto me men gave ear, and waited, and kept silence" (Job 29:21). Though parents in their speech may seem to be long and tedious, yet children must endure it.

And it is necessary that patience be added to silence, because many parents in tender love of their children, and earnest desire of their good, think they can never speak enough in instructing and admonishing them. The many exhortations given in Scripture to children to hear, hearken, give ear, give heed, mark, and observe the words of their parents (Gen. 49:2; Prov. 1:8; 4:1; 7:1) imply silence and patience. They who ought to be swift to hear must be slow to speak (James 1:19). I do not deny that much more is intended under those phrases, namely, obedience, yet must these also be presupposed, for he that will not in silence patiently hear his parents while they speak, will much less obey what they say.

Contrary to silence is rudeness and too much boldness in children, when, without due respect of their parents' presence, they will chatter of this thing or that thing, so much that if strangers should come into the room where such children are, they would not think that their parents were in their presence; or if they knew it, they might well think that such children have little respect to their parents.

Contrary to patience in hearing is fretting and murmuring against parents (if at least their speech be a bit long) and rushing or slinking away before they have finished. These faults are the greater, if children by their talkativeness or impatience hinder or interrupt their parents' speech when they are giving any admonition or instruction, for thus they show both too little respect for their parents, and also too little regard of the means of their own good.

A Child's Respectful Controlling of His Speech to His Parent

A child's respect in wisely controlling his speech to his parents may be shown in many ways, as:

1. By giving to them respectful and honorable titles. No title can be more honorable than that which is most proper and usual, "father" to the one parent, and "mother" to the other. God takes the title "Father" to Himself as a title of great dignity (Jer. 31:9; Gal. 4:6).

Objection: This title so belongs to God, as we are to call none on earth "father" (Matt. 23:9).

Answer: This is not simply to be taken of the title itself, but of the mindset of him that gives or claims that title. If it is claimed or given to obscure God's fatherhood or to make a man a father of himself without dependence on God or reference to Him who is properly the Father of all, it is an ungodly and blasphemous title, but otherwise lawful and authorized.

In Scripture the title “father” is given to all degrees of dignities among men, as to kings (1 Sam. 24:11), captains, and other chief governors (2 Kings 5:13), to priests (Judg. 18:19), prophets (2 Kings 6:21), apostles (1 Cor. 4:15), and other ministers (1 Tim. 5:1). In the fifth commandment all superiors are included under it, therefore “father” is a title of great honor, and by the rule of relation “mother” is a title of as great honor to the female sex. Religious and dutiful children have ever used to give these titles to their parents. “My father,” says Isaac to Abraham (Gen. 22:7), Jacob to Isaac (Gen. 27:18); “my mother,” says Solomon to Bathsheba (1 Kings 2:20). I find also the title of “sir” used (Matt. 21:30), a title of honor.

2. By using *few words* before their parents, and those few not without good reason, being first spoken to by their parents, or having permission of them, or making known to them some necessary matter, at least not against their parents’ liking, so as their parents should be offended by it. And if they observe their parents to be unwilling to hear them speak any more of such and such a matter, then ought they to lay their hands upon their mouths, as Isaac (Gen. 22:7–8) and Jacob (Gen. 27:12). This is a sign of great respect.

3. By meek and humble speeches. Such was the speech of Jonathan, the natural son of Saul (1 Sam. 19:4), and of David his son-in-law (1 Sam. 24:10), by which he was very satisfied, and his anger pacified.

4. By observing a fitting opportunity, as when parents are not extremely busy, or with company, or too emotional. When Saul was calm (1 Sam. 19:6), how well did he accept Jonathan’s apology for David? But when full of emotion (1 Sam. 20:30), how poorly did he take it? This wise observing of a suitable opportunity shows great respect.

5. By a quick, ready, willing, pleasing answer, when by their parents they shall be spoken to. Eli was as a father to Samuel, therefore when Samuel thought that Eli called him,

he quickly and readily answered, "Here am I" (1 Sam. 3:4, 6), and when Eli desired to know what the Lord had said to him, Samuel told him all, and held nothing from him (1 Sam. 3:18). The younger son noted in the parable showed a son-like reverence in giving a willing and ready answer to his father (Matt. 21:30), though he failed in his obedience, by not performing what he promised.

The Vices in Children Contrary to Such Respect in Speech

Contrary to those branches of respect in speech are,

1. *Pride*: when children scorn to give the title of "father" or "mother" to their parents. This is the mindset of many who have gotten more wealth or honor than ever their parents had. In public especially such children often refuse to give those titles. Solomon was not like that. Though he was a great king sitting upon his throne, in the sight and hearing of all his people that were about him, he called Bathsheba "mother" (1 Kings 2:20).

If children had that concern for the honor of their parents which they should, they being themselves in places of honor and dignity would rather openly call their parents "father" and "mother," that they might be known as the father and mother of so honored a person.

2. *Talkativeness*, and too much boldness, or rather rudeness in speech, when children having to do with their parents, can never be done (as we speak) but must urge matters to the very uttermost. Many parents are often much provoked by this. It does not matter that the child is right, especially in a matter of no great consequence. For the sake of respect, the child must leave it alone, at least for a time. And if the matter of dispute is weighty, as in points of religion, the child must either take some other opportunity of better informing his parent, or else get some other wise friend to do it.

3. *Forcefulness*, when children answer their parents as if they were their equals: giving word for word. It is as inappropriate for children to talk back, as servants, to whom the apostle has explicitly forbidden it (Titus 2:9). Both law and nature forbid children to be provoked by anything that their parents say or do;¹ how great then is their fault who give scornful and forceful words to their parents when they are not provoked, as the elder son noted in the parable, and the elder brother of the prodigal child?

4. *Indiscretion*, when children have no respect to any time, busyness, or temper of their parents in speaking to them (Matt. 21:29; Luke 15:29), and so, much provoke them. It is laid down as a warning to parents, that they “provoke not their children to wrath” (Eph. 6:4). How much more must children observe that warning?

5. *Stubbornness*, when children pout and give no answer at all to their parents. This is too common a fault in children, and many parents are much offended and grieved by it. A child-like silence is very commendable, and a sign of great reverence, but this is worthy of much blame, a sign of great disobedience to one’s duty; and as carefully to be avoided, as the former is to be practiced.

Children’s Respectful Talk about Their Parents

So true and complete ought that deep respect to be which children have to their parents, that their speech not only to them before their faces, but also of them behind their backs, must be so shaped both in content and manner, when they have any opportunity to talk about their parents, as all that hear them may note them to have a deep respect to their parents.

1. Here Gouge cited Gregory Nazianzus (330–389), a theologian of the early church.

As a general direction to better perform this duty, let children speak nothing of their parents that they would hate to come to their parents' ear. More particularly, let them speak of those things which most tend to their commendation, that so (as Christ said of His Father) they may honor their parents (John 8:49). Let other things be buried in silence as much as is possible. And if others speak of matters disgraceful to their parents, let them give their parents the benefit of the doubt, and, as far as they may, diminish the force of the accusations, and sharply reprove those that slander their parents. This is that blessing which children owe to their parents, for neglecting this the wise man rebukes children saying, "There is a generation... that doth not bless their mother" (Prov. 30:11).

Contrary to that kind of blessing is revealing parents' weaknesses, noted in cursed Ham (Gen. 9:22), and telling lies about them, noted in ungodly Absalom (2 Sam. 15:3), and mocking and cursing them, which is explicitly condemned (Prov. 30:11). The reward for this is death according to God's law (Lev. 20:9), a shameful and disgraceful death, for the ravens of the valley shall pluck out his eyes, and the young eagles shall eat it (Prov. 30:17): which speaks of the end of a notorious criminal that is hanged (Gen. 40:19).

A Child's Respectful Conduct to His Parent

As the speech, so the conduct of children towards their parents must be seasoned with respect for several reasons. First, this is a fruit and proof of childlike fear as well as that. Secondly, of the two, this is the surer evidence, for actions are better signs of the disposition of the heart than words. Thirdly, kind words joined with contrary deeds must be counted merely complimentary and hypocritical. Fourthly, where there is a contradiction between words and deeds, the one will be a witness against the other, and that man's condemnation the greater. Therefore let all respect be

shown in children's behavior to their parents, in these and similar instances.

1. If a parent is coming to a child, and the child observes it, let him quickly go to meet his parent, as did Joseph to his father (Gen. 46:29), and Solomon to his mother (1 Kings 2:19). These two examples are to be noted because both were in a high government position, one a great governor, the other a king.

2. Let such child-like displays of honor be performed as is fitting for the age and sex, either in going to, remaining before, or going from a parent, as uncovering the head, bending the knee, bowing the body, standing up, etc. The two important persons, Joseph (Gen. 48:12) and Solomon (1 Kings 2:19), bowed, the one to his father, the other to his mother.

3. Let the facial expression and gestures of the body be so soberly and modestly controlled in the presence of the parent, as may display due respect.

4. Let the place of higher honor be given to parents, and if occasionally a child be above his parent, let him come below him. For that is a clear sign of subordination and submission. What makes men to strive for the higher position, except they would be counted better than those with whom they strive? But that ought not to be the mindset of children to their parents.

Question: What if children be more wealthy or honorable in status than their parents, are they then to defer the higher honor to them?

Answer: No honor is comparable to the dignity of fatherhood. It gives a greater status to the parent over his child than any other honor can to the child over his parent. I grant that a child may by some office and outward dignity be so advanced above his father that other men may more honor and respect the child, and give the higher place to him, and for order's sake the child may and ought to receive it in

company, but when they are alone, the child must instead respect the father.²

The Vices Contrary to Children's Respectful Gestures towards Their Parents

Against these branches of respectful gestures, are:

1. *Rudeness and bad manners*, when children do not know how to show the difference between their parents and strangers, but wait for their parents to come to them, and they stay in their place and do not get up to meet them.

2. *Puffed up self-importance*, when they think it too much to honor their parents in how they stand and act in their presence. It happens many times, that parents show more respect to other people than their own children do. On the contrary, the son should show somewhat more respect than his father does to other.

3. *Lack of self-control and boldness*, when children are too familiar with their parents, playing with them and giggling upon every little opportunity. This kind of conduct greatly tends to disgrace and dishonor parents. For what can they who see it think, except that such children have been too pampered and poorly brought up?

4. *Ambition*, when children so crave position and prestige, especially in company, that rather than be under some whom they supposed to be at least their equals, they will be above their parents. This often happens when parents, being humble, defer to those whom their children, being proud, think lower than themselves. Now instead of placing themselves under their subordinates (as they suppose) they will be above their parents, a point of great insolence. Such ought

2. We omit Gouge's discussion of biblical examples of children asking their parent's blessing, sometimes kneeling before them (Gen. 27; 48; 49), which he commends but says that it should be done "according to the custom of the time and place in which they live."

to be the respect of a child to his parent, that he should lower himself below those that are his subordinates, rather than exalt himself above his parent. As a man must let go of his rights with other men in many cases for the sake of peace, so especially with his parent, in the case of superiority. Would not everyone that knows what honor a child owes to a father, condemn that child's ambition, that should so insist upon his position and prestige, as to take them from his parent?

Having finished with children's respect, their obedience follows.

Children's Obedience

The obedience of children does most prove the authority of parents, and is the surest evidence of the honor a child gives to his parents. Therefore is it expressed by name in the text, and all other duties are included under it (Eph. 6:1; Col. 3:20). Respect without obedience is a mere mockery, not at all acceptable. Of the two, a child would better fail in the former. Consider the parable of the two sons (Matt. 21:31). Respect in comparison to obedience is just a complimentary honor. Obedience is a true, real honor, and the surest test of a child's doing his duty. Obedience is a duty so appropriate to children, that the apostle applies it to them as a proper attribute, saying, "as obedient children" (1 Peter 1:14). The example of Christ is here set before us as a pattern: He "was subject" to his parents (Luke 2:51) Solomon counts the neglect of it a despising of a parent (Prov. 23:22).

Disobedience and rebellion are the greatest opposition to a parents' authority that can be. For what is the purpose of authority over those who resist it and rebel against it? The apostle counts disobedient children among the most sinful persons that exist (2 Tim. 3:2). He sets forth their disobedience by a metaphor taken from untamed, head-strong animals that will not be brought under the yoke, using a

word therefore is not inappropriately translated “unruly” (Titus 1:6)³ and it corresponds to some extent to a Hebrew phrase given to disobedient children, “children of Belial” (Deut. 13:13), which can be translated “sons without profit,” or, as some will have it, “sons without yoke,” that is, such children who refusing to be in submission to parents are not profitable, but work much trouble and cause great grief.⁴ God’s law appoints to disobedient and rebellious children the punishment of a public, shameful death (Deut. 21:18).

3. Gouge refers in the margin to the Greek word “unruly” (*anupotaktos*) in Titus 1:6, which literally means, “not under order.”

4. On this point, Gouge cites the theologian and Bible translator, Jerome (c. 345–c. 419).