

FAMILY

The Way for Parents

November 26, 2017

Ephesians 6:1-4

Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. 2 “Honor your father and mother” (this is the first commandment with a promise), 3 “that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land.” 4 Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

CHAPTER SIX

(6:1–3) “Obey” is *hupakouō* (ὕπ ακ ο υ ω), the simple verb meaning “to hear,” the prefixed preposition, “under,” the compound verb meaning, “to hear under,” that is, “to hear under” authority. It speaks of the one hearing as being under the authority of some one else. Thus, the verb comes to mean, “to hearken to a command, to obey, to be obedient to, submit to.” The verb is in the present imperative, which construction commands habitual, constant obedience here. The phrase, “in the Lord” is to be construed with “obey.” That is, as Expositors says; “It defines the quality of the obedience by defining the *sphere* within which it is to move—a Christian obedience fulfilled in communion with Christ.” Vincent says: “The children being with their parents in the Lord, are to be influenced by religious duty as well as by natural affection.” The word “right” is *dikaios* (δ ι κ α ι ο ς), “not in the sense of *befitting* merely, but in that of *righteous*, what is required by *law*—the law that is at once founded on the natural relation of children and parents and proclaimed in the divine commandment (v. 2)” (Expositors). “Honor” is *timaō* (τ ι μ α ω), “to estimate, fix the value.” To honor someone therefore, is to evaluate that person accurately and honestly, and treat him with the deference, respect, reverence, kindness, courtesy, and obedience which his station in life or his character demands. Expositors says: “Obedience is the *duty*; honor is the disposition of which the obedience is born.”

Translation. The children, be always obedient to your parents in the Lord, for this is a righteous thing. Be always honoring your father and your mother, which is a commandment of such a nature as to be the first commandment with promise, in order that it may be well with you, and in order that you may be long-lived upon the earth.

(6:4) “Provoke” is *parorgizō* (π α ρ ο ρ γ ι ξ ω), “to rouse to wrath, to provoke,

exasperate, anger.” Expositors says: “The parental duty is given first negatively, as avoidance of all calculated to irritate or exasperate the children—injustice, severity and the like, so as to make them indisposed to filial obedience and honor.” “Bring up” is ektrephō (ἐκ τ ρ ε φ ω), “to nourish up to maturity, to nurture, bring up, to rear up.” The word is not confined to the nourishing of a child physically, but includes its bringing up or rearing in the various departments of its life.

“Nurture” is *paideia* (π α ι δ ε ι α), “the whole training and education of children which relates to the cultivation of mind and morals, and employs for this purpose, now commands and admonitions, now reproof and punishment” (Thayer). “Admonition” is *nouthesia* (ν ο υ θ ε σ ι α), “exhortation, admonition.” Trench says of this word, “it is a training by word—by the word of encouragement, when that is sufficient, but also by that of remonstrance, of reproof, of blame, where these may be required, as set over against the training by act and discipline which is *paideia* (π α ι δ ε ι α).”

Translation. And the fathers, stop provoking your children to anger, but be rearing them in the discipline and admonition of the Lord.¹

6:1–4 The injunctions concerning parent-child relations follow quite clearly the wording of Col. 3:20–21. Paul only adds the commandment with a modified form of its attached promise (2; *cf.* Ex. 20:12) and the positive injunction that fathers (note the male responsibility) instruct and train their children in the Lord.²

b. Children and parents (6:1–4)

The Spirit-controlled life (5:18) is necessary for having a good parent-child relationship.

6:1–3. **Children** are to **obey** their **parents**. The phrase **in the Lord** does not mean that children are to obey parents only if their parents are believers. As Colossians 3:20 clearly denotes, a child’s obedience to his parents is pleasing in the Lord’s sight. The reason **for this** is that it **is right** (*dikaion*); it is a proper course to follow in society. Paul then quoted the fifth commandment (Ex. 20:12; Deut. 5:16) to support the need for children to obey parents (Eph. 6:2a, 3). The parenthetical clause states that this **is the first commandment with a promise**. But this is actually the second command with a promise (*cf.* Ex. 20:6). Some say Paul meant that this is the first command that children need to learn. But the first, not the fifth, of the Ten Commandments should really be learned first. More likely, Paul meant that this is “first” in the sense of being “a primary commandment,” that is, of primary importance for children and it also has a promise. The promise for those who obey their

¹ Wuest, K. S. (1997). *Wuest’s word studies from the Greek New Testament: for the English reader* (Eph 5:21–6:4). Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.

² Turner, M. (1994). Ephesians. In D. A. Carson, R. T. France, J. A. Motyer, & G. J. Wenham (Eds.), *New Bible commentary: 21st century edition* (4th ed., p. 1242). Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press.

parents is **that** they **enjoy** a prosperous and **long life on the earth**. This states a general principle that obedience fosters self-discipline, which in turn brings stability and longevity in one's life. (Stated conversely, it is improbable that an undisciplined person will live a long life. An Israelite who persistently disobeyed his parents was not privileged to enjoy a long, stable life in the land of Israel. A clear example of this was Eli's sons Hophni and Phinehas [1 Sam. 4:11].) Though that promise was given to Israel in the Old Testament, the principle still holds true today.

6:4. **Fathers** are addressed because they represent the governmental head of the family on whom rests the responsibility of child discipline. Fathers are **not** to **exasperate** (*parorgizete*, "provoke to anger"; used only here and in Rom. 10:19; cf. Col. 3:21) their **children** by unreasonable demands, petty rules, or favoritism. Such actions cause children to become discouraged (Col. 3:21). **Instead**, fathers are to **bring them up**, that is, rear or nourish (*ektrephete*, "provide for physical and spiritual needs"; also used in Eph. 5:29) them **in the training** (*paideia*, "child discipline," including directing and correcting; cf. "training" in righteousness [2 Tim. 3:16] and God's "discipline" of believers [Heb. 12:8]) **and instruction** (*nouthesia*; cf. 1 Cor. 10:11; Titus 3:10) **of the Lord**. Children are to obey "in the Lord" (Eph. 6:1) and parents are to train and instruct "in the Lord." He is to be the center of their relationships and of their teaching and learning.³

6:1-4

Children and Fathers

Jewish and Greco-Roman writers unanimously agreed that children needed to honor their parents, and, at least till they grew up, needed to obey them as well. The command to honor one's parents was in the Old Testament (Ex 20:12; Deut 5:16) and included living in such a way as to bring honor on them in a godly society (Deut 21:18-21). Many Jewish writers believed that honoring one's parents was the most important commandment.

At the same time, children were often taught through beating, which was standard in child rearing and education; fathers were considered responsible for their education. Paul is among the minority of ancient writers who seem to disapprove of excessive discipline (6:4). (Greek and Roman society was even harsher on newborn children; because an infant was accepted as a legal person only when the father officially recognized it, babies could be abandoned or, if deformed, killed. Early Christians and Jews unanimously opposed both abortion and abandonment. This text, however, addresses the discipline of minors in the household.)⁴

³ Hoehner, H. W. (1985). Ephesians. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, pp. 640-642). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

⁴ Keener, C. S. (1993). *The IVP Bible background commentary: New Testament* (Eph 5:22-6:4). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

Children and Parents

Ephesians 6:1-4

Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. "Honor your father and mother"—which is the first commandment with a promise—"that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth."

Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.

It is a conviction of mine that no man has a right to tell other people how to raise their children until he has children of his own and has tried to raise them. As a corollary, I am convinced that no *wise* man will give advice even then until his own children have grown up and turned out well.

Unfortunately, a preacher cannot teach the sixth chapter of Ephesians without dealing with the relations of parents to children and children to parents, since Paul introduces the subject. And a pastor who is concerned for his people will not want to ignore relationships simply because they are troublesome. I sometimes jokingly tell parents that they can get by with two children, because they are matched in numbers and the parents are bigger. But when you have three, one is always getting away from you. In a sense that is what is happening in a broader way today. We can handle one or two problems. But the home is beset by so many problems today that success at being good parents seems to be getting away from us.

Norman Corwin wrote in an article for *Reader's Digest* entitled "Perfect Home": "One child makes a home a course in liberal education for both himself and parents; two children make it a private school; three or more make it a campus." But many parents today are not sure that they are up to being professors in this university, and even then they are unsure of what should be offered in the curriculum.

A New Position for Children

Paul introduces the subject with the duty of children toward their parents. It is another example of submission by Christians to Christians, going back to his thematic statement in Ephesians 5:21: "Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ." He began with wives submitting to husbands. Here he deals with children submitting to parents, and later he will address slaves and masters.

But before we deal directly with Paul's teaching on children, it is worth noting that nothing in all history has done so much for the elevation and development of children as Christianity. In our study of the preceding passage, Ephesians 5:22–33, I pointed out the great advance for women produced by Christianity. But that elevation, great as it was, is overshadowed by the improvement in the status of children. William Barclay, whom I quoted in regard to women, notes correctly that under the Roman law of *patria potestas* ("the father's power"), "A Roman father had absolute power over his family. He could sell them as slaves; he could make them work in his fields, even in chains; he could take the law into his own hands, for law was in his own hands, and he could punish as he liked; he could even inflict the death penalty on his child. Further, the power of the Roman father extended over the child's whole life, so long as the father lived. A Roman son never came of age."

There was also the matter of child repudiation, leading to exposure of the newborn. When a baby was born it was placed before its father. If the father stooped and lifted the child, the child was accepted and was raised as his. If he turned away, the child was rejected and was literally discarded. Such rejected children were either left to die, or they were picked up by those who trafficked in infants. These people raised children to be slaves or to stock the brothels. One Roman father wrote to his wife from Alexandria: "If—good luck to you!—you have a child, if it is a boy, let it live; if it is a girl, throw it out."

Against such pagan cruelty the new relations of parents to children and children to parents brought by the Christian gospel stand forth like sunshine after a dismal storm.

The Duty of Children

In writing to families, Paul begins with children because of his purpose in providing examples of submission, as I said. As he develops this duty, the apostle stresses two matters.

1. *Obedience.* Obedience is the fundamental relationship of children to parents. As we are to see, it is not an absolute obedience (as, for example, if a parent should command a child to do a wicked or un-Christian thing), and it ought always to be obedience rendered in the context of a loving parent-child relationship. Nevertheless, it is a true obedience, guided, but not abolished, by love.

What Paul has in mind as he speaks of the obligation of a child to obey his or her parents is natural law, that is, the law of relationships written upon the human conscience by God apart from special revelation. Children are to obey, "for this is right." This is not confined to Christian ethics. It is recognized and taught by all the world's cultures, both ancient and contemporary. Children owe obedience to parents. It is true that this duty has often been greatly distorted and abused, in Christian as well as in non-Christian circles, but it is an abiding obligation nonetheless.

The obligation is not merely on the side of the child, who must obey, but also on the side

of the parent, who must enforce the obedience. This is because the parent stands as God in relationship to the child. To teach the child to obey the parent is to teach the child to obey God. To allow the child to defy and disobey the parent is to teach the child to defy and disobey God with all the obvious consequences.

In his discussion of this point John R. W. Stott points out that in the traditional Christian handling of the Ten Commandments the rule “Honor your father and your mother” (Exod. 20:12), the fifth of the ten, is placed in the second table of the law which deals with human relationships, while in the Jewish handling of the Ten Commandments it is placed in the first table, which deals with our relationship to God. Stott argues that this, rather than the Christian division, is “surely right.” It is because obedience to parents is part of our relationship to God and because disobedience to parents is at heart a spiritual rebellion.

Stott points out that this is why under Jewish law the most extreme penalty, death, was proscribed for anyone who cursed his or her parents or was incorrigible in relationship to them (cf. Lev. 20:9; Deut. 21:18–21).

2. *Honor.* The second duty Paul imposes on children in relationship to parents is honor, a duty which, he is careful to show, is based on divine revelation and not merely on natural law. Indeed, it is the fifth of the Ten Commandments, which I have already cited: “Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the LORD your God is giving you” (Exod. 20:12).

That is a difficult area, of course, for not all parents live in such a way that their children can properly honor them, especially if the child has become a Christian and the parents are not Christians. What is a child to do, for example, if his or her father is an irresponsible alcoholic or profligate or if the mother is immoral, undisciplined, and excessively worldly? Can a child properly honor such a parent? Should he? To link this duty to the preceding, should a child obey the commands of such non-Christian parents?

The answer is that a child, while he is a child, owes obedience to a parent in all areas except those that contradict the revealed law of God. In this, the child’s position is the same as that of a Christian wife in relationship to a non-Christian husband or a Christian citizen who finds himself in conflict with an anti-Christian government. The principle is: “If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor” (Rom. 13:7). All owe obedience and respect to those over them, *but not at the expense of the obedience we owe to God.*

Stott suggests, to give an example, that if a non-Christian parent forbids a Christian child to be baptized, this is a matter in which the child can justly obey the parent. For although Jesus commanded baptism, he did not specify precisely when it was to be done, and it is possible to postpone baptism to a later time. On the other hand, if the parent should command the child not to worship and follow the Lord Jesus Christ in his or her heart, this the child could not obey. For to abandon following after Christ would be to

abandon Christianity.

If you are having difficulty in this regard, I suggest that you study your parents and pick out those areas in which you can properly honor them. I remember doing this with my father at a very critical point in my growing up, although my father was not at all a bad father in the sense I have been speaking of and never discouraged, but rather encouraged, my Christian commitment. The difficulty was twofold: first, my father was a busy doctor who was very seldom home and, second, when he was home it was difficult to talk to him. My father does not communicate easily on a personal level. In fact, I cannot remember ever having had a meaningful and constructive conversation with my father.

But I determined to examine his life for areas in which I could particularly honor and admire him, and I discovered that there were many such areas. I learned that my father was extremely hardworking and conscientious. Indeed, that was why he was away from home so much. So although his being away created problems, there were advantages also. The fact that he could pay for an extended and thorough education for me was one of them. Second, I discovered that he was extremely generous. My father never flaunted his giving to Christian and other charitable causes; in fact, he hardly mentioned it, although my father was quite open in talking about money. When I learned what he did, some of the resentments I had in other areas dissipated.

Let me encourage you to do this, as Paul encourages children in this paragraph. I notice three inducements. First, obedience and honor are *right* relationships; they are grounded in natural law. Second, they are a *Christian duty*; they are to be exercised “in the Lord” and are part of the Ten Commandments. Third, they are enforced by a *promise*, namely, that it will “go well with” those who practice them and they will “enjoy long life on the earth.” This last promise is not a blanket assurance that every individual who honors his or her parents will live longer than every individual who does not. But it is a general promise that God’s material and physical blessing rests on those who work at being Christians in these relationships.

The Duty of Parents

It should be obvious from what I have already said that the duty placed upon children involves a correspondingly great responsibility for their parents, which is what Paul turns to next. For if children are to obey their parents, parents must give them proper directions to obey. And if they are to honor their parents, their parents must be worthy of that honor.

It is important that Paul gives instructions to fathers specifically. This does not exclude mothers, of course. It includes them in the same way the word “brothers” or “brethren” is used to include all Christians in other passages, and because Paul is speaking of “parents” (both “fathers and mothers”) in the first three verses. For this reason the Good News Bible actually translates “fathers” (*pateres*) as “parents” in verse 4. Nevertheless, it is significant, as I say, that Paul addresses fathers specifically for the simple reason that the responsibility

for managing a home and raising children is primarily theirs.

They are not responsible entirely for what their children become, as I hope to show, for a part of what children become is their own responsibility. But fathers are responsible for treating them in a non-exasperating way and for bringing them up in the instruction of the Lord.

Paul's words to fathers have two parts, one negative and the other positive. The negative part involves restraint. Fathers are not to "exasperate" their children but are rather to exercise their authority as fathers in a balanced way. In the parallel passage in Colossians Paul tells fathers, "Do not embitter your children, or they will become discouraged" (Col. 3:21). That is, although there is a proper and necessary place for discipline, that discipline must nevertheless "never be arbitrary (for children have a built-in sense of justice) or unkind. Otherwise, they will 'become discouraged.' Conversely, almost nothing causes a child's personality to blossom and gifts to develop like the positive encouragement of loving, understanding parents."

Barclay tells of the testimony of the distinguished painter Benjamin West in this respect. He was young, and one day his mother went out, leaving him in charge of his younger sister Sally. In his sister's absence he discovered some bottles of colored ink and decided to paint his sister's portrait. He made an awful mess. But when his mother came back she said nothing about the terrible ink stains. Instead she picked up the piece of paper on which he had been working and exclaimed, "Why, it's Sally!" Then she stooped and kissed him. Benjamin West used to say, "My mother's kiss made me a painter."

Martin Luther said, "Spare the rod and spoil the child—that is true. But beside the rod keep an apple to give him when he has done well."

On the positive side Paul speaks to fathers about training, saying, "instead, bring them [your children] up in the training and instruction of the Lord." How are fathers to do this unless they know what the Word of God teaches? How are they to teach with wisdom unless they have themselves learned in Christ's school? Obviously fathers will fail at this great task unless they are themselves growing with God. They must be studying the Bible. They must be seeking to live by it and practice it in their own daily lives. Parents (and especially fathers) must be models. Howard Hendricks says, "Children are not looking for perfect parents; but they are looking for honest parents. An honest, progressing parent is a highly infectious person."

Yet I must say a word on the matter of the child's own responsibility, as I promised. Children are their own people, and they have their own set of responsibilities both before God and others. Consequently, although they may be taught wisely and raised morally and that instruction be supported by parental example, they nevertheless sometimes do go astray, and *that is not necessarily the parents' fault.*

The first example of child-rearing in the Bible should teach us that. We know that Adam

and Eve were a sinful man and woman after the Fall, as we all are. But they were undoubtedly model parents nonetheless. They were highly intelligent and knew God intimately. Moreover, they are numbered in the godly line of the age before the Flood, the line which contained such outstanding spiritual giants as Enoch, Methuselah, and Noah. There is no question but that they raised their children to know and honor God. Yet in spite of this their first child, Cain, turned out to be a murderer. Why? The Bible says it was the result of the outworkings of his own sinful heart.

So I say to parents: If your child has abandoned the Lord and is living a worldly life, it is not necessarily your fault. It may be, but not necessarily. Do not abandon hope. God has called many such children. Your duty is to continue to live as Christians and pray for your child regularly. The Bible says, "The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective" (James 5:16).

On the other side, I want to say a word to children who have not had godly parents. The fact that your parents did not teach you about the Lord or lead a consistently godly life is unfortunate for them and a handicap for you, but it is not an excuse for your failing to be what God would have you be as his followers. I spoke of Cain, an ungodly son of godly parents. But when I think of Cain I inevitably also think of Joseph, who is a great contrast. Joseph's father was not particularly spiritual, and he was raised in a family environment that was not conducive to any high standards of behavior. His brothers were spiteful, profligate, and violent. Joseph was carried away to Egypt. He had no outward spiritual support. Yet he had determined in his youth to follow God, and he did it even through adversity. He was never turned aside by outward circumstances.

Faith of Our Fathers

Sometimes those who are properly raised go astray, and sometimes those who are spiritually disadvantaged are models of Christian life and character. But these are exceptions, and the normal pattern is the communication of faith from generation to generation within the context of a genuinely Christian home. It is hard for children to learn to obey their parents. It is hard for parents to bring their children up in the training and instruction of the Lord.

But difficult is not impossible, and by the grace of God Christian parents and children have been managing just those difficulties for centuries. They can manage it in our own time too. Howard Hendricks's book, from which I have quoted several times, is called *Heaven Help the Home!* It is a clever, provocative title, but by the addition of an *s* it also becomes a true statement. *Heaven* (that is, God) *helps the home!* God is in the business of building homes, and he is on our side if we are truly trying to obey him and follow his directions.

The world is against us. The world wants absolute autonomy and will attempt to destroy any established structure to get it. It will try to destroy our families. It will try to

get us on its side. But it need not succeed. We can live as Jesus tells us to live, and God can and will bless our homes.⁵

1. The duty of children (verses 1–3)

Children, obey your parents ... Here is another example of that general submissiveness which according to 5:21 is expected of all members of God's new society. But this time the requirement is stronger, namely obedience. For wives were not told to 'obey', and in my view the 1662 Prayer Book marriage service was wrong to include this verb in the bride's vows. The concept of a husband who issues commands and of a wife who gives him obedience is simply not found in the New Testament. The nearest approximation to it is the cited example of Sarah who 'obeyed Abraham, calling him lord'. But even in that passage the apostle Peter's actual instruction to wives is the same as Paul's, namely, 'Be submissive to your husbands.' And, as we saw in the last chapter, a wife's submission is something quite different from obedience. It is a voluntary self-giving to a lover whose responsibility is defined in terms of constructive care; it is love's response to love.

Children, however, are to obey their parents. Although Paul goes on to restrict parental authority and to guide it into the channel of Christian education, it is still clear that parents' authority over their children is distinct from and stronger than the husband's 'headship' over his wife. Yet Paul does not take it for granted. His teaching is always rationally argued. As with the wife's submission, so with the child's obedience, he builds his instruction on a carefully laid foundation. He gives three grounds for the obedience of children in a Christian home: nature, the law and the gospel.

First, nature: *Children, obey your parents ..., for this is right*, or righteous (*dikaios*). Child obedience belongs to that realm which came in medieval theology to be called 'natural justice'. It does not depend on special revelation; it is part of the natural law which God has written on all human hearts. It is not confined to Christian ethics; it is standard behaviour in every society. Pagan moralists, both Greek and Roman, taught it. Stoic philosophers saw a son's obedience as self-evident, plainly required by reason and part of 'the nature of things'. Much earlier, and in oriental culture, one of the greatest emphases of Confucius was on filial respect, so that still today, though centuries later, Chinese, Korean and Japanese customs continue to reflect his influence. Indeed, virtually all civilizations have regarded the recognition of parental authority as indispensable to a stable society. We experience no sense of surprise, therefore, when Paul includes 'disobedient to parents' as a mark both of a decadent society which God has given up to its own godlessness and of 'the last days' which began with the coming of Christ.⁵

If the obedience of children is part of the natural law which God has written on human hearts, it belongs also to the revealed law which God gave on stone tablets to Moses. So

⁵ Boice, J. M. (1988). *Ephesians: an expositional commentary* (pp. 190–216). Grand Rapids, MI: Ministry Resources Library.

Paul goes on: *Honour your father and mother (this is the first commandment with a promise), that it may be well with you and that you may live long on the earth* (verses 2, 3). In his quotation Paul freely conflates the Greek text of Exodus 20:12 ('Honour your father and your mother, that your days may be long ...') and Deuteronomy 5:16 ('that it may go well with you'). Since this is the fifth of the ten commandments and appears at first sight to concern our duty to our neighbour, many Christians have divided the decalogue into two uneven halves, the first four commandments specifying our duty to God and the remaining six our duty to our neighbour. But the Jews regularly taught that each of the law's two tablets contains five commandments. The significance of this arrangement is that it brings the honouring of our parents into our duty to God. And this is surely right. For at least during our childhood they represent God to us and mediate to us both his authority and his love. We are to 'honour' them, that is, acknowledge their God-given authority, and so give them not only our obedience, but our love and respect as well. It is because parental authority is divinely delegated authority that respectful obedience to parents was invested with such great importance in the life of God's covenant people. Moses was commanded to say to Israel: 'You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy. Every one of you shall revere his mother and his father ... I am the Lord your God.' Reverence for parents was thus made an integral part of reverence for God as their God and of their special relationship to him as his people. Hence the extremely severe penalty (death, in fact) which was to be inflicted on anyone who cursed his parents and on the 'stubborn and rebellious son' who refused to obey them, defied their warning discipline and proved to be incorrigible.⁷

The apostle Paul, however, prefers to enforce God's commandment with a promise than with a threat. He reminds his readers that the command to honour parents is *the first commandment with a promise*, and he goes on to quote the promise of prosperity and long life. This deceptively simple statement contains several problems. Some commentators beg to disagree with Paul, claiming that the fifth commandment is not, in fact, the first to have a promise attached to it, since the second commandment also has one, promising 'steadfast love to thousands' who love and obey God. A sufficient answer to this objection is that these last words 'are a declaration of God's character rather than a promise'. Others express the opinion that in this case it is not the first but the only commandment with a promise, for no other commandment has one. To this F. F. Bruce aptly responds that Paul is thinking 'not only of the decalogue but of the whole body of Pentateuchal legislation which is introduced by the decalogue'.⁹ This does not satisfy everybody, however. So some interpret 'first' as a reference to rank not order (as when the scribe asked 'Which commandment is the first of all?'), and suggest that it means 'a commandment of foremost significance, with a promise attached' or 'the first in importance among those relating to our social duties'³ or that 'this, for children, is a primary commandment, accompanied with a promise'.

The promise concerned was material prosperity (*that it may be well with you*) and long life (*that you may live long*). During the time of the theocracy, when Israel was both a nation and a church over which God ruled, his covenant blessings were closely tied to the promised land, and to safety, health and good harvests in it. But now times have changed,

and God's dealings with his people have also changed. This seems to be implied by Paul's deliberate alteration of the promise from the original 'in the land which the Lord your God gives you' to *on the earth*. The promised land fades from view. God's covenant people are now an international community, and his blessings are largely spiritual in Christ. At the same time, alongside his blessing 'in the heavenly places' (1:3), there is here a promised blessing 'on earth'. Probably we should interpret this in general rather than individual terms. Then what is promised is not so much long life to each child who obeys his parents, as social stability to any community in which children honour their parents. Certainly a healthy society is inconceivable without a strong family life.

Two practical questions arise from the requirement that children obey their parents. Is the command unconditional? And to whom is it addressed?

Many Christian young people, who are anxious to conform their lives to the teaching of Scripture, are perplexed by the requirement of obedience. Are they to obey absolutely everything their parents tell them to do? What if they have themselves come to know Christ, while so far as they know their parents remain unconverted? If their parents forbid them to follow Christ or to join the Christian community, are they obliged to obey? In reply to such questions, which are often asked in great pain and anxiety, I think I need first to say that during a young person's minority (and I have more to say about this later) obedience to parents should be the norm, and disobedience the rare exception.

For example, supposing you are a young person who, having been brought up in a non-Christian home, have recently come to Christ and now desire to be baptized, but your parents are forbidding it. Personally, I would not advise you to go ahead in defiance of your parents' expressed wishes. Even baptism, though Jesus commanded it, can wait until you are older and the law of your country gives you a measure of independence. If, on the other hand, your parents were to forbid you to worship and follow Christ in your heart, this you could not obey. It must have been just such a situation as this that Jesus had in mind when he warned of family conflict in which parents and children would be opposed to one another and our enemies would belong to our own household. In such circumstances, however painful or perilous, our loyalty to Christ must come first. If we love even our parents more than him, he said, we are not worthy of him. Not, of course, that we should ever seek family conflict or be guilty of fomenting it. On the contrary, all the followers of Jesus are called to be peacemakers and, so far as it depends on us, to live peaceably with everybody.⁶ Yet sometimes tension and strife simply cannot be avoided.

It is quite true that in the parallel passage in Colossians children are told to obey parents 'in everything'. But this is balanced in Ephesians by the command to obey them *in the Lord* (6:1). The latter instruction surely modifies the former. Children are not to obey their parents in absolutely everything without exception, but in everything which is compatible with their primary loyalty, namely to their Lord Jesus Christ.

This brings us to the second practical question: who are these 'children' who are to

obey their parents? And when do they cease to be such? Is Paul addressing himself only to infants, and to young boys and girls? Or does he include all young people who are still unmarried and living at home, even though now they may be grown up and may long since have left their childhood and their teens behind? No single answer can be given to this question; for different answers would need to be given in different cultures. In most western countries the age at which young people attain their majority has in recent years been lowered from twenty-one to eighteen. At that age now they are no longer minors, they are given the vote, and they are free to marry without parental consent. At the opposite extreme, in the empire of Paul's day, 'the power of the Roman father extended over the child's whole life, so long as the father lived. A Roman son never came of age.' In some third world countries today, especially in Asia, a similar custom prevails. All one can say in relation to such situations is that either law or custom in every society recognizes at least a measure of independence for young people, either when manhood or womanhood is reached, or when they attain a certain age, or when they leave home or marry. Christians should not defy the accepted convention of their own culture in this matter. So long as they are regarded in their culture as children or minors, they should continue to obey their parents.

One other important point. Even after we have attained our majority, are regarded in our culture as being no longer under the authority of our parents, and are therefore no longer under obligation to 'obey' them, we still must continue to 'honour' them. Our parents occupy a unique position in our lives. If we honour them as we should, we will never neglect or forget them. Many third world cultures, even non-Christian ones, care for elderly parents far more conscientiously and thoughtfully than most of us do, who live in the so-called Christian West. Although in some circumstances it may be unavoidable and in others even desirable, it is a sad reflection on the selfish western tradition of the nuclear family that instead of looking after our elderly relatives ourselves, we consign them to an old people's home. Thus to isolate, and even symbolically to reject, one's own parents can seldom be reconciled with the command to honour them.

So far we have been following Paul as he grounds the child's obedience to his parents on both nature and Scripture, on natural law and revealed law. That is, he urges it first because it is right and secondly because it is written. His third argument introduces the gospel and the new day which dawned with Jesus Christ. This is implied in the injunction that children should obey their parents *in the Lord*, namely, in the Lord Jesus. Already we have seen that these words modify the parallel command in Colossians to obey parents 'in everything'. But this does not exhaust their meaning. They bring child-obedience into the realm of specifically Christian duty, and lay upon children the responsibility to obey their parents because of their own personal relationship to the Lord Jesus Christ. It is he who as Creator first established order in family and society, and in the new society which he is now building he does not overthrow it. There is an essential continuity between the old order and the new, between the original creation and the new creation in Christ. Families have not been abolished. Men and women still marry and have children. 'In the Lord' there are still husbands and wives, parents and children. What has changed relates to the ravages of

the fall. For the family life which God created at the beginning and pronounced to be 'good' was spoiled by human rebellion and selfishness. Relationships fell apart. Society was fractured. Love was twisted into lust, and authority into oppression. But now *in the Lord*, by his reconciling work, God's new society has begun, continuous with the old in the fact of family life but discontinuous in its quality. For now all our relationships are transformed precisely because they are *in the Lord*. They are purged of ruinous self-centredness, and suffused instead with Christ's love and peace. Even obedience to parents is changed. It is no longer a grudging acquiescence in parental authority. Christian children learn to obey with gladness, 'for this pleases the Lord'. They remember the loving submission which Jesus himself gave as a boy to his parents.¹ Now this same Jesus is their Lord and Saviour, and the creator of the new order, so they are anxious to do what pleases him.

2. The duty of parents (verse 4)

The instruction to children to obey their parents presupposes, as we have seen, the fact of parental authority. Yet when Paul outlines how parents should behave towards their children, it is not the exercise, but the restraint, of their authority which he urges upon them.

The picture he paints of fathers as self-controlled, gentle, patient educators of their children is in stark contrast to the norm of his own day. 'At the head of the Roman family ... was the *pater familias*, who exercised a sovereign authority over all members of the family ... The autocratic character of the *patria potestas* manifested itself not only in the father's right to punish, but also in his *iuo vitae necisque* (killing the newborn; exposure of children) ... *The pater familias* has a full right of disposal over his children, as over slaves and things ...' William Barclay adds: 'A Roman father had absolute power over his family. He could sell them as slaves, he could make them work in his fields even in chains, he could take the law into his own hands, for the law was in his own hands, and punish as he liked, he could even inflict the death penalty on his child.'⁴

Completely different was the Christian father, especially if he remembered what Paul had written earlier, namely that his fatherhood was derived from the 'one God and Father of us all' (3:14-15; 4:6). The overarching theme of *Ephesians* is that through Christ's reconciling work there is now one multinational, multicultural family of God. So human fathers are to care for their families as God the Father cares for his. And incidentally mothers are surely included too. Although the word in verse 4 is, in fact, 'fathers' (*pateres*), yet it could be used for 'fathers and mothers', much as 'brothers' (*adelphoi*) meant 'brothers and sisters'. Certainly it is parents, both father and mother, who are referred to in verses 1-3, so that it is entirely legitimate for GNB to put 'parents' in verse 4.

Negatively, they are told: *Do not provoke your children to anger* (verse 4), or 'do not exasperate your children' (NIV) or 'goad your children to resentment' (NEB). Paul recognizes how delicate a child's personality is. Some authors have speculated that in his own childhood he was comparatively deprived of love, and that in this instruction to parents

there is a flashback to some early childhood reminiscence. We do not know. What we do know is that parents can easily misuse their authority either by making irritating or unreasonable demands which make no allowances for the inexperience and immaturity of children, or by harshness and cruelty at one extreme or by favouritism and over-indulgence at the other, or by humiliating or suppressing them, or by those two vindictive weapons sarcasm and ridicule. These are some of the parental attitudes which provoke resentment and anger in children. How many 'angry young men', hostile to society at large, have learned their hostility as children in an unsympathetic home? There is a place for discipline, as Paul goes on to say, but it must never be arbitrary (for children have a built-in sense of justice) or unkind. Otherwise, they will 'become discouraged'. Conversely, almost nothing causes a child's personality to blossom and gifts to develop like the positive encouragement of loving, understanding parents. Indeed, just as a husband's love for his wife is expressed in helping her develop her full potential, so parents' love for their children is expressed in helping them develop theirs.

Behind this curbing of parental authority there lies the clear recognition that, although children are to obey their parents in the Lord, yet they have a life and personality of their own. They are little people in their own right. As such they are to be respected, and on no account to be exploited, manipulated or crushed. 'The dominant father of the Victorian novels', writes Sir Frederick Catherwood, 'who used his own authority for his own ends is no more entitled to claim Christian authority than the rebellious son. One is abusing authority, the other is flouting it. Both are wrong.'

It is not only in the novels of Victorian England that oppressive parenthood is to be seen, however. Another example comes from more recent times in the United States. Edna Ferber's novel *Giant* tells the story of the Texan, Jordan Benedict. Owner of a two and a half million acre cattle ranch, he is furious because his infant son Jordy, aged three, does not take to horses. When set on one in full cowboy regalia, he cries to be taken down. His father is disgusted. 'I rode before I could walk', he says. 'All right', responds his wife Leslie, 'that was very cute, but that was you. This is another person. Maybe he doesn't like horses ...' 'He's a Benedict,' his father retorts, 'and I'm going to make a horseman out of him if I have to *tie* him to do it'. 'You've been playing God so long you think you run the world'. 'I run the part of it that's mine'. 'He's not yours. He's yours and mine. And not even ours. He's himself ...'

Every child must be allowed to be himself. Wise parents recognize that not all the non-conforming responses of childhood deserve to be styled 'rebellion'. On the contrary, it is by experiment that children discover both the limits of their liberty and the quality of their parents' love. Moreover, in order to grow up, they have to develop their independence, not because they are resistant to their parents' authority but because they need to exercise their own.

Paul does not rest content with his negative instruction to parents not to provoke their children to anger. He complements it with this positive exhortation: *Bring them up in the*

discipline and instruction of the Lord. The verb (*ektrephō*) means literally to ‘nourish’ or ‘feed’ and was used in 5:29 of the nourishment we give to our own bodies. But it is also used of the upbringing of children. Calvin’s translation is, ‘Let them be fondly cherished ..., deal gently with them,’ and William Hendriksen’s, ‘Rear them tenderly.’⁹ Here is an understanding, centuries before modern psychology emphasized the vital importance of the earliest years of life, that children are fragile creatures needing the tenderness and security of love.

The implications of this insistence on the parental upbringing of children are many. One is that Christian parents should jealously guard their responsibility, delegating some of it indeed to both church and school, but never entirely surrendering it. It is their own God-given task; nobody can adequately or completely replace them. Another implication is that parents need to take time and trouble with their children. Failure to do so causes many problems later. As Dr Lloyd-Jones pertinently observes, ‘If parents but gave as much thought to the rearing of their children as they do to the rearing of animals and flowers, the situation would be very different.’

How then should parents rear their children? Answer: *in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.* The second word (*nouthesia*), whether translated ‘instruction’ or ‘warning’, seems to refer primarily to verbal education, while the first word (*paideia*) means training by discipline, even by punishment. ‘*Paideia (discipline)* is training with the accent on the correction of the young.’ It is the word used in Hebrews 12 both of earthly fathers and also of our heavenly Father who ‘disciplines us for our good’.

On the need for discipline and punishment the Old Testament was clear. ‘He who spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is diligent to discipline him.’ Again, ‘Folly is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of discipline drives it far from him.’ Of course our Victorian ancestors used these verses from Proverbs to justify their excessively stern discipline. In our generation, on the other hand, we have witnessed an over-reaction leading to excessively *laissez-faire* permissiveness. To the one extreme we need to say: ‘The opposite of wrong discipline is not the absence of discipline, but right discipline, true discipline.’ To the other extreme we need to say: ‘The opposite of no discipline at all is not cruelty, it is balanced discipline, it is controlled discipline.’⁶ Above all, parents must be clear about their motives. It is always dangerous for them to discipline their children when they are annoyed, when their pride has been injured, or when they have lost their temper. Let me quote Dr Lloyd-Jones again, for his exposition of these verses is full of practical wisdom: ‘When you are disciplining a child, you should have first controlled yourself ... What right have you to say to your child that he needs discipline when you obviously need it yourself? Self-control, the control of temper, is an essential prerequisite in the control of others.’

So far we have been thinking principally of the disciplining of children. But the Christian upbringing of children is mental as well as moral. It includes instruction too. One popular contemporary fashion is to urge parents to be totally ‘non-directive’ and to leave their children to find their own way. Paul is of a different mind. Certainly some parents are too

directive, too domineering, and thereby inhibit their children from learning to make their own decisions and so grow into maturity. We have to distinguish between true and false education. False education is indoctrination, in which parents and teachers impose their mind and will on the child. True education, on the other hand, is stimulation, in which parents and teachers act as a catalyst, and encourage the child to make his own responses. This they cannot do if they leave the child to flounder; they have to teach Christian values of truth and goodness, defend them, and recommend their acceptance, but at the same time abstain from any pressure, still more coercion.

The discipline and instruction in which parents are to bring up their children, Paul writes, are 'the Lord's'. This has been taken by some to mean simply that the kind of instruction and discipline intended 'belong to a Christian upbringing' (NEB), and that Paul is specifying Christian as opposed to secular education. But I think it means more than this, namely that behind the parents who teach and discipline their children there stands the Lord himself. It is he who is the chief teacher and administrator of discipline. Certainly the overriding concern of Christian parents is not just that their children will submit to their authority, but that through this they will come to know and obey the Lord. There is always much rejoicing and thanksgiving whenever the teaching and discipline of a Christian home leads, not artificially but naturally, to a child's acceptance of the teaching and discipline of the Lord Jesus himself.⁶

Parents and children

Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. 'Honour your father and mother'—which is the first commandment with a promise—'that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth' (6:1-3). The rendering of obedience to one's parents is not simply a social convention, but it is a duty that is to be rendered to God. So important did God deem this particular duty of mankind, that he included it in the ten commandments, the foundation of the law for his nation, Israel. The respect that children are to give to their parents is essential for a well-ordered society, for the stability of the home, and also for the development of discipline and character in children. Notice the way the apostle says this: 'Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right'. It is proper, it is good, for children to render obedience to their parents. He cites the fifth commandment: 'Honour your father and mother'—which is the first commandment with a promise—'that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth.'

But Paul doesn't stop with the responsibilities of children to their parents. He goes on: **Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and**

⁶ Stott, J. R. W. (1979). *God's new society: the message of Ephesians* (pp. 220–250). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

instruction of the Lord (verse 4).

The father is held accountable by God as the one who is responsible for teaching the children and for being the disciplinarian of the children. Fathers are warned at this point that as they carry out these responsibilities of discipline and instruction, they are not to be tyrannical or harsh in their treatment of the children.

We read countless passages in the Old Testament that warn against a latitudinarian spirit by which parents are so permissive that they refuse to discipline unruly children. Remember the statement that the parent who will not discipline his child, hates the child (Proverbs 13:24). Parents, when they are disciplining their children, often say, 'This hurts me more than it hurts you.' That really is true. There are times when parents find it extremely difficult to discipline their children because they don't want to alienate the children and they don't want to put up with the tears that may follow from disciplinary action. But when they just allow children to do whatever they want, without any discipline and without any instruction, they are loving themselves rather than their children.

So we have a host of admonitions in Scripture that call parents to be very diligent in the administration of discipline to their children. But with this caveat, **do not exasperate your children**. This doesn't mean that every time a child becomes angry with a parent, it is because the parents have been guilty of unjust provocation. But there is such a thing as a belligerent, insensitive, harsh, and stentorian type of discipline which so frustrates children that they are filled with hostility and resentment towards their parents which then spills over into the rest of their lives. Of course, the ultimate model of discipline and chastisement is God himself, who always tempers his wrath with mercy.⁷

CHAPTER 6

RELATIVE DUTIES OF PARENTS AND CHILDREN AND OF MASTERS AND SERVANTS, VS. 1-9.—EXHORTATIONS AND DIRECTIONS AS TO THE SPIRITUAL CONFLICT, VS. 10-20.—CONCLUSION, VS. 21-24.

SECTION I—Vs. 1-9

¹Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right. ²Honour thy father and mother, (which is the first commandment ³with promise,) that it may be well with thee, and thou ⁴mayest live long on the earth. And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and ⁵admonition of the Lord. Servants, be obedient to them that are *your* masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, ⁶in singleness of your heart, as unto Christ; not with eye-service, as men-pleasers; but as the servants of Christ, doing the ⁷will of God from the heart; with good will doing service, as ⁸to the Lord, and not to men: knowing that whatsoever good thing any man doeth, the same shall he receive of the Lord, ⁹whether *he be* bond or free. And, ye masters, do the same things unto

⁷ Sproul, R. C. (1994). *The Purpose of God: Ephesians* (pp. 135-141). Scotland: Christian Focus Publications.

them, forbearing threatening: knowing that your Master also is in heaven; neither is there respect of persons with him.

ANALYSIS

Children should obey their parents. This obedience should be in the Lord, determined and regulated by a regard to Christ, v. 1. The ground of the obligation is—1. It is itself right. 2. It is enforced by an express command in the decalogue, to which a special promise is annexed, vs. 1–3.

Parents should do nothing to cherish evil feelings in the minds of their children, but bring them up in the discipline of Christianity, vs. 4, 5.

Servants should be obedient to their masters. This obedience should be rendered—1. With solicitude. 2. with singleness of mind. 3. As part of their obedience to Christ, v. 5. Therefore, not only when observed by men or from the desire to please men, but as serving Christ and desiring to please him; rendering their services with readiness as to the Lord and not to men; because they know that at his bar all men, whether bond or free, shall be treated according to their works, vs. 6–8.

Masters are to act on the same principles of regard to the authority of Christ, and of their responsibility to him in their conduct towards their slaves, avoiding all harshness, because master and slave have a common Master in heaven; with whom there is no respect of persons, v. 8.

COMMENTARY

V. 1. *Children, obey your parents.* The nature or character of this obedience, is expressed by the words, *in the Lord*. It should be religious; arising out of the conviction that such obedience is the will of the Lord. This makes it a higher service than if rendered from fear or from mere natural affection. It secures its being prompt, cordial and universal. That Κύριος here refers to Christ is plain from the whole context. In the preceding chapter, v. 21, we have the general exhortation under which this special direction to children is included, and the obedience there required is to be rendered *in the fear of Christ*. In the following verses also Κύριος constantly has this reference, and therefore must have it here. The ground of the obligation to filial obedience is expressed in the words, *for this is right*. It is not because of the personal character of the parent, nor because of his kindness, nor on the ground of expediency, but because it is *right*; an obligation arising out of the nature of the relation between parents and children, and which must exist wherever the relation itself exists.

V. 2. This consideration is enforced by a reference to the express command of God. The duty is so important as to be included in that brief summary of the moral law given by God on Mount Sinai. It was engraven by the finger of God on the tables of stone, *Honour thy father and thy mother*. Any flagrant breach of this command was, according to the Mosaic

law, punished with death. *To honour* is to reverence; and, therefore, the command has reference to the inward feeling as well as to the outward conduct. This precept is said to be $\pi\rho\acute{\omega}\tau\eta, \epsilon\nu \epsilon\pi\alpha\gamma\gamma\epsilon\lambda\acute{\iota}\alpha$. This may mean, it is the first commandment in the decalogue which has a specific promise attached; for the promise connected with the second commandment does not relate to the observance of that particular precept, but to keeping God's covenant. Or it may mean that it is the first commandment of the second table of the law, and has a promise annexed; or, $\pi\rho\acute{\omega}\tau\eta$ may be taken here as in Mark 12:28, 30, in the sense of chief, i. e. the first in importance. The sense would then be, 'Honour thy father and mother; this is the prime commandment, the first in importance among those relating to our social duties; and it has the specific promise annexed. It shall be well with thee on the earth.' This view of the passage is on the whole to be preferred. It is not likely that Paul would call this "the first commandment with promise," when it is in fact the only command in the decalogue which has any specific promise annexed to it. And to say that it is the first in order of arrangement in the second table of the law, not only adds nothing to its importance, but supposes the apostle to refer to a distinction between the two tables of the decalogue, not elsewhere recognized in Scripture.

The promise itself has a theocratical form in the Old Testament. That is, it has specific reference to prosperity and length of days in the land which God had given to his people as their inheritance. The apostle generalizes it by leaving out the concluding words, and makes it a promise not confined to one land or people, but to obedient children every where. If it be asked whether obedient children are in fact thus distinguished by long life and prosperity? The answer is, that this, like all other such promises, is a revelation of a general purpose of God, and makes known what will be the usual course of his providence. That some obedient children are unfortunate and short lived, is no more inconsistent with this promise, than that some diligent men are poor, is inconsistent with the declaration, 'The hand of the diligent maketh rich.' Diligence, as a general rule, does secure riches; and obedient children, as a general rule, are prosperous and happy. The general promise is fulfilled to individuals, just so far "as it shall serve for God's glory, and their own good."

V. 4. The duty of parents, who are here represented by the father, is stated in a negative and positive form. *And ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath.* This is what they are not to do. They are not to excite the bad passions of their children by severity, injustice, partiality, or unreasonable exercise of authority. A parent had better sow tares in a field from which he expects to derive food for himself and family, than by his own ill conduct nurture evil in the heart of his child. The positive part of parental duty is expressed in the comprehensive direction, $\alpha\lambda\lambda' \epsilon\kappa\tau\rho\epsilon\phi\epsilon\tau\epsilon \alpha\upsilon\tau\grave{\alpha} \epsilon\nu\ \pi\alpha\iota\delta\epsilon\acute{\iota}\alpha\ \kappa\alpha\iota\ \nu\omicron\upsilon\theta\epsilon\sigma\acute{\iota}\alpha\ \kappa\upsilon\rho\acute{\iota}\omicron\upsilon$, i. e. educate them, bring them up, developing all their powers *by* ($\epsilon\nu$ instrumental) the instruction and admonition of the Lord. $\Pi\alpha\iota\delta\epsilon\acute{\iota}\alpha$ is a comprehensive word; it means *the training or education of a child*, including the whole process of instruction and discipline. $\Nu\omicron\upsilon\theta\epsilon\sigma\acute{\iota}\alpha$, from $\nu\omicron\upsilon\theta\epsilon\tau\acute{\epsilon}\omega$ ($\nu\omicron\upsilon\theta\varsigma$, $\tau\acute{\iota}\theta\eta\mu\iota$) *to put in mind*, is included under the more general term, and is correctly rendered *admonition*. It is the act of reminding one of his faults or duties. Children are not to be allowed to grow up without care or control. They are to be instructed, disciplined, and

admonished, so that they be brought to knowledge, self-control, and obedience. This whole process of education is to be religious, and not only religious, but Christian. It is *the nurture and admonition of the Lord*, which is the appointed and the only effectual means of attaining the end of education. Where this means is neglected or any other substituted in its place, the result must be disastrous failure. The moral and religious element of our nature is just as essential and as universal as the intellectual. Religion therefore is as necessary to the development of the mind as knowledge. And as Christianity is the only true religion, and God in Christ the only true God, the only possible means of profitable education is the nurture and admonition of the Lord. That is, the whole process of instruction and discipline must be that which he prescribes, and which he administers, so that his authority should be brought into constant and immediate contact, with the mind, heart and conscience of the child. It will not do for the parent to present himself as the ultimate end, the source of knowledge and possessor of authority to determine truth and duty. This would be to give his child a mere human development. Nor will it do for him to urge and communicate everything on the abstract ground of reason; for that would be to merge his child in nature. It is only by making God, God in Christ, the teacher and ruler, on whose authority every thing is to be believed and in obedience to whose will every thing is to be done, that the ends of education can possibly be attained. It is infinite folly in men to assume to be wiser than God, or to attempt to accomplish an end by other means than those which he has appointed.⁸

⁸ Hodge, C. (1858). *A commentary on the Epistle to the Ephesians* (pp. 311–361). New York: Robert Carter and Brothers.