

**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.**

### **GOD'S GRACE AT WORK IN CHRISTIAN FAMILIES**

On this Fourth of July weekend, we just happen to be covering the Fourth Commandment. It would be entirely fitting for us today to talk about the Christians' relationship to the government, because the Bible tells us that whatever authority there is in government has been established by God. To obey your government is also to obey God. To honor your government is also to honor God. The only time Christians are allowed to disobey their government is when that government commands us to disobey God.

However, it is not the government which holds our society together. There is a more fundamental structure in all societies which is more important than government. The family is the glue that really holds our society together. It is in the family where children learn to be obedient and respectful. It is in the family where children receive the majority of their education. It is in the family where children learn how to work and to provide for themselves. It is in the family where they become responsible, productive and caring adults. You can have the greatest police force in the world and the greatest schools in the world, but without the foundation of solid families holding everything together, we would live in chaos. Unfortunately, the family is under attack in our time as it never has been before in the history of our country.

Let me say this upfront. I am not going to hold up to you this morning the model of a perfect family, because there is no such thing as a perfect family. You will not find such a model of the perfect family in the whole Bible. Adam and Eve could have had the perfect family, but sin destroyed their paradise. Instead, they endured the awful heartache of brother hating brother even to the point of Cain murdering Abel. Was it right for Jacob to have two wives and raise children with two servant girls as well? Of course it wasn't! The story of Jacob and his family is a story of as dysfunctional a family as you will ever find. And in spite of all of that, the children of this family became the twelve tribes of Israel, which was Jacob's God-given name, or grace name. So the story of a Christian family is not the story of a perfect family. There is no such thing. The story of a Christian family is always a story of God's grace.

So as we study the Fourth Commandment this morning, we want to see ***God's grace at work in Christian families***. First we will see what God expects of children. Then we'll see what God expects of parents. Last, we will see how Jesus has redeemed the Christian family.

#### **I. What God expects of children and their parents**

So children, you should listen carefully to the sermon this morning because the Fourth Commandment is especially for you. In fact I would go so far as to say that if there is one special commandment that you should keep, it's the Fourth Commandment. God has given you this

commandment for your good. God wants you to grow up to be god-fearing children who are wise and diligent and respectful and successful. That's why God gave you parents.

Think of all the things they do for you. You don't remember it, but there was a time when your parents did everything for you. They fed you with a spoon when you thought it was fun to blow bubbles with your cereal. They changed your diapers. Have you ever changed a diaper? You know that's no fun. Your parents changed your diapers thousands of times. The clothes you have on this morning? Who bought those clothes for you? Your parents did. Who taught you how to say you're A-B-C's? It was probably your parents.

Most importantly, your parents are God's agents to watch over you and keep you safe – both physically and spiritually. So when they say, "Don't put your hand in the blender when it's running!" that becomes a commandment to you from God. Because God doesn't want you to lose your fingers! And when your parents tell you, "I don't want you to watch that television show because it is too violent," that's God speaking to you so that you don't learn to do bad stuff. When your parents tell you to clean your room, that's God speaking to you through them, because God wants you to learn how to work and be responsible.

So what does the Fourth Commandment say to you, "**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."** What does the word "obey" mean? It means to do what your parents tell you to do. Do you always do that? When your mom tells you to clean your room, do you get up and get it done? Or do you keep playing with your toys until she tells you a second time, and a third time, and a fourth time, and finally gets angry with you! That's not obeying your parents, is it? And that's a sin.

And when you she tells you for the fourth time in a really loud voice, which she really hates to use, what do you do? Do you stomp off to your room with a scowl on your face? Do you make some disrespectful comment like, "Give me a break?" Notice what the Fourth Commandment says. It says **HONOR** your father and mother. Honoring your parents goes even beyond just doing what they tell you to do. Honoring your parents means that you show them respect. Honoring them means that you are thankful for them and treasure them in your hearts. Honoring them means that you show them your love.

And did you see what God promises to those who keep this commandment? He says "**that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on earth.**" This promise is not like the promise he makes in John 3:16, where it says, "**whoever believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.**" EVERYONE who believes in Jesus will have eternal life, without exception. Not every child who obeys his parents will have a long life. But as a general rule, or a rule of thumb, children who respect and obey their parents will enjoy long life on earth. So if your parents tell you not to put your hand in the blender, and you do it anyway, you will not enjoy your life on earth very much, will you? And if you ride your bike in the street after dark, when your parents told you not to, you may not enjoy a long life at all.

Children, I have a confession to make. If God held me accountable for all the times that I disobeyed my parents, I think I would have died when I was four. How about you? Have you kept the Fourth Commandment? Have you ALWAYS honored and obeyed your parents? That's why we need God's forgiving grace every single day. And I am going to talk to you about that in just a few minutes. I'll

show you what Jesus has done to redeem you to be a child of God. But first, I want to see if your parents have kept their side of this commandment.

## II. What God expects of parents

**“Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.”** Of course these words apply to both parents, father and mother. But they especially apply to fathers, because God made you the head of your household and has given you this awesome responsibility of raising up your children as godly children. And ladies, if you think that’s being sexist, ask yourself this question. Do you want a man in your house who is a godly man, who teaches his family about Jesus, and who disciplines his children in love and tenderness? Or do you want a man in your house who says, “Go ask your mother?” Well, God wants you to have the godly man and not the manly man and that’s why he addresses fathers above all. So what does God say to parents, and especially to fathers?

**Do not exasperate your children.** So you know what “exasperate” means? I didn’t either, so I looked it up in the dictionary. It said “don’t sit on your children until they can’t breathe anymore.” Well, that’s not quite what it said. It said not to make your children angry or not to frustrate your children. You can do that if you find fault with everything they do. Do you see how that makes them angry and even more rebellious? You can do that if you punish them too harshly for something they did wrong. Think Adrian Pederson. What do you think taking a branch and whipping a boy would do to his emotional wellness? Moms and dads, here is a suggestion. In all honesty and openness, ask you spouse how you can improve in your discipline of your children. Talk about it in a godly way.

**Bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.** Fathers, this is your job and it is probably the most important job that you will ever have in your life. Not that moms aren’t involved as well, but the buck stops with you. Are you teaching your children about Jesus? Are you reading a Bible story to them before they go to bed? Are you praying with them and teaching them how to pray? Let me tell you something. This task of teaching your children about Jesus is more important than watching the next episode of your favorite T.V. show. It is something that you can’t do during a commercial break in the movie. It is not something you can do just on Sunday morning or the one night in the week that you have time. It takes time. It takes consistency. It takes your best effort, because God has given his children into your hands and said, “Here. Take care of them, and teach them about me!”

Have you done that? Are you doing that? Like I said up front, “There is no such thing as a perfect family.” There are no perfect children, and there are no perfect families. What we do have is a perfect God who by his grace has redeemed the Christian family to become a nurturing ground for children growing in their faith.

## III. How God’s grace rules in Christian families

We see that especially in the story from our gospel lesson. If there was ever a perfect family or close to perfect family, it was Jesus’ family. I say almost perfect because even though Jesus was perfect his mother and father and brothers were not. You heard the story in the gospel lesson, but let’s review it quickly. Jesus and his family went to the Passover when he was twelve years old. At age twelve

Jewish boys were expected to do their part as an adult and keep the festivals as God commanded – which Jesus did. They went down to Jerusalem with all kinds of people from Nazareth. This was a four or five day affair. Besides celebrating the Passover, families spent time together. On the way home, Mary and Joseph assumed that Jesus was with some of the other families from home. After all, Jesus was the perfect child. They hardly had to watch over him at all because he was so responsible. When they realized he wasn't there, they went back to Jerusalem and frantically searched for him for three days. Can you imagine how frightened they must have been? When they found him in the temple, Jesus was talking theology with the seminary professors. Mary scolded him and said, "Why have you treated us like this?" And Jesus said, "Why were you looking for me? Didn't you know that I had to be in my Father's house?" Very gently, Jesus reminded Mary and Joseph that he was God's Son and had to do God's work. Even when he had to correct his parents, Jesus honored them. He showed them love and respect.

So why does God include this one story, and just this one story, in the childhood life of Jesus? Was it so we could say to our children, "Why can't you be more like Jesus?" Of course not. This story from Jesus' life is pure gospel. See how Jesus respected and honored his parents? Children, Jesus did this for you. He did this to make up for all the times you rolled your eyes at your mom and disrespected your dad. He fulfilled this commandment for you. That means that when you get to heaven, and God asks you if you kept the Fourth Commandment, you can say, "No, I did not. But Jesus kept this commandment perfectly for me."

The story is there for you as mothers and fathers as well. Do you see how Mary and Joseph did not understand Jesus' purpose in life? Do you see how even though they were good parents who taught Jesus well and who brought him to church, they were not perfect parents? But Jesus forgave them and he honored them and he loved them nevertheless. And Jesus forgives you, too, for all the careless things you've said to your children which hurt them, and for all the times you neglected to give your time and energy for their spiritual growth. You are not perfect parents, but God's grace still rules in your homes.

When my father was about 87 years old, I had a conversation with him that I think every child should have with their parents. My dad was a good father. I remember when I was four years old, and my father was up in our bedroom saying our prayers with us, when my mother screamed that the barn was on fire. He was not afraid to pray with us. He never spanked us yet was a good disciplinarian. He could discipline us with a look or just a few words. But he was not perfect, either. One of his faults was that he worked so hard on the farm that he rarely took the time to play ball with us, even though he was a good ball player. So when he was 87, he felt guilty about how he had failed us when we were children and let his work become more important than his children. I told him what a good dad he was in so many other ways and then I said, "Dad, I forgive you and Jesus forgives you for that 5% where you failed." And he gave a sigh of relief and was at peace.

There are no perfect children. There are no perfect parents. There are no perfect families. But our God is greater than our weaknesses and God's grace will always be at work in the Christian family. Amen.