

A Parent's Bill of Rights

Exodus 20:12

Introduction

We are going to study a lot of scripture today and talk about a very difficult subject. In fact, all the children who are living at home will probably want to exit right now as we get to the fifth commandment that deals with honoring and obeying your parents. We are going to turn the tables a little bit.

We hear a lot today about the rights of the child, the equal rights amendment for the child, the year of the child, not to infringe on their particular bents and all of that. Yet, we are going to go to scripture to discover, I believe, something that is a balance and that is, the "Parent's Bill of Rights".

There is balance in this, so do not misunderstand. In fact, I read this past week of a little boy who had been severely disciplined by his mother and father. When they all went to bed, he slipped out of his bed and snuck back to his parents room and attached a note to the door that said, "Dear Parents, Be nice to your children and they might be nice to you. Love, God"

As parents, it is difficult to find the balance. I think the gospels give us some clues as to the deep-seated needs of a child. I want to begin with the child before I get to the parents.

The Commandment Expanded

Turn to Luke, chapter 2, as we find implicit teaching of four needs that all children have. All four needs are found in verse 52.

Let us begin with verse 51. This is a familiar story in which Jesus, who is a boy of perhaps eleven or twelve years of age, does not follow His parents back. He is in the temple debating with the scribes and the Pharisees and astounding them with His knowledge. He is finally accosted by His parents, as they find Him there, and He follows them back home.

Verse 52 then says,

And Jesus kept increasing in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.

Notice we are given four ways that Jesus kept increasing. That gives us the implication that children have four deep needs that are the parent's

responsibility to nurture and develop as they are being reared in the home.

Wisdom

1. The first need of a child is wisdom.

Even as we observe the humanity of Jesus Christ, He lacked wisdom. And wisdom, of course, is the ability to discern between that which is right and wrong; between that which is safe and dangerous; between that which is immoral and pure. So a child being reared in your home, will discover wisdom by instruction and teaching.

My twin sons, at four years old, think that it would be perfectly okay for them to drive home from church. They cannot understand why they are not allowed to steer. Well, I know why they are not allowed to steer – because I want to get home! They, however, do not understand what is safe and what is dangerous.

Your child, even though he or she may be thirteen, fourteen, or seventeen, may still not be able to distinguish between friendships that are healthy and those that are destructive. We give them that kind of instruction so they will increase in wisdom.

Stature

2. There is a second need and that is, stature.

You could write into the margin of your Bible, "maturity". This is not just talking about how tall children get, this is in relation to how mature they are.

Have you ever caught yourself saying, "My goodness, children grow up so fast now days."?

Of course you have – everyone over twenty says that. Well, believe it or not, it is true. Children are actually growing up faster today than ever before.

I read some fascinating statistics. In the 1600's, puberty occurred between the ages of eighteen and twenty. In fact, the Bach Boys Choir sang until they were eighteen, and then, their voices started cracking. Imagine that.

Now, it is said that because of the overexposure to immorality, the level of puberty in children is decreasing four months every decade. Now, puberty occurs at the age of eleven. In twenty years, it will occur at ten and a half, and so on.

A home is a place where a child can be a child. It is a place where we turn off all of the influences that push them to grow up; that push them into a sin-sick mold where they think they have to be adults at the age of thirteen, or fifteen, or sixteen. It is a place where we let children take their time maturing.

There is a deep need for a slow maturation in your children. Home is not the place to tease them if they do not grow up fast enough or as fast as you think they should; if they are short or tall. Home should be a haven. In fact, I think we have taken out of our society and our homes the ingredient that protects children, and that is, naiveté. Children are no longer naive.

I can remember when I was in fifth grade, I thought if I held a girls hand, I would get cooties. Do you remember hearing about cooties? If some girl rubbed my shoulder, I would say, “Oh, I need a cootie shot.”

If you tell a fifth grader that now, they will look at you like you are from another planet or something. Cooties?!

Now I know how wise my parents were. There was some naiveté in our home that is no longer in homes today, but desperately needs to be.

If you teach your children that Santa Claus exists, I will stay off your back. I am teaching my children that cooties exist, so do not bother me!

Home is a place where children mature. And, I think, if we have godly homes, our children may mature slower. But that is not a sign to be up in arms, that is a protection. Naiveté is something we should engender.

Favor with God

3. There is a third need that children have, and that is, favor with God. In other words, a child does not automatically know how to relate to God.

The first questions will be, “Who is He? How big is He? Where does He live? How do I pray? How do I talk to Him? Does He see me?”

All of those questions relate to favor with God. And the home is the place where we instruct them in how to relate to God. They may never adopt that instruction. Our prayer is that they will.

We teach children that the relationship with God is primary.

Favor with men

4. Fourthly, children need to have favor with men.

Children are primarily selfish; children are born for the “me” and the “mine”. They will never learn to relate to people until that is instructed out of them or they learn to control it. So, when we find that children have a lack of favor with men, we teach them how to respond to men; that is, unselfishly, in a giving way, with responsibility.

I remember breaking a window when I was a little kid. It was a beautiful hit; one of the best. I hit that baseball right on the meat of the bat and that thing went sailing. Two yards over, it crashed through a lady’s window. Do you know what I did? You probably know what I did because you would have done the same thing – I got out of there!

I finally got caught. My parents, of course, took me by the hand and led me over to the lady’s house to apologize and to pay.

What were my parents teaching me? They were teaching me how to have favor with men. Left to myself, I would do anything that I wanted to and try to get away with it. But the home is the place where we are instructed in the way to relate to people.

These are four important needs that children have.

Why the godly home is under attack

Have you ever wondered why the godly home is under attack? Let me give several reasons why.

The home is where children learn the four needs

1. The first reason is because the godly home is the place where children learn the four things that we have just discussed.

In a godly home, the child learns wisdom, how to mature, how to relate to God, how to relate to men. So the godly home is under attack.

Now turn to Ephesians, chapter 6, and let me give two more reasons why the godly home is under attack. Paul gives some insight. This is the command expanded, if you would, in Ephesians, chapter 6, verse 1. And, by the way, young people, this is the only command in scripture specifically given to a child – to you.

Now the word “children,” in verse 1, is the Greek word “teknon,” which could be translated to mean, “anyone under the authority of Mom and Dad”. So, in other words, as long as I am under their authority, as long as I am in the home, whether it is at the age of eighteen or nineteen or whatever age I may be, that is when this command applies to me. That is why I believe it is a temporary expansion or an addition. The one we are going to look at in a moment in Exodus is a permanent attitude, but this is temporary.

Ephesians, chapter 6, verse 1, says,

Children, obey your parents in the Lord . . .

The word “obey,” is “hupakouo,” which means, “to hear” and “to be under”. It is a compound word that you put together to make English sense out of it. He is saying children are to get under the authority of Mom and Dad and to listen; to hear.

He is probably expecting a debate, so he adds the last few words in the verse,

. . . for this is right.

Where is the psychological analysis? Where are the reports on that one? Where are the statistics? It does not matter. All he is saying is, “Children, obey the authority of your parents because this is right.”

You know how irritating it is for Mom and Dad to tell you to do something and when you ask, “Why?” they say, “Because I said so.”? Paul sounds just like a dad in this verse. He says, “Children, obey your parents.” Why? Because, “this is right.”

The home produces respect for authority

2. The principle, I think, is that in a home, a child learns to respect authority. So the godly home is under attack not only because of the above four reasons, but, secondly, because it is the home where a child learns to respect authority.

Learning to respect authority is, of course, so important because it provides the foundation for a child knowing how to respond to the authority of God. If you allow your child to disobey you, you are

destroying the potential for them to have a healthy understanding of what it means to respond to the authority of God. So we begin in the home and they learn to respect and to respond.

Let me read some statistics that show what our society is doing, in the terms of a popular speaker who travels extensively and has written several best selling books. He said that he looks for a day when there will be no schools, no families, no parent-child relationships. He says, “We must settle for nothing less than the total elimination of the family.” He has a very big problem with authority.

Turn to Romans, chapter 1. I want you to see something.

I am not saying that disobedience to parents is something new. It is not. In fact, G. Campbell Morgan, a great expositor, said, “Never in any day has there been such a blight of children disobeying parents than today. It is a sign of Christ’s soon return.”

He wrote that in 1901. This is not a new problem. In fact, it goes all the way back to Cain and Abel.

However, there is something that, I believe, is alarmingly new. It is found in Romans, chapter 1. Look at the list of sins that Paul says will indicate the degradation of a society when God, in effect, gives up. Verse 30 says that there will be,

slanderers, haters of God, insolent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents,

Now that is not new, but what I find alarming is the last verse in that chapter. Note verse 32.

and although they know the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, they not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who practice them.

What is happening in our society today? Disobedience is finding hearty approval.

Let me read what officials are recommending today. They are saying that, “laws dealing with the rights of parents be re-examined when they infringe on the rights of children.”

There is hearty approval for children being disobedient.

Let me read a document that is now, twelve years old. A senator writes his constituents,

Dear Friends, Do you believe that children should have the right to sue their parents for being forced to attend church? Should children be eligible for minimum wage if they're asked to do household chores? Do you believe that children should have the right to choose their own family? As incredible as this sounds, these are a few of the new children's rights laws that are becoming a reality under a United Nations program and should be fully implemented by the year 2000. If radical anti-family forces have their way, this U. N. sponsored program will become an all-out assault on our traditional family structure.

What is at the bottom of this? It is the degradation of a society that not only allows children to disobey, but heartily approves. No longer are you under the authority of Mom and Dad.

So, what do we say to that? How can we combat that?

Let me tell you, we cannot. We will in our own lives, however, take at face value what Paul says in Ephesians, chapter 6.

Children, obey [get under the authority and listen to] your parents in the Lord, for this is right.

The home produces respect for authority.

The home provides a recognition of godly values

3. Let me give another reason that the godly home is under attack. The home provides a recognition of godly values.

The first value or absolute recognized in the home is obedience.

I know you are probably as moved as I am when you hear statistics. I believe that our homes are, to a very large degree, failing in providing values and absolutes. I also believe, however, that families are having to battle a great deal of influences to keep their children protected and pure. We are living in a day in which children are bombarded with information. They are exposed to things that we would *never* have spoken about.

I read a statistic that said eighty-eight percent, nearly ninety percent, of all sexual situations depicted on TV are outside of marriage. Ninety percent. Is it any wonder that one million girls between the ages of

twelve and seventeen, get pregnant every year? Over half of them, by the way, will abort that child. I am going to talk a lot about that next Sunday. Ten million teenagers have a venereal disease, and every day, five thousand teenagers are infected. One child in five uses drugs twice a week. These statistics go on and on.

I have heard parents say, "Oh, I don't want to pressure my children into adopting my set of values."

I want you to wake up. Do you know why? Because your child is being pressured to adopt a set of values already. There are three forces from which they will choose their values – their peers, their ungodly society, and you, the parents. The question is, "Who has the upper hand? Who has the most impact?" God has designed it to be Mom and Dad.

Now notice that Paul gives us a balance, in case the dads becomes overbearing. Look at verse 4 of Ephesians, chapter 6.

Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

So, balance this with loving instruction. Nurturing is a beautiful word. It is not, "bang, bang, bang," it is, "let me show you how and what and why."

The question that this text raises to me, and especially in this society, is, "Where are the dads?"

Paul did not say, "Mothers instruct your children." He is taking the ball and laying it in the lap of the father in the home. Now there may be single moms hearing this who are facing the incredible difficulty of raising a child and I believe God's grace will be evident to you as you follow Him. But, if there is a mom and a dad in the home, it is not the mom who gets the dad out of the sack on Sunday morning; it is not the mom who makes sure the kids are in Sunday school, it is the *dad*.

Do you remember the story of the group of people who brought their children to Jesus for Jesus to touch them and hold them on His lap? The disciples rebuked them for bringing their children. It is interesting that in the original language, it is a masculine pronoun, "They rebuked them" – men. Do you know who was bringing the children to see Jesus Christ? It was the fathers.

Not only should you evaluate your own home, but think of what is happening today – the dads are gone; they are absent; they are preoccupied. The father has

become simply the provider who makes sure the kids have clothes on their back and food on their table and a roof over their heads. He thinks, "I've done my job." God says, "You haven't even begun. You are the spiritual nurturer."

And you thought I was going to talk to children today.

The Commandment Explained

Now, turn to Exodus, chapter 20, and let us take a look at the command itself and talk to children.

Paul amplified and built upon the basic principle of this command and gave it a temporary addition, "while you are under the authority of parents, obey them because it is right."

However, if you will look at Exodus, chapter 20, verse 12, you will notice that something is missing. This hit me like a ton of bricks this past week. I have always read this and assumed something was in this command. But, if you look at it, you will notice, someone is missing. Who is missing? The children. Notice what this command simply says,

Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be prolonged . . .

He is not talking about little children. In fact, this is a general principle. Are you the son or daughter of someone? Of course you are. Then *you*, not the "teknon," not the little child or the teenager that is under the authority, *you* and *I* are to permanently honor our father and our mother. He writes, in verse 12,

Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be prolonged in the land which the Lord your God gives you.

Two implications by "Honor"

Let me give two thoughts about honoring. The Hebrew word for "honor," or "kabad," has two implications.

Responsibility

1. The first implication is responsibility.

Turn to Mark, chapter 7, and let me point out the way this is illustrated by Jesus Himself. He is condemning the Pharisees and the religious crowd – the traditionalists. Look at verses 9 through 11.

He was also saying to them, "You are experts at setting aside the commandment of God in order to keep your tradition. For Moses said, 'Honor your father and your mother'; and, 'He who speaks evil of father or mother, is to be put to death'; but you say, 'If a man says to his father or his mother, whatever I have that would help you is Corban (that is to say, given to God),'"

Now let us back up for a moment and take note of what is happening. These people were greedy. These religionists knew that Moses had said,

Honor your father and your mother . . .

They immediately assumed that meant financial help for their parents, when they reached a point that they could not care for themselves. So, in order to continue their own materialistic pursuits, they had to find a way around this commandment; this law. And they came up with a brilliant idea. They said, "We'll take our money that's left over and give it a pronouncement; a dedication to God. We'll call it Corban. Then we'll say, 'Mom and Dad, you wouldn't want this money. We've dedicated this to God.'"

As a result, according to this text in Mark, the parents who needed financial help were being neglected.

I have talked to a number of you and I have talked with my wife about this situation in regards to her own mother. Some of you, at this time, are caring for a mother and a father who cannot take care of themselves. Some of you are facing the prospect, perhaps very soon, of taking care of your parents. In some cases, it may be a wonderful experience, while in others, it may be very difficult. But, in all of these different experiences, we do not evaluate how we treat Mom and Dad on the basis of how we feel, we treat our parents on the basis of what God says. And implied in this command is a responsibility financially. I am not going to tell you how, that is something that you must decide before the Lord.

The question is, "Are we taking care of our parents when they can no longer take care of themselves?" That is our implied responsibility in this command to honor them.

Before I give you the second implication, I have to give you this. I saw a bumper sticker on the car of a middle-aged couple that said, "I hope I live long enough to make my kids regret it."

That is the attitude today, isn't it? Yet, there should not be regret. There should be an open house and an open arm; there should be the privilege and responsibility of giving our children this cycle of unending, unselfish love. Our parents raised us and later, they get to a point where we, in a sense, take care of them. Our children observe that and they do the same for us. This is the cycle that God has designed.

I read this past week that today, if you have a child, you will spend, in raising them and putting them through college, at least \$350,000 per child. You may be thinking, "Where am I going to get *that* money from?" You will put them to work, right? No. The \$350,000 is quite a financial responsibility, but then, it is turned right back around and invested back in the parents. We take care of them when they can no longer take care of themselves, just as they did for us.

Somebody said, "If you want to be wealthy, never have children."

There are a few fortunate people who have children and have money left over, but for most of us, we have children and that is the financial commitment of our lives. Our parents had that same commitment for us and we give it right back to them as a way of honoring our father and our mother.

Reverence

2. Now, there is a second implication in honoring your father and your mother and that is, reverence. So there is responsibility and reverence.

The word "honor," literally means "weighty". That is its first usage. It developed from that into a word that meant "important". So you hold a person important if you honor them; you consider their advice weighty.

So you never get to the point, if your parents are alive, that you slough off their opinions. We still respect what Mom and Dad have to say. We are no longer under the temporary admonition to obey what Mom and Dad say, but we would be unwise to hear their advice, having observed them go down the path of life, and turn around and say, "Well, I don't care what you say, I'm not listening."

I consider myself young, but compared to some of my peers, I would be too old to do what I do and that is, talk to and receive counsel from my parents. Some of you have godly moms and dads; some of you may

not have parents who love the Lord, but yet, you reverence them; you hold them as weighty; you respect the gray hair; you respect the age. They have been down the path of life and God says, "Never check them off. Always have an open ear for what they have to say."

I wrote down a couple of ways of honoring parents. One way is to listen. A second way it to show appreciation. You could develop this list yourself. Respect their opinion. Express your love.

When I was a freshman at the university that my older brother and I both attended, we received a note that my mother had contracted a disease. The doctor's had not been able to pinpoint what the disease was and, in fact, my father had been told that she was going to die and to prepare for that. Now, you would have to know my parents to know how they ever got to that point without letting us know, but they did not want to disturb our studies. We finally got the note though, and we had enough money for my brother to fly home. He was going to be there with my father, while I would be left at college to just wait and see what would happen.

There, in my college room, as an eighteen year old, the thought struck me for the first time, that I could lose my mother and I could not remember the last time I told her I loved her. So I did something that made me feel really awkward – I sat down at a table, as my brother was packing his bags, and I wrote, what you could call, a love letter to my mother. I expressed my feelings to her. My brother took the note, put it in his bag, and went to the hospital where my father was sitting by my mother's side. He gave my dad the note, among other things.

My mother was in a coma and my father read my letter to her while she was in a coma. We have not talked a lot about that note, but that day changed me. Now, I never talk to her on the phone or see her without saying, "Mom, I love you."

My father, in fact, bless his heart, as well as all of his sons have adopted the same policy – we come home, four big, grown, husky boys, and put our arms around our dad and give him a kiss on the cheek. You should see us at the airport – people think we are from another planet! We do the same thing to Mom. Now it took my mother's illness for that to happen, but I am one of the fortunate people who had an opportunity to see her again and tell her face to face.

Leo Buscaglia, a very popular, traditional professor at UCLA, perhaps even a Christian, has a

class in which he teaches values. His classes are always packed. He begins every semester by asking his students to go back to their dorm room and write a paper. Their paper is to be on the subject of what they would do if they had five days to live. They are to write that paper and turn it in at the next class. A couple of days later, the paper is returned without a grade. But written across the top, in bold letters, are the words, "What are you waiting for? Do it now."

Do you honor your parents? Do you reverence your parents? Do you nurture your children? Do you teach them the things that would prepare them for life? *That*, ladies and gentlemen, is the fifth commandment. And even though it is four thousand years old, it still works and it is still right.