

## “The first commandment with a promise”

### Ephesians 6:1-4 NIV

“Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.

(2) ‘Honor your father and mother’-- which is the first commandment with a promise--(3) ‘that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth.’

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



People question me about my belief in the Bible.

“How can you trust a book that was written more than 2000 years ago?”

For me, belief did not come easily.

- My parents believed in God, but their faith didn’t pass automatically to me.
- At times, if my parents wanted something, I usually wanted the opposite.
- That describes my agenda for a few years.
- In addition, if you can think of a reason to doubt, I probably experienced it at some point.

For a while, I questioned aspects of the Creation and suspected the Bible’s authenticity.

- Yet today’s Scripture helps confirms my faith in God and His word.
- The Bible’s writers and teachers approached problems with a remarkable insight that so-called enlightened people often lack.

Here’s what I mean.

The Bible nearly always speaks to both sides of human situations.

- Rarely does scripture blame only one side for a problem as popularly practiced today.
  - God’s word holds both sides accountable.

The Bible perspective differs from talk in the media, in the halls of congress, college classrooms, coffee gatherings—even some churches.

**Certain classes and groups of people typically find fault with other groups.**

We hear often about greed.

**The media often accuse top corporation executives of greed.**

Thus folks tend to link greed with CEOs or corporations.



They never apply selfish desire to themselves and their colleagues, who receive millions a year to dress up, coif their hair, and securely read teleprompter scripts prepared by others.



**To the media’s reckoning, greedy poor people and greedy blue collar workers do not exist.**

**Yet greed doesn’t occupy only corporate offices.**

- **As do bitterness and immorality, greed infects people of all socio-economic and racial backgrounds.**
- **So when Paul wrote to the church in Colossae he didn’t write to only the rich.**

He directed God’s word to the entire church: **“Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry”<sup>1</sup>**

Greedy people sometimes attain riches;  
Yet millions of covetous poor people prodigiously attempt to become wealthy, too.  
**Greed affects nearly all of us.**

**Another example of the Bible not taking sides occurs in the following 3400 year-old passage.**

<sup>1</sup> Colossians 3:5 NIV

The Lord said to Israel’s judges:

**“Do not pervert justice; do not show partiality to the poor or favoritism to the great, but judge your neighbor fairly.”<sup>2</sup>**

As you know, some news outlets and judges often show prejudice against certain groups. **Nearly always, the Bible speaks to both sides. You’ve probably noticed that Scripture holds husbands and wives equally accountable for the success of marriages.**

The Lord uniquely holds both children and parents accountable as well.

**On this Father’s Day 2020, what wisdom does Scripture give us?**

**If we expect happy, well-adjusted, maturing families, both kids and parents must do right.**

Children should **“obey”** their parents **“in the Lord.”**  
**The Bible qualified obedience to parents by saying, “in the Lord.”**  
**Why stipulate: “in the Lord”?**



<sup>2</sup> Leviticus 19:15 NIV

**In Roman society 2000 years ago, some parents did rotten stuff in the same way some modern parents do.**

**A few years ago, the news reported on a Colorado high school sponsored assembly.**

**At least three adults at that school-sponsored meeting urged the kids to take drugs like “Ecstasy” and marijuana, and engage sexually with others of their own sex and the opposite sex.**

Whether this was an extreme situation, I do not know, but in Roman society 2000 years ago, such behavior would have been considered normal.

**Neither did all parents, decades back in this country, teach their kids proper conduct.**

**When I was a high school junior over sixty-five years ago, I attended a party where the host parent began passing spiked drinks to the kids.**

**He had to know alcohol’s effects on the young people—including his daughter.**

**Some of the guys got extremely surly.**

**In case you wonder, I didn’t partake, I wasn’t interested in the host’s daughter, and I didn’t know Norma at the time.**

**Back to the point in Ephesians.**

**If I’m a Christian, and my parent wants me to do something immoral, illegal, or unfair, I owe my first responsibility to the Lord, not to my parent.**

**That’s why Paul qualified the instruction by saying: “obey your parents in the Lord.”**

**On the other hand, we please God when we obey our parents.**

**“Reminisce Magazine”<sup>3</sup> published this childhood poem of Robert Louis Stevenson, author of *Treasure Island*, *Kidnapped*, *A Child’s Garden of Verses*, and *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*.**

**In this poem, Stevenson told his perception that by sending him to bed during the daylight hours of summer, his parents treated him unfairly.**

**In some regions, if a child’s bedtime is 8PM, it can be a long summer evening before it gets dark. His parents’ early to bed orders seemed unjust to young Stevenson, so he wrote this poem.**

**“Bed in Summer”**

**In winter I get up at night  
And dress by yellow candle-light.  
In summer, quite the other way,  
I have to go to bed by day.**



Very young RLS  
Wikipedia

<sup>3</sup> June, July, 2007

**I have to go to bed and see  
The birds still hopping on the tree  
Or hear the grown-up people’s feet  
Still going past me in the street.**

**And does it not seem hard to you  
When all the sky is clear and blue,  
And I should like so much to play,  
To have to go to bed by day?<sup>4</sup>**

**Many parental orders seem illogical to young people.**

**They often see no reason for the commands.**

**Why should they have to do it?**

- **In their short life-term experience, some instructions make no sense.**
- **In the full scope of things, even eight decades may not provide an adequate range of experience.**
- **Some people build on flood plains thinking they are safe because nothing has happened there for fifty years.**
- **Then a few years later, a hundred-year-flood comes their way.**

The Bible provides the advice of the Builder, who alone possesses the full range of wisdom.

**The word “obey” conveys vital info.**

**“Obey” refers to both hearing and doing.**

**All of us know the types of conversations that occur between parents and their children.**

**For example, a mom or dad asks the child to do something, and then follows with the question,**

**“Do you hear me?”**

- **The problem isn’t that the earbuds in the kid’s ears are tuned to the max.**
- **Not that the kid’s ears are so dirty one could plant a bushel of beans in them.**
- **Or that the child has turned completely deaf like his/her great grandpa.**



**The “Do you hear me?” question relates to whether the child has the will to listen.**

**If the child wants to be part of a happy family, the child must listen and do what the parents ask.**

**“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.’”**

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<sup>4</sup> Robert Louis Stevenson

## **Father’s Day is a great day to start obeying. Tomorrow is a good day to keep listening.**

In the early 1960s, a single mother and her son responded to a Hollywood church outreach. The mother attended one of our home studies for a while, but at the time made no decision to follow Jesus. She and the boy lived with her parents. Her father was respectful, friendly, and polite, but he did not believe in God.

In his early teen years, the boy became interested in Jesus and wanted to give his life to Christ. His grandfather, the head of the house, forbade him to be baptized. Some thought that the boy should defy his grandfather’s orders and “obey” Jesus.

After prayerful consideration, we counseled the young man to delay his baptism, submit to his grandfather, and become the most helpful, pleasing, obedient young man possible. That meant promptly making his bed in the morning, keeping his room clean, and respectfully doing household chores ASAP.

Within just a few weeks, the grandfather said, “I do not know what is going on with ‘Joe,’<sup>5</sup> but it sure is good, and I like it.” Not only did the grandfather

permit the boy’s baptism, he wanted to witness the ceremony. The boy’s mother later gave her life to Christ, too.

Christ’s love, respect for others, and unselfish actions win hearts for God.



**Next, Paul wrote to the Colossian Church:**

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

**What does exasperate mean?**

**In the *Living Bible*, Kenneth Taylor came close by translating the passage this way:**

**“Don’t keep on scolding and nagging your children, making them angry and resentful. But bring them up with the loving discipline the Lord Himself approves, with suggestions and godly advice.”**

**I wish I had listened and closely followed this biblical advice when our children were young.**

Kermit Roosevelt, son of President Teddy Roosevelt, said of his father, “The trouble with Dad is that he’s got to be either the bride at the wedding or the corpse at the funeral.”

**Our kids could likely have said that about me.**

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<sup>5</sup> Not his real name.

The father's tone was harsh toward his five-year-old son. **"Not now, Tyler,"** he said as he looked for something in the store's electronics aisle. The father was intent on finding whatever he was looking for. However, Tyler kept asking questions that a five-year-old would ask, **"What are you looking for?"** And **"Can I help?"** His father kept dismissing him. It was obvious that the father was irritated and lacked patience. Back and forth the conversation went. Surprisingly, Tyler did not seem discouraged with his father's curt responses.

After the father paid and was about to leave the store, Tyler could be heard asking another question. Tyler wanted to do something with his father. To those observing this interchange it was not a revelation that the father once again dismissed his son, telling him that he did not have time to play a game. Tyler looked sad. Those standing in line at the cash register felt badly for the young boy. When they returned home, the five-year-old asked, **"Can we play Clue?"**

A minister related that as a young preacher, his office was a makeshift room back of the worship area. A single light dangled on a cord over his small desk. As he sat one afternoon working on his sermon, he heard a shuffling. **"Who's there?"** he asked.

A little voice said, **"Daddy, it's me."** The preacher said, **"What do you want, son? Need some money for an ice cream? Come on in and I'll give you a quarter."** The boy sauntered on into the room and climbed up in his daddy's lap and said,



**"I don't want nothin'. I just want to be close to you."**

As a father who didn't pay enough attention to his children when they were young, I relate to all of these stories.

**"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.'**

**"Don't keep on scolding and nagging your children, making them angry and resentful. But bring them up with the loving discipline the Lord Himself approves, with suggestions and godly advice."**

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God willing next week, a sermon about the elderly I preached in May 1968, at the Hollywood Church of Christ  
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