



When you think of the word “freedom,” what are some things that come to mind? Some of you might think of our country which values life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. For you kids and students, you may be thinking about school that is ending very soon and summer with all of its camps and not-school activities. If you’re like my mother, you might be thinking about the video you saw on YouTube where cows are let out to graze after a long winter cooped up in a barn who literally begin to jump for joy on their way out to the pasture.

When we think of freedom, do we think about honoring and obeying our parents? These ideas can seem almost opposed to one another. But I don’t think that they are. Today, as we continue in our series “Building a Home: One Room at a Time,” going through different rooms in the home, we are stopping and looking into the kid’s room. Being a kid is an important stage of life and parents have such an important role to play. It is a season of learning for everybody. We all know parenting does not come with a manual once you leave the hospital.

As many of you know I just became an uncle a week and a half ago. As new parents my brother and sister-in-law are excited, sleep deprived and very cautious. My prayer for my nephew Alden has been for many months now that no matter the easy or difficult times that he goes through, that he would glorify God with his life and experience the ultimate joy in knowing him. Now that is freedom.

This also leads me to pray for his parents. Because parents are so important in their kids’ lives so much wisdom is needed in the parenting process. I’m praying for patience for them. I’m praying that they would exemplify lives changed by Christ and the freedom found there. Parental authority, which is a reflection of God’s authority, can bring blessing and lifelong freedom in ways that we may not expect.

Turn with me to Ephesians chapter 6 and we are going to read the first four verses:

Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. “Honor your father and mother”—which is the first commandment with a promise— “so 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.

I totally recognize how simple these verses sound and how complicated family dynamics can be. This can be a difficult road to follow but we see in many places in the Bible, including this passage and the surrounding chapters, that pursuing Christ and living as he instructed is so satisfying and freeing. Before we look at the simple truth of these four verses specifically, I think it is important that we notice them in the context of the letter.

In Context of Paul’s Letter

First, it is clear that Paul is writing to a church and therefore to people pursuing Christ. In verses 22 through 24 of chapter 4 he says,

“You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.”

Paul is pushing people to Christ and to live like we believe him. He’s pushing us toward freedom, toward ultimate freedom by living under God’s authority. Freedom is knowing that you and I matter because God loves us so much that he sent his son to die for us and give us new life. If I find my value in how successful a youth event is or how well I preached this sermon I feel like a loser when it doesn’t go well. Trust me, I have had to fight off those lies many times. Maybe you feel the same way when you don’t play well in a soccer game, when you don’t feel pretty, when your friends are mean to you, when you yell at your kids or a when business deal falls through. But that is not why we matter. Jesus said that if you are his disciple then you will know the truth and the truth will set you free! Our value comes from God. Paul is trying to get us, the church, to live in a way that shows our true identity.

Second, Paul also thinks specifically that family interactions are an important way for people to know their identity in Christ and begins this section on the family in chapter 5 verse 21 by saying,

“Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.”

He begins by starting with husbands and wives, then goes on to talk about children and parents, then slaves and masters, who were also considered part of the home. Paul knows that submitting to one another can be difficult because we are imperfect people who insist on our own way and think we all know what's best for us. We all make mistakes and can be rude or mean or have kids that are rude or mean. Some of us might not even have Christian families, and yet are we still held to this standard? I would argue that most parents, regardless of faith, have more wisdom than your average 16-year-old and can teach valuable lessons. And if we are pursuing Christ, as long as it doesn't lead us to sin, who knows how obedience to parents shows the authority of Christ active in our lives. Christ can use you to witness to your family. Also, I encourage you to find people in the church who will offer Godly advice and continue to point you to the freedom found in pursuing Christ.

Children

Now let's dive into our passages' first look at what Paul says to children. He does not tell parents to have their children obey them but instead speaks directly to the kids. He tells them to *"obey [their] parents in the Lord."* I can tell you right now that if you are rebelling against your parents it will be difficult for you to be close to God. My brother and I were recently talking and he told me that it is fine for me to share this. But he said that at the end of high school he felt a constant tension. He became more interested in God but could care less about obeying our parents. He was still out getting tattoos and being sneaky about it. But after a while he felt he could not get any closer to God until he began to obey the authority that God had placed in his life. He would tell you to this day that obedience to our parents was one of the first steps to gaining a healthy relationship with the Lord. In Romans Paul says that God has set up earthly authorities and by submitting to your parents and obeying them, you are acknowledging that God is ultimately in control. You are showing that a big, loving, powerful God is in control. That is freeing!

I think we must be careful too because if you are like me, you can be obedient for the wrong reasons. It can become an issue of pride. That's not freedom—when you judge how good you are based on your actions. It reminds me of the older brother in Jesus' story of the prodigal son in Luke 15. The younger son knew his mistakes and realized how being disobedient had ruined his life and he repented. The older son was frustrated when he thought he wasn't getting the love and attention he deserved for always being what in his mind was "good." He thought that he could earn his father's love by being obedient, when in fact his dad loved him regardless of his actions. This can be a difficult balance.

Does that mean that you must obey everything your parents are telling you? I think the phrase "in the Lord" provides a good indicator. Part of that phrase means that you obey them as a way to obey the Lord. One of the best ways that you can learn to be obedient to our loving God is by being obedient to your parents as with the example I gave with my brother. But if they tell you to do something that is sin or against the Bible, don't do it. Be gracious and accept the consequences that may come. You are called first to obey God.

Obedience is Right

Paul ends the first verse by saying, *"Children obey your parents for this is right."* He's appealing to what we call "natural law." That means this is something God has written on every human heart. This isn't just what Christians believe; it's the standard thing to do in every culture. All societies see the recognition of parental authority over children as necessary for a stable society. We also view education as being an important part of a stable society. Did you know that 1 out of 5 students in the U.S. will drop out before graduation? A recent survey done by the Barna group showed that 76% of people believed that greater parental involvement would help improve lower performing schools. God designed adult authority

Eventually we get older and move out of the house. Paul goes on to quote the fifth commandment in verse 2: *"honor your father and your mother."* The command to honor one's parents is lived out primarily by willfully obeying our parents when we are under age and in their care. But as adults it is important that we don't lose the value of honoring our parents although this is no longer by direct obedience. We honor our parents by way of respect. As a 25-year-old, I live on my own and am not expected to obey my parents by doing chores or being back at my house at a certain time. But I certainly seek to respect them. I value what they say, I try to be willing to help them when things are difficult.

I think there are questions we should ask ourselves as we seek to honor our parents: How do I care for them? How do I interact with them or speak of them in the presence of my peers (or, maybe in your case, your kids)? What does my interaction with my parents reveal about what I think about my heavenly father despite how well of a job I think they did? We love because Christ first loved us. Your own kids will see this example.

Best for Us

After Paul quotes the fifth commandment, he gives a second reason for obedience, and that is that it is best for you. He says, *"so that it may go well with you and you may enjoy a long life on the earth."* Our actions are never without positive or negative consequences. Eat too many Skittles and you'll feel sick. Choose

not to do your homework and you may have to retake the very classes you are ready to be done with.

I recently saw a documentary called *Undeclared* by recommendation of Shawn because it was a great film and also because it had a good illustration for my sermon! This movie shows the transformation of inner city kids on a football team when they are taught the value of doing the right thing, including listening to their coaches and to think outside their own interests. A young boy in the movie they call Money is a decent football player but a great academic. He knows he won't be playing after high school. He gets injured earlier in the season forcing him to miss his last season as a senior. Depression hits him and he doesn't want to go to school or do the rehab necessary for his damaged ACL. His coach, who is much like a father figure, hunts him down and tells him he needs to be in class and do his physical therapy. Money listens to his coach and is able to make the last game of the season. Before the game, Coach Bill pulls him aside. He reminds him of what he is always tells the crew. "If you do the right thing, people will continue to help you." He then goes on to say that someone who was very well off had heard his story. They were willing to pay the entirety of Money's college education, wherever he gets in and wants to go.

Sometimes obedience is painful and we miss out on something that we really wanted to do. Sometimes we don't understand why we have to do something, we can be so short-sighted. But I think just like this anonymous donor, God can bless us with some amazing things. Obedience can shape our character and can even come with reward. This isn't a guarantee that obedient children won't die young or have struggles in life, but generally speaking, obedient children will be kept from harm's way. They will be spared bad habits and bad friends. There is practical freedom found here when we live according to God's design. Sometimes we don't know what God is doing with us but he has called us to be obedient. Have we practiced being obedient with our parents?

Parents

Concerning ultimate freedom found under God's authority, that is what Paul says to children. He then moves on to parents. Parenting is no easy task. As soon as you have a method set, the next child makes sure to switch everything up to ensure that method is ineffective. This process is messy but Paul gives some advice in verse 4. He says, "**Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.**" Why does Paul only refer to fathers? It's most likely used as emphasis because they were the head of the house and were responsible for discipline. In fact, in the ancient world, they

could kill their kids for being disobedient. The principle that he is laying out is important for both fathers and mothers to hear. But what does he mean? In *The Message Bible* it says, "Fathers, do not exasperate them by coming down hard on them. Take them by the hand and lead them in the way of the Master." Paul knows the importance of discipline but his emphasis here is on pointing kids to God's authority, an authority who says his yoke is easy and his burden is light, an authority that teaches us contentment despite our circumstances.

I love this imagery. It is the idea of walking alongside your child, going through life with them. Now this doesn't mean that they won't get mad at you or dislike discipline even when given in a godly manner. But are you being reasonable, listening to them, not disciplining them in anger?

The hope is that you are leading them to Christ who is the most loving, the most caring, the most freeing. But how will they know they are obeying the Lord unless you tell them? Why would they want to obey and follow the Lord unless you show them why it's worth it? The book *Sticky Faith* researched why so many students abandon their faith once they leave the home and sought to find a way to make kids live their faith into adulthood. Sadly, they found in a national survey that only 12% of teenagers regularly had conversations about life/faith with their moms and only 5% did so with their dads. Involving kids in real life discussions and telling them what you are learning in your faith or "big church" and not just asking them what they learned in Sunday School makes faith more tangible. It makes obeying Christ a more desirable thing when it's not just a Sunday or dinner prayer-thing. As your kids grow older, let them hear about the faith questions you have. Where is God challenging you?

Growing up my mom used to put scripture all around our house. She still does! Scripture was on a note card stuck on our bathroom mirror; at the bottom of a chore list; in an encouraging note placed in my lunch; on the fridge or as part of a kitchen decoration. Sometimes I would forget they were even there and then she would stop by perhaps when I was brushing my teeth and tell me why she loved that verse. We would talk about her prayer journal and how God was responding to her prayers. My dad would take us out on little dates to the movies; to get donuts or go out to coffee and would always have an intentional question to ask me or whomever he was spoiling at the moment. In my later teenage years I greatly valued the way my dad shared what he was learning in his life as well.

My parents were definitely not perfect and neither was I always obedient. But I don't know what has driven my parents and almost any other parent I know to their knees more than

parenting. You've had to, and still do, ask for wisdom. You had to learn when to let go and trust that God has things in control. You have had to constantly remind yourselves that God is so much bigger than your successes and your failures—and that is freeing! We want our kids to know that same freedom.

No matter what stage of life we are in, let us be wise and make the most of every opportunity, as it says in Ephesians 5:16. My prayer for myself and all of you is that we can learn to submit to the ultimate authority in whom we can find a wonderful freedom!

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

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