

Why You Should Require Your Child to Obey

Two years ago, I must have struck a nerve with the article “Parents, Require Obedience of Your Children.” It has proved to be one of our most visited resources.

In view of that, I thought it might be helpful to go behind that article, and give a deeper, wider biblical basis for rearing and disciplining children. My guess is that most of us parent by intuition and tradition. That’s not all bad. Parenting is an art, not a science. And artists do not consult manuals as they paint.

But our human intuitions and traditions should be shaped by God’s revelation. So think of this article as a short lesson about some things God has revealed in the Bible that give foundation and guidance for our parenting. We’ll start with the very basics.

1. Marriage between one man and one woman for life is God’s plan for the procreation and rearing of children.

The lifelong covenant of marriage between a man and a woman is God’s original idea for the human race. It is modeled on, and rooted in, God’s eternal plan to redeem a bride for his Son—the church.

“Therefore a man will leave his father and his mother and be joined to his wife, and they will become one flesh” (Gen. 2:24).

“But from the beginning of the creation, God ‘made them male and female.’ ‘For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and cleave to his wife, and the two shall be one flesh.’ So then they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man put asunder”

(Mark 10:6-9).

“‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and shall be joined to his wife, and the two shall be one flesh.’ This is a great mystery, but I am speaking about Christ and the church” (Eph. 5:31-32).

2. The covenant union of marriage was the way God planned to fill the earth with human beings who would reflect His glory by their faith and creative productivity.

God blessed them and said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply, and replenish the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves on the earth’” (Gen. 1:28).

3. Children were not to be conceived outside the covenant of marriage. For that reason—and others—sexual relations were denied to the unmarried, and adultery was forbidden to the married.

“Escape from sexual immorality” (1 Cor. 6:18).

“You shall not commit adultery” (Rom. 13:9).

4. Children are a gift from God; they are not of our own making.

Job tells us that it was God who gave him his children. The psalmist says our children are a heritage from the Lord. And Ruth illustrates that, when a child is conceived, that conception is the work of God.

“Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked will I return there. The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord” (Job 1:21).

“Look, children are a gift of the Lord, and the fruit of the

womb is a reward" (Ps. 127:3).

"So Boaz took Ruth, and she became his wife. When they came together, the Lord enabled her to conceive, and she bore a son" (Ruth 4:13).

5. Parents, therefore, are to *provide* for their children's needs.

Parents are to provide for the basic needs of their children, from their first nursing at the breast to their establishment of self-sufficient maturity. Paul taught the fathers of Ephesus to "nourish" or "nurture" their children. This is the basic meaning of the Greek *ektrepho* in Ephesians 6:4—"bring them up."

Paul modeled the providing father in his relation to his spiritual "children" in the church of Corinth:

"And I will not be burdensome to you, for I do not seek what is yours, but you. For the children ought not to lay up for the parents, but the parents for the children" (2 Cor. 12:14).

6. Parents are to *instruct* their children in the basic skills of cultural life, the truths about God and His way of salvation and the path of wisdom in this world.

"These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates" (Deut. 6:6-9; see also Ps. 78:5-7).

"Hear, O children, the instruction of a father, and attend to

know understanding. For I give you good precepts; do not forsake my teaching. For I was my father's son, tender and the only beloved in the sight of my mother. He also taught me and said to me, 'Let your heart retain my words; keep my commandments, and live' (Prov. 4:1-4).

7. Parents are to *discipline* disobedient children with proportionate and loving measures of punishment.

God teaches us this through direct commands in Scripture.

"Chasten your son while there is hope, and let not your soul spare for his crying" (Prov. 19:18).

"Foolishness is bound in the heart of a child, but the rod of correction will drive it far from him" (Prov. 22:15).

"Do not withhold correction from a child, for if you beat him with the rod, he will not die. You shall beat him with the rod, and deliver his soul from death" (Prov. 23:13-14).

"The rod and reproof give wisdom, but a child left to himself brings his mother to shame" (Prov. 29:15).

"Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord" (Eph. 6:4).

God also teaches us to discipline our children by examples where fathers failed to do it.

"For I told (Eli) that I will judge his house forever, for the guilt which he knew, because his sons are cursed, and he did not rebuke them" (1 Sam. 3:13).

"Then Adonijah (David's son) the son of Haggith exalted himself, saying, 'I will be king,' and he assembled chariots and horsemen and fifty men to run before him. His father had

not confronted him at any time by asking, 'Why have you done this?' He also was a very attractive man, and he was born next after Absalom" (1 Kin. 1:5-6).

And, thirdly, God teaches us to discipline our children by setting us an example in the discipline of his own children. This is especially relevant for Christian parents, because God has already covered the sins of His children by the blood of Christ, yet He believes they need discipline in the shaping of their faith and character.

"My son, do not despise the chastening of the Lord, nor be weary of His correction; for whom the Lord loves He corrects, even as a father the son in whom he delights" (Prov. 3:11-12).

"Those whom I love, I rebuke and discipline. Therefore be zealous and repent" (Rev. 3:19).

"Endure discipline; God is dealing with you as with sons. For what son is there whom a father does not discipline? If you are without discipline, of which everyone has partaken, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. Furthermore, we have had human fathers, and they corrected us, and we gave them reverence. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live? For they indeed disciplined us for a short time according to their own judgment, but He does so for our profit, that we may partake of His holiness. Now no discipline seems to be joyful at the time, but grievous. Yet afterward it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness in those who have been trained by it" (Heb. 12:7-11).

No one loves his children more than God does. And no one is more attentive to discipline us for our good. Every Christian parent should consider seriously that when our children are under our care, we are God's representatives to prepare them for their heavenly Father's discipline when they are no longer

under ours. If they find God's discipline surprising, we may have left something undone.

8. Parents are to *encourage* their children.

We receive this instruction through direct commands in the Bible to encourage our children rather than discourage them. The commands come in the negative form of warning, perhaps because we are so prone to dishearten our children with criticism, and so inept at authentic, spontaneous, non-manipulative praise.

"Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, lest they become discouraged" (Col. 3:21).

"Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger" (Eph. 6:4).

God gives us His own fatherly example of the encouragement of His own children.

"He does not treat us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities. ... Like a father shows compassion to his children, so the Lord gives compassion to those who fear Him" (Ps. 103:10, 13).

"Can a woman forget her nursing child, and have no compassion on the son of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget" (Is. 49:15).

And the apostle Paul gave himself as an example of this kind of encouraging treatment of children.

"As you know, we exhorted, comforted, and commanded every one of you, as a father does his own children, that you would walk in a manner worthy of God, who has called you to His kingdom and glory" (1 Thess. 2:11-12).

9. The responsibility of parents to require obedience is underlined by the duty God gives to children to obey.

We see this in the Bible's direct commands to children.

"Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land which the Lord your God is giving you" (Ex. 20:12 = Deut. 5:16; Matt. 15:4; Mark 10:19).

"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 be well with you and you may live long on the earth'" (Eph. 6:1-3).

"Children, obey your parents in all things, for this is well pleasing to the Lord" (Col. 3:20).

And we see our duty as parents to require obedience of our children in the way the Scriptures indict those who do not obey their parents.

"And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind, to do those things which are not proper. ... They are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty ... disobedient to parents" (Rom. 1:28-30).

"Men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy" (2 Tim. 3:2).

And the elders of the church are told to model for their people a home life with submissive children.

"... and one who manages his own house well, having his children in submission with all reverence" (1 Tim. 3:4).

10. The both-and task of parenting—encouraging and discipling—is rooted in God's purpose that true biblical faith

flourishes when Christians (and their children) are regularly reminded of God's kindness *and* his severity.

You stand fast through faith. So do not become proud, but fear. ... Note then the kindness and the severity of God. (Romans 11:20–22)

“Faith flourishes when Christians (and their children) are reminded of God's kindness and his severity.”

The kind of fear we should cultivate in ourselves as Christians, and in our children, is not the cowering fear that slaves have of their masters, but the reverential fear of the one we love and delight to please – a fear that awakens when we are drifting from him, and sends us hurrying back. Such is the fear of God that is the beginning of wisdom (Proverbs 9:10). It is what we feel toward our *Father* in heaven (1 Peter 1:17; Psalm 103:13), and what we expect our children to learn from our fatherly kindness and discipline. “My son, fear the Lord” (Proverbs 24:21).

Faithful Parenting Takes Sacrifice

Parenting is a very high calling from God. It is one of the most influential roles in the world. It portrays God to children before they know what God is like. It shapes them profoundly. It is the way God designed for His saving truth to pass from one generation to the next. It is not easy but costly.

Passive parenting is easy, and bears bitter fruit. Faithful parenting demands sacrifice and self-denial. It is not guaranteed success. The best-reared children may rebel. God's did. “Children have I reared and brought up, but they have rebelled against me” (Is. 1:2). This is a great sorrow. But it is not the bitter fruit of parental neglect.

Pour out your prayers to God, and give your heart to your

children. Give them your strength, and give them God's truth. The rewards will be great. And you will not regret it.

John Piper (@JohnPiper) is founder and teacher of and chancellor of Bethlehem College & Seminary. For 33 years, he served as pastor of Bethlehem Baptist Church, Minneapolis, Minnesota. He is author of more than 50 books.

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