

A Commandment With Promise

Ephesians 6: 1 – 4

November 1, 2009

I. Introduction

- A. On this Sunday, when we have the joy of celebrating the dedication
 - 1. Of a young child and his parents to the Lord
 - a. It seems appropriate to share with you some thoughts from a scripture text
 - (1) Dealing with the relationship between children and their parents
 - b. As we look at the Apostle Paul's teaching about a commandment with promise
 - 2. But first, a story that you may, or may not, find humorous
- A. Six year old Tommy came downstairs crying. "What's the matter?" asked his Mother.
 - 1. "Daddy just hit his thumb with a hammer," the boy replied.
 - a. "A big boy like you shouldn't cry over a thing like that," said the Mother.
 - (1) "Why didn't you laugh?" "I did," he replied."
- A. And so it goes in the world of fathers and sons, parents and children
 - 1. Complex relationships that require lots of patience, perseverance and understanding...on the part of the children sometimes
 - a. And all that and a whole lot more on the part of the parents many times
- A. Being a good parent, or a good child for that matter, is not an easy task
 - 1. But I believe a good, healthy relationship between a parent and child
 - a. Can be boiled down to two relatively simple words – love and respect
 - (1) Simple words, yes. But packed full of meaning
- A. Love and respect – words that could have application to many relationships
 - 1. And I believe they are at the heart of our text that was read for us this morning
- A. Children, obey your parents in the Lord – not because you have to
 - 1. Or because you're afraid of your parents or what might happen if you are disobedient
 - a. Though a recognition of consequences is an important lesson to learn
 - 2. But, obey your parents...for this is right – it is the right thing to do
 - a. They are your parents, **if** you love them and respect them – note those two words
 - (1) Then obedience is simply the right thing to do
- A. And fathers – we could probably include mothers here, too
 - 1. Parents, do not provoke your children to anger
 - a. Instead, respect them as individuals created by God, love them
 - (1) And bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord

- 2. Love and respect - it sounds so easy, let's just all go home and put it into practice
 - a. If it were only that uncomplicated, the world would be a much nicer place
- A. But we know it isn't that simple – everyone here this morning is a child
 - 1. Or has been a child at some time – and we know
 - a. Obedience to parents does not come naturally to children
 - 2. In fact, the tendency to want to do our own thing, and to resist being told what to do
 - a. Is a strong current that flows just under the surface in all of us
 - (1) And it stays with us through all of our life
- A. If you think that independent attitude is something you'll outgrow as you get older
 - 1. Just wait until the time comes
 - a. When your children start telling you that you're getting too old to drive anymore
 - (1) See if that doesn't stir up some of those same rebellious feelings once again
- A. And God, who created us, surely knows all about this independent streak
 - 1. That is a part of our nature as human beings
 - a. I believe that is why he included, in the instructions for living an abundant life
 - (1) That were given through Moses to the children of Israel
 - (a) This "commandment" to honor parents by being obedient to them
- A. And this commandment, Paul says, is the first that is directly connected to a promise
 - 1. "So that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth"
- A. Now why, we might ask, did God create us with this natural tendency to rebel
 - 1. And then tell us to be obedient, or that in our obedience
 - a. We hold the key to a long, and satisfying life here on earth
 - (1) That's really what the phrase "it may be well with you" means
- A. Why didn't God just make us with the natural tendency to be obedient
 - 1. To parents, or to anyone else in authority while he was at it
 - a. Wouldn't that have made life in our homes so much easier
- A. Just imagine a father saying – Son, go take out the trash. Ok, Dad, I'll get right on it.
 - 1. And then he would actually go and do it – without being reminded
- A. Or a mother saying - Daughter, would you please go straighten up your room
 - 1. And while you're at it, put on something a little more decent to wear
 - a. And the daughter says - Sure, Mom.
 - (1) Hey, why don't you just come pick out an outfit for me
 - b. That way, there won't be any question about whether you approve or not

(1) Doesn't that sound wonderful

- A. Or, imagine even a small child who always responds positively
 - 1. When Mom or Dad says – No more snacking before dinner
 - a. Or – please help pick up your toys, it's time to go to bed now
 - 2. Wouldn't it be great if children were always obedient and never put up a fuss?
- A. Except for one thing – if obedience came that naturally, how would we ever learn respect
 - 1. And if doing the right thing was our automatic response
 - a. Where would be the need for love, and tolerance and forgiveness
 - (1) And how would we learn what love is, anyway
- A. That's just a part of the importance of this whole parent/child relationship thing
 - 1. It's the first place most of us learn about love, respect and obedience
 - a. Which is to say, it's the first place most of us learn how to relate to God
- A. Think what that means when you hear the kind of story I read recently
 - 1. About a group of ninth and tenth graders from a place called Ramsey Court, MN
 - a. Who were interviewed recently about their dads.
 - 2. They were asked this question: "What comes to mind when you think of the word 'dad'?" Answers came immediately from both ends of the spectrum.
 - a. One young person said, "I think of the word jerk."
 - (1) Others thought of the words angry, mad, and absent.
 - 3. On the other hand, some of the young people said, "I think of wholeness, kindness, security, safety."
 - a. Dad is an immensely powerful word if we stop to think about it
 - 4. I think that particular story was written in connection with Father's Day
 - a. So again, it would be interesting to hear the response about Mothers
 - (1) But I suspect the same wide range of words would appear
 - 5. And I wonder sometimes how those images of a father or a mother
 - a. Are reflected in the images that we have in our minds about God
- A. That does not mean that a child is completely at the mercy of his/her experience at home
 - 1. That's not the only place where we can learn about love and respect
 - a. But it is one of the earliest places, and probably one of the most influential
 - (1) Where we learn the discipline of obedience
 - b. And we learn what it means to build a relationship based on love and respect
 - 2. And I believe that the way obedience is taught and experienced

- a. And the relationship between parent and child that is modeled
 - (1) Can have a powerful impact on our understanding of God
 - (a) And the relationship that God wants to have with his children
- A. And so we have this commandment to children to be obedient
 - 1. Because obedience is an important ingredient in a strong, healthy relationship
 - a. Between children and their parents
 - 2. But we also have the admonition to parents
 - a. Be careful how you go about teaching your children to obey
 - (1) Because you are also modeling the grace and love
 - (a) On which our relationship with our heavenly parent depends
- II. One of the most difficult things about building a relationship of mutual love and respect
 - A. Between parents and children is that, like all other relationships, it takes time
 - 1. Maybe it's easy to think that a family just naturally spends a lot of time together
 - A. But if you are like most families today, the opposite may be true
 - 1. Especially after the children are old enough to take care of themselves
 - a. And get more involved in activities outside of the home and family
 - A. With the advent of more and more families where both parents are working
 - 1. Has come the popular idea of spending "Quality time" together
 - a. If you can't be together as a family as much as you would like
 - (1) Then, at least, make the moments count when you are together
 - 2. That's not a bad idea – it does emphasize the need to be aware
 - a. Of how parents are actually making use of the time they have
 - (1) To spend together and with their children
 - 3. My perception is that for some parents, the idea of quality time
 - a. Is whenever they accompany their children to an activity, be it sports or whatever
 - (1) Where the kids can have a good time and the parents can sit back and relax
 - 4. I'm not saying that can't have a positive effect on the relationship
 - a. But I'm guessing that in the few minutes spent traveling to and from such an event
 - (1) The words that are spoken, and the attitudes that are expressed
 - (a) Might have just as much of an impact as the actual activity involved
 - A. I'm reminded of the story of a highly respected congressman
 - 1. Who frequently was heard to remark about a special day he remembered
 - a. When his father took a day off from work to go fishing together

2. In the mind of the Congressman, that day stood out as a very special time
 - a. When his dad put their relationship ahead of everything else
 3. Until some time later, after the Father had passed away
 - a. And one of the family members was reading through a dairy he had kept
 - (1) They ran across this entry – Took off from work to go fishing with Junior
 - (a) Didn't catch anything. The whole day was wasted.
 - b. Even if the attitude isn't recognized at the time
 - (1) The result may go much deeper than we can ever imagine
- A. The flip side of that story is the one about the farmer who took the day off
1. From working in the corn field so he could take his teenage sons
 - a. To an important community event
 2. When his neighbor criticized him for the weeds in his cornfield, the farmer said
 - a. We're not about growing corn here, we're about growing boys
 3. There's no question that work has to take a certain priority in our lives
 - a. But in the long run, relationships must have their priority, too
 - (1) Or they won't "just happen"
- A. Speaker and author Carol Kent was on the fast track to being an absentee parent--until her young son, Jason, made a simple observation. She recalls:
1. "We were eating breakfast together, and I had on an old pair of slacks and a fuzzy old sweater.
 - a. Jason flashed his baby blue eyes at me over his cereal bowl and said -
 - (1) 'Mommy, you look so pretty today.'
 - (a) I didn't even have makeup on!
 2. So I said, 'Honey, why would you say I look pretty today?'
 - a. Normally I'm dressed in a suit and high heels.'
 3. And he said, 'When you look like that, I know you're going some place
 - a. But when you look like this, I know you're staying at home with me.'
 4. Ms. Kent reports that is when she got down on her knees with her appointment book
 - a. And offered her time and her priorities up to God
- III. Fathers/parents, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up
- A. In the discipline and instruction of the Lord
1. Children, learn to obey your parents in the Lord – honor your father and mother
 - a. It's a two-way path of mutual love and respect

- A. But what's with this promise – “so that it may be well with you...
 - 1. ...and you may live long on the earth”
- A. The standard joke about a husband and wife is that
 - 1. If you have a good marriage relationship, you will enjoy a long life together
 - a. And if you don't, it will seem like a long life anyway
- A. I don't know if that can be applied to parents and children, too, or not
 - 1. But I believe we should be careful how we take this promise
 - a. And not necessarily look at the number of years that a person lives
 - (1) As a direct measurement of how obedient they were to their parents
 - 2. Because the flip side of that would be to assume that if a person dies at a young age
 - a. It must have something to do with disobedience
 - (1) And I don't believe that is how we are to understand this promise
- A. Yes, we can easily see how a rebellious attitude and the accompanying actions
 - 1. Might bring about consequences that could shorten a person's life
 - a. How often can a young person's experimentation with substance abuse
 - (1) Or other self-destructive behavior be traced to the simple attitude –
 - (a) Mom and Dad said I shouldn't do it, but I'm going to do it anyhow
- A. But I hear something else in this promise that accompanies the commandment to obey
 - 1. In fact, I see a principle that can serve as a model for teaching our children
 - a. God says – this is how you should live your life
 - (1) And like all children, we might ask – But why do I need to behave like that
 - b. And God doesn't say – Because I said so!
 - (1) Even though God would certainly have the right to say that
 - 2. Instead, God says – If you learn to be obedient to your parents
 - a. You will have learned a valuable lesson about life, and about living
 - (1) Trust me, I know life, I created you and the world that you live in
 - 3. If you learn obedience, your life will be better, and perhaps even longer
 - a. Obedience will result in something good for you
 - (1) That's why I have given you this commandment
 - (a) Because I love you and I want what is best for you
 - 4. That's the way I believe God instructs us in right living
 - a. And I believe it serves as a model for how we as parents can instruct our children
- A. I know, parents don't always have the luxury of time to explain

1. The rationale behind their every decision regarding their children
 - A. But in the long run, it seems to me that emphasizing the positive results of right behavior
 1. Will provide a better motivation for obedience
 - a. Than only criticizing the wrong behavior
 - A. Learning obedience at any age means that sometimes we will do the wrong thing
 1. And then we must learn about the negative consequences of disobedience
 - a. But obedience that is based on mutual love and respect is far better
 - (1) Than obedience that is based on fear
 2. That is true for parents and children, and it is true about us and God, as well
- IV. Parents, we are grateful for your commitment to bring up your children
- A. In the nurture and admonition of the Lord
 1. And children, I hope that you will remember –
 - a. Obeying your parents is the right thing to do
 - (1) It's a way of showing love and respect
 - b. And not only that, it comes with God's promise
 - (1) If we want the fulfilling, abundant life that God desires for all his children
 - (a) Then we all need to learn to be obedient