

Sermon for May 11, 2014 – Mother's Day

Ephesians 6:1-4

Theme: **God's Will for Parents and Children.**

- 1) *Children should honor their parents.*
- 2) *Parents should teach their children about Jesus.*

Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. ² "Honor your father and mother," which is the first commandment with promise: ³ "that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth." ⁴ And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord.

Our society seems to have lost its way regarding the relationship parents and children ought to have. Children are all too quick to mouth off – showing no respect to their parents. I have also seen parents being verbally abusive towards their children – treating them as slaves and not as the sons and daughters God entrusted to their care.

Because of this sad state of affairs, let us take the opportunity this day affords to study the relationship God wants Christian parents and children to have with each other, under the theme: **God's Will for Parents and Children.** 1) *Children should honor their parents.* 2) *Parents should teach their children about Jesus.*

Part One: Children should honor their parents.

Our sermon text begins: *Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.* The word "obey" literally means "listen" with the intent of doing what is said. Children, do everything your parents say. The only exception is if they ask you to commit a sin - then we must obey God rather than man. Other than this exception, God wants you to listen to your parents in everything. It doesn't matter how inconvenient what they tell you to do seems at the time, God wants you to obey without crying, complaining or grumbling. To do anything else is sin.

But this is hard to do! Sometimes our parents ask us to do things that seem unreasonable like cleaning up our messy rooms before we can spend time with our friends. Don't they understand how long it will take us to clean? Or when they ask us to do homework before we can watch TV - don't they understand how tired we are? It's hard enough to simply obey our parents, but to do that without complaining is impossible!

You are right: it is impossible to obey our parents the way the LORD wants us to obey. Why? Because our sinful nature does not want to believe that our parents know what's best for us. Instead of seeing love in their commands, our sinful hearts accuse them of trying to use us as cheap labor. Our selfish nature does not want to acknowledge all the blessings we receive from our parents like clothing, food, shelter and, most importantly, love. Our hearts often think evil thoughts towards our parents, and for this we ought to repent.

When we do repent, let us remember Jesus' loving obedience to his Father's will on our behalf. Jesus did not question or complain when His Father asked him to endure the cross to forgive us. He simply obeyed His Father's will. And because Jesus did this, we stand forgiven of all disobedience.

Consider this as well: Through baptism, God the Father declares us to be his dearly loved children – holy and precious in His sight. And since we are his sons and daughter through faith, He says: "Obey your father and mother – not only because this is the right thing to do, but also because of what my Son has done to

save you. I will send the Holy Spirit to help you battle with your sinful nature that tries to prevent you from obeying. Obey because Jesus saved you from your sins. This is how you can show the world that you are my precious sons and daughters.”

Our sermon text continues: *"Honor your father and mother."* What the Holy Spirit says here, he says to all children regardless of their age. *"Honor your father and mother."* But what exactly does that mean? Does it mean sending cards and candy on special occasions like today? Does it mean publicly proclaiming your love for mom on Facebook and Twitter one day of the year? No, honoring our mother and father means much more than this.

To honor someone is to love, treasure and esteem them. Children honor their parents by obeying them – not grudgingly, but out of deep love and respect for who they are and the wonderful blessings God provides through them. Adults honor their parents by continuing to love and cherish them - respecting their experience and advice. It means being patient with them when they are old. As your parents were there for you when you were lonely as a child, honoring our parents means that we will be there for them when they face loneliness now. To honor our parents means that we will speak well of them and put the best construction on everything they do or say. It means that we will forgive any past faults or sins they may have committed against us, and not hold anything against them. And why? Because this is how our heavenly Father has forgiven us in Christ.

To honor our parents as adults means that we will take care of them as they took care of us. Sadly, we often fail in this aspect, don't we? Luther once said that it is easier for one parent to take care of ten children, than ten children to take care of one parent. As I visit nursing homes and see how rarely many of the elderly are visited by their children – how true Luther's words ring. Now, don't get me wrong, I am not saying that you should never put a parent in the care of a nursing home – no, there are times when that is very necessary and is the best way you can honor your parents. What I am saying is, "Don't forget them there." Even if they have advanced stages of dementia or Alzheimer's disease and neither know or care whether or not you visit; the Lord knows and cares. He wants us to honor our fathers and mothers even when they don't know we are doing it.

Sadly we all must confess that we have failed to honor our parents as we ought, don't we? It's all too easy to get impatient with our aging parents and complain about them in our hearts. It's all too easy to shut our parents out of our lives - to be so focused on our future and goals that we simply forget to visit or even call them. We all too easily forget their deep love for us and the loneliness they face.

And where should that leave us? At the foot of the cross, asking the LORD to forgive our sins for Christ's sake. And the LORD does forgive us for Christ's sake. Jesus showed perfect concern for His mother – so much so that He made sure she was taken care of while He suffered immensely on the cross. And on that same cross, Jesus suffered and died for all the times we failed to honor our parents as we ought. Because of His perfect obedience and suffering for our sins, we stand forgiven.

In the peace of this forgiveness, Jesus says: "Go, now, and honor your father and mother. I will send my Spirit to help you overcome your selfish heart. Whenever you feel impatient or frustrated, remember me and my work for you on the cross. I will help you show love to your parents, because when you do this, you not only honor them, but you also glorify me and my Father in heaven."

"Honor your father and mother," which is the first commandment with promise: ³ "that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth." God promises to watch over and bless all who keep this commandment. How? Generally speaking, with a long life on this earth. Now, please understand this promise correctly: God does not mean to say that he will always and automatically grant us a long life if we honor our parents. No, his plans might be different for us. He might cut either our, our children or our

parents time of grace short on this earth. But if he does this, we can trust that He does it only out of love. We might not understand because His ways are much higher than our ways. But he wants us to trust his promise, that *all things work together for good to those who love God* (Rom 8:28 NKJ). Remember the Lord's promise: *the righteous are taken away to be spared from evil. ² Those who walk uprightly enter into peace; they find rest as they lie in death.* (Isa 57:1-2 NIV84)

Part 2: Parents should teach their children about Jesus.

Our sermon text now turns to parents: *And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord.* There is so much I would like to say about this verse because each word is rich in meaning. Unfortunately, since time does not allow me to expound on this verse in detail, I will just make a few points.

Parents: children are a trust from the LORD. They are not dolls to play with as you please. They are not your slaves. They are *your* children – entrusted to you by God himself so that He, through your care, can teach them about his divine grace, care and concern.

And this is why God's first admonishment to parents is this: *do not provoke your children to wrath.* This is not to say that there is no place for discipline to curb bad behavior: there is! But, excessive discipline is abuse, and any form of abuse is a sin. It is also a sin to verbally berate our children, to be excessive in our demands and expectations, and to tease or make fun of them. These are just a few examples of how parents can, sinfully, provoke their children to wrath. And why is that so bad? One theologian put it this way: *"The father who mismanages his child makes it next to impossible for his child to be what it should be and thus robs his child of the blessing of the Fourth Commandment and brings God's curse upon his child as well as upon himself."* (Lenski)

What is the proper way to act towards the children God has given us? Another theologian beautifully wrote: *From what you seek in your children, measure what you owe to them! 1. You desire obedience from them, show yourselves full of love to them. 2. You desire that they honor you, apply to them the right nurture. 3. You desire that they protect and adorn your old age, so help them to inherit the promise: that it may be well with thee and that thou mayest live long on the earth.* (Zimmerman)

Sadly, don't we parents have to confess our sins here as well? We have not always shown the proper love God wants us to show. It's all too easy to lay down the law – expressing anger or disappointment to the exclusion of building up our children with encouraging words and loving actions. For this we ought to repent and ask God's forgiveness. And guess what, the LORD forgives us for Christ's sake. He tells us that He has removed our sins from us as far as the east is from the west. And what is more, he promises to send his Spirit to help us show proper love to our children. And the greatest love we can show our children is *bringing them up in the training and admonition of the Lord.*

In all you do for your children, direct them to Jesus in both your words and actions. Don't just send them to church, bring them. Have family devotions. Read and discuss the Bible together. Take the opportunity God has so graciously provided to give your child a Christian education at **our** Lutheran Elementary school in Algoma and our Lutheran High School in Manitowoc.

And if your children are older and out of the house, continue to be an example for them. Pray for them. Encourage them in their faith by telling them about Jesus.

Brothers and sisters in Christ: When it comes to the relationship parents and children should have, our society has lost its way. Let us learn from Scripture to honor our parents in the LORD – trusting in His

forgiveness and love to help us. Let us also learn to love our children and bring them up in the training and admonition of the LORD – teaching them about Jesus, so that we may enjoy a long life with them, both now and in the eternal paradise Jesus is even now preparing for us. Amen.