

The Commandments (Part Ten)

Honor Your Parents, Part One

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Given 24-Jun-89; Sermon #BS-TC10

I am going to be getting back this day anyway on the series on the Ten Commandments, and I mentioned to you at the very beginning of this series of sermons that I felt that the commandments were arranged in an order beginning with the most important. That is, the one that if broken will lead to the breaking of all the others and result in chaos in the worship of God.

Now the first commandment states to us that God is the sovereign Creator and ruler of His creation, that He will not allow the worship and honor that is due to Him to be given to others, because that would only result in misdirection, frustration, pain, and death to those who worship any but Him. The first commandment then has to do with *what* we worship. Now, most of the time, the god which gets between us and the true God is ourselves. But we are to worship the Creator, who is the author of a way of life that will produce right relationships with Him and, of course, with other humans on this planet.

The second commandment emphasizes that God wants us to have no illusions about what He looks like. He has purposely hidden this, except to tell us that we generally look like He does. However, there are very few specifics. We know that He has hair, but we do not know how tall He is. We know that His hair is blazingly white, but how long is it? Is it as long as mine? Kind of an Italian cut? I do not know.

How tall is God? Is He 5'6"? Is He 6'2"? Are His eyes blazing with intense blue, or are they green or brown? What color are they? Maybe a color we have not even seen yet. He has never told us. We know that He has two arms, two hands, two legs, but we know precious little else about what He looks like.

He has done this because physical dimensions are sometimes misleading about character, and He wants to emphasize the spiritual. A man does not

live by bread alone, that is, by the physical, but rather by the spiritual. The second then has to do with the way that we worship Him. The first has to do with what we worship. The second has to do with the way that we worship Him, and we are to worship Him according to John 4:24, in spirit and in truth.

Now the third commandment emphasizes God's attributes and offices as exemplified, that is, manifested, shown by His name. His names reveal what He is, and it is the responsibility of those claiming to be Christians to add to and uphold the reputation and glory of everything that that name implies, those names imply. Now, when we were begotten, we were baptized by the Spirit of God into the name of God, and what that means, in short, is that the family name of God, that is God's family name, God, the God Family, becomes our family name, your family name. And so the third commandment then has to do with the *quality* of our worship.

So the first has to do with what we worship, the supreme and sovereign Creator of everything that is. The second has to do with the way that we worship that sovereign Creator, that is, in spirit and in truth. The third has to do with the quality of that worship, the quality of our witness before mankind.

Now the fourth commandment provides the means by which men can keep things straight by providing a more formal environment for coming to know truth, so that men would know God's plan, understand God's purpose, His character and personality, have right and true goals toward which to expend their energies. Now God chose through Israel that when they lost the Sabbath, they lost track of everything else. It is very clearly stated in Ezekiel 22 that Sabbath breaking and idolatry went hand in hand, and it is extremely difficult to say which one came first. Regardless, they are linked together, and the breaking of the Sabbath pulls one away from God so that one is not able then to know God's purpose, to keep in touch with God, to worship Him in the right way, or uphold the reputation of His name—and everything collapses. It may fall little by little, but the Sabbath occupies a keystone position in keeping in contact with God and in the keeping of all the other commandments.

So the first four commandments define our relationship with God. They teach us the magnitude of God's name and power and exhort us to remember Him as Creator of all.

Now the fifth commandment begins the second section of the commandments. I believe that it is placed, like the first commandment, first among those which govern our relationships with other men, because of the effect its keeping or failure to keep has on those relationships. The fifth commandment is not only chief in importance in this regard, but it also acts as a bridge between the two sections of the Ten Commandments, because when the fifth commandment is properly kept, it leads to reverence and obedience of God Himself.

Let us turn to Exodus the 20th chapter, and we will begin this sermon, starting in verse 12.

Exodus 20:12 "Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long upon the land which the Lord your God is giving you."

Now that commandment teaches us a number of things that we need to have riveted in our minds so that they might be able to be used. First of all, I think we need to understand the word "honor." The meaning in Hebrew and English is virtually the same. It means to give high regard. We are to give high regard to our father and to our mother, or to give respect, or to give esteem to. Keep turning the synonyms so that if you are not familiar with one, you might relate to the other.

It means to give special recognition to. It is over and above what might be given to others. It means, on the other hand, to bring respect or credit to. The implication is by one's obedience, that is, by one's behavior, you bring honor to, rather than a curse to. It means to be an outward token, a sign or act that manifests high regard.

The application of this is that if a man is very valiant in battle, he gets a Silver Star, or if he is extremely valiant in battle, witnessed by quite a number of people, he receives a Congressional Medal of Honor. See, that is a special recognition, a token or sign or act that manifests high regard. And so

the award then manifests the regard that the nation has for this person who was so valiant in battle. Now remember, that is part of our keeping of this command.

Now the word respect, let us define it a little bit further. It was one of the synonyms for the word honor. It means to have deferential regard for. Certainly God wants us to have deferential regard for our parents, and I will expand on this just a little bit: to have deferential regard for, to treat with propriety and consideration, to regard as inviolable. If you really have respect for something, let us say, the command of God, you will not break it.

It means, in this application, that your respect for your parents has to be held in such regard that they receive such deferential treatment and consideration that you will do everything within your power to uphold the reputation of that family and them as individuals. I said I was going to expand this. This gets to be very interesting, because we find that this commandment is also the basis for respect and deferential regard to those who are civil authorities, and also those who might be in teaching positions. That is, it could include the ministry, it could include those who are teaching in schools, colleges, universities as well. This regard that we are to have for them has its basis in this commandment.

I want to expand on this just a little bit and then we are going to pretty much leave it, but I want to show you. Let us go back to I Kings the 19th chapter, and I will show you what we mean here. The main character here in this context is Elijah; Elisha is the secondary character.

I Kings 19:19-20 So he departed from there, and found Elisha the son of Shaphat, who was plowing with twelve yoke of oxen before him, and he was with the twelfth. And Elijah passed by him and threw his mantle on him. And he left the oxen [that is, Elisha did] and ran after Elijah, and said, "Please let me kiss my father and my mother, and then I will follow you." And he said to him, "Go back again, for what have I done to you?"

It is important to this context that you understand that Elisha was not the son of Elijah, that he was the son of Shaphat. Now let us go to II Kings 2, verse 12. Again, the main characters here are Elijah and Elisha, and Elijah has just been taken up into the heavens by the fiery chariot, I should say.

II Kings 2:12 Elisha saw it, and he cried out, "My father, my father. . . !"

Elijah was not Elisha's father, but Elijah was Elisha's teacher in a spiritual area, and so he had a deferential regard for Elijah that superseded that which he would have for others, and he designated that, gave it as a token or sign, by calling Elijah his father. It is from this that what spun off of it was that the disciples of Elijah and other prophets were called the sons of the prophet. They were not literally sons, but the prophet was their teacher, and they had the regard and respect for him that was due to a parent.

Now this got out of hand, and you will find in Matthew the 23rd chapter Jesus brought the subject up when He said, "Call no man your father on earth." Now it is interesting, I think, that in viewing the context there, He did not mean the same thing here, but what He was talking about was that there is a perverse pride in men that produces distinctions through titles, that destroys the equality of the family relationship that God wants in His Family. But it in no way diminishes the consideration and regard that you are to give to fathers and mothers, and it will become quite plain in a little while as we go on.

Another little proof of this, that Jesus did not mean that we were to diminish in any way this respect, is shown by the apostle Paul in I Corinthians 4:14-15, where Paul very clearly told those people in Corinth that they were his children in the Lord and that he was their father. But in no way did the apostle Paul elevate himself in some kind of spurious pride above them, for he was the servant of all, though he was their spiritual father. And those of you who have been in the church long enough know that Mr. Armstrong many times told us that we were his children in the Lord and that he was our father. And so we had a deferential regard; and you have to have a deferential regard for Mr. Tkach as well, because of the same principle that is involved here.

Now why does God want one to honor his parents and other authority figures? There are two major reasons. Number one is because the family is the basic building block, or unit, of society, and the stability of the family is basic to the stability of the community. All government is derived from the relationship of parent to child. And so the lessons then, and the principles that are learned from honoring, respecting, and thus obeying one's parents, will result in a society stable enough to promote development of the whole person.

Let us go to Isaiah the third chapter, and we are going to see a principle that is involved here: that if God wants to destroy a country from within, all He has to do is begin to shift the balance within the family, and the nation comes tumbling down. We will begin in verse 1.

Isaiah 3:1-3 For behold, the Lord, the Lord of hosts, takes away from Jerusalem and from Judah the stock and the store, the whole supply of bread and the whole supply of water; the mighty man and the man of war, the judge and the prophet, and the diviner and the elder; and the captain of fifty and the honorable man, the counselor and the skillful artisan, and the expert enchanter.

What he means here is everything that they would look to for strength and support. All of these people are central—the righteous leadership, wisdom—they are real pillars in the community, and if we do not honor them, if we do not respect them, if we do not defer to them, society begins to be eroded from within.

Isaiah 3:4 "I will give children to be their princes, and babes shall rule over them."

Isaiah 3:12 "As for My people, children are their oppressors, and women rule over them. O My people! Those who lead you cause you to err, and destroy the way of your paths."

Taken to an extreme, the dishonoring of parents leads to anarchism, that is, no government at all—people running wild, everyone doing their own thing, whenever they feel like it, whatever, whenever they want to do it. Now what

happens in that kind of a circumstance? What happens is that all of a person's energies go just to survive. We heard in the sermonette about distractions, about turning one's energies even to good things. Is it wrong to survive? Of course it is not wrong to survive, but what if one's energies all have to go in that direction?

Then what part of life does God have? What part of life does art have? What part of life does engineering and architecture and all kinds of beauty have? What part of life does a warm and loving family relationship have? You see, all those things go by the board, and the development of the whole person ceases, and all energies go towards survival, and the first thing you know, men become animals, beasts in their approach to life.

So all God has to do is give the signal to Satan: start chipping away at the family. You start chipping away at the family, and all of society begins to break down. Pornography hits in the worst places, the most obvious places. We begin to invite television with all of its violence, all of its wrong ways, into the house, and it is easily accessible. Because, you see, people of less and less understanding, wisdom, closeness to God, get into positions where they can control what is going on in society. That is exactly what God is talking about here.

I think all of you who are, let us say, at least 45 or 50 years old, you understand that circumstances in the United States have changed radically in the last 40 or 50 years. Mr. Armstrong used to say the beginning of the end, as far as the real quality of American life, began in the First World War, when Americans with almost, and this may sound funny, a virginal approach to life went over to Europe, and they brought back ideas, lifestyles, ways of looking at things from a jaded Europe that had been there for a thousand or more years, and they introduced it into the freewheeling lifestyle of the United States, and it grew far more rapidly than it ever did in Europe.

By the time we get to the Second World War, things are really on a roll. You know what the Second World War did? The Second World War got women out of the house and into the workplace, and boy, that was the death knell of the family as we know it. It began to really speed up then, until now. We had the riots and everything in the 60s, the 70s calmed down a bit, the 80s were fairly stable again, because we had fairly good leadership, a man who came

from a pretty stable background. But who knows where we are going to go now? We still have another pretty stable man in there, but the way of life has already been undercut.

And so here we are: immaturity is a direct result of not honoring parents. That is what is happening. And because children will not respect their parents' advice, they grow up not understanding, and thus they lack wisdom. And so we have all done it to some degree, so we then condemn ourselves to learning the lessons of life through hard experience. And this lack of respect for parents manifests itself in self-will and self-indulgence to the point of rebellion.

The second reason is that the family is also the basic building block of the Kingdom of God, and the principles learned and the character built within the human family unit are transferable into that spiritual family relationship in the Kingdom of God. Now God expects a transference derived from the keeping of this commandment—from parents to Him. The parents are His representatives, and the creative majesty and the power of God is honored and revered, catch that word, it is on purpose, in the parents. Revered, a much more specific and much stronger word than honor. And I am going to back it up with a scripture in just a bit.

Let us turn to that scripture, in Leviticus 19. Now notice how powerfully God backs up this command with civil laws regarding the breaking of this command.

Leviticus 19:1-4 The Lord spoke to Moses, saying, "Speak to all the congregation of the children of Israel, and say to them: 'You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy. Every one of you shall revere [not honor, it is not the same word, some Bibles may say fear, but fear has the wrong connotation] his father and his mother, and keep My Sabbaths: I am the Lord your God. Do not turn to idols, nor make for yourselves molded gods: I am the Lord your God.'

Now the first thing that I want you to notice here is that the fifth commandment is placed on an equality with the fourth commandment, and it actually, in this context, precedes the first. God puts things in His Word with

knowledge and foresight, and in this kind of a context, in this context right here, the fifth commandment is more important than the first. It is on the same level as the Sabbath commandment. There is a reason for that, and the reason is that the fifth and the fourth commandments, and the first commandment secondarily, regulate social relationships within a community. Now all the laws that follow them are given with that one central thought in mind: they regulate relationships within a community on a practical, everyday basis.

I want you to look in verse 2, because this also has a lot to do with the context in which this appears: "You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy." Now the laws in this chapter are given with that understanding. These laws are given because I am the Lord (not me, but God). Now this is so important that it be drilled into our minds that He repeats it about 10 or 15 times in this one chapter: in verse 3, in verse 4, in verse 10, in verses 12, 14, 16, 18, 25, 28, and 30. He must want to really drive that home. We are to be holy because He is holy. I am the Lord.

Now these are not primarily statements of authority, that is, do this because I tell you. That is a statement of authority. Now the authority is there, but rather what God is doing is making a statement on the relationship between the Lawgiver and the law. In other words, this law is a reflection of His nature. And what is first? The fifth commandment. What is second? The fourth commandment. What is third? The first commandment. He shifted the order because of the context in which it appears, and because of the principle that He wants to get across. He is Father, and He is telling you in this verse that He wants the reverence that you would give to Him, to your own father and mother.

I will tell you why. *This law is what it is because He is what He is.* Therefore, if we want to be like He is, we will imitate Him through obedience to these laws that are here in chapter 19, in both their physical and their spiritual applications.

Let us look at that word reverence. Reverence toward parents and Sabbath observance, these are the two leading pillars of good government and social well-being. That is what He is telling you. These are the two leading pillars. You see, you can have good government in a Gentile nation that has no idea

who the Creator is if they have a reasonably good family life, because there is respect for father and mother, and because they may have a day of worship; maybe it is not the Sabbath, but it is something that binds the community together in commonality, even the worshipping of a false god.

But He adds in addition, Now you, to Israel, I do not want you to turn to worthless things. That is what that word idol means. You should know better. You have the true God, you have the true Father and mother, you see, and you have the true Sabbath. These are the pillars that uphold society and provide good government. You wonder why we are not having good government now, there is your answer. Because the family is not teaching children what good government is. It has to be learned in the family, not in school, not in church. It has to be learned at home.

Reverence means a profound, adoring, awed respect. More than honor. It means to tremble before. It means to be aware of one's weaknesses. Now the Sabbath in this context, you may not have thought of it this way, but it includes working six days. Is that not what the Sabbath commandment says? It sure does. Six days shall you labor and do all your work. One of the pillars of a good, stable society is not only the keeping of the day of rest—God's day of rest, the Sabbath—but it also includes everybody out there industriously working six days. This keeps you out of trouble, unless you are working at getting into trouble. So the keeping of the Sabbath is not just resting on the Sabbath, it also includes working as well.

Now let us go back to Exodus 21, verses 15 and 17.

Exodus 21:15 "He who strikes his father or his mother shall surely be put to death."

You might think, well, that is a little bit far out. Who would ever strike their father or mother? I do not imagine it happens very often, but I will tell you, I have seen little kids, two- and three-year-olds, take a swing at their mother. I will tell you, if any of my kids ever did that to my wife, the wrath of God came down on their heads. They never did that again. God says that is worthy of death.

Verse 17: you think hitting your father and mother is bad?

Exodus 21:17 "He who curses his father or his mother shall be put to death."

Boy, I will tell you, there are a lot of young people who curse their parents. So physically striking one's parents, or verbally abusing them, is no different to God than murdering them, and is worthy of death. Now why? Let us turn to Deuteronomy 21, and we will pick up a verse here first. Just hold the why in mind a little bit.

Deuteronomy 21:18-21 "If a man has a stubborn and rebellious son who will not obey the voice of his father or the voice of his mother, and who, when they have chastened him, will not heed them, then his father and his mother shall take hold of him and bring him out to the elders of his city, to the gate of his city. And they shall say to the elders of his city, 'This son of ours is stubborn and rebellious; he will not obey our voice; he is a glutton and a drunkard.' And all the men of his city shall stone him to death with stones; so they shall put away the evil person from among you, and all Israel shall hear and fear."

So if a child is unmanageable, stubborn, disobedient, the judges were to back up the parents. But the right to kill, that is, the right to assign the death penalty, did not rest with the parents. They just made the initial action. The right to actually execute lay with the elders of the village. That is, there was a trial, and if the elders then found that the parents indeed were correct, then the execution was not on the head of the parents, but had been judged by a number of their peers and then backed up.

Now, an interesting sidelight here: "a glutton and a drunkard." Very interesting. Drunkenness is drug addiction, and if there is a greater problem today than drug addiction, I do not know what it is. God is indicating that those people are worthy of death, just another form of drug addiction. God says, you know, in I Corinthians 6, that no drunkard will be in the Kingdom of God, they have no control over themselves.

Does it offend you that God is so stern? You may not utter anything in reply to that question, but I think that I would have to evaluate from what I have

seen in the congregation that there are some of you who disagree with the sternness that God has regarding this particular commandment, and may I say others as well. Do you pass this commandment off as being of little significance, of little consequence? Brethren, look what it is doing to the United States of America.

Deuteronomy 27:16 'Cursed is the one who treats his father or his mother with contempt.'

You see, we have taken this one step further. We have gone from smiting, to cursing, to contempt. Now the contemptuousness may not even be verbalized. If I have enough time, I am going to take you to a proverb where God says what you should look at as a parent, one of the things you should look at in regard to your children's attitude toward you, and what you should do about it, is their eyes. I will tell you now, because we might not get to it. Now, he did not say here that they should be put to death, but he does say that that person is cursed as a result of that attitude.

Now why is God so concerned? Let me read a comment to you from the *Keil and Delitzsch Commentary*, volume 1, page 133, the comment on Exodus 21, verses 15 and 17:

Maltreatment of a father and mother, through striking, man-stealing, and cursing, were all to be placed on a par with murder, and punished in the same way. By 'smiting' of parents, we are not to understand smiting to death, but any kind of maltreatment. The murder of parents is not mentioned at all, as not likely to occur and hardly conceivable. The cursing of parents is placed on a par with smiting, because it proceeds from the same disposition, the same attitude, and both were to be punished with death, because the majesty of God was violated in the person of the parents.

That is really something, because right there lies the importance of keeping this commandment. The relationship within the family is an exact type of a Christian spiritual relationship with God the Father and the church as mother. In the eyes of God, and in the eyes of a small child—you notice I

link the two of them together—a parent stands in the place of God Himself. And in the physical sense, the parents are the child's creator, provider, lawgiver, teacher, and protector.

Now, a child's response to this relationship will, in a large measure, then determine his later response to the larger relationships in society. It begins to extend out into the community and it is absolutely certain to affect his relationship with God. Now, by direct implication then, if we represent God, then it becomes our obligation, parents, to live like God. That is why it says, You are to be holy, because I am holy. In other words, God expects parents, in the keeping of this command, to live a life that is worthy of reverence.

Civil officials, teachers, you can honor them; but parents, you reverence. That is almost totally foreign to American thought.

Now ultimately the responsibility for the keeping of this command falls on the child, but the keeping of it begins with the parent, because they are the formulator of the child's character, even as God is the formulator of our spiritual character—we are to respond to Him. The responsibility falls, at the beginning of the child's life, mostly on the parent. So we are going to take a little bit of a look here at that responsibility.

Let us go back to Ephesians the 6th chapter, and in verse 4.

Ephesians 6:4 And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord.

There are a number of things that Paul is teaching here, and one thing that I want to interject here is: just because he says fathers does not exclude mothers. He is just addressing the one who is ultimately responsible, the father. The mother is certainly included within this as well, he is just addressing the party with the overall responsibility. A second thing that he is going to show us here is that the strong, that is, the parents, have a responsibility to the weak, that is, to the child or the children. And he is showing us that we are not to depend upon our size and strength to demand respect, but that we should strive to earn that through strength of character, through the witness that we make to those children. Strength of character, personality, wisdom, and love.

That is contained within the nurture and the admonition of the Lord; not some psychologist, but the nurture and admonition of the Lord. Now that is what the King James says, nurture. Not a very strong word, and I think that you will find that in most modern Bibles they did not translate that word nurture, and there is a good reason. It does not really mean nurture. Now the word that comes closest to being a synonym for this Greek word that is here is our English word "discipline." And this Greek word means repeated and narrow exercise in a matter. It implies action more than intellectual thought, and it means, if I can put it this way, putting children through drills.

Now it corresponds to Proverbs 22:6, where it says, "Train up a child in the way that he should go." Train means to narrow in, it means to hedge in his way, and thus discipline means, you see, repeated and narrow exercise in a matter. In other words, you train a child in. . . [sound cut out]. . . the way that leads to destruction. And so a parent has a responsibility to actively participate in narrowing his child into the way, and not just let them wander from one ditch to another. Unfortunately, many kids just grow up. They are not trained.

The next word, admonition. This word has to do more with formal instruction than the word that is in the King James translated nurture. Whereas the one word implies activity, the other word implies an intellectual setting. And so we have active training, that is, being put through drill, that is interspersed with sit-down lessons. Now, maybe I should not have used the word sit-down. It means taking an active hand in instructing your child all through the day. When we connect this with Deuteronomy 6, where God says, from the time that they get up in the morning until the time that they go to bed at night (I am paraphrasing it) you should be teaching your children. That has interesting implications, does it not? Where do you get all the time for this? Well, that is for you to figure out.

One more thing that I wanted to see here is the word "bring up," where it says, but bring them up. Now, this is the phrase that has to do with bodily nourishment, but in usage it began to be applied, and by the time the Bible was written by the apostle Paul, it included not only bodily nourishment, but it also included, in a broad way, education in every area. We have broad-based education.

So we have covered three basic areas of instruction that fall to the parents: a narrow exercise, putting through paces, training through drill; the second one is formal instruction, and I would even include there informal as well, where you are teaching a child while you are working; and then the third one, which includes any area that was not specifically covered by the other two.

Let us go to Colossians 3, and in verse 21.

Colossians 3:21 Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged.

Put together with Ephesians 6:4, where he also said, "do not provoke your children to wrath," it means that we should not embitter them, or threaten and harass them, or overly correct. It might mean to not challenge the resistance of children with an unreasonable exercise of authority. We have to understand that correction is necessary, but it must be administered in the right spirit, and that is often hard. It means that we should not always be fault-finding—children are going to make mistakes—and nagging. And it is for this reason that Paul is saying that they lose heart. They get to the place where they have such low self-esteem, because they feel they cannot do anything right. Nothing pleases mom or dad, one or the other, or both.

Now the word here in Colossians 3:21, where in my Bible it is translated discouraged, it indicates sullenness of mind, moody, listless. What he is saying is: the twig is to be bent, but it is to be bent with caution, lest it break. Firmness is not harshness or cruelty. Punishment should never be in revenge, because, as he is saying here, severity only hardens and makes them desperate, because eventually they are going to learn they can take anything you dish out.

I want to go back to Deuteronomy 13, just, in a sense, almost to show a flip side here. I do not want this to turn into a child-rearing sermon; that is not my purpose here, but there is a necessity that we understand our parental responsibility, and I think that you ought to be able to see that you are expected by God to be actively involved in the rearing of your children. It is

not something that can be left to another time. I am reading this to you because I want you to see God's approach, how on the ball, how on top of the situation He wants you to be.

Deuteronomy 13:6-9 "If your brother, the son of your mother, your son or your daughter [those are pretty close relationships], the wife of your bosom [you cannot get any closer than that], or your friend who is as your own soul, secretly entices you, saying, 'Let us go and serve other gods,' which you have not known, neither you nor your fathers, of the gods of the people which are all around you, near to you or far off from you, from one end of the earth to the other end of the earth, you shall not consent to him or listen to him, nor shall your eye pity him, nor shall you spare him or conceal him; but you shall surely kill him, . . .

That is pretty strict justice, is it not? Do you know why? Verse 10 says.

Deuteronomy 13:10 "You shall stone him with stones until he dies, because he sought to entice you from the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage. So all Israel shall hear and fear, and not again do such wickedness as this among you."

Do you want your children to be in the church? Do you want your children to abide in Christ? Do you want your children to be in the Kingdom of God? You cannot pass off this responsibility as something that you can do later. Time is going by, the children are getting older, they are growing up, their minds are forming every minute of every day. Would you want to stand before God and say to Him, or admit to Him, that by your neglect your child became an idolater? Are you beginning to get the connection? It is a heavy responsibility.

God says in Malachi 2, He wants godly seed. That is one of the major purposes of marriage. That is a responsibility that He has laid upon parents. He gives us first crack at those children to prepare them for Him. Now, what you are seeing when children run wild, the blame ultimately goes back to the parents. Maybe they were in ignorance, and that is certainly forgivable by God. We have all been in ignorance, we have all done weak and stupid,

dumb things. But we can all change; we can all change our approach toward our children and really love them.

Let us go back to the New Testament again. See, if a parent does not use the just authority that God encourages us to use, then he has no right to expect the child to turn out right, to be respectful, to be honoring him, because it will not happen automatically. So husband and wife, get together, talk these things over, find out what you expect from one another in regard to your children's respect of you, obedience of your children, the standards that you think that your child ought to be capable of reaching, and consistently work on those things together.

Now here in I Thessalonians 2 is a good example of the apostle Paul. Remember, he was the father, as it were, of a congregation. Now here he is the father of the Thessalonian congregation.

I Thessalonians 2:10-11 You are witnesses, and God also, how devoutly and justly and blamelessly [here he was quoting the kind of example that he set before the congregation, pious, moral, untainted in his dealings, everything he did was above board] we behaved ourselves among you who believe; as you know how we exhorted, and comforted, and charged every one of you, as a father does his own children.

This word exhorted means to incite by advice, to encourage. Comforted means to give strength and hope to. You do not batter them into submission, you encourage them into goodness. Sure, they need to be spanked every once in a while, but you do not want to forget to encourage them, so that they have the kind of esteem that would be normal or good among an unconverted person. And then finally, he pleaded, where it says in verse 11, charged means plead with authority.

Now how important this is, I feel, is shown in this book, *A Child's Mind*, by Muriel Beadle. I think I read some of this to you before, but it is about the development of a child's mind between the ages of birth and six. She says, this is on page 15 of the preface:

Since I doubt too that large numbers of people really know what cultural deprivation is, and in what respects enrichment programs can help children thus deprived, I certainly did not have adequate background for assessing activities of this sort until I made a systematic search for the studies that provided the rationale for such programs. I also doubt that many people question the great American belief that human beings have limitless ability to change their ways [talking about conversion] if they only take advantage of their opportunities. The fact I have learned is that behavioral change is virtually impossible if opportunity presents itself at the wrong time.

Those are thunderous words. What she is saying in this book is that a child basically has to be caught between the ages of birth and six, and by the time they reach then, it is almost impossible to change them. Now we know that we can be changed, but it takes the power of God to change us.

Verse 20 of the preface:

Yet another change that has occurred in scholarly thought about child development in the course of the last few decades is a new awareness of the importance of the very early years of life. It is not new to say [and she quotes Proverbs 22:6] "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old, he will not depart from it." But today the proverb would be amended to read, "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old, he will be *unable* to depart from it." (emphasis ours)

She is just again illustrating how difficult it is to get people to change.

And finally, from page 70:

There are many theories as to why early training has such a powerful effect and is so difficult to alter later, as indicated in this chapter, the imprinting studies. . .

These were imprinting studies done on both animals and humans, and I do not know whether you know anything about imprinting, but I will give you a simple illustration. If a duck egg is hatched, you see, and it comes out of the shell, it imprints, that is, there is a picture, if I can put it that way, put into that little ducky brain when it comes out of the shell, and regardless of what it is—it could be a dog, it could be a cat, it could be a human, it could be another duck—that duck thinks that person, dog, cat, or other duck is his mother, and he follows that other duck, or that other person, wherever he goes.

Now what is she saying? She is saying that their tests proved conclusively that children also imprint—newborn babies—and boy, I will tell you, it is so terrific when the first person that newborn baby sees is his father or mother, not some strange doctor or multitudes of nurses. As indicated in this chapter, the imprinting studies suggest that learning is most firmly fixed during a particularly sensitive period, which is biologically determined. Some psychologists theorize that the things we learn before we can talk are buried in the unconscious, and therefore cannot later be tested for validity against the perceptions we store in conscious memory. Others ascribe the persistence of early learning to its constant repetition over a long period of time.

If, in countless ways, every day from birth onward, a child is not responded to—if you just let them grow up—he will come to school age with over 2,000 days of that kind of learning behind him, and no one should be very surprised if a teacher's efforts to give individual attention to each child is not a huge success with that particular one. Very interesting book about early learning.

There is a very interesting poem out by Dorothy Law Nolte about this and I think every one of you have heard it, "Children Learn What They Live." It certainly is true that children will adapt themselves to the kind of environment in which they are, and that they will become what they are having imprinted on their mind by the example of the parent. That is why our example has to be honorable. That is why God says that we have to be holy, as He is holy.