

## Do You Love Me More Than These?

The Psalmist declared in Psalm 119:96 [RSV], ***"I have seen a limit to all perfection, but Thy commandment is exceedingly broad."*** The fifth of Ten Commandments is that of parental honor (Exodus 20:12; Deuteronomy 5:16). It is the honor of parents that has the gracious promise and reward attached to it (Ephesians 6:1-3 [RSV]), and obedience is closely tied to it. The apostle is telling us that it is through our obedience that we honor our parents. **1. Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. 2. "Honor your father and mother" (this is the first commandment with a promise), 3. "that it may be well with you and that you may live long on the Earth."**

However, it is possible to obey your parents, but not honor them, if our hearts are not right, just as many of the Jews kept the outward signs of the Law of Moses, while their hearts were far removed from God. But one can never honor one's parents while simultaneously being disobedient to them, just as we cannot honor our Father in Heaven when we are disobedient to His will. Honor is the fullest expression in Scripture regarding parents, so we ought to emphasize it.

We live in perilous times of the last days with the rise of contemporary Christianity. The "last days," as we should know, began with the advent of the church established on the Day of Pentecost some 2000 years ago. Paul warned us in 2 Timothy 3:1-5 [RSV], **1. But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of stress. 2. For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, 3. inhuman, implacable, slanderers, profligates, fierce, haters of good, 4. treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, 5. holding the form of religion but denying the power of it. Avoid such people.** This very much describes what we see taking place right before our very eyes today in the United States of America and in many parts of the world. We can preach the word (2 Timothy 4:2) and still separate ourselves from the world (Romans 12:2; 2 Timothy 3:5; 2 Corinthians 6:17) to follow brother Paul as he imitates Christ. We can also stand against their compromise of God's word by exalting the honor of our parents.

One of the most striking aspects of God's directives for parents and their children is that the primary responsibility for the children falls upon the shoulders of the father, and not the mother. Verse 4 of Ephesians 6 [RSV] says, ***"Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord."*** This, obviously, follows on the heels of Ephesians 6:1-3, which we read above. The Bible, which is the word of God, gives children two directives in this passage from the *Epistle to the Ephesians* in how they are to relate to their parents. The first of these is they are commanded to **obey** them, and the second is to they are to **honor** their parents.

What is God saying here in verse 4 above? He is saying that the head of every household, the fathers, have the responsibility to be God's representative on Earth in that home. The father has the responsibility to administer the law and the rule of God.

In the Gospel of John, we have the following recorded in John 21:12-17:

12. Jesus said to them, **"Come and have breakfast."** Now none of the disciples dared ask Him, "Who are you?" They knew it was the Lord. 13. Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and so with the fish. 14. This was now the third time that Jesus was revealed to the disciples after He was raised from the dead.

15. When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, **"Simon, son of John, do you love Me more than these?"** He said to Him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love You." He said to him, **"Feed My lambs."**

16. A second time He said to him, **"Simon, son of John, do you love Me?"** He said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You." He said to him, **"Tend My sheep."**

17. He said to him the third time, **"Simon, son of John, do you love Me?"** Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, **"Do you love Me?"** And he said to Him, "Lord, You know everything; You know that I love You." Jesus said to him, **"Feed My sheep."**

Of the 12 disciples of Jesus, Peter is certainly the most popular to us contemporary Christians. He is widely known not only because he was the most intense among the 12 when it came to personality and influence, but I believe that his unique appeal is primarily rooted in his sheer humanness. He was impulsive, and ready to engage in a sword fight on behalf of the Lord at one time, and yet in a just a few short hours later he behaved quite cowardly. He was eager but fickle. He was self-confident but vulnerable. He was aggressive but unstable in his faith. He loved Jesus but in the midst of intense pressure, he loved himself more. No wonder many of us can truly identify with Peter, a person of weakness and many defects, but one who became great and mighty in the work of the Lord.

Our Scripture reading for this morning is one of the 11 post-resurrection biblical accounts documented in the New Testament. This was already the third time that Jesus had appeared to His disciples. According to John, it happened one daybreak when Jesus appeared to seven disciples who were fishing in the Sea of Galilee, one of whom was Peter. It had been a long, grueling and frustrating night for the fishermen. All night long they had been fishing. It was just one of those times they caught nothing. We have all been in those situations ourselves. We work and labor and exert so much effort, only to get nothing back in return. The feeling of defeat and frustration is just so unbearable that we just simply give up.

The disciples also were about to give up. They were about to go back to shore when a Man shouted to ask, "Friends, haven't you any fish?" "No", they replied. The Man shouted back, "Throw your nets on the right side of the boat and you will find some." They followed the Man's advice, perhaps not because they were truly convinced or because they had so much faith, but simply because they had nothing to lose. And as it turned out, the Man was right. At that time they did now know that it was Jesus. They were almost unable to haul the net up into their boat because of the large number of fish. I am convinced that there is no possible rational explanation to that great catch. There could only be one explanation. At that very moment, God's mighty hand and supernatural power had allowed all the fish to converge on the right side of the boat.

For John, one of the apostles inside the boat, it was déjà vu. Something told him that this had happened before already when Jesus was still alive. So quickly he was finally able to put the pieces together. He recognized the Man to be Jesus, ***“It is the Lord.”*** Peter, the ever-impulsive man that he was, was the first to jump out of the boat to meet the Lord. That same morning, after the fishermen had returned back to shore, Jesus fixed them a breakfast of broiled fish, and He shared a very intimate meal with His disciples. They broke bread and shared the fish, just like good old times.

It was after eating that Jesus and Peter had their special moment together. It must have been very strange for Peter to see Jesus again, face to face. In his mind, Peter was struggling. A part of him wanted to apologize to Jesus for denying Him. A part of him wanted to offer an explanation for what he had done. But a part of him was just in awe of Jesus, of the fact that He was truly alive again, in the flesh, just as He promised. It was Jesus Who broke the silence, saying, ***“Simon, son of John, do you truly love Me more than these?”*** What could Jesus be referring to as “these”? Many Bible commentary writers offer different views. Some say that Jesus was referring to the disciples. In effect, Jesus asked, ***“Peter do you love Me more than all your friends?”*** Other commentaries write that the question was really, ***“Peter, do you love Me more than these men love Me?”*** But other commentaries suggest that the question was, ***“Peter, do you love Me more than fishing and more than all the fish you have caught?”*** I tend to agree that this was the case. Jesus was reminding Peter that he and the other apostles had been called specifically by Jesus to be ***“fishers of men”*** (Matthew 4:19 [RSV]). I believe Jesus was telling Peter that he needed to put away the boat and the fishing gear, and do what the Lord had called and trained Him to do: Seek and save the lost and dying of the world by bringing them the Gospel message of salvation found only in Christ.

Whatever Jesus may have been referring to, one thing is certain, and that is that the Lord was leading Peter to confront the frailty of his devotion and loyalty to Jesus. For two more times, Jesus asked Peter, ***“Do you love Me?”*** Peter was obviously hurt by the repetitious asking, as if Jesus was not willing to believe in Peter’s love for Him. But the truth of the matter is, Jesus had a legitimate concern to question the depth and sincerity of Peter’s love for Him. Peter was reverting back to his old occupation of fishing, something in which he had vowed to forsake in order to follow Jesus some three and a half years earlier. Peter, in essence, was in rebellion, for he was being disobedient to the Lord’s instructions. Jesus had not released Peter from his vow to follow Him. By asking Peter if he really loved Him, Jesus was prodding Peter to remember something else Jesus had taught when He said previously in John 14:15 [RSV], ***“If you love Me, you will keep My commandments.”***

God has always demanded obedience from His children. It is true that one can obey and do so without the motive for obedience being out of love, but one can never love without being obedient to one’s superiors. Just as the word of God is given for the elderly, for adults, and for teenagers, so, too, is it given for children. That is why the first directive to children is, ***“Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right,”*** (Ephesians 6:1).

What does the word *obey* mean? The word *obey* here is exactly the same word used in verse five of Ephesians 6 with reference to servants. Verse 5 says, ***“Servants, be***

***obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh. . . .*** Now that kind of obedience is very clear to us.

When a master calls his servant in, he gives positive directives of the servant's duties. He might say, "I want you to do this in the morning and that in the afternoon. When you are done, the rest of the day is yours." Once the master has given his directives, the servant must carry out whatever the master has directed by his words.

That is what it means when Verse 5 says, "***Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh . . . .***" It means that when I receive a commandment from my superior, I carry it out as well as I can.

Now to children God says, "***. . . obey your parents. . . .***" That means they are to listen to their directions, seek to understand them; and seek to carry out their intent to the best of your ability.

What is supposed to be the nature of this obedience? The text says, "***Children, obey your parents in the Lord. . . .***" In other words, this is a religious obedience. It has to do with our responsibility to the Lord. When children obey their parents, they are to look beyond their parents' commands, will and authority. Children must learn to see that their parents are training them and bringing them up in "***the nurture and admonition of the Lord.***" They must recognize that their parents' authority is in subjection to the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, Who put parents over them. He made them His representatives to guide and direct their children.

When children are obeying their parents, they should be constantly thinking of the smile or frown of God their actions are causing. That is why obedience to parents is a religious matter. A child can be obedient to his parents and not be a Christian, but no child can be a Christian and have a pattern of disobedience to his parents.

Some children obey their parents out of natural love. The fact that a child is obedient to his parents is no proof that he is a Christian. But, if he lightly disobeys his parents it is a proof that he is ***not*** a Christian. That shows that his rebellion against the Lord Jesus Christ is not broken.

Since the Lord has put parents over children, rebellion against parents is rebellion against the Lord. By this a child is saying that he will not obey the Lord. The nature of obedience that God requires is religious obedience. "***Children, obey your parents in the Lord. . . .***" (Ephesians 6:1)

***"Children, obey your parents in the Lord,"*** must also be understood to mean you must obey your parents if your parents' command is not against the word of God. If they ask you to do that which comes against Scripture, then you must obey God's word. Jesus said in Matthew 10:37, "***He that loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. . . .***"

In Matthew 10 Jesus said that He did not come to bring peace but a sword. He said that at times He would divide parents from their children and children from their parents. Those are the exceptional cases.

There are very few instances when parents ask you to disobey the law of God. God says that you are to do whatever a parent requires that is not in direct violation of His holy law. He says you are to obey them in the Lord with reference to the Lord's authority and presence, and the fact that the Lord will hold you accountable for what you have done.

What reason does God give for that obedience? Look at our text. The command is: **“Obey your parents in the Lord.”** What reason does Paul give? The text says, **“Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right.”** He stops there.

You may ask the question, “Why should I obey my parents when they only have a third grade education? I know more than they know. They use poor judgment in a lot of areas. Why should I obey them?” God has one answer to this: **“For this is right.”**

You may ask, “Why is it right?” It is right because God, Who is wisdom itself, designed the family with its order of authority under Christ.

God's pattern of discipline established in the Garden of Eden is based upon the principle of reward for obedience and punishment for disobedience. This is a very important principle to remember in training children. Children must be trained to know that God has placed parents over them. When they obey our directions, we smile. When they disobey, we frown and bring the rod of correction.

Many a time it becomes necessary to sit down with one of the children and ask them if they did something they knew was wrong. Teaching children to confess their wrongs is a very essential element in Godly training and discipline. They must be taught that the Lord's chastening hand comes upon those He loves until they confess and turn from their sins. When a child is chastened, he must understand that his parent is God's minister doing God's command. When a child is spanked he must know that the parent doing the spanking is doing so under the authority of God Himself to correct the rebellious child because parents are God's representatives in that home. That is very much a Biblical principle, even though it does not seem to get taught much nowadays.

We must teach our children to look unto Jesus Christ as the example of our life. Colossians 3:4-5 [RSV] says, **4. When Christ Who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory. 5. Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: fornication, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.**

In those three questions Jesus asked Peter that morning long ago, Peter answered, **“Yes, Jesus, I truly love You.”** Each time Peter replied, Jesus would answer back again, **“Feed My lambs.”** In most of our Bibles, this particular account of the Gospel is referred to as the reinstatement of Peter. It was the appointed time when Peter, the betrayer, once again became Peter, the faithful servant of Jesus.

We may not be able to fully grasp this truth, but those who have failed and those who have fallen have a very special place in the heart of the Jesus Christ, our Risen Savior. This is certainly one of the most touching and most awesome messages of the resurrection. Peter was already resigned to go back to fishing. In his heart, he could never pursue the Kingdom of God. He had failed Jesus. He had failed the other apostles who looked up to him as their leader. Most of all, he had failed himself. He even promised to follow Jesus wherever He went, but when the going got tough, he could only shrink back in fear. Shame and frustration filled his heart. He was disgraced and humiliated by his weaknesses, his failures and, most of all, his pride and conceit. But you see, in the midst of his indignity, the grace of the Risen Savior became more and more glorious. As Jesus was looking at Peter, the Lord could only whisper in his heart, "Peter, if you only knew how great you will become one day." That was exactly what happened. After Pentecost, we see a totally different Peter. During the Pentecost, he preached a very mighty sermon and 3,000 people were converted to Jesus Christ that very moment. In Acts 3, together with another disciple, John, they healed a man who was lame from birth, the first ever recorded apostolic miracle that eventually sparked the great Christian persecution. It was because of the lone testimony of Peter before the Sanhedrin the fate of the apostles changed. They now were being persecuted by the high priests and their associates. At the height of God's anointing in the early church, people would bring the sick into the streets and lay them on mats so that when Peter's shadow would touch the sick as he passed by they would be healed. Tradition uniformly asserts that Peter went to Rome and labored there for the Gospel. In his old age, he suffered a cruel and violent death under Emperor Nero. He, too, was also crucified like Jesus, but he was crucified upside down because he felt so unworthy to die in the same manner as the Lord did.

Every time we come to the table of Jesus to partake of the emblems of His death on the cross of Calvary on our behalf, I want us to remember that unforgettable morning when Jesus broke bread and ate fish with the disciples. As we partake of the Communion elements, I want us all to remember two words. The first of these is **expectation**. Even in the midst of my greatest failure and my most supreme disgrace, like Peter, I have a glorious future in Jesus Christ. At the moment I may only see my failures, my tragedies and my mistakes, but certainly, in God's appointed time as I learn to accept the consequences of my failure and as I persevere to do what is pleasing to God, I will be able rise above all things and possess the life that God had prepared for me.

The second word is **self-examination**. It is quite powerful to imagine how Jesus Christ was able to share an intimate meal with the very disciples who had abandoned Him and betrayed Him in His moment of great suffering. There was no hatred or vengeance in the heart of the Lord. Jesus knew that what was done to Him was cruel and immoral, but the glory of God and the purposes of the Father were more important to Him. May this truth lead each one of us to look into ourselves and the many times we, too, have abandoned and betrayed Jesus Christ. May the Spirit of the Lord lead us to godly sorrow that leads to repentance and may our hearts rejoice that God's love is able to cover a multitude of sins.

In this life, all of us shall fail and all of us shall fall, but take heart, in Christ, we shall all rise up in power. But what is power? As a preacher, as a husband and as a father, I have many great dreams and aspirations in life, but my greatest desire of all is to be true to Jesus Christ until my very last breath. This, for me, is what power is all about!