Preaching Series: The Christ-Centered Family
Sermon Title: Raising Godly Children, Part One

Text: Ephesians 6:1-3 -- Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. "Honor your father and mother" (this is the first commandment with a promise), "that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land."

Introduction: Jonathan Edwards, was a Puritan Preacher in the 1700s. He was one of the most respected clergymen of his day. He attended Yale at the age of thirteen and later went on to become the president of Princeton College. He married his wife Sara in 1727 and they were blessed with eleven children. Every night when Mr. Edwards was home, he would spend an hour conversing with his family and then praying a blessing over each child. Jonathan and his wife Sarah passed on a great, godly legacy to their eleven children. One hundred and fifty years after his death, an American educator, A.E. Winship conducted an interesting study by tracing the descendants of Jonathan Edwards to see what had become of them. His findings are remarkable, especially when compared to another man from the same era known as Max Jukes whose life was studied by sociologist Richard Dugdale in 1877. First, here's what A. E. Winship learned about Jonathan Edwards: His legacy includes 1 U.S. Vice-President, 1 Dean of a law school, 1 dean of a medical school, 3 U.S. Senators, 3 governors, 3 mayors, 13 college presidents, 30 judges, 60 doctors, 65 professors, 75 Military officers, 80 public office holders, 100 lawyers, 100 clergymen, and 285 college graduates. **How may this be explained? Edwards was a godly man. He was also hard-working, intelligent and moral.** Furthermore, Winship states, "**Much of the capacity and talent, intensity and character of the more than 1,400 of Edwards' family is due to Mrs. Edwards**." **Max Jukes' legacy came to Richard Dugdale's attention when the family trees of 42 different men in the New York prison system were traced back to him**. He lived in New York at about the same period as Edwards. Jukes' descendants included: 7 murderers, 60 thieves, 190 prostitutes, 150 other convicts, 310 paupers, and 440 who were physically wrecked by addiction to alcohol. Of the 1,200 descendants that were studied, 300 died prematurely.

These contrasting legacies provide an example of what some call **THE FIVE GENERATION RULE**. "**How a parent raises their children— the love they give, the spiritual values they teach, the emotional environment they offer, the education they provide — influences not only them but the four generations to follow, either for good or evil**." What a challenging thought! If someone studied your descendants four generations later, what would you want them to discover?

Do you want an **Edwards' legacy** or a **Jukes' legacy**? **The life you live will determine the legacy you leave**! (Larry Ballard – Youth with a Mission, Family Ministries, July 1, 2017)

This is now our fifth message in the brief preaching series I've chosen to call, **the Christ-Centered Family**. I invite you to join me as we look at **Ephesians 6:1-3** and see what the Apostle Paul has to say about **the duties of our children that parents are incumbent to teach them**. Remember that we're in a passage that calls Christians to submit to one another. The word means **to arrange oneself under another**. So far, we've looked at how husbands do that by serving their wives, laying their lives down for them just as Christ did for his bride the church to make her holy. Then we looked at how wives are called to submit themselves to their husbands because Scripture says that he is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church. **If you want to know more about what was said in these messages, and specifically about submission, you can listen to them on our website at Riverridge.online**.

Here in our text for this morning, Paul tells children not merely to SUBMIT to their parents, but to OBEY them. He uses a different word that is stronger than simply to submit. It means to "**conform to a command or authority**." It's what a soldier does when his superior officer gives him a command (**Matthew 8:8-9 - The centurion replied, "Lord, I do not deserve to have you come under my roof. But just say the word, and my servant will be healed. For I myself am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. I tell this one, 'Go,' and he goes; and that one, 'Come,' and he comes. I say to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it).** Here, Paul issues this command and then lays out the basis for this instruction by presenting three grounds for the obedience of sons and daughters to their parents. **Here's the first one.**

Children, obey your parents …, for this is right (or righteous). A child's obedience to his parents comes from what some refer to as "**natural law."** This refers to God's instructions which are not found in special revelation (i.e. the Bible), but instead, by that which He has written on all human hearts (general revelation). This is what **Romans 2:14-15** is talking about -- **For when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them**). Most people seem to know right from wrong intrinsically. **The conviction to obey one's parents is not solely confined to a Christian code of conduct. It is standard behavior in virtually every**

society! Greeks and Romans taught the same thing. So did people in the Far East. In the oriental culture, the respect of one's parents was greatly emphasized in the days of Confucious and continues to be so today. ***Virtually every civilization has regarded the recognition of parental authority as vital to a stable society***. Perhaps that's why Paul includes "**disobedience to parents**" as a mark of a decadent society that God has turned over to their own godlessness **(Romans 1:28-32 -- And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done. They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. Though they know God's decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them**). SO, PAUL'S FIRST APPEAL FOR CHILDREN TO OBEY THEIR PARENTS IS BASED ON NATURAL LAW. **WE JUST KNOW IT'S THE RIGHT THING TO DO**. Here's a second ground for the obedience of sons and daughters to their parents!

Children – Honor your father and your mother! **This appeal is based on THE REVEALED LAW that God gave to Moses written on two tablets of stone, not on THE NATURAL LAW that is written on one's heart**. **The 5th commandment** says, "**Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you**" (**Exodus 20:12**). This passage is very important for Christians because it connects the honoring of our parents to our relationship with God. At least in our early years, our parents represent God to us and demonstrate HIS AUTHORITY and LOVE. **When we honor and obey our parents, we are showing love and respect not only for them but also for God Himself**. That's why the two are tied so closely together in **Leviticus 19: 1-3 -- And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, 2 "Speak to all the congregation of the people of Israel and say to them, You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy. 3 Every one of you shall revere his mother and his father…**". When children honor their parents, they are taking seriously the commandments of God and striving to live a life that is pleasing to Him. **And when they don't the opposite is also true**. That's why God commanded that an extreme punishment was to be inflicted on a rebellious child who refused to honor his parents in ancient Israel **(Leviticus 20:9 -- For anyone who curses his father or his mother shall surely be put to death; he has cursed his father or his mother; his blood is upon him**).

In the New Testament, the Apostle Paul chooses to enforce this commandment with A PROMISE as opposed to A THREAT. He says this commandment is the first

one with a promise – (**Verse 3**) **"that it may go well with you and that you may live long on the earth (NASB)**." This promise for Israel was related to their ability to remain in the Promised Land and to enjoy safety, good health and bountiful harvests in it – **Deuteronomy 5:16 -- that your days may be long, and that it may go well with you in the land that the Lord your God is giving you**. That's why Paul changed the wording to "**that you may live long on the earth**." This is the more accurate translation. The church now exits all over the world unlike Israel which is a tiny country in the Middle East. **Today the blessing is more general as it applies to Christians and means this**: **God gives social stability to any society where children honor and obey their parents**. It should not surprise us, then, that in the last days, among other things, children will be disobedient to their parents and instability will rule (**See 2 Timothy 3:1-2**).

Here are two questions that relate to obeying one's parents. **First, are children to obey absolutely every command from their parents**? While obedience should be the norm and disobedience the exception, there will be times when children should not obey their parents. For example, when a parent commands their child to stop following Christ and to follow other gods. Jesus was clear that our first allegiance is always to Him (**Matthew 10:37 -- Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me**). Perhaps the best way to state it is to say **children should obey their parents without exception in everything that is compatible with their primary loyalty to Jesus Christ**. I remember a young man I led to Christ who came from a Hindu background. His parents warned him that if he did not turn back to his Hindu roots, they would kick him out of the house. In this case, he had to decide who to obey, his parents or our Lord. It was a difficult situation, but he chose to tell them that he was determined to follow Christ. Fortunately, they did not command him to leave. **The second question relates to how long a child is obligated to obey his parents. Is this supposed to happen for the rest of his life**? John Stott recommends that Christians not defy the accepted convention of their own culture when it comes to this question. So long as they are regarded as children in their culture, they should obey their parents.

So far, we've looked at two of the basis for children obeying their parents … natural law (for this is right) and God's law (honor your father and mother). Here's one more from the Apostle Paul.

Children … obey your parents in the Lord. Here we're told to obey because of **the gospel of Jesus Christ** which brings new life to His followers (**Romans 6:1-4 -- What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? Do you not know that all**

of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life). We are new creatures in Christ! This is what is implied in the phrase … **in the Lord**. Because we have a personal relationship with Jesus, we now recognize Him as our Lord and Master. As our Creator, He first established order through the creation of the family. **And even though the family unit was corrupted by the fall so that it can be very dysfunctional, it has not been abolished**. In fact, because we are now in Christ, all of our relationships (including those with our parents) are transformed by the power of the Holy Spirit. Christians remember the loving submission Jesus demonstrated for His parents and now we aspire to do the same because we want to please Him in everything --**Colossians 1:10 -- And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way**. THIS IS WHAT CHILDREN DO WHEN THEY OBEY AND HONOR THEIR PARENTS.

Here are a couple of summary thoughts for parents who are trying to raise godly children:

- **Teach your children the value of doing what is right by modeling it for them**! **Children are to obey because it's the right thing to do**. But if we don't concern ourselves with doing what is right, I doubt if they will either. **Lynn Austin shares this story**: My five-year-old son had been looking forward to visiting the planetarium in Chicago while on vacation, but when we arrived, we learned that children under age 6 were not admitted. "***Let's pretend you had a birthday***," she told him. "***If the ticket man asks how old you are, I want you to say, 'I'm 6.***'" She made him practice it until he sounded convincing, then bought the tickets without any problems. When the show ended, we moved to the museum. There a large sign read, "***Children 5 and under admitted free***." To avoid a $5 admission fee, she had to convince her son to forget his pretend birthday. The consequences of this lie became apparent as they walked up the steps to their last destination, the aquarium. "***Wait a minute, mom***," her son said with a worried look. "***How old am I now?***"
- **Be slow to rescue children when they disobey**! The best thing might be to let them suffer the consequences of their sinful choices. Experience can be a great teacher. (**I took one of our kids back to a store when I found out they took something without paying for it**.)

Conclusion: How important is this instruction to our children? While visiting Buckingham Palace **Chuck Colson was once asked by Prince Phillip**, "**What can we do about crime here in England?**" Colson replied, "**Send more children to**

Sunday School." The Prince thought he was joking. Colson, however, pointed out a study by sociologist **Christie Davies** which found that in the first half of the 1800s British society was marked by high levels of crime and violence. In the late 1800s and early 1900s, the levels for each decreased dramatically. What changed an entire nation's national character? Throughout that period, attendance at Sunday School rose steadily until by 1888, a full 75% of the children in England were enrolled. There they listened to the teaching of God's Word and learned to walk in obedience to it. Since then, attendance has fallen off to 1/3rd of its peak level, with a corresponding increase in crime and disorder. **We can make a difference in the future of our families, our communities, our country and world. To do so, we must teach our children to honor and obey their parents**!